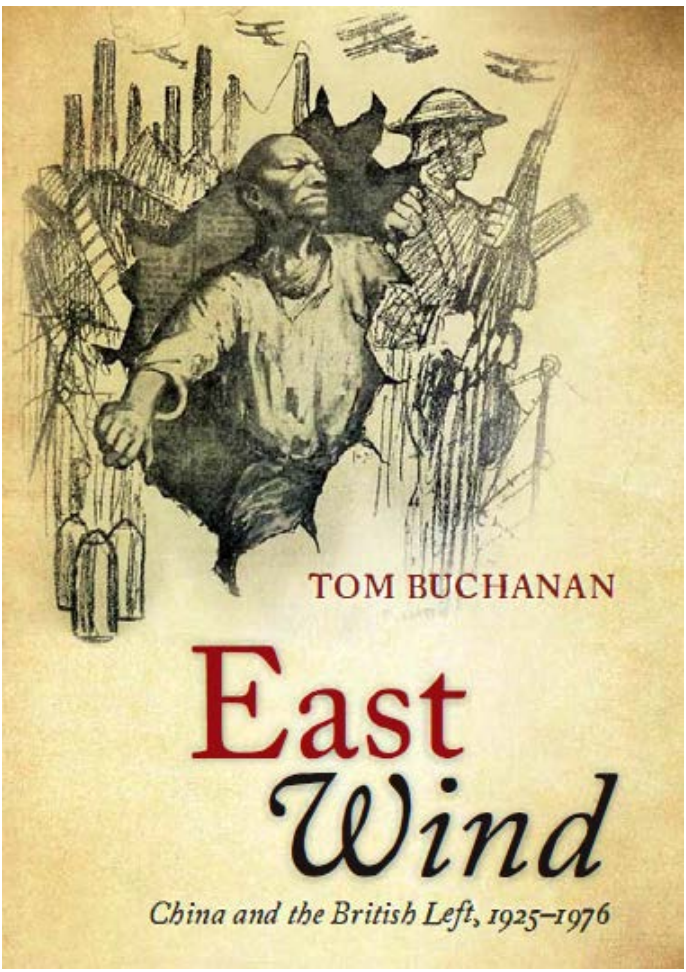
East Wind

China and the British Left, 1925–1976

TOM BUCHANAN



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Contents

Note on the Romanization of Chinese names

I have generally followed the modern *pinyin* system used within the People's Republic of China since the 1960s (hence, Beijing rather than Peking). However, to avoid confusion and aid comprehension I have used the older Wade–Giles system in cases where that form is still generally in use (hence, for instance, Mao Tse-tung rather than Mao Zedong, Chiang Kai-shek rather than Jiang Jieshi, and Sun Yat-sen rather than Sun Yixian). Both versions of names are given in the index.

List of Abbreviations

AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
BCFA	Britain–China Friendship Association
BCPIT	British Council for the Promotion of International Trade
BLCCF	British Labour Council for Chinese Freedom
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
BUACF	British United Aid for China Fund
CARD	Campaign against Racial Discrimination
CCC	China Campaign Committee
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDL	China Democratic League
CDRCU	Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity
CIB	China Information Bureau
CPB (M–L)	Communist Party of Britain (Marxist–Leninist)
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPSG	China Policy Study Group
CUL	Cambridge University Library
FBI	Federation of British Industry
FOCP	Friends of the Chinese People
FRUS	*Foreign Relations of the United States*
GBCC	Great Britain–China Centre
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IPC	International Peace Campaign
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
IRD	Information Research Department (of the Foreign Office)
ISC	International Scientific Commission (in the Korean War)
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)
LAI	League against Imperialism
LEC	London Export Corporation
LHASC	Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LPCR	*Labour Party Conference Reports*
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
LTC	London Trades Council
MML	Marx Memorial Library, London
MRC	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick
NEC	Labour Party National Executive Committee
NUS	National Union of Seamen
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PPTUS	Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat
PRC	People's Republic of China
PWC	Peace with China

SACU	Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding
S–CA	Scotland–China Association
SBTC	Sino-British Trade Council
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
T&GWU	Transport & General Workers' Union
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TUCCR	*Trades Union Congress Conference Reports*
WPPE	Working People's Party of England

List of Illustrations

Picture Credits

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Map of modern China, indicating places mentioned in the text. Chinese names are given in Pinyin/Wade Giles forms


S R
G O L I A
Ussuri river incident 1969
MANCHURIA
INNER MONGOLIA
Shenyang/ Mukden
NORTH KOREA
Sea of Japan
BEIJING/ PEKING
Tianjin/ Tientsin
Port Arthur/ Lushunkou and Dairen/Dalian)
HEBEI/ HOPEI
SHANXI/ SHANSI
Yellow R.
Yanan/ Yenan
SHANDUNG/ SHANTUNG
Weihaiwei
Qingdao/Tsingtao
SOUTH KOREA
JAPAN
Battle of Taierzhuang/ Taierchuang
SHAANXI/ SHENSI
Xi'an/ Sian
Yellow R.
JIANGSU/ KIANGSU
Nanjing/ Nanking
Shanghai
East China Sea
Wanxian/Wanhsien
HUBEI/ HUPEI
Hankou/ Hankow
Wuhan
Yangtze R.
AN/SZECHWAN
Chongqing/ Chungking
ZHEJIANG/ CHEKIANG
Nanchang
Changsha
HUNAN
JIANGXI/ KIANGSI
Yangtze R.
FUJIAN/ FUKIEN
Mazu/Matsu
GUIZHOU/ KWEICHOW
CCP base areas, early 1930's
Jinmen/ Quemoy
TAIWAN (Formosa)
NAN
West R.
GUANGXI/ KWANGSI
GUANGDONG/ KWANGTUNG
Guangzhou/Canton
PACIFIC OCEAN
Hong Kong
VIETNAM
South China Sea
HAINAN
LAOS
PHILIPPINES
LAND

Preface

China may never have exercised the same hold over the imagination of the British left as the Soviet Union, but it was an abiding interest throughout the five decades after 1925, and there were particular times (notably in 1925–7, 1937–8, and 1950–3) when it demanded the full attention of both the left and the wider Labour movement. Supporting China, however, was far from straightforward. In July 1925 the socialist writer Noel Brailsford posed the question, 'What then is China?'[1], and throughout these years the left struggled to provide an answer. China presented a confusing multiplicity of faces: oppressed and oppressor, ancient civilization and new culture, hope and threat. It represented anti-imperialism in the 1920s, anti-fascism in the 1930s and 40s, socialist development in the 1950s, and revolutionary unpredictability in the 1960s and 70s. From the late 1950s onwards, moreover, China offered its foreign supporters a series of ever more severe political shocks, and many on the British left had lost interest or transferred their loyalties elsewhere long before the mid 1970s. This book, therefore, charts the relationship between China and the British left across fifty years of tumultuous upheaval and remarkable political and economic transformation. In the process, it addresses three principal questions: firstly, how did the British left (broadly defined) understand and relate to China during a period of such intense change and conflict; secondly, what impact did China make on the British left; and thirdly, what part did the left play in Sino-British relations?

The left was convinced that it had a role to play in promoting a better understanding of China: yet understanding often seemed to be in short supply, sometimes comically so, in its own dealings with China. In 1955, for instance, Kingsley Martin, the long-serving editor of the *New Statesman*, interviewed a senior Chinese government minister in Beijing. He misread the situation and, mistaking courtesy for evasion, walked out before the interview had properly started[2]. The left also struggled to translate Chinese revolutionary politics into a British context, and much was lost in the translation. One hallmark Maoist policy that held a particular fascination for the British left was the requirement that all workers, including bureaucrats and intellectuals, should undertake periods of manual labour. In 1965 Tony Benn (as Postmaster General in the Labour government) privately mused that he would like to see the top management in the Post Office doing one day a week on the shop floor. But he realized that a 'good idea' that was appropriate to a revolutionary society such as China would not necessarily work in Britain. In any case, '. . . somehow I don't see myself as a cleaner or a postman without

[1] *New Leader*, 3 July 1925.

[2] C. H. Rolph, *Kingsley: The life, letters and diaries of Kingsley Martin* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), 318–19, citing Martin's private diary. Martin later felt mortified for behaving like an 'impatient, insensitive, bungling Westerner . . .'.

the whole thing becoming just a huge press gimmick'[3]. Rather less endearing was the response of some leading British intellectuals to the plight of their Chinese counterparts during the Cultural Revolution, which showed an often chilling disregard for the true power relations in Mao's China. Raymond Williams commented that '[w]hen I heard pathetic stories about professors being taken from their libraries and laboratories and sent to help bring in the harvest I felt totally on the side of the revolutionaries. . . . I do not see why an ordinary healthy man or woman should not participate in manual labour.'[4] Likewise, the economist Joan Robinson is reported to have said that 'a lot of professors could benefit from physical exercise'[5].

As these remarks indicate, the British left's relationship with China could easily be presented as little more than a series of gaffes born of mutual incomprehension. Such an assumption underlies the substantial, and sometimes not very discriminating, literature on fellow-travelling and political tourism[6]. The left was undoubtedly at times naive and guilty of seeing only what it wanted to see in revolutionary China. However, the intention here is to illuminate not only the left's weaknesses, but also its achievements. For instance, for some years after the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949, when the British government, businesses, and missionaries were forced to curtail or greatly reduce their activities in China, the left provided the only remaining bridge between Britain and the new People's Republic of China (PRC). In particular, its promotion of trade with the PRC during the 1950s posed a rather effective challenge to the rigidity of the Cold War. More generally, it will be shown that the left held true to the belief that China had immense unrealized economic potential. For each of these five decades, we will encounter serious commentators on the British left who saw trade with China as the solution for Britain's economic difficulties. At the time such claims appeared fantastical, and as late as 1972 the seasoned journalist Richard Harris told a Fabian Society working party that '[t]he mirage of a vast China trade has come and gone three or four times in the last two centuries. It is not dead yet'[7]. However, China's remarkable economic growth since the 1980s has not been a mirage, even though modern China is hardly the receptor for British manufactured goods that the left had once intended.

The left's vision of a 'vast China trade' spoke to the economic insecurities of the British working class, but there was always more to the left's solidarity with China than mere commercial calculation. This was also a story of profound human

[3] Tony Benn, *Out of the wilderness: Diaries, 1963–67* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 337, entry for 1 October 1965. Benn had been speaking to an unnamed Labour politician (probably William Warbey) who had recently visited China.

[4] Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with 'New Left Review'* (London: New Left Books, 1979), 403–5.

[5] Marjorie S. Turner, *Joan Robinson and the Americans* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 213.

[6] David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973) provides a more subtle treatment than Paul Hollander, *Political pilgrims: Travels of western intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); see also Colin Mackerras, *Western images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[7] British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), Fabian Society papers, J/75/2/73, memorandum by Richard Harris, p. 14.

sympathy for a people that had suffered more than its share of bad government, poverty, foreign exploitation, and natural disaster. From the 1920s onwards, the left frequently challenged the popularly held negative stereotypes of China—of 'Charlie Chan, murder, torture and villainy'[8]. In their place it presented an image of the Chinese as resilient, calm, and dignified in the face of suffering. The danger—especially after 1949—was that such sympathy could cloud the left's capacity for critical friendship. This was what Bertrand Russell, in an essay published in 1950, described as the beguiling myth of the 'superior virtue of the oppressed'. Referring to the nationalist movements of nineteenth-century Europe, he wrote that: 'One by one these various nations rose to independence, and were found to be just like everybody else; but the experience of those already liberated did nothing to destroy the illusion as regards those who were still struggling'[9]. China's willingness to throw its weight around in the 1960s destroyed some, but by no means all, illusions. As late as 1980 the journalist Jonathan Mirsky complained of what he termed the 'smack the Panda-haters disease' amongst China's supporters. By this he meant a refusal to believe that China was anything other than 'warm, cuddly, cute, but—above all—endangered'[10].

In this book a broad, three-fold definition of the 'left' has been adopted. It encompasses, firstly, political parties explicitly of the left, such as the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and, latterly, some small Marxist–Leninist parties; secondly, intellectuals of the Communist and non-Communist left, such as Rajani Palme Dutt, Kingsley Martin, Bertrand Russell, and Joseph Needham; and thirdly, the left within the Labour Party and the trade unions. For much of this period—at least until the Sino-Soviet split—the Communist Party played a central role in the left's relations with China. Accordingly, I have sought to determine its exact role with regard to organizations such as the China Campaign Committee and the Britain–China Friendship Association. However, the book also addresses the policies and attitudes of the 'mainstream' Labour movement. It should be noted that all the leaders of the Labour Party from Ramsay MacDonald to James Callaghan took an interest in China at different stages in their careers[11]. Even Hugh Gaitskell, on the right of the party, was intrigued by the idea of visiting China—a project entitled 'Operation Marco Polo'—shortly before his death in 1963[12]. Another major theme that will emerge is that while the left was often critical of mainstream Labour's stance over China, there were, in fact, many points of convergence. Whether with regard to the crisis in Sino-British relations of 1926–7, the proposed consumer boycott of Japan in 1937–8, or the attempts to improve relations with the People's Republic in the

[8] *Tribune*, 16 April 1937.

[9] Alan Ryan, *Bertrand Russell: A political life* (London: Allen Lane, 1988) citing Russell's *Unpopular essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950), 82.

[10] *China Now*, 91 (July/August 1980), 26.

[11] This particularly applies to Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson (see below, esp pp. 149–51, 145 and 159), but note also James Callaghan's interest in China in 1979–80 (see below, pp. 214 and 214 note 9).

[12] University College London (UCL) library, Gaitskell papers, C285, correspondence between Desmond Donnelly and Gaitskell, July 1962. The idea came from Donnelly, a Labour MP who had visited China on a number of occasions in the 1950s.

1950s, the left's best prospect of success was generally to work with the grain of sympathy for China within the Labour movement.

Chronologically, the book covers a period that opens with the clashes of 30 May 1925 in Shanghai, when the municipal police fired on Chinese strikers, and closes with the death of Mao Tse-tung on 9 September 1976. These dates are by no means intended to be symbolic: they define a discrete period within which the left retained a strong interest in (and sympathy with) developments in China. As we shall see, there was a history of support for China amongst radical circles in Britain dating back well into the nineteenth century. However, the 'Hands off China' campaign of 1925–7 was the first mass mobilization carried out on behalf of China in Britain. It was, moreover, carried out by the left in its 'modern' institutional form. The CPGB had been created out of a number of smaller left-wing organizations in 1920; the Labour Party was re-organized on a national basis at the end of the First World War, and had briefly formed a minority government in 1923–4; and the trade unions were now marshalled for collective action under the aegis of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. Conversely, the death of Mao—and the swift unravelling of the Maoist project in China that followed it—ended what remained of the British left's 'special relationship' with China. The Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989, which is dealt with in an epilogue, snuffed out a brief attempt to revive this relationship in the mid 1980s.

It is also important to make clear at the outset what this book is *not* about. Firstly, it is not a book about British Maoism. Although the emergence of the Maoist groups is discussed at the appropriate point[13], within the timescale of this book—and even within the politics of the 1960s and 70s more specifically—their role was relatively marginal. British 'Maoism' certainly lacked the political clout or the intellectual cachet of Maoist movements in France, Italy, and some other countries of Western Europe[14]. Nor, secondly, is this a book about Hong Kong although, again, the subject is addressed where relevant. The left did not quite know what to make of Hong Kong. It was aware that it was a colonial possession that should be returned to China, and was surprised when this did not happen in 1945. It also saw Hong Kong as a centre for highly exploitative industrial practices, and therefore a threat to British jobs, as well as riddled with corruption. There were, however, complicating factors. During the later 1930s, for instance, the colony had played a useful part in attempts to support China against Japan, while after 1945 the people of Hong Kong—many of them, after 1949, refugees from Communist rule—did not mount strong and consistent pressure for an end to British control. The exploited masses seemed rather reluctant to rid themselves of colonial rule. The left's interest in Hong Kong tended, therefore, to be social and economic rather than political in nature, and episodic rather than sustained. Some left-wing

[13] See in particular Chapter 6.

[14] See Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution and the legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), A. Beldan Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and practice in France and the United States* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1988), Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its afterlives* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), and Jean Chesneaux, *China in the eyes of the French intellectuals* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1987).

politicians took a belated interest in Hong Kong during the crisis of 1966–7, but this soon diminished once the British authorities made a genuine attempt to tackle the manifest social and economic grievances.

This book relates one of the last great untold stories of the British left. But describing it as such does not, of course, imply that nothing has previously been written on the subject; rather, that the entire story has never been told, on the basis of the fullest available archival evidence, in a single book. The major existing work is Arthur Clegg's pioneering and invaluable *Aid China, 1937–1949* (1989). However, Clegg was also a leading participant in the events that he described and had an evident political bias. Accordingly, his work needs not only to be approached critically, but also substantially revised in the light of newly available archival sources. Robert Bickers's *Britain in China* (1999) provides a model account of how the British presence in China in the opening decades of the twentieth century can be located within a wider cultural and political context. Most recently, Patrick Wright's *Passport to Peking* (2010) has shown how the 'spirit of Geneva' invigorated Anglo-Chinese relations at the political and cultural level in 1954. Of the more general works, both Robert Boardman's *Britain and the People's Republic of China, 1949–74* (1976) and Brian Porter's *Britain and the rise of Communist China: A study of British attitudes, 1945–54* (1967) provided helpful context for my research, but both books were written before archival material became widely available. A number of more recent monographs, notably David Clayton's *Imperialism revisited* (1997), have made good use of material in The National Archives to reconstruct British diplomatic and commercial policy towards China in the 1950s. However, they only deal in passing with the political relationships which form the focus of this book[15].

Perhaps more surprisingly, there is little mention of China in either the official histories of the CPGB—possibly reflecting the trauma of the Sino-Soviet split—or in the literature on the foreign policy of the Labour Party[16]. This is a gap that

[15] Arthur Clegg, *Aid China, 1937–1949: A memoir of a forgotten campaign* (Beijing: New World Press, 1989); Patrick Wright, *Passport to Peking: A very British mission to Mao's China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Robert Bickers, *Britain in China, Community, culture and colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Robert Boardman, *Britain and the People's Republic of China, 1949–74*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1976); Brian Porter, *Britain and the rise of Communist China: A study of British attitudes, 1945–54* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); David Clayton, *Imperialism revisited: Political and economic relations between Britain and China, 1950–54* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

[16] The CPGB commissioned a history of the party in September 1956. The first two volumes in the sequence were written by James Klugmann: *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, i: *1919–1924* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1968) and *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, ii: *1925–1926* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969). Noreen Branson wrote the next two: *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, iii: *1927–1941* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985) and *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, iv: *1941–1951* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997). The series was completed after the party's demise by a further two books which adopted a far more scholarly and critical approach: John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB*, v: *1951–1968* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003) and Geoff Andrews, *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism*, vi: *1964–1991* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2004). For recent books on Labour's foreign policy, see John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History* (London: Routledge, 2007) and Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, i: *The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

needs to be filled if the worldview of the left in these formative decades of the twentieth century is to be fully understood. China was not just one of many countries in which the left took a passing interest at moments of crisis. It was far more than that: a sleeping giant that could—when awakened—transform the world, for better or worse. To make a case for China's importance for the British left in these years is not simply to indulge in present-mindedness: to read the past from the perspective of China's unmistakable importance today. Instead, it is to observe the many political campaigns that China inspired in Britain across the decades, and to listen to the views of leading politicians and intellectuals. After all, the comment that China 'is exerting an ever-growing, and now perhaps even preponderating, influence on the affairs of Europe' was not made in the early twenty-first century, but by John Strachey, the best-known left-wing intellectual of his day, in February 1937[17].

[17] *Left News*, February 1937, 226.

Acknowledgements

In 1996, having recently completed a book on Britain and the Spanish Civil War, I began work on comparing the political impact of the Sino-Japanese war of 1937–9 on Britain to that of the Civil War. However, I soon realized that in order to understand fully this particular episode, I had to locate it within the context of a much larger, and somewhat neglected, subject—namely, the relationship between China and the British left during the twentieth century. Inevitably, in the course of researching this larger subject I have incurred a great many debts, and I am happy to have the chance to acknowledge them here.

Firstly, I am very grateful to the Director of Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education (OUDCE), Dr Geoffrey Thomas, and his successor, Professor Jonathan Michie, for their support in helping and encouraging me to pursue such an ambitious research project. Without the opportunity of taking a number of terms of sabbatical leave, the research and writing of this book would scarcely have been possible. I must, therefore, also record my gratitude to my colleagues—in particular, Dr Christine Jackson and Annette Mayer—for providing invaluable support and cover while I was on leave. My visits to archives were generously supported by the department's Research Fund.

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Early in my research I was fortunate to receive help from some of those who had actually participated in these events. In 1997 I interviewed the late Derek Bryan at his home in Norwich, although, sadly, his wife Hung Ying was by then too ill to be interviewed. I was also delighted to learn that one of my tutors at OUDCE, Dr Premen Addy, had been an early member of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU) and I have benefited immensely from a number of conversations with him over the years. I also corresponded with the late Percy Timberlake, who had been a pioneer of Anglo-Chinese trade in the 1950s. In 1999 Jean Gulliland kindly shared memories of her visit to China as part of a women's delegation in 1956. Professor Franco Graziosi discussed the International Scientific Commission of 1952 during my visit to Rome in 2002. Roger Harrison discussed Marxist–Leninist politics with me in 2006, and John Gittings gave me the benefit of his long engagement with China when we met in 2007.

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grandfather, Michael Lindsay, as well as sharing insights from her own research into his life. Kay Poster let me see a file of letters, cuttings and political papers belonging to her father Cheng Su. John Fraser sent me press cuttings related to F. L. Kerran's visit to China in 1937. Colin Holmes allowed me to consult the Alan Winnington papers that he had deposited at Sheffield University in the course of his research. Catherine Townsend allowed me to see some papers of her father, Peter Townsend, that were still in her possession as well as giving me permission to consult those already deposited at Sheffield University. Geoffrey Warner allowed me to look at the typescript of Kenneth Younger's diary. Jenny Clegg kindly answered questions relating to the career of her father, Arthur Clegg.

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I have given papers on aspects of this research at a number of seminars and academic conferences. I am grateful to the organizers of these events for allowing me the opportunity to present my ideas at an early stage, as well as for the helpful comments of those who attended. I gave papers on 'China and the British left' to the following: an informal research discussion group, Jesus College, Oxford (1999); the Institute of Contemporary British History conference on 'The left in Britain in the 20th century' (1999); the China Studies Seminar, Oxford University (2002); and the University of Durham History Seminar (2007). I gave a paper on 'The Chinese Cultural Revolution and the West European Left' to the conference on 'Transnational moments of change in Postwar Europe', at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio conference centre (2000). I presented two papers on the period between 1945 and 1955 at the History Faculty, University of Oxford, in 2006–7 as part of the Faculty's collaborative workshops with Princeton University on 'Making order in the post-war world'. My paper entitled 'Cold War loyalties: the British left, "fellow-travelling" and the Korean War' was presented to the Oxford History Faculty (2007) and the Birmingham History Department (2008). I gave a paper on the movement to boycott Japanese goods at a conference on trade boycotts, University of Wolverhampton (2008). Finally, my paper entitled 'Shanghai–Madrid Axis: comparing British responses to the conflicts in Spain and China, 1936–9', given in 2010 as part of the History Faculty seminar series on 'Great Causes in Modern Europe', drew me back to the question that had stimulated my interest in China and the British left in the first place.

I would like to thank the following for kindly giving me permission to quote from archival material: The Provost and Fellows of King's College Cambridge (Joan Robinson papers); the Royal Society Centre for the History of Science (Sir Harold Thompson papers); the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College (Cripps papers); Catherine Townsend (Peter Townsend papers); Dr Jacob Empson (William and Hetta Empson papers); the Trustees of Lambeth Palace Library (Lang and Temple papers); Fiona Courage, Manager of Special Collections, University of Sussex Library (*New Statesman* and Kingsley Martin papers); Georgia Glover (Barbara Castle papers); the Society of Authors (Leonard Woolf papers); the City of London, London Metropolitan Archives (Samuel Chinque and London Trades Council papers); the Keeper of the Archives, University of Oxford; Lady Elizabeth Shore (Peter Shore papers), and Helen Langley, Curator of Modern Political Papers at the Bodleian Library (Wilson papers).

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Tom Buchanan

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Introduction: Distance, narrative, and perception

DISTANCE

Although Beijing lies some 5,000 miles from London, the actual journey from Britain to China—especially by sea—can be considerably further. But for many the distance—both physical and metaphorical—seemed greater still. One reviewer wrote in *Labour Monthly* in 1949 that 'I was brought up with much the same feelings about China and the Chinese as I had about the Milky Way and its twirling conglomerate of stars. They were all right, the Chinese, but very far away, completely out of reach, and not really to be understood'[1]. Even in the 1920s China—still sometimes romantically styled 'Cathay'—appeared to inhabit a liminal world between reality and the imagination. Derek Bryan, who worked in the Consular service in China during the 1930s and 40s, and subsequently became a leading supporter of the People's Republic in Britain, confessed that as a boy China had seemed 'both remote and strange, but sounded interesting. There were the nice stamps, with dragons or junks on them, [and] a much loved teacher at school had used the struggles between the northern and southern warlords in China as material for his French lessons…'[2]. One of the principal tasks facing the left was to help draw China out of this twilight and to place its many problems and challenges four-square in the modern world. In 1925, when Noel Brailsford asked whether China was 'Market or mission-field, pagoda or sweat-shop?', he swiftly added a new option: that of an 'insurgent nation'[3].

Over time, the advent of air travel shrank at least the physical distance. Derek Bryan, freshly graduated from Cambridge, sailed from Tilbury in December 1932 on a voyage to Shanghai that lasted 37 days. (A small coaster and a train journey finally brought him to Beijing, where he studied Chinese for the next two years.) He had experienced a 'delightful cruise, mainly through the tropics', but by the later 1930s Imperial Airways was offering a passage to Hong Kong in a mere eight and a half days[4]. Other options were also becoming available. In 1937 the Labour politician and journalist F. L. Kerran 'took the daring risk' of flying across the Pacific from Hong Kong to San Francisco on the 'China Clipper'—a journey of almost 9,000 miles that lasted six days[5]. The disruption of war temporarily imposed

[1] *Labour Monthly*, September 1949, 286. The review was written by one 'John Lilburne'.

[2] Derek Bryan, 'A cycle of Cathay: personal experience', typescript of a lecture given on 4 March 1988. I am grateful to Derek Bryan for letting me have a copy of this text. The title refers to a line from Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall' (published in 1842): 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay'.

[3] *New Leader*, 3 July 1925.

[4] *Daily Worker*, 18 December 1937.

[5] Aberdeen University, Ogilvie-Forbes papers, Ms 2740/39, Kerran to 'Sir John', 30 December 1937; *Luton Herald*, March 1938 (I am grateful to John Fraser for the latter reference).

new obstacles. Hsiao Ch'ien, a young Chinese writer, found that it took him barely a month to sail to Britain in 1939, but one hundred days to return in 1945[6]. After the war, however, flight swiftly became the favoured means of travel to China, at least for those who could afford it[7]. In 1946 Lady Isabel Cripps, the chairman of the wartime Chinese relief fund, embarked on a good will mission by BOAC flying boat from Southampton. She was accompanied by a small entourage and a large number of gifts (including a glass dessert service for Madame Chiang Kai-shek and a Worcester dinner service for her sister, Madame Sun Yat-sen)[8].

Following the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, the increasing numbers of left-wing visitors generally travelled to China by plane via the Soviet Union (with frequent stops in Siberia). Basil Davidson, who joined a delegation in the autumn of 1952, reported that the journey from London to Beijing took four days and three nights. The thrill of flying into China across the Great Wall offered some compensation for the travails along the way[9]. The alternative was to take the Trans-Siberian Railway, which had been completed in the early part of the twentieth century. The septuagenarian trade unionist Tom Mann had travelled this way in1927. As he told his old comrade John Burns: 'I'm a long way from London, came through Warsaw & Moscow, over 7,000 miles so far, 6,000 of it through snow'[10]. When Marion Ramelson came by the same route in November 1949 she simply recorded in her diary 'Brrh, its cold!'[11] By the later 1950s, however, such hardships were no longer a required part of the experience of travelling to China. In 1958 the Labour MP Harold Wilson noted that '[b]efore the war Peking seemed as remote as another planet. Yet I was told I could board a Russian jet in Peking at 6.30 in the morning and be in London Airport at 9.30 the same evening'. China was now 'nearer to Britain in time and distance than Edinburgh/London 150 years ago'[12]. By the 1960s cheap charter flights were operating regularly between Britain and Hong Kong.

Despite its ever-greater proximity, however, China retained a sense of distance throughout this period due to its scale, inaccessibility, cultural difference, and—after 1949—political isolation. Cecil l'Estrange Malone, who travelled widely in China in 1926, wrote that it was a territory so vast as to be 'comparable to a continent', home to 'between one-third and one-quarter' of the world's population, but suffering from 'an almost complete absence of [road and rail] communications'[13]. The historian R. H. Tawney noted in 1931 that 'in a country as large as

[6] Hsiao Ch'ien, *Traveller without a map* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), 160.

[7] As late as 1975, the scientist Dorothy Hodgkin recommended the Trans-Siberian railway as the cheapest way to get to China. She had been approached by a student who was trying to raise £550 to join a tour with the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (Bodleian library, Oxford, Hodgkin papers, Ms Eng. C. 5688, G112, Hodgkin to A Morris, 25 February 1975).

[8] LHASC, LP/GS/INT/2/2, BUACF committee minutes for 19 September 1946.

[9] Basil Davidson, *Daybreak in China* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 27.

[10] Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann, 1856–1941: The challenges of Labour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 224.

[11] LHASC, CP/IND/MISC/5/7, Ramelson's diary/scrapbook. See below, p. 115.

[12] Bodleian library, Ms Wilson c.113, speeches of 20 August 1958 and 3 July 1958.

[13] Colonel C. L. Malone, 'What shall we do with China?', *Socialist Review*, October 1926, 11.

Europe' there were only 35,000 miles of motor-road and 12,000 of railway (a figure easily exceeded by Britain's rail network alone)[14]. Brailsford wrote in 1927 that between China's 'fabled cities, with their priceless treasures of art, the means of transport are exactly what they are in the African bush'[15]. Harry Pollitt, the British Communist leader who toured China by rail in the spring of 1955, until summoned home to fight the general election campaign, had plenty of time to reflect on 'what a vast unending country China seems…'[16]. The backwardness of the vast Chinese hinterland contrasted all the more sharply with the westernized coastal outposts which Tawney memorably described as 'a modern fringe… stitched along the hem of the ancient garment'[17].

China—vast, teeming, and poor—made a powerful impact on visitors, and tugged at their social conscience. According to Tawney, the 'first sensation of a visitor to a Chinese city is one of suffocation beneath a torrent of human beings, straining at manual labour or clamouring to be given it'. The tweed-suited academic provoked astonishment by 'seeking to lend a hand' to coolies as they hauled their heavy carts through the streets[18]. Tom Mann was amazed to find 'a country with no wagons or carts, or lorries and everything on the road carried by humans!!!'[19] Margery Fry, who arrived in Shanghai in 1933, wrote that '[i]ts rather terrible to be in a country where the main and cheapest form of power is that of human muscle. One obviously can't avoid using rickshaws but it's worse than the ancient bath chair business for the men run really fast'. She found the poverty 'heartbreaking', and was shocked at the contrast between the downtrodden poor and the elegance and physique of the 'richer classes'[20]. Joshua Horn, who first visited Shanghai as a ship's surgeon four years later, wrote that impressions of the city's beggars, prostitutes, and exploited children were 'indelibly etched' on his mind. He returned in the 1950s to work as a dedicated doctor who believed that Maoist politics held the key to the people's wellbeing[21]. George Hardy, a much-travelled Communist agitator who lived in Shanghai in the later 1920s, recoiled from the callousness of British officials in the face of appallingly high rates of Chinese infant mortality. When he asked if nothing could be done he allegedly was told: 'What would happen if they didn't die?'[22] Even after the Communists had taken power, Basil Davidson described Shanghai as an 'Asian slum' and a 'rubbish heap that passes for a city'[23].

[14] R. H. Tawney, *The attack and other papers* (Woking & London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), 36.
[15] *New Leader*, 25 February 1927.
[16] *Daily Worker*, 19 April 1955.
[17] R. H. Tawney, *Land and Labour in China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932), 13.
[18] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 119; Ross Terrill, *R. H. Tawney & his times: Socialism as friendship* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), 71.
[19] MRC, Mss 334/3/2/40, Mann to 'Mam', 20 March 1927.
[20] Margery Fry, circular letter 3, 22 September 1933. I am grateful to Annabel Cole for providing me with transcripts of this correspondence.
[21] Joshua S. Horn, *'Away with all pests': An English surgeon in People's China* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), 18–19.
[22] *Labour Monthly*, October 1952, 477–8.
[23] Davidson, *Daybreak*, 69, 87.

Until the advent of air travel, Shanghai was often the first point of contact for foreign visitors. Yet, as Tawney noted, it was an 'optical illusion': a gateway to China, but 'not China herself'[24]. The real China, of course, lay inland. Until the late twentieth century the bulk of China's population worked and lived on the land, and any genuine encounter with China was, necessarily, an encounter with the peasantry. As Malone put it, the 'typical scene in China' was the 'little primitive home-stead, often a mere mud hut, of the struggling peasant farmer'[25]. Peter Townsend, who travelled to China in 1941 and stayed for a decade to work with the Chinese industrial cooperative movement, came to realize that the countryside was, in fact, a 'peasant landscape'. 'Go where you will, the foreground is peasant, the background peasant-made . . . [the peasant] dominates the landscape. He humanizes it. He conquers it.'[26] Rural China may have seemed almost trackless, but it never lacked a human imprint. Margery Fry, travelling south of Nanking, noted from her train window that 'everywhere there are graves. Singly, in 2s and 3s, in big groups, breaking up the fields with awkward islands of sanctity'. She found this countryside eerily familiar: 'one could almost have sworn . . . that one was in the flats of Somerset, willow sprinkled country with low-running ditches and narrow dykes between'[27]. Nothing better illustrated the old cliché of the 'unchanging East' than this timeless peasant landscape—yet this was precisely the agrarian world that the Communists sought to transform during and after their conquest of power. A succession of foreign writers, from Peter Townsend to the American journalist William Hinton and the Swede Jan Myrdal, would write influential descriptions of Chinese village life undergoing a process of profound change[28]. Indeed, David and Isabel Crook wrote no less than three books on the transformation of the northern village of Ten Mile Inn, published at ten yearly intervals after 1959[29].

China's difference lay in more than its sheer scale. Visitors also experienced China as a series of profoundly intrusive sensations—smells, sounds, and the breaking of Western bodily taboos. Margery Fry, for instance, found the 'continual hawking and spitting, indoors and out, morning, noon and night, with or without spittoon . . . dreadfully hard to bear'[30]. Bertrand Russell described how in the foreign-controlled Treaty ports the 'cheerful disordered beauty' of the Chinese quarters contrasted sharply with 'Europe's ugly cleanliness and Sunday go-to-meeting

[24] Tawney, *Attack*, 38.

[25] Cecil l'Estrange Malone, *New China: Report of an investigation*, Part II: *Labour conditions and Labour organisations* (ILP, 1926), 3.

[26] Peter Townsend, *China Phoenix* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 89.

[27] Circular letter from Margery Fry & Marie Michaelis, 22 September 1933.

[28] William Hinton, *Fanshen: A documentary of revolution in a Chinese village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966); Jan Myrdal, *Report from a Chinese village* (first published 1963; Pelican edn, Bungay, Suffolk: Penguin, 1967) and its more Maoist sequel Jan Myrdal and Gun Kessle, *China: The revolution continues* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971).

[29] See Isabel Crook and David Crook, *Revolution in a Chinese village: Ten Mile Inn* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959); *The first years of Yangyi Commune* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); and *Mass movement in a Chinese village: Ten Mile Inn* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979). The third book completed the Crooks' eyewitness account of the land reform movement in 1948.

[30] Margery Fry, circular letter 5, 11 October 1933.

decency'. The ports presented a wicked choice between 'safety, spaciousness and hygiene' and 'romance, overcrowding and disease'[31]. For many foreign visitors the most obvious triumph of the new Communist regime after 1949 was in the struggle against human waste. David Crook observed the clearing of Beijing's sewers in 1951—hundreds of soldiers digging out 'mountains of rich-looking black slime', which was then carted into the countryside as fertilizer[32]. The journalist George Gale, who accompanied a Labour Party delegation to China in 1954, reported that the major cities had been cleaned up: '. . . the smell of Chinese sweat is better than the smell of Chinese excrement'[33]. Not even honoured guests were spared. When Denis Healey, the Labour Party's Shadow Chancellor, and his wife Edna visited a school for the 're-education' of cadres in 1972, they were solemnly told how the students had to clean out the latrines on their first day—'how awful the smell was as they plunged about in the muck, splashing the stuff all over their clothes'[34].

Some visitors took China's strangeness and inconvenience in their stride. The Labour MP Barbara Castle noted in 1954 that when she asked to use the lavatory at a cooperative farm: 'I was taken into a shed full of pigs and hay and given a pot! The women stood around while I had my pee!'[35] But others, notably Beatrice Webb, were repelled by China. Her journey from Manchuria to Hong Kong (accompanied by her husband Sidney) in the autumn of 1911 coincided with the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty. She immediately concluded that Chinese civilization was both decadent and inferior to that of Japan, from where she had just come. The Chinese had been 'devastated by drugs and abnormal sexual indulgence. They are, in essentials, an *unclean race*'. Webb's views owed much to her belief—based on the 'vicious femininity' of many male faces—that sodomy prevailed 'extensively' in Chinese society[36]. Bertrand Russell, however, is said to have offered a more straightforward explanation: she 'loved Japan and hated China because there were no lavatories at the railway stations in China and because the Japanese bought the Webbs' books'[37].

Beatrice Webb's comments about Chinese decadence belonged to a wider discourse on the left about the paradox of China's civilization. On the one hand, there was an awareness that China had a civilization which—as Stafford Cripps put it—was already flourishing when Britain was still in its 'woad period'[38]. Great engineering feats such as the Grand Canal, still thronged with traffic in the early 1930s, were old 'when Roman engineers were driving roads through Britain'[39]. Conversely,

[31] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), 74–75.
[32] *Labour Monthly*, May 1951, 'Letter from Peking', 219.
[33] George Stafford Gale, *No flies in China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), 152.
[34] Denis Healey, *The time of my life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 366.
[35] Bodleian Library, Ms Castle 5, diary entry for 24 October 1954.
[36] George Feaver (ed.), *The Webbs in Asia: The 1911–12 travel diary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 140 (entry for 6 November 1911). Feaver points out that Webb's evidence was 'largely anecdotal' (p. 25, note 39); BLPES, Beatrice Webb's diary, fols. 2896–7 and 2916.
[37] Kingsley Martin's review of Russell's autobiography in the *New Statesman*, 26 April 1968, 548.
[38] Bodleian Library, Mss Cripps 89, notes for a speech of 5 February 1943. This point was frequently made—see the comments by John Scurr MP in *Daily Herald*, 14 February 1927.
[39] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 19.

since the mid-nineteenth century China had suffered from chronic disunity, economic backwardness, and repeated humiliation at the hands of foreigners. For many, in the 1920s and 1930s, the answer to this puzzle lay in the Chinese character: the Chinese were 'childish and charming', possessed of a 'pacifist philosophy', and easily exploited[40]. This was W. H. Auden's 'passive flower-like people', wronged by the 'prodigious' West[41]. The Chinese were a 'quiet race', although—as the 'Boxer' rebellion of 1900 showed—fearsome when roused[42]. Even for left-wing commentators, therefore, admiration for China's civilization was combined with assumptions of Western superiority in practical matters. In its dealings with China, Brailsford argued, British civilization meant simply 'the clean deck, the accurate gun and the balanced ledger'[43].

Although Communist China presented less of a physical shock to the senses, many foreign visitors continued to find it profoundly different and challenging. When Barbara Castle returned from the People's Republic to the capitalist fleshpots of Hong Kong in 1954, she and her colleagues felt 'naked and, in some strange, inexplicable way ashamed. Perhaps the Americans are right and our brains ought to be re-washed'[44]. Richard Crossman, the left-wing Labour MP, recalled his visit to China in 1958 with a perceptible shiver. For all of its material advances it was, he wrote, an 'oriental terra incognita', and 'I shall never forget my nostalgia for the cosy occidental Soviet Union during my three weeks alone in China'. As his visit had coincided with the latest crisis in China's relations with the United States and its allies on Taiwan, he had been kept isolated, and this shaped his 'picture of the world of Chinese communism—as a completely foreign and external experience'[45]. Such alienation was not unusual. Martin Bernal, who was a student in China in 1959–60, later reflected that many arrived in China 'in love with its culture and deeply moved by the Revolution'. Such sentiments did not survive contact with officialdom and 'above all . . . the lack of human contact and the denial of entry into Chinese life'. Few foreigners had truly penetrated beyond the barriers of Chinese life before 1949: since then it had become 'virtually impossible'[46].

AN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION: RUSSELL, TAWNEY, AND NEEDHAM

In October 1920 Bertrand Russell and his lover Dora Black arrived in Shanghai, having sailed from Marseilles aboard a French ship. Russell had been invited to

[40] Douglas Massie in *New Leader*, 19 February 1932; W. Herron in *Labour Party Conference Reports* (*LPCR*), 1925, 262.
[41] From Auden's sonnet sequence 'In time of war' in W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, *Journey to a war* (first published 1939; rev. edn, London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 271.
[42] Brailsford in *New Leader*, 3 July 1925.
[43] *New Leader*, 10 December 1926.
[44] *New Statesman*, 11 December 1954, 775–6.
[45] *New Statesman*, 5 July 1963, 17–18.
[46] *New Statesman*, 2 May 1975, 598–9.

lecture at the National University of Peking, and there was a moment of panicked hilarity on the quayside when Bertrand and Dora feared that the invitation—sent by one 'Fu-Ling yu'—might be a practical joke[47]. In every respect, however, the moment was a propitious one. Russell was one of the leading progressive thinkers of his day, and a scourge of convention. He had been jailed for his opposition to the First World War, and he and Dora had recently returned (with some sharp criticisms) from a visit to the Soviet Union. Now, he relished the opportunity to discover a country that was not only home to an ancient civilization but was also a new Republic set on a modernizing course. The atmosphere, he wrote, was 'electric with the hope of a great awakening'[48], and the students were eager to learn from the West. (Russell's students apparently even included the young Mao Tse-tung[49].) For Russell, despite the fact that he almost died of pneumonia, these months in China were remembered with immense fondness and personal happiness. He was impressed by the intelligence, energy, and self-confidence of his students, and the wit of his hosts. He 'had not realised until then that a civilised Chinese is the most civilised person in the world', and the contrast with the boorish 'Englishman in the East' was stark[50]. Russell found China a country 'filled with philosophic calm', whereas the weekly letters and newspapers from England seemed to 'breathe upon us a hot blast of insanity'[51]. It was precisely this fear for how an innocent China could survive the depredations of the West that informed his major work in this field.

In *The Problem of China* (1922), Russell argued that there was nothing inferior about Chinese civilization, which had proved remarkably resilient in the face of many foreign challenges over the centuries[52]. The difference between China and the West lay, instead, in terms of values. 'Our way of life', according to Russell, 'demands strife, exploitation, restless change, discontent and destruction'. The 'domineering cocksureness' of the West was rooted, fundamentally, in its superiority in science (and, therefore, 'greater proficiency in the art of killing') and its will to power. The West—whether embodied in Imperialism, Bolshevism, or the YMCA—regarded mankind as mere 'raw material' to be moulded. The Chinese, by contrast, valued the intellect and a peaceful existence over 'progress and efficiency'. They were 'rational hedonists' who preferred 'enjoyment to power'[53]. The average Chinaman was 'happier than the average Englishman' because his nation was built on a 'more humane and civilised outlook than our own'. The Chinese 'like our thought but dislike our mechanism', whereas in Japan the opposite

[47] Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree*, i: *My Quest for Liberty and Love* (London: Virago, 1975), 108.
[48] Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, ii: *1914–1944* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968/70), 124–33, here p. 128.
[49] Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 294, 296–8.
[50] Russell, *Autobiography, 1914–44*, 126, 129; Russell, *Problem of China*, 96–7.
[51] Russell, *Autobiography, 1914–44*, 129.
[52] This paragraph is based on Russell, *Problem of China*, esp. pp. 13, 17, 52, 81–2, 119, 197, 241, 242, and 252.
[53] Russell, *Autobiography, 1914–44*, 138, citing his letter printed in *The Nation*, 8 January 1921.

applied. For Russell, the problem was how China could survive without abandoning the cultural traditions which he valued so highly. A China that adopted nationalism and militarism would soon embark on its own career of aggression: it would simply join the international 'madness' and perish in the coming world conflagration. His prescription—one of orderly government, greater control by the Chinese state over its industrial development, and the spread of education—was intended to strengthen China to the point where it could defend itself, while allowing it to turn away from 'materialistic activities imposed by the Powers'. Such a programme would allow China to play 'the part in the world for which she is fitted': to give mankind a 'whole new hope'.

Russell was aware that this was a tall order. As he told Lady Ottoline Morrell, 'I would do anything in the world to help the Chinese, but it is difficult. They are like a nation of artists, with all their good and bad points'[54]. In May 1924, however, he was given the opportunity to put some of his ideas into practice when Ramsay MacDonald, prime minister and foreign secretary during the short-lived first Labour government, appointed him to a committee set up to decide how to spend the 'Boxer Indemnity' funds. Russell wrote a memorandum arguing that education was the 'sole purpose' for which the money should be used. Soon afterwards he was removed from the committee by the incoming Conservative administration, but a substantial proportion of the money was eventually used in the manner that he had suggested[55]. Russell's ideas about China's place in the world order were highly influential on the left, and helped to shape its perception of China in the interwar years. The image of a civilized, peaceable people cruelly attacked by a brutal neighbour wielding the weapons of modernity, which underpinned the left's profound sympathy for China in the face of Japanese aggression during the 1930s, owed much to Russell[56]. Yet, at the same time, the exigencies of national resistance began to erase Russell's vision of a race of peaceful hedonists. In a propaganda film of the late 1930s, the Communist party leader Mao Tse-tung demanded 'shells, battleships, planes that fly like a bullet, bombs that can destroy a battalion of enemies…'[57]. During the Second World War Hsiao Ch'ien, who moved within influential intellectual circles in Britain, publicly attacked Russell and other 'well-meaning people who were trying to dissuade China from modernising'[58]. The world was, in his view, far too dangerous a place for any country to neglect its material development and national defence. Post-war China would not

[54] Undated letter of 1921, in Russell, *Autobiography, 1914–44*, 141.

[55] Ibid. 147–8 for the texts of MacDonald's letter and Russell's memorandum. The China Indemnity Application Act of March 1931 allocated one part of the funds for educational purposes and the other part for infrastructure projects in China. The Universities China Committee was subsequently established to encourage Chinese students to come to Britain and to promote the teaching of Chinese language and literature in British universities (see Barbara Whittingham-Jones, *China fights in Britain* (London: W. H. Allen, 1944), 28–31).

[56] See below, Chapter 2.

[57] *Left Review*, February 1938, 808–9, citing the film 'China strikes back'.

[58] Ch'ien, *Traveller*, 108–10. See also his wartime publications: *The Dragon Beards versus the Blueprints: Meditations on post-war culture* (London: The Pilot Press, 1944) and *China but not Cathay* (London: The Pilot Press, 1942).

be 'built on marble balustrades with weeping willows swaying over the edge of their tiled eaves… [but] steel and cement'[59]. The emergence of the People's Republic as a world power in the 1950s, and especially its acquisition of nuclear weapons, was very far from the outcome envisaged by Russell in 1922. Indeed, in 1963 he would describe China as an 'obstacle to world peace' for refusing to sign the Test Ban Treaty[60].

If Russell, in the spirit of the Enlightenment *philosophes*[61], saw pre-Communist China as a beacon of hope in a troubled world, R. H. Tawney focused on China's acute developmental problems, and above all the land question. Tawney, a professor of economic history at the London School of Economics and an expert in the history of early modern European society, spent a total of eight months in China during two separate visits. The first of these, in 1930, was on behalf of the US-based Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR); for the second, in late 1931, he joined a mission sent by the League of Nations to provide advice on education. While in China, Tawney stayed with the American writer Pearl Buck, whose hugely successful novel *The Good Earth* (1931) vividly conjured up the marginal world of the Chinese peasant for a Western audience. Tawney's *Land and Labour in China* (1932)—based on his memorandum for the IPR—did the same for a political readership[62].

Tawney's starting point was the sheer density of Chinese agricultural life. 'To look over a plain in China from a low hill or city wall is to see fifty villages at once. They are as thick on the ground as are, in Western countries, individual farms.'[63] Three quarters of the population were engaged in agriculture, and the land-holding peasant farmers were therefore central to the stability of the state. Yet the peasants were scraping a living on minute parcels of land, so small as to resemble an 'agriculture of pygmies in a land of giants'[64]. Lacking modern tools and chemicals, they survived by ingenuity, intense physical toil, and reliance on centuries-old systems of irrigation. Their problems were intensified by China's chronic political instability and domination by warlords since the revolution of 1911. A high proportion of farmers stood on the 'brink of actual destitution': like a man standing up to his neck in water who could be drowned by a mere ripple. Others were willing to follow the Communists in 'elemental revolt against intolerable injustices'[65]. By contrast, industrialization was surging ahead, but only in a few Western-dominated cities. In 1930 some 42 per cent of all factories were located in Shanghai, where conditions recalled 'those of the first, and worst, phase of the Industrial Revolution

[59] Ch'ien's article in the *New Statesman*, 11 March 1944, 171, and correspondence in subsequent issues, including Ch'ien's response in 1 April 1944, 225.

[60] *New Statesman*, 16 August 1963, 194.

[61] Ryan, *Bertrand Russell*, 94–7.

[62] See Terrill, *R. H. Tawney*, 67–71. For a good overview of Tawney's career, see Lawrence Goldman, 'Richard Henry Tawney', *Oxford DNB*.

[63] Tawney, *Attack*, 42 (This book reproduces some of Tawney's articles on China published in the *Manchester Guardian*, May 1931).

[64] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 38.

[65] Ibid. 72–4.

in England'[66]. Beyond such centres of exploitation, Chinese industry was pre-capitalist, driven by cheap human labour. As a historian Tawney felt some familiarity with these rows of houses 'open to the streets, at once workshops and homes', where artisans worked and lived alongside their employers[67].

Although his writing evoked a world of poverty and backwardness, Tawney had no time for the stereotypes of the 'unchanging' East[68]. This was no 'static civilisation', unsuited for economic success. China's economic, political, and intellectual life were in a remarkable state of 'simultaneous ferment', and the country could well be on the brink of wholesale change[69]. There were certain similarities here with Russell's work, in particular a shared fear that China would simply imitate the West rather than drawing on its own strengths to control Western technology[70]. Yet by comparison, as one Marxist critic put it, Russell was a 'muddled amateur and a self-styled sociologist'[71]. Tawney offered hard-headed reformist advice on everything from cooperatives, farmers' credit, agricultural research, and land reform to the exchange placement of civil servants through the League of Nations. He stood in a long tradition of foreign experts who wanted to help China to modernize and protect itself[72]. However, the Communist-led 'revolution of the peasants', which he had predicted would be 'unpleasant' and not 'perhaps . . . undeserved'[73], imposed a far more drastic solution to the land question than that which Tawney had envisaged. Under Communist rule the foreign would, in Mao's words, 'serve China' on China's own terms. There would be little room for foreign experts—even, after 1960, those from the Soviet Union.

Joseph Needham's exposure to China, as well as his emotional and intellectual engagement with it, was far more sustained than that of Russell and Tawney. Needham was a biochemist and Fellow of the Royal Society, but also a remarkable polymath, steeped in history, philosophy, and theology. He was a Marxist (although not a member of the Communist Party), a Christian Socialist who had attended the Rev. Conrad Noel's church at Thaxted since 1927, and a keen Morris dancer. He experienced what he termed the 'great turning point' of his life in 1937 when a group of Chinese students (including his lover and future wife Lu Gwei-djen) arrived to work with him at his Cambridge laboratory[74]. Needham spent the years

[66] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 149.
[67] Ibid. 114.
[68] Terrill, *R. H. Tawney*, 254.
[69] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 19, 12.
[70] Ibid. 130–2, 194. Note also Tawney's comment that the West can learn the 'art of living' from China (Ibid. 178).
[71] G. L. Pu, 'A decade of China, 1922–32: From Russell to Tawney', *Labour Monthly*, November 1933, 697–702.
[72] See Jonathan Spence, *The China helpers: Western advisers in China 1620–1960* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969).
[73] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 74.
[74] 'Henry Holorenshaw' (Needham's usual pseudonym), 'The making of an honorary Taoist' in *The Caian*, 1994–5, first published 1973, 117–38, here p. 127. In the absence of a full-length autobiography, this reflective piece is very helpful in providing a context for Needham's intellectual development. See also Gary Werskey, *The visible college: A collective biography of British scientists and socialists of the 1930s* (London: Free Association Books, 1988) and Eric Hobsbawm, 'Era of wonders', *London Review of Books*, 31/4 (26 February 2009), 19–20.

1943–6 in China facilitating British scientific cooperation with the Chinese authorities, and returned regularly for shorter visits thereafter. Unlike Russell and Tawney, therefore, Needham arrived in China during wartime, flying 'over the hump' from India to the remote south-west, and he first experienced it not as a visiting academic/tourist but as a scientific emissary and researcher—keen to explore the most remote quarters of 'free' China. As his lyrical review of William Hinton's *Fanshen* (a classic account of land reform) suggests, he found rural China captivating, and the struggles of the Chinese peasants inspirational:

> For anyone who knows the northern Chinese countryside, with its pale colours, mud-brick cottages and farm buildings, shrines and temples, isolated among fields of yellow earth, groves of poplars in dry valleys, the picture is almost unbearably vivid . . . [the Chinese people were determined to] create a state of society which we might call at the same time truly Christian and Confucian, with equalitarianism as the outcome of brotherly love in spite of almost overwhelming difficulties[75].

Needham was fascinated by every aspect of Chinese civilization, and in particular the question (which also intrigued Tawney) of why such an advanced society—the source of so many scientific innovations—had failed to develop modern science, and thereby had fallen behind the West in recent centuries. During his stay in China he collected a large quantity of historical material related to this theme, and as early as 1946 was announcing that his 'great aim' was to write a book on 'Science and Civilisation in China'[76]. Originally envisaged as a single-volume study, this project eventually became his life's work and the basis of his reputation as a sinologist, historian of science, and self-styled 'bridge-builder' between East and West[77].

In fact, Needham dedicated the latter part of his life to two great causes: *Science and Civilisation in China* and defending the Chinese revolution against its western critics. If the first made his reputation, the latter frequently endangered it. In 1952, for instance, he courted 'great public unpopularity' by claiming that the United States was engaging in bacteriological warfare against China and North Korea[78]. During the 1960s he led the movement in support of the People's Republic of China at a time when the British legation in Beijing was burnt down by Red Guards and a number of Britons detained for years without trial. Such commitment spoke of Needham's deep love for China, as well as his desire to see the emerging Asian states—so long humiliated by the West—treated with respect and justice. At the same time, however, Needham was also driven by a strong sense of his own rectitude, and this made him not only a formidable enemy for the British authorities but also an awkward ally for the British left. When senior Communists' private conversations were monitored by Special Branch during the Korean War, they were heard to acknowledge that Needham was very important to them, but also that he was 'a man with a terrific sense of his own importance' and motivated

[75] *Tribune*, 10 November 1967.

[76] CUL, Needham papers, C32, letter of 22 January 1946, letter to 'Dear Professor'.

[77] For the best account of the project, see Simon Winchester, *The man who loved China* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). Holorenshaw, 'Making', 119.

[78] Holorenshaw, 'Making', 132; and see below, pp. 134–6.

by ambition[79]. Indeed, Needham's pursuit of official recognition for his work was well known and—in the case of the Order of the Brilliant Star, awarded amidst the collapse of Chiang Kai-shek's regime in 1949—richly comical[80]. In 1992, three years before his death, when he was elected a Companion of Honour, he joked to friends that it was a 'failed O[rder of] M[erit]'[81].

Needham was feted in the People's Republic of China as a leading foreign supporter, and was well connected to the political and scientific elite. In 1972, according to an amusing—if unverifiable—anecdote, Mao even consulted Needham on whether the Chinese should, in future, drive cars or continue to ride bicycles![82] In certain key respects, however, Needham's understanding of Chinese civilization sat uneasily with Maoist Communism. When the Communists took power in 1949, Needham had said that 'however Marxist' Mao and his party might be, they would only succeed by 'a profound adaptation of these theories to the concrete conditions of Chinese society'[83]. Yet, for Mao, these 'conditions' were the very shackles that had to be broken. As Eric Hobsbawm has put it, Needham's 'heart went out to the [Chinese] imperial past rather than to the revolutionary present to which he was committed'[84]. In particular, he had a profound respect for the two disciplines that had underpinned Chinese civilization over many centuries: Confucianism and Taoism. The former offered an ethical, humanistic code for rational government and social relations, while the latter was a religion that encouraged empirical enquiry. He felt a special affinity for Taoist spirituality and, indeed, styled himself an 'honorary Taoist'[85]. 'Euro-American civilisation' had, he argued, signally failed to offer a better alternative to 'Confucian justice and Taoist peace'[86]. A study of Taoism showed that 'the ideal Chinese way was always to persuade, to lead from within and below, to let natural processes take their course, rather than to dominate, to enforce and to impose'[87].

[79] TNA, KV2/3055, monitoring dated 24 January 1951 and 1 February 1951: in the first case the speaker was Rajani Palme Dutt. Needham later acknowledged that his 'obstinacy and determination' could make him difficult to work with, but that he 'gradually learnt . . . open-mindedness and diplomatic tact' (Holorenshaw, 'Making', 129).

[80] CUL, Needham papers, C42. Needham was first notified of the award in October 1947 and was desperate to receive it before the KMT regime collapsed, requiring special permission from the British Foreign Office. In his memoir he presented the award in a rather better light by describing it as being made 'at the conclusion of the war, towards the end of the united front period', which would imply 1945–6 rather than 1949 (Holorenshaw, 'Making', 131).

[81] *The Independent*, 27 March 1995, obituary by Mansel Davies (consulted online, 21 September 2010).

[82] Winchester, *Man who loved China*, 236–7. Needham is said to have answered that he found his bicycle perfectly satisfactory in Cambridge. Winchester does not give a source and acknowledges that the conversation possibly 'never took place'.

[83] Needham's foreword to Alun Falconer, *New China; Friend or foe?* (London: Naldrett Press, 1950).

[84] Hobsbawm, 'Era of wonders', 20.

[85] Holorenshaw, 'Making', 136, describes the nature of the 'irresistible attraction' of Taoism for Needham.

[86] Joseph Needham and Dorothy Needham, *Science outpost—Papers of the Sino-British Science Co-operation office* (London: Pilot Press, 1948), 258.

[87] *New Statesman*, 1 January 1965, 12.

Needham consistently emphasized the continuities in Chinese civilization, and the lasting importance of these philosophical traditions for modern China. For instance, in 1965, shortly before the onset of the Cultural Revolution, he publicly argued that the 'age-long traditions of Confucianism and Taoism . . . always would remain, the background of Chinese mentality'. '[M]arxism in Cathay must be seen as an entirely different mental background from marxism in Christendom'. Indeed, the Chinese intelligentsia had been able to adopt dialectical materialism so swiftly precisely because of its roots in Chinese philosophy[88]. Yet, while Mao Tse-tung remained deeply attached to the ancient Chinese legends, he was a bitter enemy of Confucianism, and saw its destruction as essential to the success of his Chinese revolution. Ultimately, therefore, there was an unresolved tension in Needham's relationship with revolutionary China: his prime loyalty was to Chinese civilization rather than to Mao or the 'Maoist vision'[89].

THE BRITISH LEFT AND CHINA: SALVAGING A PAST

In the early 1980s Arthur Clegg embarked on a project to rediscover the British left's relationship with China. Clegg, by now in his late 60s, had as a young man played a prominent role in the China Campaign Committee: the principal organization supporting China against Japanese aggression. He was also a member of the Communist Party and served as foreign editor of the *Daily Worker* during the 1950s, prior to leaving the party in 1957 as a result of his 'leanings to China'[90]. Clegg went on to teach economics and the history of science, latterly at London's City University, and became an accomplished poet. Indeed, his *Pictures of the Thirties* (1975) had already sketched out a verse history of this most formative of decades. Now, in retirement he dedicated himself to writing a properly researched account of the 'forgotten campaign' of the 1930s and 40s. Clegg tackled this historical lacuna with great energy: he tracked down the papers of many prominent activists, reopened contacts with former comrades in both Britain and China, and organized volunteers to comb back copies of the local and national press[91]. Clegg's *Aid China*—published in 1989 in Beijing—rescued the campaign from historical neglect. However, he was interested in more than simply reconstructing the work

[88] Joseph Needham, *Within the Four Seas: The Dialogue of East and West* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), 156, and SACU *Bulletin*, 1; *New Statesman*, 1 January 1965, 12.

[89] Below, p. 197.

[90] For Clegg, see the obituaries by George Matthews in *The Independent*, 16 February 1994 and by John Cowley in *The Guardian*. John Callaghan writes that Clegg left the party in 1957 'over [unspecified] differences about China', *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, 308. The quotation cited here comes from an undated card (*c.*1988?) from Clegg to the historian Leslie Morton: 'It's a long time ago since you ticked me off for my leanings to China' (LHASC, CP/HIST/1/15).

[91] In some cases, Clegg elicited fascinating recollections, while in other cases the results were disappointing. For instance, the poet Miles Tomalin recalled only that he had been 'just a general dogsbody, doing odd jobs' for the CCC, while Lord Listowel—a prominent and active member of the committee—said that he only remembered 'one art exhibition' (MML, Clegg papers, Tomalin to Clegg, 5 June 1980; Hull, DBN 21/1, Clegg's paper of 26 March 1980).

of a single committee. As he wrote in 1980, there was more to Anglo-Chinese relations in the century after 1839 than a simple record of British dominance over China: there were also aspects in which the British people could 'take pride'. In effect, he was urging those British activists who continued to support China after the Sino-Soviet split to place themselves within an anti-imperialist tradition dating back to the earliest modern contacts between Britain and China. In January 1980 he told a meeting of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding that it should regard itself as the 'inheritor of all the traditions of support for the Chinese people' dating back to opposition to the Opium Wars 'and [Augustus] Lindley laying guns for the Taipings'[92]. Some of these cases—such as that of Lindley—were reasonably well known, but there were large gaps in the story: 'How', Clegg asked, 'did the British Left greet the 1911 Revolution?'[93]

In fact, as we have seen, at least one prominent figure on the left—Beatrice Webb—was present in China at the time, and was far from impressed with the prospects for political change. In any case, Clegg was probably posing the wrong question. It is surely unfair to expect the 'British left'—however that is defined—to have had a view on every development in China since the Opium Wars. Indeed, it is notable that, while China's supporters in the twentieth century were often aware of their nineteenth-century progenitors, they tended to date the modern campaign for China only from the mid 1920s. For instance, a document circulated in 1965 by the Britain–China Friendship Association noted that its National Committee included those who had campaigned in defence of the Chinese people 'right from the early days of the conflicts in China in the '20s'[94]. In other words, it was the decade after 1911 that marked the watershed, with not only the emergence of Chinese nationalism but also the transformation of the British left following the Russian Revolution. Two other points should also be borne in mind by way of qualification. First, for all the heroic examples of solidarity with the Chinese people, there were also many instances of intolerance and prejudice within the labour movement—especially those directed against Chinese immigrants within Britain and the empire. Secondly, there was a tradition of humanitarian and moral campaigning for the reform of Chinese society that was quite independent of the left. For instance, the movement against the binding of women's feet in the late nineteenth century (the 'Natural Foot Society') was led by missionaries and their wives, while the attack on *mui tsai* (indentured labour for girls) in interwar Hong Kong was launched by a fervent anti-Communist, Colonel John Ward[95].

Even so, Clegg was justified in tracing criticism of British policy towards China back to the first Anglo-Chinese (or 'Opium') War of 1839–42. The conflict, which

[92] SACU papers, committee minutes, 12 January 1980.

[93] *China Now*, November/December 1980, 16, 18.

[94] BCFA to members, 15 February 1965 (LHASC, CP/IND/HANN/11/08)—my emphasis. See also the 1986 document cited below (Epilogue, p. 212).

[95] For the 'Natural Foot Society', see Margaret A. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 60–6; for *mui tsai,* see Frank Welsh, *A history of Hong Kong* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 393–8.

followed attempts by the Chinese imperial authorities to ban the smuggling of opium from British India, established a completely new relationship between Britain and China. Under the 'unequal' treaty of Nanking (1842), Britain was awarded substantial compensation and allowed to trade from five 'treaty ports' (Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai). Britain also gained sovereignty over the island of Hong Kong in perpetuity. It was a spectacular—if morally questionable—expression of British imperial might. William Gladstone (then still a Tory) denounced Britain's actions in parliament in 1840: 'a war more unjust in its origin . . . I do not know'[96]. Outside of parliament, the war also captured the attention of the Chartist movement. Although the time lag of many months between Britain and China made it difficult to follow the conflict closely, the Chartists were in no doubt that the war was immoral and conducted on behalf of British industrial and commercial interests. As one leader put it, '[t]he manufacturers . . . had been trying some of their free trade experiments in China of late, and were shooting [the Chinese] for not allowing themselves to be poisoned for the benefit of commerce'[97]. Shijie Guan has argued that the Chartists felt a strong sense of empathy with the Chinese—as both faced repression by the British state—and saw the conflict as setting a dangerous precedent for other European adventures[98].

The war dealt a blow to the authority of the Qing (or Manchu) dynasty and encouraged a spate of rebellions. In particular, Hong Xiuquan, a prophet from southern China who drew his inspiration from Christian teachings, proclaimed himself the ruler of a 'Heavenly Kingdom [*Taiping*] of Great Peace'. As the rebellion spread—Hong's forces captured the old imperial capital of Nanking in 1853—the 'Taipings' attracted considerable interest in Britain as potential agents of religious, moral and political reform[99]. According to Thomas Taylor Meadows, writing in 1856, the Taipings aspired to introduce 'institutions of equality and communism', and offered 'equality of property, or at least of a sufficiency for everyman'[100]. The young British merchant seaman Augustus Lindley (1840–1873) journeyed into Taiping-administered territory in 1859 and was immediately struck by the peace, prosperity, and absence of beggars. These were not the usual 'servile Tartar-subdued Chinamen' but a breed of 'free men', and he felt a 'mysterious sympathy in their favour'[101]. Lindley volunteered to help the Taipings, and even organized the capture of the gunboat *Firefly* from Shanghai harbour in1863 on their behalf. The rebellion was eventually defeated in 1864 by a combination of internal disunity, unexpected Qing resilience, and foreign intervention. The British

[96] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 8 April 1840, col. 818.

[97] The Manchester Chartist leader James Leach, cited in Shijie Guan, 'Chartism and the First Opium War', *History Workshop Journal*, 24/1 (1987), 19–31, 23. See also Glenn Melancon, *Britain's China policy and the Opium crisis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 117–18.

[98] Guan, 'First Opium War', 25, 28.

[99] For a helpful overview, see J. S. Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings* (London: Routledge, 1969).

[100] Cited in John Newsinger, 'Taiping revolutionary: Augustus Lindley in China', *Race & Class*, 42/4 (April 2), 59. Meadows's *The Chinese and their rebellions* was published in 1856.

[101] Newsinger, 'Taiping revolutionary', 63.

and French governments had wrung further concessions out of the imperial authorities in the Second Anglo-Chinese War of 1856–60, and thereafter preferred a partnership with the weakened Qing dynasty to victory for the unpredictable rebels. In 1863 the British government permitted Major Charles Gordon (who was later to perish at Khartoum in 1885) to serve as commander of the mercenary forces defending Shanghai against a rebel offensive. Despite their defeat, the Taipings were later honoured by the Chinese Communists as pioneering peasant revolutionaries, and also had their admirers in Britain. Charles Curwen, a left-wing sinologist who had worked in China between 1946 and 1954, found the sword of a Taiping leader that had been purloined by Gordon and returned it to China in 1962. In 1981, with the support of the Chinese government, he launched a fund to erect a memorial to Lindley and restore his grave[102].

These troubled years—in which many millions perished—were followed by a period of relative stability. Britain's commercial position in China had been greatly strengthened by the treaties of 1858 and 1860, which also granted the extension of the burgeoning colony of Hong Kong to Kowloon on the adjoining coast. Later, in 1898, Britain took a ninety nine-year lease on the neighbouring 'New Territories' to secure fresh water supplies and strategic depth for the defence of Hong Kong. Meanwhile the international settlement at Shanghai, which was swiftly emerging as the heart of foreign commercial interests in China, acquired self-governing powers (with a British majority stake) in the 1860s. The extent of Britain's presence in China was without parallel. Britain had avoided the heavy administrative responsibilities of an Indian Raj: yet the Royal Navy patrolled the Yangtze, British law obtained in numerous concessions and treaty ports, and British officials controlled the customs service (on behalf of the Chinese government). 'Britain in China', as Robert Bickers has described it, provided opportunities not only for merchants, bureaucrats and missionaries, but also for British workers who served as policemen or in the armed forces. During the final decade of the nineteenth century, the main threat to British interests came not from the Chinese government, but from growing competition from other imperial Powers. These, for the first time, included Japan, which defeated China in 1895 and seized control over Korea and Formosa (Taiwan), and Germany, which took control of Tsingtao on the Shantung peninsula in 1898. In the short-term, however, the Powers united to crush the 'Boxer Rebellion' of 1900. This violent popular movement, supported by the Dowager Empress, was directed against foreigners and especially Christian missionaries. In the West the Boxers were widely perceived as 'fanatical, violent xenophobes . . . a force from China's past, resisting an enforced modernity'[103]. During the heated parliamentary exchanges over China in the 1920s, one Tory MP,

[102] For Curwen's application to join the CPGB in 1955, giving details of his work in China with the Friends' Ambulance Unit and the Baillie Schools, see LHASC, CP/CENT/PERS/2/2. For the Taiping sword, see *Labour Monthly*, October 1962, 456–7. At this point Curwen was on the National Committee of the Britain–China Friendship Association. For the Lindley appeal, see *China Now*, 95, March/April 1981, 27. It is not clear whether the sum of £150 was raised.

[103] Robert Bickers, 'Introduction' to Robert Bickers and R. G. Tiedmann, *The Boxers, China and the World* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. xi.

who had served in the British expeditionary force, recalled the 'mutilated and twisted bodies' left by the rebels[104].

Late-Victorian radicals had little to say about China. The British left was still in its institutional infancy: Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation was established in 1881, the Fabian Society in 1884, and the ILP in 1893[105]. However, the humiliations that Britain had inflicted on China—such as the sacking of the imperial summer palace by British and French troops in 1860—*were* remembered by the left in the twentieth century. During the Japanese aggression of the late 1930s, for instance, there were those who argued that it was hypocritical for Britain—which had sent its armed forces into China six times between 1830 and 1927—to condemn Japan. Japan's crime was merely one of degree, and Britain had 'shown [it] the way'[106]. One of the best-known symbols of China's humiliation was the infamous sign erected in the Huangpu park in Shanghai which—apparently—stated 'Dogs and Chinese not admitted'. The sign—a photograph of which appeared in a book published by Cecil l'Estrange Malone in 1926—was frequently alluded to in later years by both the Chinese Communist authorities and their British supporters. However, research indicates that while various forms of exclusion from the park were enforced after its opening in 1868, no sign bearing this particularly offensive wording was ever displayed. Indeed, when the *New Leader* provided a drawing of the sign in 1926 (probably influenced by Malone's book) it felt compelled to offer a clarification a few months later. The sign, apparently, should have read 'reserved for the foreign community—dogs and bicycles not admitted'[107]. Ultimately, it seems, the story of the Shanghai sign in its crudest form was simply too good not to be true[108].

If the legacy of the heyday of British imperialism in China was one of shame and discomfort for the British left, attitudes in the early twentieth century were rather more complex. For instance, the radical economist J. A. Hobson in his classic work *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) presented China as the 'crucial test' for Western imperialism—and as a potential threat to the interests of the British working class. China, with its vast population, 'endowed with an extraordinary capacity of steady

[104] Commander Fanshawe MP, *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 203, 8 March 1927, col. 1103.

[105] Hyndman later developed a strong interest in East Asia, notably in his *The awakening of Asia* (London: Cassell & Co., 1919): see Gregory Claeys, *Imperial sceptics: British critics of empire, 1850–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. pp. 152–3.

[106] *New Statesman*, editorial article, 4 September 1937, 328–9; *New Leader*, 14 January 1938 and 29 April 1938.

[107] See Robert Bickers and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 'Shanghai's "Dogs and Chinese not admitted" sign: Legend, history and contemporary symbol', *The China Quarterly*, 142 (June 1995), 444–66. Malone, *New China*, Part II, facing p. 20; *New Leader*, 16 November 1926 and 18 February 1927. The regulations governing access to the park had passed through various iterations since 1894: the version cited in the *New Leader*'s clarification was the latest revision, operative from 1917–28. The park was thereafter opened to the public (Bickers and Wasserstrom, 'Legend, history and contemporary symbol', 446).

[108] For a good example of the muddled persistence of the story, see the 1953 letter from one Fred Guthrie of Erith, Kent, to the Labour Party. He wrote that 'there is a magnificent park in either Hong Kong or Singapore with this inscription over the main entrance (or was for years). Dogs and Chinese not admitted'. He asked for the 'facts' so that he could refer to the sign in his public speaking (LHASC, LP ID, Box 44, letter dated 5 May 1953).

labour, with great intelligence and ingenuity, [and] inured to a low standard of material comfort' offered immense opportunity to western business. However, in one scenario that he sketched out, Chinese industry—developed with the aid of British capital—might reach a stage at which it could 'turn upon her civiliser . . . undersell him in his own markets and secure for herself what further developing work remains to be done in other undeveloped parts of the world'. Alternatively, Western businessmen could become rentiers, living a life of aristocratic luxury off the profits from China. The working class would be kept in check by a 'flood of China goods', which would suppress wages, or even 'by menaces of yellow workmen or of yellow mercenary troops'. In Hobson's view, 'the real "yellow peril"' would therefore follow the capitalist assault on China, the destruction of its civilization, and the exploitation of its human and mineral resources[109]. By invoking the 'yellow peril', Hobson was giving a different twist to the millennial fear—which had been popularize in the British writer M. P. Shiel's novel *The Yellow Danger* (1898)—about the threat that China might pose to Western civilization[110].

The fear that China's vast population may pose a threat to workers' interests gained powerful expression within the British labour movement during the first decade of the twentieth century. The decision by Arthur Balfour's Conservative government to allow mining companies to bring indentured Chinese labour into the Transvaal after the Boer War was seen by many British workers as a betrayal, reducing both employment opportunities and wages. The subsequent cry of 'Chinese slavery' helped the Liberals and their allies in the recently formed Labour Representation Committee (LRC) to win a landslide election victory in 1906. Although this was presented as a moral issue (which combined the defence of British workers' rights with concern for the well being of the Chinese 'slave labour'[111]), the campaign was implicitly—and at times explicitly—racial. The ILP conference in 1904 objected to the premature imposition of 'civic and industrial co-operation with races widely different in feeling and habit from our own'[112]. During the election campaign in 1906, Graham Wallas noted that pictures of Chinese men on election hoardings 'aroused among very many voters an immediate hatred of the Mongolian racial type. . . '[113]. In West Toxteth, the trade union leader Jim Larkin supported the Labour candidate by organizing a march by some fifty members of the Dockers Union dressed 'à la Chinese' and pulling a hearse decked out to represent the burial of freedom. Larkin had even provided a lotion to give the men a 'yellow countenance' and pigtails made of oakum which they pinned to their caps.

[109] J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902; 3rd edn, London: Allen & Unwin, 1938), 304, 308, 312, 313–14.

[110] On the 'Yellow peril', see Sascha Auerbach, *Race, law and the 'Chinese puzzle' in Imperial Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Jenny Clegg, *Fu Manchu and the 'Yellow Peril': The making of a racist myth* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 1994); for an even more modern twist, see *The Independent*, 16 December 2010.

[111] See the LRC pamphlet, 'Slavery in the Transvaal' (LHASC, LRC 13/246).

[112] David Howell, *British workers and the ILP, 1888–1906* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 347.

[113] J. P. May, 'The Chinese in Britain, 1860–1914' in Colin Holmes (ed.), *Immigrants and minorities in British society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), 117.

This bizarre cortege trailed through Liverpool for three hours and, as the men were due to be paid, steadily grew in numbers[114].

Tensions over the employment of Chinese labour persisted even after the 'slavery' agitation had subsided, notably within the National Union of Seamen under the populist leadership of Havelock Wilson. Wilson claimed that the old British 'sea dog' would soon be replaced by 'underpaid Chinese starvelings', while a maritime workers' journal in Cardiff stated that 'the Chinaman isn't worth a toss as a seaman; . . . his only claim to indulgence is that he is cheap'[115]. There were a number of violent incidents in British ports and in 1911, after Chinese sailors were used to break a strike, most of the Chinese laundries in Cardiff were destroyed. There was a further spate of anti-Chinese rioting in British ports during January 1919[116]. Although these disturbances were caused by fears for jobs, they coincided with lurid allegations that linked the Chinese community to drug abuse and the seduction of white women. A fear of Chinese decadence and villainy was powerfully reinforced within British popular culture by the immense success of the writer Sax Rohmer's 'Fu Manchu' novels and stage plays, the first of which was published in 1913. Such episodes of anti-Chinese hostility were, however, exceptional, and were not repeated after the early 1920s (when 'dangerous drugs' legislation curbed both opium use and the associated moral panic). Throughout this period, moreover, the Chinese community in Britain remained very small. According to Benton and Gomez, it grew from a mere 387 resident Chinese in 1901 to a fairly stable 2,419 in 1921[117]. For the period covered by this book, the Chinese community was peaceable and self-organizing, and (apart from during periods of crisis such as the late 1930s and 1960s) had only limited contact with the British left. Its numbers also steadily expanded and, following a surge of growth in the 1960s, by 1971 there were some 96,000 Chinese people living in Britain[118].

In the late nineteenth century, opposition to the Qing dynasty began to develop within China, and in 1894 Sun Yat-sen, a young doctor, took part in a failed rebellion in Canton. Sun was born in South China and raised on stories of the Taiping rebels, but he grew up in Hawaii and Hong Kong, where he gained his professional qualifications. After 1894 he toured the world building support amongst the Chinese diaspora, and became a leading advocate of political reform and social modernization. Sun arrived in Britain for the first time in October 1896, and on 11 October he was kidnapped and incarcerated for eleven days in the Chinese Legation in Portland Place. He faced the prospect of being smuggled onto a ship and returned to China for execution, and made strenuous efforts to get word to his friends in London.

[114] Fred Bower, *Rolling stonemason: An autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), 169–70 (initial reference in May, 'Chinese in Britain', 121).

[115] Auerbach, *Race, law and the 'Chinese puzzle'*, 39; May, 'Chinese in Britain', 116.

[116] See Jacqueline Jenkinson, 'The 1919 race riots in Britain: A survey' in Rainer Lotz and Ian Pegg (eds), *Under the imperial carpet: Essays in Black History, 1780–1850* (Crawley: Rabbit Press, 1986), 182–207.

[117] Gregor Benton and Edmund Terence Gomez, *The Chinese in Britain, 1800-Present: Economy, transnationalism, identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 51.

[118] Ibid.

At one point he told a British servant at the Legation that 'You may compare me with the leader of your Socialist party here in London.... I am the leader of a similar opposition party in China...'[119] Despite this appeal to the left, however, it was his old tutor from Hong Kong, Dr James Cantlie, who did most to secure his release by orchestrating pressure on the Chinese authorities from the Foreign Office and the press. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, and especially after Sun's death in 1925, the room in which he had been held became something of a shrine (although it could not withstand the complete redevelopment of the site by the Chinese government in the 1980s). In May 1946 a plaque to commemorate the 'father of the Chinese Republic' was unveiled on the bombed-out wall of 8 Gray's Inn Place, all that was left of the house in which Sun had lived during his stay in London. Messages were read out from Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Chiang Kai-shek[120].

Sun's imprisonment in London—skilfully publicized by his supporters[121]—only enhanced his international stature. Accordingly, when the Qing dynasty was overthrown by a military rebellion in October 1911, he appeared well placed to lead the new Chinese Republic. Fenner Brockway, a young Indian-born journalist writing in the ILP's *Labour Leader*, saw Sun's recent socialistic speeches in Japan as evidence that 'among the people of the East and the peoples of the West the Cause moves forward to triumph'. An editorial in the same newspaper noted that the 'semi-socialist projects' of the Chinese Republicans were suddenly implanting Europe's most advanced ideas into the heart of the 'hoariest empire'[122]. However, while Sun was a richly symbolic figure he was less successful as a practical politician. He soon lost power to the military leader Yuan Shi-kai and, after Yuan's death in 1916, China fragmented into rule by feuding warlords. Sun's Nationalist party (the Kuomintang/KMT) eventually gained control of its own enclave in Canton in 1919, but Sun died before he could fulfil his goal of reuniting China from this base. He left a two-fold legacy. Firstly, his political ideas transcended party divisions. His 'Three Principles of the People' (nationalism, democracy, and 'the people's livelihood') were amorphous enough to appeal both to nationalists and to members of the newly founded Communist Party. Secondly, Sun forged an alliance with the Soviet Union, which—unlike the allied powers that had treated China so shabbily at the Paris Peace conference—he saw as a sympathetic, anti-imperialist state. In the early 1920s, under the influence of advisers from the Communist International ('Comintern'), the KMT developed a centralized party structure akin to many emerging Communist parties.

China joined the allied side in the First World War in 1917 and sent a Labour Corps of some 140,000 men to toil behind the lines on the Western Front. The radical journalist Henry Nevinson later recalled the unwarlike Chinese looking up from

[119] Whittingham-Jones, *China fights in Britain*, 39.

[120] TNA FO371/53667; *Manchester Guardian*, 6 May 1946. The plaque (with a bas-relief by sculptress Dora Gardine) had been commissioned by Lord Ailwyn, a Conservative peer who launched a fund on his return from a parliamentary mission to China in 1943.

[121] See J. Y. Wong, *The origins of a heroic image: Sun Yatsen in London, 1896–7* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[122] *Labour Leader*, 20 October 1911, 658, 664.

road-making to watch a British regiment pass by with 'an amused and slightly contemptuous smile'[123]. In spite of this contribution, however, China was harshly treated at the Paris peace conference. Not only was its call for an end to the foreign concessions rejected, but Japan was awarded the German colony of Tsingtao and the adjoining Shantung region, which it had seized in 1914. Wilsonian self-determination clearly did not apply to China. On 4 May 1919, when the news broke in China, thousands of students from Beijing University took to the streets in protest and sparked nationwide demonstrations. In the ensuing chaos the Chinese government refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles. The 'May Fourth movement' was the most celebrated and seminal moment in China's transition to political modernity, and marked not only the advent of nationalism as a powerful mobilizing force, but also the beginning of a search for a new politics and a new culture. This was the eager, open-minded, mentality that Bertrand Russell encountered amongst his students in 1920.

The First World War changed the balance of power in East Asia. The German empire had been destroyed, and Britain and France—while victorious—had been severely weakened. Meanwhile both Japan, Britain's ally in the region since 1902, and the United States sought greater freedom of action. At the Washington conference in 1921–2, an attempt was made to fashion a lasting settlement out of the conflicting interests of the Great Powers. Agreed limits were placed on naval strengths in the Pacific and the signatories of a new nine-power treaty pledged to uphold China's territorial integrity and the 'open door' for trade. As a sop to China, Japan returned the Shantung region. For the time being the status quo was preserved, but it proved highly vulnerable to the twin challenges of Chinese nationalism and Japanese militarism. One of the shrewdest analysts of the conference was Rajani Palme Dutt, an Oxford-educated intellectual of Indian–Swedish parentage and a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In December 1921 Palme Dutt, as editor of the new theoretical journal *Labour Monthly*, argued that China was the 'visible crux' of the conference. Yet, far from settling China, the Powers would merely unite the Chinese into a 'single struggle against the forces of the foreigner and of capital . . . national consciousness [would become] re-inforced by a social consciousness into one gigantic movement of insurrection'[124]. Forty years later he felt that this prediction had worn rather better than the 'shrivelling documents' of the Washington conference. But as a student of Karl Marx, he was accustomed to thinking that China might spring surprises. After all, he liked to recall, in 1850 Marx had suggested that when the European reactionaries finally fled to Asia, seeking the home of 'primal conservatism', they might be shocked to find written on the Great Wall of China:

> "République chinoise
>
> Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité"[125]

[123] *New Leader*, 16 April 1926.
[124] *Labour Monthly*, 15 December 1921, 486–8.
[125] Karl Marx's article in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung Revue*, January–February 1850; cited by Palme Dutt in *Labour Monthly*, October 1959 and July 1961.

1

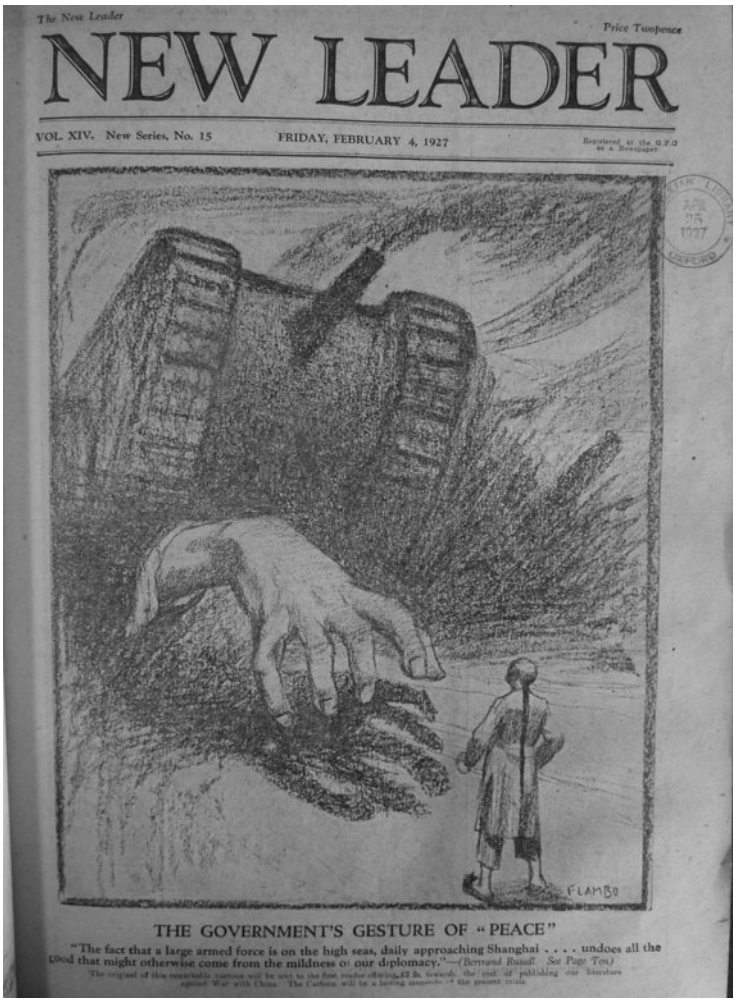
1925–1931: The British Left and the Nationalist Revolution

SHANGHAI: 30 MAY 1925

On 30 May 1925 a British officer ordered members of the Shanghai Municipal Police to open fire on Chinese protestors, killing at least nine of them[1]. This violent incident, which was immediately hailed as a Chinese 'Amritsar'[2], represented a turning point in the relations of both Britain and the British left with China. The Shanghai killings, followed on 23 June by even more bloody clashes in Canton's foreign concession, marked the beginning of a dangerous confrontation between British imperial power and the emerging Chinese nationalist movement led by the KMT. What had started as a protest against poor conditions in Shanghai's foreign-owned factories swiftly escalated into a far wider challenge to Britain's position in China. Between July 1925 and October 1926, the trade of Hong Kong was severely disrupted by a strike and boycott organized from neighbouring Canton. Moreover, in January 1927 the Chinese occupation of the British concession in Hankow represented the first step in the dismantling of Britain's formal presence in China. In response, the British Conservative government sent a force of 20,000 men—the largest such expedition mounted in the interwar years—to secure Britain's interests in Shanghai ahead of the arrival of the victorious Nationalist soldiers. This hard-line stance was somewhat deceptive as British policymakers were in fact willing to make limited concessions to legitimate Chinese demands. Foreign Secretary Sir Austen Chamberlain's conciliatory 1926 'December memorandum' expressed British policy just as accurately as the dispatch of the Shanghai Defence Force a month later. Even so, until the late 1920s Britain would be seen as the principal enemy of Chinese nationalist aspirations. For the British left, meanwhile, these events triggered the first serious political engagement with the Chinese revolution. During 1925–7 there was a series of campaigns known collectively as the 'Hands off China' movement. However, although these mobilizations displayed a high—even remarkable—level of international solidarity, they also bore the imprint of the political tensions on the left of the period. This chapter will focus on the crises of

[1] The protests arose from strikes at Japanese-owned factories in the city, and the shooting of a Chinese striker by a Japanese foreman. For a detailed account, see Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt children of empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Hanover and London: Middlebury College Press, 1991), 97–104.

[2] See, for instance, Bertrand Russell in the *New Leader*, 19 June 1925. 380 Indian protestors were killed by British soldiers at Amritsar in 1919.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FLAMBO

THE GOVERNMENT'S GESTURE OF "PEACE"

"The fact that a large armed force is on the high seas, daily approaching Shanghai . . . . undoes all the good that might otherwise come from the mildness of our diplomacy."—(Bertrand Russell. See Page Ten)

Fig. 1. China resists the tanks of the Shanghai Defence Force
(Flambo, *New Leader*, 4 Feb. 1927)

1925–7, but the somewhat quieter years after 1928, which witnessed a sharp rise in Sino-Japanese antagonism and the establishment of 'Soviet' zones within rural China, also deserve attention.

UNITED FRONTS

In both Britain and China the most formative influence on the left in the mid 1920s was the attempt to implement Moscow's policy of a 'united front' between Communists and stronger non-Communist progressive parties. In China this took the

form of an alliance between the Canton-based KMT, the Soviet Union, and the recently formed Chinese Communist Party (CCP)[3]. The alliance had been forged by Sun Yat-sen in 1923, shortly before his death, and was strengthened by the arrival of the Soviet agent Michael Borodin as principal adviser to the KMT. From a Soviet perspective, China was not yet ready for socialism. Accordingly, Stalin instructed the Communists to work with the KMT for a national revolution that would create a unified state and assert national sovereignty against the imperialist powers. However, the role of the Chinese Communists was hardly a passive one as party cadres worked tirelessly to secure leading positions within the KMT and the state apparatus, as well as fomenting working-class and peasant activism. This unstable alliance was supported by leftists within the KMT, such as Eugene Chen, the Trinidad-born Foreign Minister, and Sun Yat-sen's widow Soong Ching-ling. However, many conservative elements within the KMT's broad social and political coalition were deeply suspicious of the Communists and feared that a struggle for national liberation was rapidly turning into a social revolution. They gathered around Sun Yat-sen's eventual successor, Chiang Kai-shek, who, as director of the Whampoa military academy, had already cracked down on working class militancy in Canton in March 1926.

These tensions came to a head during the Nationalists' successful 'Northern Expedition' of 1926–7, when their forces advanced against the warlords in central China, captured the conurbation of Wuhan (which included Hankow), and established a government there. The high-water mark of the united front was the occupation of the sprawling Chinese quarter of Shanghai by Chiang Kai-shek's forces on 26 March 1927, after a Communist-led general strike had seized control. An eyewitness report published in Britain described a scene 'reminiscent of the first days of the Russian October Revolution. The armed workers look like typical Red Guards patrolling the streets'[4]. However, on 12 April Chiang's soldiers (abetted by local gangsters) turned on their left-wing allies and launched a violent repression in Shanghai in which hundreds of Communists and trade unionists were massacred. This violence was then replicated in other urban areas across Nationalist China. Within months the left-KMT government in Wuhan had fractured. The dominant faction chose to side with Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communists were formally expelled from the Nationalist Party. Chiang's victory, and the establishment of a new government loyal to him in Nanking, initiated the so-called 'Nanking decade' of 1927–37. The left in Britain, which had recently acclaimed Chiang Kai-shek's leadership of the revolution, now admitted that he was at best a typical warlord, at worst a Bonapartist or a harbinger of fascism[5]. The debacle in China represented a

[3] See the chapter by Michael Weiner on East Asia in Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A history of international Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), and S. A. Smith, 'The Comintern, the Chinese Communist Party and the three armed uprisings in Shanghai, 1926–27' in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds), *International communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 254–70.

[4] A 'special cable' published in *Workers' Life*, 1 April 1927.

[5] *Workers' Life*, 18 March 1927 for praise of Chiang Kai-shek; *Daily Herald*, 20 April 1927; *Workers' Life*, 22 April 1927 and 29 April 1927.

severe setback for Stalin and the Comintern, especially as Stalin's bitter rival Trotsky had predicted the violent collapse of the united front. Borodin fled to Moscow with some of the left KMT leaders, while the Chinese Communists were reduced to living in clandestinity or were forced to scatter into the countryside. Mao Tse-tung, who had recently emerged within the CCP as an expert on the Chinese peasantry, led a small Communist band into the Chingkangshan hills in southern China. A number of 'Soviet' base areas slowly coalesced in this remote terrain, although they were initially engaged more in a struggle for survival than for power.

The collapse of the united front in China was mirrored, if without bloodshed, by events in Britain. Here the Labour Party, led by staunch anti-Communists such as James Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson, had kept the Communist party at arm's length since its formation in 1920 and repeatedly denied it the right to affiliate. Even so, political identities on the left were still far from sharply defined in the mid 1920s, and there was much common political ground[6]. For instance, it was MacDonald's short-lived first Labour government which established full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1924. Moreover, there was a strong left-wing current within the wider Labour movement, including a number of influential (but non-Communist) trade union leaders such as A. A. Purcell, A. J. Cook, Alonso Swales, and George Hicks. In 1925–7 the TUC General Council even collaborated in a joint trade union committee with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, in 1924 the Communists initiated the National Minority Movement to galvanize united front activity 'from below' among the trade union rank and file. The turning point in Britain was the defeat of the General Strike in May 1926, which destroyed any further prospect of 'direct action' by the trade unions and led to bitter recriminations between the Communists and the left-wing union leaders. Thereafter the recently appointed General Secretary Walter Citrine led the TUC into a less confrontational relationship with government, while individual Communists were increasingly denied access to the institutions of the Labour movement, although they continued to find a sympathetic home in the trade unions[7]. The raid by British police on the Soviet 'Arcos' trading company in London in May 1927, and the subsequent severing of diplomatic relations with the USSR by the Conservative government, gave further proof of the failure of the united front approach.

The defeat of the 'united front' in China and Britain coincided with—and to some extent was a product of—a new phase in the power struggle within the Soviet leadership, and resulted in a sharp left-turn in international Communist politics. In October 1927, for instance, a telegram from the Comintern urged an initially reluctant CPGB to fight against the 'bourgeois leadership of the Labour Party, against parliamentary cretinism…'[8]. In China, meanwhile, the Communists

[6] This case has recently been made persuasively in Kevin Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British left,* i: *Labour legends and Russian gold* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006).

[7] See David Howell, *MacDonald's Party: Labour identities and crisis, 1922–1931* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 380–403 for a detailed account of Labour's mounting intolerance of the Communist presence in its ranks.

[8] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 73–4.

launched a rebellion in Canton in December 1927, which was swiftly crushed with heavy loss of life. The 6th Congress of the Comintern in July–September 1928 confirmed the new sectarian era of 'Class against class'. Communists, anticipating a period of revolutionary upsurge and imperialist warfare, now branded their former social democratic comrades as 'social fascist' enemies. However, while it is easy to see evidence here of foreign Communists dancing to Moscow's tune regardless of local circumstances, in both China and Britain the new policy also reflected the genuine bitterness associated with the fracturing of the united front[9].

'FAINT IN THE EAST . . .': THE BRITISH LEFT AND THE CHINESE 'AWAKENING'

On 6 February 1927, at the height of the 'Hands off China' movement, a packed Labour Party rally at the Royal Albert Hall opened with Edward Carpenter's socialist anthem 'England Arise', which was played twice. One reporter noted: 'The vast audience seemed to lay special emphasis on the second line, "Faint in the East, behold the dawn appear" '[10]. This comment offers a glimpse of how the British left thrilled to the sudden and unexpected revolutionary developments in China—all the more so because none could be sure exactly what this 'dawn' would bring. While radicals had expressed sympathy for the oppression suffered by China at the hands of British imperialism ever since the 1840s[11], this new sentiment was of a wholly different order. For the first time the left believed that what was happening in China would have profound implications for the West and for 'the white domination of the coloured races in all parts of the world'[12]. The Chinese were no longer victims but potentially powerful actors in world politics, and commentators on the left struggled to convey the scale and potential of these events. For Noel Brailsford, the growth of a 'modern consciousness of nationality in China' was the main fact 'of our generation'[13]. Leonard Woolf linked China to a 'world revolt' against Europe encompassing other modernizing regimes in Turkey and Persia[14]. Tom Mann, who led an international labour delegation to China in the spring of 1927, wrote from Vladivostok that the Chinese revolution was 'the biggest thing that has happened in our lives', and described himself as 'enthused with the glorious possibilities'[15].

More specifically, the point was often made that this was no mere Boxer rebellion[16]—a byword for anti-foreigner violence—but rather a modern nationalist

[9] See Matthew Worley, *Class against class: The Communist Party in Britain between the wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002) for an important reinterpretation of this controversial period.

[10] *Daily Herald*, 7 February 1927.

[11] See above, pp. 13–21.

[12] *New Leader*, 31 December 1926; see also *Daily Herald*, 17 March 1926 ('the whole yellow race has risen against its masters').

[13] *Daily Herald*, 8 February 1927.

[14] *Daily Herald*, 12 October 1927, see also Rajani Palme Dutt's article in *Labour Monthly*, August 1925.

[15] Letter to John Burns, 7 February 1927, cited in Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann*, 224.

[16] For the comparison with the Boxers see, for instance, *New Statesman*, 14 May 1927, 141–2; *Daily Herald*, 9 June 1925.

movement with a well-developed political programme. The British left showed some interest in the so-called 'Christian General' Feng Yu-hsiang (who was favoured by Moscow) as a progressive—if erratic—force in Chinese politics[17]. However, the principal focus of its attention was always Sun Yat-sen's nascent Chinese Republic in Canton and the attempt by his followers to expand its authority northwards. Sun, who died in March 1925, attracted genuine admiration in Britain. Ben Tillett told the TUC conference in 1927 that he was 'practically the Moses of China' and a 'wonderful democrat', while Sun's decision to turn to the USSR for support earned him plaudits from the Communists as well[18]. The left saw the Canton Republic as a microcosm of a modern, progressive Chinese state that would steadily extend its authority across China—unless Britain and other imperialist powers intervened to prevent it. For Bertrand Russell the KMT was a modern, westernized force, representing 'all that is best in China'[19]. Cecil l'Estrange Malone, another who had recently travelled in the region, discerned in Canton 'a new progressive China' with new roads, order, and an absence of 'unpleasant smells'. Canton was 'far and away the finest and most wonderful Chinese city in the Far East'[20]. Speakers' notes issued in May 1927 conjured up a new Nationalist China in which 'energetic officials' were forging a 'modern state, independent before the world, with sound finances, modern legal codes and twentieth-century communications'[21].

If accounts of the Chinese revolution sometimes tended towards the utopian, this reflected the difficulty that the British left faced in forming a clear picture of the situation in China, especially outside of the major cities. The left-wing press generally lacked correspondents on the ground and had great difficulty in obtaining reliable news. In 1930 the *Daily Worker* was embarrassed when one week it praised the achievements of a Chinese revolutionary column and the next had to denounce them as mere mercenaries[22]. All of the newspapers and journals on the left alluded to the fact that news from China was often 'barely intelligible', or that it merely provided opera bouffé 'comic relief' for British readers[23]. In mid 1927 the *Daily Herald* found the situation so 'obscure and baffling' that it required the services of an astrologer to understand it[24]. As David Lloyd George wrote apropos the Chinese political scene in 1927: 'the characters bear strange and difficult names; inevitably there are times when our attention wanders, and the interminable marches and counter-marches, the alliances and betrayals . . . seem of little

[17] *Workers' Weekly*, 3 July 1925; *New Leader*, 23 April 1926. The *Daily Herald*, 7 July 1925, asked if Feng was a 'humbug or a misguided patriot?' Feng's widow visited Britain as part of the first unofficial delegation sent by the People's Republic of China (*Daily Worker*, 30 September 1950).

[18] *Trades Union Congress Conference Reports* (*TUCCR*), 1927, 385; *Workers' Weekly*, 20 March 1925.

[19] *New Leader*, 17 September 1926.

[20] *Daily Herald*, 16 July 1926; Malone, *New China*, ii. 5.

[21] University of Warwick Modern Records Centre (MRC), Mss 36, ISTC c.74 (Speakers' notes issued on 20 May 1927 by the BLCCF).

[22] *Daily Worker*, 12 June 1930 and 17 June 1930. A reference to the unit known as the 'Ironsides'.

[23] *New Leader*, 11 December 1925; *New Statesman*, 21 February 1925.

[24] *Daily Herald*, 15 July 1927.

significance to us in Europe'[25]. However, such complaints were particularly appropriate for the warlord era which was slowly drawing to a close in the mid 1920s. Indeed, one of the great attractions of the Nationalists and their sometime Communist allies was precisely their ability to offer new and more comprehensible narratives to a western audience.

At a time when personal contacts with China were dominated by business and missionary connections—both generally associated with the right—and when most working people only visited China as soldiers, policemen, or merchant seamen, those few on the left with first-hand knowledge of the country were highly prized. Feng Saw, who straddled both worlds as a member of the KMT London Committee and a Labour parliamentary candidate for the (disaffiliated) Holborn party, was warmly received as a platform speaker[26]. Both Bertrand and Dora Russell were also prominent in their support of the Chinese cause, as was Tom Mann, who is even said to have mastered singing the 'Internationale' in Chinese[27]. However, the most influential individual in the mid 1920s was undoubtedly the maverick former Communist MP Cecil l'Estrange Malone. He was said to be working 'night and day' for the Chinese cause and almost single-handedly constructed a network that encompassed Chinese and British politicians, journalists, and propagandists. Malone, who was by now a member of the ILP, had become deeply interested in the Far East in 1924. He visited China and Japan in the spring of 1926 and cultivated the Nationalist foreign minister Eugene Chen. Both Malone and Bertrand Russell were associated with the left wing of the KMT, and helped to run the pro-KMT Chinese Information Bureau (CIB) in London. British intelligence believed that part of the reason for Malone's visit to China had been to raise support for this venture, and secured evidence that he had received funds from the KMT in China during 1927[28]. The CIB, although hardly unbiased, offered a unique source of information on events in China for organizations such as the TUC[29].

In addition to the problems posed by distance and poor communications, the British left faced two specific problems in seeking to understand the Chinese revolution. First, the Comintern 'line' imposed serious distortions on the Communist discourse on China. Partly this was because the Comintern itself was struggling to understand the fast-moving events and, behind the scenes, was often riven with debate over what direction to give to the Chinese Communists[30]. Moreover, the

[25] David Lloyd George, Foreword to Arthur Ransome, *The Chinese puzzle* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1927).

[26] *Workers' Life*, 18 February 1927; *Manchester Guardian*, 11 February 1927.

[27] *Workers' Life*, 15 February 1929.

[28] For Malone, see the entry by David Martin and John Saville in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vii (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 1984), 159–64; see Malone's MI5 file, TNA KV2/1905 for evidence of his links with the KMT.

[29] See *TUCCR*, 1925, 314–15. See *Daily Herald*, 27 January 1927 for a denial that the Bureau was an agent of the Canton Government.

[30] S. A. Smith, 'Comintern', 258–9. The commission on China that drew up the theses for the 7th Plenum of the Comintern in late 1926 was chaired by the British Communist William Gallacher. Many years later—in the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute—he recalled that '…I was chairman of a Chinese Commission in 1928 [*sic*]. Stalin gave very valuable aid to that Commission and there is no doubt whatever, at that time, of the great faith the Chinese Comrades had in him and how eagerly they listened to all he had to say' (LHASC, CP/IND/GALL/01/06, Gallacher to Michael Shapiro, 2 February 1963).

bitter debates between Stalin and his rivals for the leadership of the Soviet Union meant that the catastrophic consequences of Comintern advice could not be acknowledged. Accordingly, British Communists remained loyal to the KMT when others on the left, less ideologically encumbered, were predicting the collapse of the united front[31]. So long as the united front lasted, British Communists were (at least publicly) full of praise for the KMT—after all, unlike the Labour Party, it had allowed the affiliation of the 'young, courageous' Chinese Communist Party, and it was 'definitely Left wing'[32]. At the CPGB Congress in October 1926, a KMT fraternal delegate was cheered and his party recognized as the 'real leadership' of the Chinese workers' and peasants[33]. As late as February 1927, only two months before the Shanghai massacre, the CPGB's weekly newspaper wrote that the British working class had no choice but to side with the rising Chinese labour movement, 'free and expanding under the "white sun on a blue sky" of the Kuomintang…'. Already, however, there was a note of caution as to the KMT's real revolutionary potential, given its very broad social basis that united workers and peasants with 'revolutionary middle class elements'[34]. The CPGB's Central Committee sent a telegram to congratulate the KMT on the fall of Shanghai; but the very fact that it expressed confidence that the Nationalist army would maintain the 'closest alliance with working and peasant masses' hinted that the opposite might well be true[35].

A second significant issue was the perception of Chinese trade unionism in Britain. As we shall see, the British labour movement saw trade unionism as an important means not only for improving conditions in China, but also for preventing the undercutting of British wages. However, there was little evidence to suggest that British-style independent trade unionism was truly gaining ground in China. In 1926 the TUC concluded that there was 'much rumour and little fact' about modern Chinese trade unions (as opposed to the old trade guilds, which still existed). Many unions were essentially political organizations or had only a shadowy existence. Claims that there were 450,000 trade unionists in Canton and 300,000 in Shanghai were treated with deep scepticism[36]. In 1932 Tawney concluded that there was 'more effervescence than solid organisation', and much 'meddlesome interference' from politicians[37]. Tom Mann's belief that he could pass on the principles of trade unionism by simply brandishing his union card at mass rallies in China was at best naive[38]. Moreover, China was not represented in organizations such as the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and the international

[31] For instance, the *New Statesman*, 12 March 1927, predicted an 'open rupture' with Chiang Kai-shek, p. 653.

[32] 'What is the Kuo Min Tang?', *Workers' Weekly*, 10 September 1926.

[33] *Workers' Weekly*, 22 October 1926.

[34] *Workers' Life*, 11 February 1927, 2, 4.

[35] *Workers' Life*, 25 March 1927.

[36] *TUCCR*, 1926, 225. See also Marjorie Nicholson, *The TUC overseas: The roots of policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 96–103. Mrs Cecil Chesterton, a social reformer who visited China in 1932, concluded that trade unions were still in their infancy and that the family or clan was 'the unit of civilisation' (*New Leader*, 11 November 1932).

[37] Tawney, *Land and Labour*, 153.

[38] *Labour Monthly*, February 1957, 74 (article by Robin Page-Arnot).

trade secretariats, which were still essentially European in membership. British trade unionists therefore found it difficult to verify the credentials of the various workers' organizations which appealed for their support, most of which were said to go 'straight into the wastepaper basket'[39].

Their suspicions were heightened by the growing role that international Communism played in Chinese industrial politics during the later 1920s. The British trade union movement rejected any association with the revolutionary Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS), which was established by the Red International of Labour Unions in Hankow in May 1927, although the retired Tom Mann was present at its creation. The Secretariat later moved its headquarters to the greater safety of the Shanghai International Settlement, where one of its principal activists was the English trade unionist George Hardy. The secretary of the PPTUS, Paul Ruegg (aka Hilaire Noulens), and his wife were arrested in Shanghai in June 1931 and a year later sentenced to death by the Chinese authorities. Tellingly, however, the international campaign for their release—something of a *cause célèbre* in Germany and France—attracted little interest in Britain outside of Communist circles[40].

'HANDS OFF CHINA': 1925–1927

As with many protest movements, 'Hands off China' has become encrusted with myth and this—alongside a lack of archival sources—has somewhat obscured its form and political character. The Communists subsequently claimed the 'Hands off China' campaign as their own, and it is typically described by historians simply as an aspect of the Communist politics of this period. This view doubtless owed something to claims by the British government that documents seized in the Arcos raid demonstrated that 'Hands off China' was one of a number of 'subversive' movements actively encouraged by the Soviet Union[41]. It is worth noting, therefore, that although 'Hands off China' was a simple and effective slogan, its meaning changed considerably between 1925 and 1927. It was first used during the largely spontaneous protests against the deployment of British troops to suppress the strikers in Shanghai, at a time when the 'Hands off Russia' campaign of 1919–20 was still fresh in the memory. By late 1926, however, 'Hands off China' had developed into a well-orchestrated campaign against the threat of war with the Chinese Nationalists. Likewise, the protestors' political demands had also evolved, from a concern with harsh industrial conditions and the unwarranted use of British force into a call for a wholly new relationship with China. In addition, it should be noted that

[39] TNA, FO 371, 11688, Acting Consul-General in Canton to Foreign Office, 24 May 1926, reporting the views of l'Estrange Malone during his recent visit.

[40] The research of Frederick S. Litten leaves no doubt that the Rueggs, who were eventually released in 1937, were Comintern agents whose real names were Yakov Rudnik and Tatyana Moiseenko ('The Noulens affair', *The China Quarterly*, 138 (June 1994), 492–512). The affair was frequently reported in the *Daily Worker*, where it was compared to the case of the jailed American militant Tom Mooney (*Daily Worker*, 31 August 1932).

[41] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 206, 24 May and 26 May 1927, cols 1843–9.

'Hands off China' relates to a number of simultaneous—and often overlapping—campaigns within which not only the Communists but also the ILP, the trade union left, and the anti-war movement played a significant role. Confusingly, the slogan 'Peace with China', which was revived during the Korean War, was also used at times by the Labour Party and the No More War Movement. Indeed, even the slogan 'Hands off China' may well have first been used by the ILP[42].

The jockeying between the Communists, the ILP, and the Labour Party over China at this time often disguised how much they had in common in their response to the unfolding crisis. With a few notable exceptions on the right of the Labour Party, it was widely accepted that Britain's presence in China was imperialistic, that Britain should give up its extra-territorial rights and concessions, and that conditions in the factories of Shanghai must be greatly improved. As the crisis deepened, even Ramsay MacDonald, who was by this time increasingly at odds with the left wing of the ILP, came to adopt much of the left's position on China. For instance, in an interview published on 7 December 1926 he called for the diplomatic recognition of the Canton government, while in January 1927 he repeatedly stated that the old China was dead and that agreement must be reached with the new[43]. Accordingly, what was at issue was the *speed and nature* of British disengagement—MacDonald was opposed to a humiliating 'scuttle' from China[44]—and the role of extra-parliamentary protest. The Labour leadership was constrained by the need to appear responsible when British lives and interests were at stake, and rightly feared that popular agitation would benefit the Communists. The Communist Party certainly made much of the running at the height of the 'Hands off China' campaign, calling for 'mass action' rather than 'feeble resolutions' and warning that it would be dangerous to wait for the 'slow moving' Labour movement to act[45]. However, the Communists were hampered by the dictates of Comintern policy and by their own exaggerated expectations. Therefore, although the Communist Party claimed the political credit, in many respects it was the ILP, which sat between the parliamentary politics of the mainstream Labour Party and the popular politics of the CPGB, which was particularly well suited to intervene in this crisis. It not only had direct contacts with Chinese politicians through Malone's networks, but also the main themes of the campaign—extreme social injustice, the immorality of the British presence in China, and the threat of war—were central to the ILP's own political beliefs.

The first phase of 'Hands off China' came in the immediate aftermath of the Shanghai shootings in June 1925, when there were scattered protests by Chinese students and others in Britain. Swales and Citrine sent a robust letter to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin on behalf of the TUC General Council, objecting to the

[42] *Daily Herald*, 11 June 1925 for the first reference that I could find. For 'Peace with China', see *Daily Herald*, 28 January and 3 February 1927. The No More War Movement called on its followers to organize local 'Peace with China' demonstrations (*No More War*, February 1927, 1) and its branches were often listed as joining in both 'Hands off China' and 'Peace with China' activities.

[43] *Daily Herald*, 7 December 1926, 20 January 1927, 7 February 1927.

[44] *Socialist Review*, January 1927, 2.

[45] *Workers' Weekly*, 1 October 1926 and 3 December 1926.

use of force against the strikers, and the Communist Party made the first of a number of unsuccessful approaches to the Labour Party and ILP for the establishment of a joint 'Hands off China' committee. However, the initial impact of the crisis was relatively limited, as the protests centred on the exploitation of labour in Shanghai[46]. Moreover, the attention of the left was wholly absorbed at this point with the looming crisis in the British coal-mining industry. China only moved centre stage following the defeat of the General Strike in May 1926, the ebbing of resistance to the coal miners' lock-out during the summer and early autumn, and the launch of the KMT's Northern Expedition in July. A crucial moment was the shelling by British gunboats of the Yangtze river port of Wanhsien on 5 September 1926, which caused heavy loss of civilian life. On this occasion the conflict was not with the Chinese Nationalists but the forces of a local warlord who was commandeering British shipping. Even so, this evidence of British 'frightfulness' caused outrage and was condemned by an emergency resolution at the Labour Party conference in October[47]. The readiness of the Royal Navy to resort to such measures reinforced fears that a similar incident could lead to all-out war[48]. Ramsay MacDonald stated that the commander of the gunboat HMS *Cockchafer* had 'probably lost his head' and should have been suspended[49]. With Wanhsien, China reclaimed the attention of the British left. In late September the ILP held a crowded London rally, confounding fears that the plight of the British miners would not leave 'room for interest in events so far off'[50]. L'Estrange Malone's 'lurid' account of the Wanhsien shelling in a speech at Hackney baths caused concern in British intelligence circles that a 'true' account of the episode should be published to counter the 'utterly erroneous legend' fostered—with evident success—by the left[51].

Towards the end of 1926, the parties of the left responded in different ways to the mounting threat of armed conflict. In December the Communist party called for—and began to organize—a national movement of inclusive 'Hands off China' committees. These were not only intended to mount demonstrations but also, if necessary, engage in direct action to resist British military intervention. By February 1927 there were more than 70 local committees, and by April this had risen to over 80. In most cases the committees were organized through trades councils or by local delegate conferences, although L. J. MacFarlane was probably correct to claim that these were set up 'almost solely as the result of Communist Party

[46] For instance, this was the focus of the speeches by Labour MPs in the Commons debates of 15 and 18 June 1925 (*Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 185, cols 27–36, 906–1407).

[47] Labour Party NEC minutes, 10 October 1926; *Labour Party Conference Reports* (*LPCR*), 1926, 255: Morgan Jones MP, who moved the resolution, claimed that 2–3,000 civilians had been killed. The ILP pamphlet *What is happening in China? The Wanhsien massacre* (ILP, 1926) claimed that a town of 751,000 people had suffered between 2000 and 7,800 casualties. See also the photograph of the destruction in the *Daily Herald*, 12 November 1926, and the comments by Ramsay MacDonald in the *Socialist Review*, October 1926, 8–9, and January 1927, 1–3.

[48] Indeed, the Foreign Office noted with regard to Wanhsien that 'our naval people . . . were spoiling for a fight' (Clifford, *Spoilt children*, 165–6).

[49] *Socialist Review*, October 1926, 8–9.

[50] Fenner Brockway commenting in the *New Leader*, 1 October 1926.

[51] TNA KV2/1905, 'BEWC' to Home Secretary, 1 December 1926.

initiative'[52]. The character of the committees varied greatly: in some cases they represented united fronts of Communists, the ILP, and trades union branches, but there were also some cases, such as in Manchester/Salford, where the local ILP federation conspicuously withdrew in protest at the Communist presence[53]. This nationwide mobilization—marked by packed public meetings and torch-lit rallies—was an impressive display of international solidarity and anti-war sentiment. However, the CPGB lacked a practical focus for its agitation and was well aware that it had failed to meet its goal of disrupting British military preparations. The party's Central Committee reflected in 1928 that 'Communist influence in the trade unions was not enough to secure an embargo on troops and guns for China'. An attempt to extend the agitation to British sailors was bitterly resented by the right-wing National Union of Seamen[54]. As MacFarlane observed, there was to be no iconic triumph to match the dockers' blacking of the *Jolly George* in 1920[55] (or, indeed, the successful actions against Japanese ships in 1937–8).

Meanwhile, the ILP nationally mounted its own energetic version of 'Hands off China' culminating in a Trafalgar Square rally on 12 February. There was no doubting the urgency of the party's call to activists: 'The N.A.C. [National Administrative Council] expects every branch to do its duty'. The *New Leader*'s special supplement on China at the height of the crisis was said to have sold 100,000 copies[56]. The ILP also matched the Communists' rhetoric—on two occasions the party secretary Fenner Brockway publicly pledged that the ILP would take direct action to resist British military intervention against the Canton government. On the second occasion, at an anti-imperialist congress in Brussels, he grasped the hand of the Chinese delegate in a well-received gesture prompted by the Comintern's Willi Münzenberg[57]. Such theatricality could not conceal the fact that many ILP branches were being drawn into the Communists' local committees against the wishes of their leaders. However, unlike the Communists, the ILP was well placed to involve the mainstream Labour movement in its campaign. It offered up its own Albert Hall rally, scheduled for 6 February 1927, to the National Joint Council of Labour so long as an ILP speaker was allowed to make the case for the withdrawal of all British forces. This concession was granted and—according to Ramsay MacDonald who gave the keynote speech—a 'wonderful' rally ensued[58].

[52] For lists of the local committees, see *Workers' Life*, 11 February 1927 and 29 April 1927. In late February the London Trades Council was given a coordinating role for all 'Hands off China' activity in London (*Workers' Life*, 25 February 1927). L. J. MacFarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its origin and development until 1929* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), 179.

[53] *Manchester Guardian*, 22 March 1927.

[54] *Workers' Life*, 27 January 1928; TNA KV2/1027, for an article by George Hardy aimed at British seamen in the *International Seafarer*, January–March 1927; *Manchester Guardian*, 10 February 1927 for NUS hostility to 'Hands off China'.

[55] MacFarlane, *British Communist Party*, 179.

[56] *New Leader*, 4 February 1927, 2, 18.

[57] *New Leader*, 1 October 1926 and *Daily Herald*, 28 September 1926; *Daily Herald*, 12 February 1927; *Workers' Life*, 18 February 1927; Fenner Brockway, *Inside the left: Thirty years of platform, press, prison and Parliament* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1942), 167.

[58] *Daily Herald*, 7 February 1927 and 8 February 1927; Labour Party NEC minutes, 26 January 1927.

In a further attempt to galvanize action within the labour movement, the London Trades Council (LTC) established a 'British Labour Council for Chinese Freedom' (BLCCF) in December 1926. This self-styled 'unofficial body with influential supporters' emerged from a meeting convened by the newly elected secretary of the LTC, Albert Wall, on 7 December and brought together leading members of the trade union left, ILP politicians (including James Maxton, the party chairman, and l'Estrange Malone), and intellectuals such as Bertrand Russell and Reginald Bridgeman. Bridgeman, a radical former diplomat, and Wall acted as joint secretaries[59]. The Council was chaired by George Hicks who, as chairman of both the TUC General Council and the National Joint Council of Labour, was extremely well placed to advance the Council's six-point 'charter'[60]. (For this very reason, Hicks's position was somewhat awkward and he resigned from the BLCCF in early February, claiming that the National Joint Council had now taken up the cudgels over China[61].) Given the very limited documentary sources available, it is not clear exactly how and why the BLCCF was set up[62]. In practice, it acted as a centre of expertise, issuing news bulletins from China, authoritative critiques of government policy, and speakers' notes for activists, rather than as an agent of mass mobilization. Malone saw it as a means to interest 'our trade union friends' more deeply in the Chinese cause[63]. It was certainly not an attempt to perpetuate the united front, as no Communists were involved (although Bridgeman was a Communist fellow-traveller). Indeed, the BLCCF coincided with an initiative whereby the Communist Party invited some fifty leading Labour MPs and intellectuals to sign a manifesto against war with China. Tellingly, some of those approached, such as H. G. Wells, Fenner Brockway, and trade unionist John Jagger, refused to sign. So, too, did George Lansbury, who pointed out that he had already joined the BLCCF as it was precisely the 'sort of *ad hoc* organization that was needed at this moment'[64]. However, there was *some* overlap between the two initiatives (for instance, Hicks, Russell, and Tillett were all members of the BLCCF who also signed the manifesto). Therefore the non-Communist character of the BLCCF presumably represented a tactical decision to channel anti-war/pro-China sentiment most effectively within the Labour movement.

The crisis reached a peak in January–March 1927, when the British government's decision to send the Shanghai Defence Force caused the negotiations over the fate of the Hankow concession to stall, and further heightened the danger of

[59] *Daily Herald*, 10 December 1926 and 3 January 1927: London Trades Council report for 1926; the members of the Council were Tillett, Swales, Lansbury, Maxton, l'Estrange Malone, WN Ewer, and two members of the LTC (J. Stokes and F. Willis). For Bridgeman, see the entry by John Saville in Bellamy and Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vii: 26–38.

[60] The 6 points were: i) recognition of the full sovereignty and independence of China; ii) recognition of the Cantonese government as the national government; iii) British government to renounce all extra-territorial privileges; iv) new treaties to replace the unequal treaties; v) withdrawal of British warships; vi) greater cooperation with the Chinese labour movement. Ben Tillett appeared to claim credit for this document—'I had to draw up those six points of the Charter' (*TUCCR*, 1927, 385).

[61] *Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1927.

[62] The best source is in the papers of the LTC at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). The minute book for 1927 (Acc 3287/01/13) contains many of the speakers' notes issued by the BLCCF.

[63] TNA KV2/1905, citing Malone's note to Bridgeman, 19 February 1927.

[64] *Workers' Weekly*, 10 December 1926, 17 December 1926, and 31 December 1926.

conflict with the Chinese Nationalists. Although the Hankow negotiations were ultimately successful, the 'Nanking incident' in late March 1927, when attacks by Chinese troops on foreign residents provoked a British naval bombardment, kept up the tension between the British and Nationalist governments. The gravity of the situation, combined with the pressure generated by 'Hands off China', placed the leaders of the Labour movement in a difficult position. Only Labour's political and trade union institutions could provide practical opposition to government policy, but any intervention in the crisis carried significant political risks. MacDonald and Henderson had issued a statement on 4 January 1927 broadly supporting Chamberlain's pragmatic 'December memorandum' as the basis for negotiating a new relationship with China, and discouraging public protest by their own supporters. MacDonald's role was treated with suspicion—to some extent justifiably—by the Communists. However, his position during the crisis was a consistent one in that he supported a negotiated solution that would give no opening for revolutionary politics in Britain. It was the British government's decision to send soldiers to Shanghai—with which he felt that he 'had to disagree'—that forced him into a more radical posture. Until that point, as MacDonald confided to Miles Lampson, the recently appointed British representative in Beijing with whom he enjoyed warm relations, he had 'really been trying [his] best to help you and the Foreign Office', and had hoped to bring his 'political friends… right out in full support of the Government's action…'[65]. In MacDonald's view, the Shanghai deployment created greater insecurity for British interests in China, and his policy was, in effect, to help the government to return to the moderation of its 'December memorandum'.

In late January 1927 the National Joint Council of Labour sent two deputations to interview Austen Chamberlain (on the second occasion joined by Stanley Baldwin) and protest against the 'flaunted military demonstration' against the Chinese Nationalists[66]. The Labour leadership also took the 'unprecedented step'[67] of communicating their views directly to the Chinese foreign minister Eugene Chen, assuring him of their support and encouraging him to persist with negotiations. Although this was seen by some—including some in the Labour Party—as a misguided and even unpatriotic action, it was vindicated by Chen's decision to return to the negotiations, citing the encouragement that he had received from Labour[68]. The Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) added to the pressure by voting three times in the Commons against the decision to send troops to Shanghai. On the first occasion (10 February

[65] MacDonald to Lampson, 9 February 1927. In reply Lampson stated that 'the whole British Community out here realises how helpful you have been and what they owe to you' (21 March 1927). (See David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), 466–467.) See the amicable and frank correspondence between the two men in the MacDonald papers, John Rylands Library, Manchester, RMD/1/10/3–4 & 7–9. Lampson had served under MacDonald when MacDonald had acted as Foreign Secretary during the first Labour government, 1923–4.

[66] *LPCR*, 1927, 58.

[67] MRC, Mss 292 951/6, TUC Research Department memorandum, 31 August 1927.

[68] Eugene Chen told Arthur Ransome that the Labour Party letters had been 'of the greatest assistance in helping us to get into the minds of our supporters that to be anti-Imperialist does not mean to be anti-British' (Ransome, *Chinese puzzle*, 74). Malone had also been involved behind the scenes. For instance, he wrote to Chen with cuttings of MacDonald's speeches to show that the Labour leader's position was becoming more amenable (TNA KV2/1905).

1927), when Labour called for the 'immediate diversion and recall' of the forces sailing for China, the left claimed the credit for the strong wording of the amendment[69]. On 8 March Labour MPs voted against the Supplementary Estimate for the cost of the expedition, and on 16 March supported a milder resolution regretting the 'ostentatious dispatch' of the Shanghai Defence Force. One of Labour's speakers on 16 March was the newly elected Wilfred Wellock, the victor in the recent Stourbridge by-election, who claimed that the voters had 'given a decision' against the government's China policy[70]. Of course, Labour had no prospect of reversing government policy, given the size of the Conservative majority in the Commons. However, in as much as the parliamentary debates were more concerned with what the troops should do on their arrival in China, Labour's stance reinforced the moderates in Cabinet. Austen Chamberlain, for one, had no intention of allowing a full-scale military intervention, and was fully aware of the strong domestic feelings against war[71]. In the event the Shanghai Defence Force was used in a wholly deterrent capacity, much to the annoyance of the resident 'Shanghailanders' who had hoped that it would be employed to reassert Britain's presence higher up the Yangtze.

The crisis had been handled skilfully by MacDonald. He had managed to ride the wave of 'Hands off China' sentiment without changing his political position. At the Albert Hall rally on 6 February 1927, he gave an impassioned speech for negotiation under the modest slogan: 'Peace, not panic'[72]. Not for the last time over China, the pressure generated by the left created the conditions in which political progress could be made by a more moderate Labour leadership. Even so, MacDonald had taken risks and there was a political price to pay. Labour was open to the charge that it had yielded to Communist pressure, and there were some elements in the Labour Party unhappy with the position adopted. J. H. (Jimmy) Thomas, a leading trade unionist on the right of the Labour party, said that he was not alarmed at the sending of troops, and it was better to send a 'big army' than a handful of men. He was denounced by Ernest Bevin as a representative of 'Jingo labour'[73]. More damagingly, the Labour MP Leslie Haden Guest resigned his North Southwark seat in February 1927 in protest at the party's opposition to sending the troops to Shanghai. Such a position, in his view, exposed the British residents to the threat of a massacre 'worse than Khartoum'. However, Haden Guest's bid to defeat Labour in the ensuing by-election on a China and pro-imperialist platform was unsuccessful: although the Conservatives endorsed Haden Guest, the seat went to the Liberals and he came third with a mere 3,215 votes[74].

[69] See *Workers' Life*, 18 February 1927; *LPCR*, 1927, 207; *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 203, 8 March 1927, col. 1122.

[70] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 203, 16 March 1927, col. 2138. For Wellock, a former Conscientious Objector, see Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The defining of a faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 50, and *The Times*, 23 February 1927.

[71] See Edmund S. K. Feng, *The diplomacy of imperial retreat, 1924–31* (Hong Kong & New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 131.

[72] *Daily Herald*, 2 February 1927 lists the slogans.

[73] *Daily Herald*, 31 January 1927, 2 February 1927, and 4 February 1927; *LPCR*, 1927, 205–6.

[74] For details of the by-election campaign, see *The Times*, in particular Haden Guest's comments in 16 March 1927 and 25 March 1927. See also Haden Guest's speech in *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 202, 10 February 1927, cols 346–53.

Fig. 2. Labour right-winger Jimmy Thomas restrains strike action over British intervention in China and the 1927 Trades Dispute Act
('Espoir', *Workers' Life*, 22 Apr. 1927)

The 'Hands off China' agitation soon faltered when it became clear that the immediate threat of war had passed and that the Chinese revolution had entered a new, and in many respects less compelling, phase. The CPGB's call for a general strike in May 1927, which linked China to opposition to the unpopular Trades Disputes Act, was symptomatic of the new extremism in Communist policy and was roundly ignored (Fig. 2). More generally, the British left began to lose interest in China in the course 1927. This was not—as might be expected—due to the Shanghai massacre of April 1927, as it generated less overt shock in Britain than an earlier 'White terror' in the city two months previously[75]. Even after April 1927, it was by no means clear to British observers that Chiang Kai-shek would emerge victorious, and it was widely understood that the Chinese revolution was still continuing in some form. Indeed, like their Soviet patrons, the British Communists were initially unfazed by Chiang's attack on their comrades in China, and merely interpreted this as a sign that the politics within the KMT were polarizing. In late May an editorial in *Workers' Life* even claimed that the Chinese revolution was 'coming more and more to resemble the Russian [revolution]'[76]. However, with Chiang Kai-shek's defeat of the left-KMT government in July, the revolution had palpably passed

[75] For instance, the TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee expressed its 'abhorrence' of the events in Shanghai on 2 March 1927, but made no comment on the April massacres (*TUCCR*, 1927, 222). See also the *New Leader*, 25 February 1927, 'The Shanghai horror'.

[76] *Workers' Life*, 27 May 1927; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 175. The BLCCF speaker's noted issued as late as 11 July 1927 referred to an 'alleged split' in the KMT, and said that it had not 'lost its revolutionary character'.

its leftist and anti-imperialist zenith. The state-building project survived, but the Chinese masses were now confined to the margins. The two years following 30 May 1925 had afforded the British left a period of unusual clarity in its understanding of modern China, but this soon gave way to a renewed sense of incomprehension as interest and news dwindled. Presciently Tom Mann, who had watched the revolution turn sour from Wuhan, told the Red International of Labour Unions that 'the fate of the Chinese revolution' would ultimately lie not with the Chinese trade unions but with the peasantry[77].

'HANDS OFF CHINA' ASSESSED

All of the parties on the British left could derive some satisfaction from their role in the crisis of 1925–7, yet only the Communists chose to remember it. The CPGB Central Committee's annual review for 1927, written in an increasingly sectarian political climate, claimed that the 'mass response' to the party's campaign, 'conducted in the teeth of reformist sabotage or passive opposition, was unmistakable'[78]. The earliest history of the CPGB, published in 1937, noted the party's success in developing a 'wide campaign' despite the 'strong feeling of apathy' in the working class movement following the defeat of the General Strike[79]. 'Hands off China' eventually attained a legendary status, and the Chinese Communist Party often alluded to it in later years as a model for international solidarity[80]. When Dora Russell visited the Revolutionary Museum in Shanghai in 1956, she was pleased to find that this 'gesture of sympathy…had not gone unremarked and unappreciated by the Chinese people'[81]. However, Andrew Thorpe has criticized the CPGB's 'near obsession' with China in early 1927 and argued that the prominence given to such a 'complex and remote issue'—in response to pressure from the Comintern—must have harmed efforts to recruit and retain party members, for many of whom China would have been an irrelevance[82]. There is some support for this view in Harry Pollitt's exasperated comment from 1930 that Communist party members knew the names of 'all the Chinese Generals' but could not give British workers practical advice about unemployment benefit[83]. Even so, at least during 1925–27, there are still good reasons to think that the question of China

[77] MRC, Mss 36, ISTC c.74, memorandum of 26 July 1927, based on reports in the Soviet newspaper *Trud*, 22 June 1927.

[78] *Workers' Life*, 27 January 1928. For an example of alleged 'sabotage' in the Shotts committee, see *Workers' Life*, 1 April 1927. Claims of Labour Party 'sabotage' were also made at a meeting of chairmen of 'Hands off China' committees in London, on 9 April 1927 (see report in LMA, Acc 3287/01/13).

[79] Tom Bell, *The British Communist Party: A short history* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), 120. James Klugmann referred to 'Hands off China' as the CPGB's most important anti-imperialist campaign of the mid 1920s (*History of the CPGB, 1925–1926*, 305).

[80] See for instance *Daily Worker*, 30 March 1959.

[81] Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree*, i. 192.

[82] Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 105, 106.

[83] Worley, *Class against class*, 199.

was a surprisingly resonant one within Britain. Above all, the British left presented a compelling political and moral argument that did not simply describe events half a world away, but linked them to social conditions in Britain.

The left's most potent weapon was undoubtedly the fear that the confrontation in the Far East would lead to a new general war. As George Hicks told the Albert Hall rally in February 1927, 'we are met in the shadow of war'[84]. The crisis of 1926–7 was frequently compared to the situation in 1914, when the powers had stumbled into war. The *New Leader* presented the danger of hostilities in Shanghai as 'the story of the Great War over again', while James Maxton appealed to the British people to 'refuse to be cannon fodder'[85]. During the Stourbridge by-election campaign, Labour's Wilfred Wellock (a leading pacifist and former Conscientious Objector) warned of 'another Armageddon' and claimed that 'Tory Jingoes' wanted war[86]. Increasingly, however, and particularly for the Communist Party, opposition to war over China was connected to the prospect of an 'imperialist' attack on the Soviet Union. In April 1927, following raids on Soviet offices in Beijing and Shanghai, the CPGB warned of provocations leading to 'further British intervention, new Wanhsien massacres and a war on the Soviet Union for which [Austen] Chamberlain has been preparing for months'[87]. Here Thorpe's point may be turned on its head, as this aspect of Communist (and, to a degree, ILP) rhetoric may well have enthused party members, but shows little sign of having engaged the wider public. In this sense the Communists' 'near obsession' with China was another expression of their devotion to the Soviet Union. To explain the full impact of the Chinese crisis in Britain, therefore, a wider range of factors need to be considered.

Firstly, it must be emphasized that this was an anti-imperialist struggle in which Britain was the principal imperial power. Despite the physical remoteness of China, the preparations for military action were clearly visible in Britain and could not be easily ignored. Troops for the Shanghai Defence Force were mustered from barracks in the major British cities in the glare of press publicity—hence Labour's allegations of 'ostentatious dispatch'. They sailed from ports such as Portsmouth, alongside munitions ships and even, at an earlier stage in the crisis, an aircraft carrier[88]. 'Hands off China' could hardly be an abstract cause so long as British 'workers in uniform' might be called upon to subdue Chinese nationalism, and the soldiers were a principal focus for the campaign. In February 1927 it was claimed that thousands of anti-war leaflets were distributed when the Second Battalion of the Coldstream Guards left for Waterloo station, and that the cheers 'that usually accompany the march past' were absent[89]. Leading Communist agitators were sent to the south coast ports and

[84] *Daily Herald*, 7 February 1927. The speaker was George Hicks.
[85] *New Leader*, 4 February 1927 and 25 February 1927.
[86] *Manchester Guardian*, 15 February 1927 and 16 February 1927. For Wellock, see Ceadel, *Pacifism*, 50, and *The Times*, 23 February 1927.
[87] Telegram from the CPGB to Maxton, *Workers' Life*, 22 April 1927.
[88] This was HMS *Hermes*: see the *Daily Herald*, 13 September 1926 and 14 September 1926.
[89] *Workers' Life*, 4 February 1927. This is contradicted by other accounts—for instance, *The Scotsman*, 31 January 1927, describes thousands watching and cheering the departure.

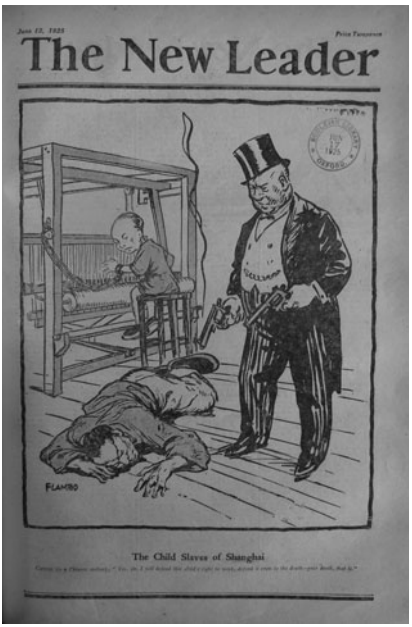

Fig. 3. British capital 'defends' child workers against Chinese strikers
(Flambo, *New Leader*, 12 June 1925)

l'Estrange Malone addressed a protest meeting at Portsmouth in February 1927. (His good war record and claim to comradeship with the departing marines may have spared him a hostile reception.) Later, two Communist demonstrators in Newcastle were each fined £5 for wearing soldiers' uniforms as part of a tableau proclaiming, 'Don't shoot the Chinese workers and their children'[90]. However, animosity towards the soldiers was tempered by sympathy for 'poor fool Tommy Atkins', the imperialists' dupe. A. A. Purcell and the Communist agitator Ernest Brown appear to have been exceptional in publicly hoping for the failure of the soldiers' mission[91].

Secondly, the crisis in China had started as a protest against the exploitation of labour, and moral outrage, tinged with pathos, was central to the early phase of the campaign in Britain (see Fig. 3). The essential points of reference were the recent reports of social reformers in Shanghai, such as the 1924 report of the Child Labour Commission appointed by the International Settlement's Municipal Council, and the initial demands were for better factory inspection and regulation. Sir Charles Trevelyan, opening an adjournment debate for Labour in Parliament on 18 June 1925, said that the immediate cause of the unrest in Shanghai was 'an industrial

[90] *Workers' Life*, 20 May 1927 (I am grateful to Lewis Mates for this reference).
[91] *Workers' Weekly*, 31 July 1925; *Workers' Life*, 18 February 1927 and 11 February 1927 ('Does Tommy know the truth about China? Send a copy to a pal in the forces'). For Purcell, see *Daily Herald*, 2 February 1927, and *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 203, 8 March 1927, col. 1121 and 16 March 1927, col. 2122; Brown told a Communist Party rally in January 1927 that 'no-one would be more pleased than he to see the British kicked out of China', (TNA KV2/3197).

cause', and proceeded to give a harrowing account of the 'monstrous' conditions in the foreign-owned factories[92]. More succinctly, the Labour MP and trade unionist Will Thorne blamed 'beastly low wages' and child labour. He explained that the reason that so many of his colleagues had become interested in this question was that 'many of us, including myself, have been exploited. I was when I was 16 years of age'[93]. Ben Tillett told the 1925 Labour conference that industrial conditions in China—worse even than those in Lancashire in the early nineteenth century—made 'one's soul revolt'. The British military was being used to uphold 'degrading forms of slavery'[94]. The ILP's *New Leader* argued that 'cotton slavery' united the great industrial cities of Oldham and Shanghai in suffering—unemployment in one, 'intolerable cruelty' in the other[95]. Emotive accounts of capitalist exploitation—conveyed through speeches, cartoons, and even poems[96]—clearly evoked sympathy in Britain. One child of eight in Rochdale, having listened to a Communist speaker describing the conditions of child workers in China, is said to have organized his friends to stage a mock strike 'against the English bosses'[97].

However, there was far more to the campaign than mere sympathy and humanitarian concern, as the left also made a connection between China's social and economic development and Britain's future economic security. The rapid pace of industrialization in cities such as Shanghai, driven by low wages, poor conditions, and the exploited labour of women and children, was presented as a threat to British workers' interests, whereas a better paid Chinese labour force would be able to import far more British manufactured goods. As l'Estrange Malone told a public meeting in early 1927, coolie conditions in China meant 'coolie wages' in Britain. Conditions in Chinese factories were appalling (like a 'very foul Turkish bath in atmosphere') and the lack of regulation would attract many Lancashire mill owners to relocate to China. He warned that a war—with attendant boycotts and loss of markets—would be the 'funeral pyre of Lancashire prosperity'. However, he also argued that if the Chinese standard of living could be raised by a mere half penny per week, British exports would be raised by £50 million per annum[98]. Malone's points were made glibly and for effect, and his humane investigations into Chinese labour conditions were set out more fully in his 1926 booklet for the ILP. However, similar arguments were made repeatedly in the press and at public meetings throughout the crisis. For instance, in September 1926 *Workers' Life* claimed that many workers in the engineering and textile industries understood the 'deadly competition of Chinese sweated labour', and that a strong national government in China offered the prospect of improved conditions via trade unionism[99]. Maxton

[92] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 185, 18 June 1925, cols 907–10.
[93] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 185, 15 June 1925, cols 27/8, 35.
[94] *LPCR*, 1925, 261.
[95] *New Leader*, 12 June 1925.
[96] See the cartoon by Flambo, 'The child slaves of Shanghai', *New Leader*, 12 June 1925 (Fig. 3); a poem by 'K.B.' entitled 'Shanghai' warned that 'You will win with your warships | You will ooze with remorse and regrets | But be warned | For the East is Eternal | It neither forgives nor forgets', *Daily Herald*, 3 July 1925.
[97] Letter from 'DH' in *Workers' Weekly*, 17 July 1925.
[98] Cutting dated 1 February 1927 in TNA KV2/1905.
[99] *Workers' Life*, 24 September 1927.

referred to British businessmen employing Chinese labour for 6d to 1s for a 15-hour day, thereby taking 'work away from the cotton operatives in Lancashire'[100].

Thirdly, the left attacked British commercial interests in China as illegitimate and unworthy of military assistance. Not only were British soldiers being sent to impede the legitimate demands of a foreign people, they were being sent to help those who could not make an 'honest living' in Britain to make a 'dishonest one' in China[101]. This view was put most starkly at the Albert Hall rally when the chairman, George Hicks, railed against the 'medley of adventurers' that the British government wanted to protect in Shanghai. These were not honest working people but 'capitalists, merchants, and their agents, engaged in shady commercial transactions' and the exploitation of 'defenceless' women and children[102]. At a subsequent demonstration in Trafalgar Square, Dora Russell said that the British government cared nothing for women and children and that this would be a war for 'people who have made money in Shanghai'[103]. Oswald Mosley, then a newly elected ILP MP, argued that British interests in China amounted to no more than a few capitalists undercutting British workers with a 'virtually slave' labour force[104]. In Parliament, Labour MPs repeatedly urged the government to distinguish between the British residents of Shanghai and their economic interests by calling for a mass evacuation—rather than a military expedition—as the logical solution to the crisis[105].

Therefore, there was far more to the left's stance on China than simply a war scare or indignation at industrial exploitation. Indeed, it had gone some way to making this a 'bread and butter' issue[106] for British workers, in which moral outrage was bound up with economic self-interest. At one public meeting a call for a League of Nations boycott of Chinese exports, so long as Chinese labour continued to be exploited, was met with 'prolonged cheers'[107]. Indeed, some of the rhetoric of this period, which envisaged highly competitive Chinese and Japanese industries 'storming the home markets of their rivals' and forcing workers in the West to accept 'super-sweated conditions', foreshadowed the insecurities accompanying 'globalization' in the early 21st century[108]. An editorial in the *Daily Herald* argued that there would be storms of protest if the capitalists filled the cotton mills of Lancashire with children from Shanghai and the jute mills of Dundee with women from Bengal—but that the effect of capitalist investment abroad '*is exactly the same*'[109]. However, the disruption

[100] *Daily Herald*, 7 April 1927.
[101] *LPCR*, 1926, 256 (John Scurr, MP).
[102] *Daily Herald*, 7 February 1927. When challenged on this point he refused to back down, adding that he was opposed to the 'shady and inhuman capitalist dealings of the Britishers' in Shanghai (*Daily Herald*, 14 February 1927).
[103] *Daily Herald*, 14 February 1927.
[104] *Daily Herald*, 31 January 1927.
[105] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 202, 10 February 1927, col. 381 (Lansbury); vol. 203, 8 March 1927, col. 1120 (Thurtle).
[106] *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September 1926.
[107] *Daily Herald*, 11 June 1925 (the speaker was the journalist Hamilton Fyfe).
[108] *Daily Herald*, 28 October 1926 and 11 June 1925.
[109] *Daily Herald*, 25 June 1925.

caused to China's economic development by war and revolution meant that these economic arguments lost their potency for some decades after 1931.

1927–31: THE CHINESE SOVIETS

The victory of Chiang Kai-shek in 1927 was far from complete. Swathes of Chinese territory to the North and West remained outside of his control, while his authority was constantly challenged by rival generals and by Communist-ruled enclaves in the south. Indeed, he briefly resigned his command in mid 1927. Even so, Chiang was strong enough to impose a period of relative stability in China which lasted until the Japanese aggression against Manchuria in September 1931. In Britain, apart from the Communists, who could not avoid some reflection on the fate of the Chinese revolution, the left did not dwell on China. MacDonald's second Labour government, elected in May 1929, was free to resume Chamberlain's policy of gradual retreat and in 1930 agreed to give up the British concession at Weihaiwei in ten years time[110]. When British gunboats helped to repel a Communist attack on the Yangtze, the CPGB's attempt to revive the slogan of 'Hands off China!'—this time against a 'social fascist' Labour government—fell on deaf ears[111]. Meanwhile, many of those who had taken a lead on China turned their attention elsewhere. The BLCCF proved ephemeral, and Reginald Bridgeman directed his energies into the League against Imperialism (LAI: founded in February 1927)[112]. Bertrand Russell largely withdrew from politics in the later 1920s, and L'Estrange Malone lost interest in the Far East after his election as an MP in 1928. He subsequently earned a reputation as a MacDonald loyalist, and the Chinese Information Bureau was said to have swiftly 'petered out'. Bizarrely, Malone became a paid agent of Japan after losing his seat in 1931[113].

The CPGB's problem was how to acknowledge the obvious policy failures in China without casting doubt on Stalin's judgement. In July 1927, for instance, it was argued that Trotsky's call for a withdrawal from the united front would have been 'sheer suicide' and that the disaster was purely due to errors by 'our brother party' in China[114]. Allen Hutt attributed the eventual recovery of Chinese Communism from the 'infantile diseases' of 1925–7 to the influence of the Comintern in fashioning a 'real Bolshevik party' by 1930[115]. The CPGB's problems were neatly encapsulated in its handling of the bloody Canton revolt of 1927, which it had initially presented as a sign of the renewed vitality of the Chinese revolution.

[110] See David Carlton, *MacDonald versus Henderson: The Foreign Policy of the Second Labour Government* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 174–84. Reginald Bridgeman saw this as an attempt by the Labour administration to strengthen the KMT government against the Communists rather than as an example of progressive gradualism (*Daily Worker*, 3 October 1930).

[111] *Daily Worker*, 6 August 1930 and 11 August 1930. 'Hands off China' was evoked again in the 1931–2 crisis (see *Daily Worker*, 2 February 1932 and 29 February 1932).

[112] For the LAI, see Bellamy and Saville, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vii, and Jean Jones, *The League against Imperialism* (London: Socialist History Society, 1996).

[113] See below, p. 56, n. 45.

[114] *Workers' Life*, 29 July 1927 and 21 October 1927.

[115] *Daily Worker*, 18 June 1930.

Within days, as many as seven thousand workers had been executed and the Communists' final urban stronghold lost. The CPGB placed the blame squarely on the gunboats of the imperialist powers, abetted by the 'capitalist agents and allies' in the Labour Party leadership[116]. When interest revived in China in the early 1930s, the anniversary of the Canton Commune was marked for a number of years by lengthy articles in the *Daily Worker*. Now at last it could be admitted that the revolt had been ill-timed and poorly planned. It was recalled, instead, as a heroic failure—'the first time a Red Flag had been hoisted in the Far East'—and as the necessary foundation for the resurgence of the Chinese Communist Party[117]. After December 1935, however, the revolt was discreetly forgotten. George Hardy, who had worked as a PPTUS activist in Shanghai in 1927–29, wrote in his memoirs in 1956 that the rebellion had been 'a leftist action facing inevitable defeat', and that Mao Tse-tung had shown that there were better alternatives[118].

In the late 1920s these alternatives were only dimly perceived in Britain, and Mao's name was still unknown. Mao's identity was first registered in the British Communist press in November 1932, when he signed a statement as chairman of the 'provisional central government of the Soviet Republic of China'[119]. The existence of a number of Soviet zones in the rural areas of southern China was a source of fascination and somewhat bewildered pride to British Communists: here were regions where, it was said, banknotes bearing portraits of Marx and Lenin were common currency[120]. In May 1930 the *Daily Worker* claimed that an area double the size of Ireland was under Communist control (mere blotches on the accompanying map), and a year later this was amended to 50 or 60 million people living in an area the size of Germany[121]. In November 1930 it was reported that over 200 Soviet districts, with a population of some 30 million and a Red Army of 300,000, would be represented at an All-Chinese Soviet Congress and appoint a provisional government[122]. But almost nothing was known about the reality of life in these scattered outposts, and no intrepid journalists were able to visit them. One of the first to get close was Mrs Cecil Chesterton, who wrote a series of articles for the ILP in 1932, followed by Peter Fleming (by no means a left-winger) in 1933[123]. Communists took heart that a powerful new force was stirring in the Chinese countryside, although it was also known that Chiang Kai-shek's forces were mounting ever more effective campaigns against the Soviet areas. However,

[116] *Workers' Life*, 16 December 1927 and 13 January 1928.

[117] *Daily Worker*, 12 December 1933, 12 December 1934, and 12 December 1935.

[118] George Hardy, *Those stormy years: Memoirs of the fight for freedom on five continents* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956), 200–1.

[119] *Daily Worker*, 24 November 1932.

[120] *Daily Worker*, 20 January 1931.

[121] *Daily Worker*, 20 May 1930 and 5 May 1931.

[122] *Labour Monthly*, November 1930, 696–8; *Daily Worker*, 11 November 1930.

[123] She published six articles from China and Japan in the *New Leader* between 4 November and 16 December 1932. See in particular the article of 25 November 1932, which draws on eyewitness accounts of the Soviet areas. See also her *Young China and New Japan* (London: G. Harrap & Co., 1933), 190–3. For Peter Fleming's account of his journey to the anti-Communist front in 1933, see his *One's Company—a journey to China* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934). He memorably described 'Mao Dsu Tung [*sic*]' as 'a gifted and fanatical young man of thirty-five suffering from an incurable disease…' (p. 185).

China's peasant Communism did not receive a human face until the arrival of the American journalist Edgar Snow in Mao's new capital Yenan in 1936.

By the late 1920s Britain's imperial position in China was clearly in decline, and international attention began to shift to China's relations with the Soviet Union and Japan, historic rivals for the control of Manchuria since the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. All three states had important interests in Manchuria, and were increasingly willing to use force to protect them. In June 1928 Japanese agents assassinated the Manchurian warlord Chang Tso-lin, destroying his train with a massive bomb. In November 1929 Soviet troops mounted a successful incursion into Chinese territory in a dispute over control of the Chinese Eastern Railway, and China—without international backing—backed down. The Communist press in Britain had to make clear that the Soviet Union was not embarked on a form of 'red imperialism' in this strategically and economically valuable region[124]. Ultimately, however, Japan's ambitions in Manchuria presented the greatest threat to both China's integrity and Soviet security. The perceived threat from Japanese militarism was magnified by the so-called Tanaka Memorandum, an infamous forgery which first surfaced in China in 1929 and which gained wide international credence. According to this document, Japan saw the conquest of Manchuria as the first step to the conquest of India, Central Asia, 'and even Europe'[125]. Forgery or not, Japan's expansionist intentions in the region were apparent, and for the next fifteen years the British left's fitful interest in China was driven by Japan's wars of aggression.

* * *

Although China ceased to be a headline issue after 1927, the crisis of the previous two years had been a formative experience for the British left. Above all, there was a new and lasting sense of interconnectedness: that what happened in China had a direct impact on life in Britain. Also the Chinese people had begun to emerge from the shadows, no longer seen as the denizens of an anachronistic and hopelessly remote world, but as assertive, modern beings with coherent political and social demands (Fig. 4). While it was still possible to find messages of goodwill to 'John Chinaman' or clichéd references to the 'awakening orient' and the 'Asiatic mind'[126], such patronizing and exotic language was less and less evident on the British left (Fig. 5). Instead, there was an increasing awareness of how the stereotypes of popular culture reinforced political power. For instance, in 1931 the *Daily Worker*'s film critic Dave Bennett dismissed one movie for its 'anti-Chinese propagandist message'. The film, he wrote, demonstrated the 'natural villainy' of the Chinese opium

[124] *Workers' Life*, 9 August 1929.

[125] *Japanese Imperialism stripped: The secret memorandum of Tanaka, Premier of Japan* (London: Modern Books, n.d.), here p. 12. This document purported to be a memorandum presented to the Emperor by the former Japanese Prime Minister, Baron Tanaka, on 25 July 1927. For a helpful assessment of the document, see John J. Stephan, 'The Tanaka Memorial (1927): Authentic or spurious?', *Modern Asian Studies*, 7/4 (1973), 733–45.

[126] *Lansbury's Labour Weekly*, 20 June 1925. See also *Daily Herald*, 12 April 1926, for an article on what 'we "advanced" people of the West can learn . . . from John Chinaman'. *Socialist Review*, October 1926, 10; Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence in *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 202, 8 February 1927, col. 43.

Fig. 4. 'China breaks through'
(Flambo, *New Leader*, 25 Feb. 1927)

smugglers on the London docks by depicting them as 'ugly, crippled, leering and crafty', eventually jailed by 'tall, handsome, clean, brave Britishers'. Such images, he pertinently observed, were 'absolutely essential' to the continued exploitation of the Chinese workers[127]. In the early 1930s Communists, in particular, found little of merit in the old China and believed that the future lay in Soviet-style modernity. In a review of *Blue Express* (a 1931 Soviet movie about China), Bennett contrasted China's pungent inequalities with the 'land of hope for the workers' across the border[128]. In 'Red dawn over China', a short story published in the *Daily Worker* in 1932, a young revolutionary student smiles at the 'clumsy old wooden plough'

[127] *Daily Worker*, 27 July 1931; the film was Peter Godfrey's *Down River*.
[128] *Daily Worker*, 19 October 1931.

Fig. 5. The persistence of stereotypes. (The cartoon refers to the coup attempt by elements of the Japanese Army in Tokyo, February 1936)
(Will Dyson, *Daily Herald*, 28 Feb. 1936)

used by the peasants. 'In his mind's eye he sees a column of tractors advancing across those sun-dried, hardly-scratched plains, turning their meagre harvest into plenty'[129]. Such dreams of socialist transformation were by no means abandoned in the travails of the following two decades. However, during the 1930s the British left would come to have a far more generous conception of the roots of Chinese culture.

[129] *Daily Worker*, 14 January 1932, story by John Gaunt. However, the peasant tells the student that: 'One thing you cannot change. The land is our own.'

2

1931–1939: Japanese Aggression

CHINA, JAPAN, AND BRITAIN IN THE 1930s

On 18 September 1931 the Japanese army claimed that Chinese saboteurs had destroyed a small section of the South Manchurian Railway on the northern outskirts of Mukden. Damage to the line, which had been under Japan's control since 1905, was slight, but Japanese troops immediately attacked a nearby Chinese barracks in retaliation[1]. In fact, the so-called 'Mukden incident' was a staged provocation by Japan's Kwantung army, which was bent on forcing the civilian government in Tokyo into supporting a policy of conquest and colonization in Northern China. Punitive action turned swiftly, therefore, into the wholesale Japanese occupation of Manchuria and, from 1932, the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo. Japan recognized this new state in 1933 and installed Pu-Yi, the last Chinese emperor, as its ruler. The timing of the crisis was opportune for Japan, as all of the Powers were distracted by the impact of the Great Depression. Britain, for instance, was in the midst of an unprecedented political and financial crisis, and went off the Gold Standard on 20 September 1931. Moreover, many Western statesmen initially sympathized with what they saw as Japan's bid to bring stability and efficient government to such a strategically important region[2]. With hindsight, however, '1931' came to symbolize a failed test of the principle of collective security, and a missed opportunity to resist unlawful aggression[3]. This view was apparently vindicated by Japan's continuing piecemeal aggression against China in the mid 1930s and the outbreak of a full-scale Sino-Japanese war in the summer of 1937. For the British left, Japan's conduct was now the dominant factor in its relationship with China, and remained so until 1945.

Japan's aggression in the 1930s was in many respects incoherent. Even the most fervent Japanese imperialists understood that China was too large and too populous

[1] League of Nations, *Appeal by the Chinese Government: Report of the Commission of Inquiry* (Geneva: 1932), 66–83.

[2] In 1934 British Foreign Office officials apparently told a Norwegian diplomat that Japan had 'done the world a favour by bringing about order in the enormous stretches of land which now is called Manchukuo' (quoted in Eldrid I Mageli, 'A real peace tradition? Norway and the Manchurian crisis, 1931–1934', *Contemporary European History*, 19/1 (February 2010), 17–36, here p. 32). Philip Noel-Baker later claimed that in 1931 there had been a school of thought in governing circles in Britain and Australia that Japan should be allowed to 'have "a go" at China because it would keep them busy…' (China Campaign Committee, *China in world affairs*, 1939, 5).

[3] As, for instance, Herbert Morrison argued at a conference on China in February 1938: *IPC Monthly Bulletin*, February–March 1938, 31–3.

to be conquered militarily, and that Japan's principal goal must be to consolidate its grip over Manchuria. Accordingly, when a League of Nations Commission of Inquiry chaired by the British peer Lord Lytton criticized its actions, its response was to walk out of the League in February 1933. If international recognition for Japan's conquests was not forthcoming, a diplomatic settlement with China proved just as elusive. The outline of such a settlement was clear: China's government would have to accept the loss of Manchuria, join an anti-Comintern pact, and suppress political groups hostile to Japan[4]. However, Japan had failed to take into account the surge of Chinese nationalism since the 1920s, inflamed by its own aggression, which made it politically impossible for Chiang Kai-shek to agree to such a shameful peace. Therefore, Japan's crushing military victories could not be turned into political gains, and not even the defection of Chiang's bitter rival Wang Ching-wei in December 1938 could lay the basis for a viable collaborationist regime. Meanwhile, Japan's ultimate goals remained unclear. There was no Japanese blueprint for world domination, although the British left was convinced that the 'Tanaka memorial' (which was widely seen as a Japanese *Mein Kampf*) proved otherwise[5]. Instead, there was a tension within Japan's ruling circles between those who wanted to expand northwards into the territory of the Soviet Union and its satellite state Mongolia, and those who favoured advancing south and east into Indo-China and the Pacific, bringing Japan into conflict with the European empires and the United States. Japan's serious military reverses in border clashes with the Soviet Union in 1938 and 1939 made the former course less likely. However, the momentous decision to gamble on the maritime option was not finally taken until late 1941, following President Roosevelt's decision to impose an oil embargo on Japan.

In 1938 Professor Gilbert Murray, a leading British supporter of the League of Nations, reflected on the three distinct 'tragedies' unfolding in war-torn China. First, there was the unparalleled daily suffering experienced by civilian refugees and the victims of bombing. The second was a 'tragedy of marred and blasted hopes', as China's political and cultural progress over the last ten years was steadily destroyed by war. Finally, there was the tragedy of Japan's transformation from a 'noble nation' into a 'nation dishonoured, a false friend, a breaker of treaties, a people fallen back to barbarism…'[6]. Murray's views were representative of British opinion at the time, which was deeply shocked by Japan's methods—in particular the bombing of Chinese cities and the atrocities committed by its soldiers against civilians. As one politician put it, '[T]he savage with his poisoned dart is a gentleman compared with these people'[7]. Moral outrage was heightened by a sense of profound disappointment

[4] Edward L. Dreyer, *China at war, 1901–1949* (London: Longman, 1995), 211, citing Foreign Minister Hirota in 1935.

[5] See, for instance, *Daily Worker*, 9 October 1937, *Daily Herald*, 6 January 1938, *New Statesman*, 11 December 1937 and 18 December 1937; LHASC, CPGB CC minutes, 23–6 April 1938; Israel Epstein, *The People's War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), 287. Many more examples could be given.

[6] Gilbert Murray, 'Introduction' in Ernest R. Hughes (ed.), *China Body & Soul* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), 13–16.

[7] *Daily Herald*, 14 October 1937, citing Cr R. Anderson, leader of Deptford Borough Council.

that Japan had turned its back on a 'civilized' western path to modern statehood: one, indeed, that should have served as a model to China. The American scholar Owen Lattimore recalled the case of a British officer who was an admirer of Japan until shown the effects of bombing in Shanghai, when he reputedly exclaimed: 'The swine, they've let me down'[8]. Support for China in Britain during the 1930s, therefore, was matched by hostility towards Japan. This was amplified for those on the left by the constant threat of a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union[9].

A minority on the left argued that Japan was merely pursuing the same imperialist goals in China as the western powers in previous decades, and that the British government was exploiting public outrage against Japan in order to prepare for war in the Far East[10]. However, this position became ever more marginal in the later 1930s, partly due to the increasing brutality of Japan's actions, partly due to new political strategies on the left (notably, as we shall see, the Communist party's adoption of the anti-fascist Popular Front), but also because of the very evident decline of British imperial power in China. Japan's bombing of Shanghai and Canton in 1937 largely supplanted the memory of British 'frightfulness' in Wanhsien and elsewhere in 1926–7. Indeed, from 1937 onwards the British were themselves victims of Japan's aggression, even if their suffering was far less than that of the Chinese. Japanese planes strafed and wounded the British Ambassador in his car in August 1937, and attacked British gunboats at Nanking. When four Britons were publicly stripped by Japanese troops in the treaty port of Tientsin in July 1939, the message of a changing order in the Far East could not have been clearer. With the British Empire on the defensive, Japan was now the undoubted villain, and, even on the left, Britain's imperial presence began to be seen in a more positive light. Whereas in January 1932 the Communist *Daily Worker* had reported that British troops in Shanghai shot at Chinese refugees as they sought safety in the International Settlement, by May 1938 it was portraying the Seaforth Highlanders as a comforting presence, thwarting Japanese ambitions in the city[11]. Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, a former ILP activist who arrived in Hong Kong in 1938, noted that for the first time the colony was of real value to the Chinese people as a haven for refugees[12].

1931–3: MANCHURIA AND SHANGHAI

The crisis over Manchuria could not have come at a worse time for the Labour Party, which was still struggling to come to terms with the collapse of the second Labour

[8] *New Statesman*, 28 June 1968, 875.

[9] Tom Wintringham offered a detailed vision of Manchuria as a future battleground in *The coming world war* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936), 235–53.

[10] See, for instance, *New Leader*, 3 September 1937. For a good example of this approach, see the articles by the ILP veteran Fred Jowett, dated 3 September 1937 and 28 January 1938, cited in Fenner Brockway, *Socialism over sixty years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford, 1864–1944* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1946), 341–2.

[11] *Daily Worker*, 30 January 1932, 30 April 1932, and 17 May 1938.

[12] *New Statesman*, 18 June 1938.

government in August 1931 and the defection of Ramsay MacDonald to lead the Conservative-dominated 'National' government. In the general election of October 1931 Labour suffered a devastating defeat, in which most of its remaining leaders lost their seats and the party was reduced to a mere 52 MPs. The new leader George Lansbury was a popular figure in the party, but his parliamentary speeches during the Far Eastern crisis were characteristically muddled and ineffectual. The political upheaval of 1931 determined the balance of forces within British politics for the remainder of the decade, and even Labour's improved performance in the November 1935 election still left it unable to mount a serious challenge to the National Government in parliament. The decision by the ILP to disaffiliate and form an independent party of the left in July 1932 dealt a further blow to Labour, although the damage was ultimately slight. Labour slowly began to regroup around a new generation of leaders, such as Clement Attlee (the party leader from October 1935), Hugh Dalton, and Herbert Morrison (leader of the London Labour Party). Arguably, stronger leadership was provided by the TUC and the trade unions, which took an unprecedented and somewhat proprietorial interest in Labour politics throughout the 1930s. The National Joint Council (which was renamed as the National Council of Labour in 1934) became the principal body for combined decision making within the Labour movement, especially during fast-moving international crises. The leading figures on the trade union side, Sir Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin, also embodied a vigorous anti-Communism that—unlike in the mid 1920s—strictly demarcated Communist activities from those of the 'official' Labour movement[13].

The impact of the Manchurian crisis on British politics was investigated in great detail by Reginald Bassett in his book *Democracy and foreign policy* (1952). Bassett was a former ILP activist who supported MacDonald in the 1931 crisis, and his book was initially attacked as a 'whitewash' of British foreign policy. However, although he did not have access to archival sources, many of his conclusions remain valid[14]. Bassett succeeded in dispelling some of the myths that had grown up around the crisis, whereby 'Manchuria' came to form the cornerstone of the case against the National Government's policy of appeasement. As early as 1935 the Labour Party's election manifesto claimed that the government 'did nothing' to check Japanese aggression in 1931–2, and thereby 'discredited' the League and 'undermined the collective peace system'. The Liberal MP Geoffrey Mander wrote in 1941 that 'the pathway to the beaches of Dunkirk lay through the wastes of Manchuria'[15]. The Foreign Secretary

[13] For the context, see Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9–13.

[14] Reginald Bassett, *Democracy and foreign policy: A case history; The Sino-Japanese dispute, 1931–33* (London: Longmans, 1952). Interestingly, Bassett's papers show that his very extensive research in the British press—the book's primary source—was carried out at the actual time of the crisis, and used in his teaching during the 1930s (Bassett papers BLPES, esp. Boxes 9 and 15). It should be noted that, apart from the British government archives, I have come across very few other relevant political papers—even in the Labour Party and TUC archives—and this reinforces Bassett's argument as to the relative insignificance of this crisis *at the time*. He was accused of a 'whitewash' by the Spanish academic and statesman Salvador de Madariaga (Bassett papers, BLPES, letters of 1 and 4 September 1952, in Boxes 12 and 26).

[15] Bassett, *Democracy*, p. 6, footnote; p. 5, citing Geoffrey Mander's book *We were not all wrong* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1941), 27.

Sir John Simon became a particular target for the left's vitriol and, following his speech to the League Assembly on 7 December 1932, was routinely described as an apologist for Japanese aggression[16]. However, Bassett argued that the anti-appeasers were being wise after the event, and that at the time the conflict evoked little political interest in Britain. The Sino-Japanese war, he concluded, 'became a matter of acute party controversy—after it was over'[17]. He did not accept that the Labour Party had a coherent alternative to the government's handling of the crisis, and dismissed the idea that—as Attlee put it in 1935—'we urged that economic sanctions should be applied to Japan'[18]. While sanctions measures were mentioned 'tentatively, contingently and conditionally' in two declarations issued by the National Joint Council (in February 1932 and February 1933), the case for such action was not—in Bassett's view—made with any conviction in parliament and was not supported by campaigns outside of parliament[19].

Bassett's interpretation of Labour policy has been criticized—with some justice—as unduly harsh[20]. Even so, he made two particularly significant points that illuminate the response of the left. First, the Far Eastern crisis raised complex questions—to which there were no easy solutions—about how aggression should be restrained. Many pacifists, for instance, were deeply suspicious of economic sanctions, regarding them as an aggressive step just short of (and possibly precipitating) war. Lansbury's poor parliamentary performance reflected his discomfort, as an ardent pacifist, with economic sanctions, and his personal preference for an embargo on arms[21]. Tellingly, two former Labour MPs who had taken a strong stand over China in the mid 1920s, Cecil l'Estrange Malone and Wilfred Wellock, both spoke out against those who wished to use the Covenant of the League of Nations to impose economic sanctions against Japan. Malone, claiming to represent those who had fought in the First World War, said that he resented being pushed into war by 'the theorists, the sentimentalists and the pacifists…'[22]. An alternative to sanctions imposed by states, either individually or in concert, was a trade union boycott on commerce with aggressor states. This was the position advocated during the Manchuria crisis by the ILP and the Communists, who had never invested much hope in the League. However, unlike in 1937–8, the left was unable to persuade dockers to take industrial action, and munitions vessels such as the *Glenshiel* and the 'death ship' *Glengarry* continued to sail from British ports[23]. A third option was a consumer boycott,

[16] Bassett, *Democracy*, 280–1, citing Attlee and the Communist MP William Gallacher in 1935. See also *New Statesman*, 1 October 1932 and 10 December 1932. Kingsley Martin, *Editor: A second volume of autobiography, 1931–45* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 181–2 demonstrates the enduring hostility towards Simon.

[17] Bassett, *Democracy*, 549.

[18] Bassett, *Democracy*, 551, citing Attlee's speech in the Commons, 22 October 1935.

[19] Bassett, *Democracy*, 551–2.

[20] See John F. Naylor, *Labour's International Policy: The Labour Party in the 1930s* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), 32–3 and p. 330, n. 67.

[21] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 27 February 1933; Bassett, *Democracy*, 430–2.

[22] Bassett, *Democracy*, 172, citing *Manchester Guardian*, 19 February 1932 and 22 February 1932. Both had lost their seats in the 1931 debacle.

[23] *Daily Worker*, 9 April 1932 and 6 May 1932. On the latter occasion it was reported that 1000 workers marched against the *Glengarry* in the East End of London, and that over four quires of the *Daily Worker* were sold.

preferably organized through the cooperative movement. This was suggested as early as November 1931 when John Strachey led a workers' demonstration to the Japanese embassy[24]. Again, however, the economic conditions were hardly propitious for such action. Indeed, in March 1932 the National Joint Committee decided that a boycott of Japanese goods could not be effective[25].

Secondly, Bassett was also correct to emphasize the lack of political mobilization around the crisis, especially during its opening phase in the autumn of 1931. A similar point was made by the influential academic and internationalist Alfred Zimmern who, in a privately circulated paper in 1935, noted the initial absence of activity by the Labour Party and other pressure groups both in parliament and in the country, and emphasized the 'inertia' of public opinion in Britain and the Dominions[26]. Where the crisis did provoke debate within Britain, it was largely concerned with questions of international law and collective security, and had little relationship to China itself. When the Labour politician Philip Noel-Baker confessed to being 'very alarmed about the Manchurian affair' in November 1931, it was because he feared that armaments firms were working with Japan to discredit the League ahead of the resumption of the international Disarmament Conference[27]. If Manchuria was something of a cipher during the crisis it was largely because of its remoteness—even compared to the Chinese heartlands. For an English audience, Pat Sloan suggested, it was simply a 'remote desert, very far east'[28]. George Hardy, in one of the earliest articles of any substance on the conflict, pertinently asked how many workers knew Manchuria, a vast territory four times the size of Britain, 'other than in name?'[29] Noel Brailsford wrote in November 1931 that it was understandable that not much thought was being given to Manchuria: 'It is very far away, it affects our national interests but slightly, its people are as yet outside the fraternity of socialist sympathy and hope'. However, he went on, it was 'at our doors' in the sense that a failure of the League to broker a settlement would affect everyone[30]. To make matters worse, with few journalists initially present in Manchuria, no arresting images were forthcoming to define the story. In February 1932 the *Daily Worker*'s Dave Bennett fell with almost indecent enthusiasm on the first newsreels of women and children fleeing the war zone, explaining that these images, 'so full of misery and suffering', could be used 'to stir the workers'[31].

[24] *Daily Worker*, 19 November 1931.

[25] NJC minute for 22 March 1932, following recommendation from the ACIQ, 16 March 1932.

[26] Bodleian Library, Ms Zimmern 98, paper dated 11 March 1935.

[27] LHASC, Labour Party archives, WG/JAP/81 Noel-Baker to 'Willie' Gillies, 18 November 1931. (It should be noted, however, that a letter written two days later shows Noel-Baker to be focused more directly on the Manchurian question—Bodleian library, Gilbert Murray papers, Mss 211, Noel-Baker to Murray, 20 November 1931).

[28] *New Leader*, 11 March 1932.

[29] George Hardy, 'British workers and the war in Manchuria', *Labour Monthly*, 13 (December 1931), 739–46.

[30] *New Leader*, 13 November 1931.

[31] *Daily Worker*, 15 February 1932. One journalist who did eventually reach Manchuria was Walter Holmes, although MI5 was convinced that he was on a secret errand for the Soviet authorities 'thinly disguised under a cloak of journalism' (see *Daily Worker*, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27 June and 9, 11 July 1932, and TNA KV2/1001).

Perceptions of the conflict changed noticeably in the spring of 1932 when the fighting spread to Shanghai. As the *New Statesman* observed, western governments could shut their eyes to 'holocausts of yellow men', but when the war impinged on western interests it was 'another matter'[32]. During this largely unplanned escalation, which followed a Chinese commercial boycott, Japanese forces used their base in the International Settlement to subdue the neighbouring Chinese districts. However, the Chinese 19th Route Army, displaying unexpected powers of resistance, held out for many weeks. Japan eventually prevailed, but the fighting—and in particular the decision to bomb the densely inhabited district of Chapei—gravely damaged its international standing. Although the bombing was less severe than that suffered by Chinese cities later in the decade, the damage to Japan's reputation was considerable as the devastation could not be concealed from journalists enjoying the relative safety of the International Settlement. Edgar Snow would describe the intimacy of the fighting in Shanghai later in the decade as akin to the battle of Verdun taking place on the river Seine, 'in full view of a right-bank Paris that was neutral'[33]. After Chapei, the *Daily Worker* offered headlines of 'mass murder', 'terrible slaughter', and 'dogs eat dead Chinese civilians'. The paper's film critic recommended a Paramount newsreel on the bombing, with its 'ghastly scenes' which 'audibly stirred' even a 'respectable' audience. However, he objected to the commentary which made China appear to be the aggressor and urged Communists to shout slogans in the cinemas[34]. In April 1932 Walter Holmes, special correspondent for the *Daily Worker*, encountered 'such silence and utter ruin [in Chapei] that you suddenly feel cold despite the warm sunshine', and more than a year later Margery Fry found that 'great areas' were 'still in melancholy ruins'[35]. The Shanghai fighting provoked an inspirational and unorthodox response from the pacifist Maude Royden, preacher at the Guildhouse, Pimlico, who proposed that a 'Peace Army' should travel to the city from Britain and physically separate the warring parties. Some 800 volunteers came forward, although the crisis had passed before any action could be taken[36].

In the spring of 1932, the Communist Party made the only substantial effort at popular mobilization on the left during the entire crisis, once more explicitly linking the war in China to the threat of an attack on the Soviet Union. However, the campaign did not match expectations, and the failure to involve industrial workers, in particular, was the focus for much self-criticism. It was noted that out of 140 resolutions sent to the *Daily Worker* only 34 were from trade union branches, and

[32] *New Statesman*, 20 February 1932, 217.

[33] Edgar Snow, *Scorched earth*, i (London: Left Book Club, Victor Gollancz, 1941), 50. Snow reported on the battles for Shanghai in both 1932 and 1937.

[34] *Daily Worker*, 30 January 1932, 23 February 1932, 29 April 1932, and 11 April 1932.

[35] *Daily Worker*, 16 May 1932 (dispatch dated 10 April); Margery Fry, 'Circular letter number 7', November–December, 1933.

[36] See Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 93–100 and Sheila Fletcher, *Maude Royden: A Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 258–61. The ILP *New Leader* welcomed this proposal, and said that hundreds of socialists would want to volunteer (4 March 1932). Royden remained a supporter of the Chinese cause. She spoke at a meeting in support of the dockers' boycott in 1938 (*Daily Worker*, 29 January 1938) and was a Vice President of the China Campaign Committee.

only two from workers in industry: a 'criminal neglect of the main line of activity'. Harry Pollitt, General Secretary since 1929, acknowledged that the China campaign 'badly lags behind the demands of the situation', and made clear that 'the test of how far we can defend the workers' Fatherland lies in our ability to stop the war in China…'[37]. Given that the sectarian politics of the 'Class against class' era still determined Communist party politics, even those resolutions that were passed were often accused of not taking the opportunity to denounce the Labour Party and the ILP. Labour's continuing support for the League was presented as a sign of its gullibility, or was given an even more sinister construction. Hence, George Lansbury was vilified in the *Daily Worker* as a 'traitor' for asking in parliament whether the powers or the League would take steps to prevent Japan from using the International Settlement for its military operations. From this perspective, Lansbury's question was motivated by his fears for 'possible damage to £50 millions worth of British warehouses, mills and docks at Shanghai'. Labour, and its 'concubine' the ILP, was still 'a party of British capitalism, a party of imperialist robbery and slaughter in China…'[38].

This phase of the Sino-Japanese conflict came to an end in May 1933 when Chiang Kai-shek concluded the Tangku truce, allowing him to return to his unfinished business with the Chinese Communists. Japan remained in control of Manchuria, as well as the neighbouring province of Jehol which had been detached from Chinese rule in March 1933. For the British left, the crisis of 1931–3 raised many of the issues (notably the question of sanctions and boycotts, as well as aerial bombardment) that would become central in the later 1930s. At the time, however, the extreme weakness of the Labour Party and the bitter divisions on the left meant that the crisis (Shanghai aside) had very limited political impact in Britain.

1933–7: RED STAR

In late May 1935 Hugh Dalton recorded in his diary that Clement Attlee (currently Deputy Leader of the Labour Party) had recently given a speech at Smethwick in the West Midlands. He noted with bewilderment that the local party had expected an important pronouncement on current issues: 'And he talked about—"The Sino-Jap dispute"!…[I]nfinitely remote from the audience both in time and space'[39]. Dalton's comments reflected his exasperation with Attlee as much as his evaluation of the situation in the Far East, where Japan was again attempting to extend its control over Northern China by 'cajolery and intimidation'[40]. There was briefly a threat of war before China gave way on 10 June 1935 and allowed the creation of a

[37] *Daily Worker*, 29 February 1932 (article by Ernest Wooley), 1 March 1932, 11 March 1932.

[38] *Daily Worker*, 9 March 1932, 15 February 1932, 19 March 1932 (article by R. F. Andrews [Andrew Rothstein]). *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 10 February 1932, col. 825.

[39] Ben Pimlott (ed.), *The political diary of Hugh Dalton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), entry for 31 May 1935, 188.

[40] *New Statesman*, 2 February 1935. On 29 May Japan had issued an ultimatum for the withdrawal of Chinese troops and the KMT from Hopei province (Dreyer, *China at war*, 178).

nominally autonomous government in Hopei province, which contained the former capital of Peiping (Beijing). At almost the same moment, Bertrand Russell, in one of his rare comments on China during the 1930s, gave a heartfelt account of the current situation which more than vindicated Attlee's choice of topic. China, he wrote, had let slip the prospect of 'real regeneration' in the mid 1920s. Instead, political infighting and Japanese aggression had rendered events in China as 'the most tragic, and probably the most important, in the world of the past ten years'. 'In comparison with the growing power of Japan', he warned, 'our squabbles in Europe are parochial'[41]. Russell comforted himself with the thought that in a hundred years time 'China will be flourishing and Japan will be ruined'[42].

From the perspective of the British left, both Dalton's and Russell's starkly contrasting opinions were equally valid. Certainly the situation in China was pregnant with danger. However, during the middle years of the 1930s China's problems must, indeed, have appeared very distant from a British audience (far more so than during the crisis of 1925–7, when British interests were more directly threatened). China received little coverage in the British press at this time, and episodes that appear extremely important with hindsight, such as the Communist Party's 'Long March' of 1934–5, were almost unknown at the time. Attlee's Smethwick speech aside, the Labour Party largely ignored China until 1937. Meanwhile, the *Daily Worker*'s attempts to stimulate interest in the region—influenced more by the security interests of the Soviet Union than a genuine concern for China—can now seem almost ludicrously inept. Witness the comment that the formation of a breakaway government under British influence in Sinkiang, the vast western province of China that bordered the USSR, 'should fill the working-class of this country with serious alarm'[43]. It would certainly send many readers scurrying for the maps which, apparently, many had requested during the crisis of 1932[44]! While there was hardly any sympathy for Japan on the left in the 1930s[45], there was also little sympathy for the government of Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang was viewed by many as leading a quasi-fascist regime, and the suppression of civil liberties by the

[41] *New Statesman*, 1 June 1935, 799.
[42] *New Statesman*, 22 June 1935, 918.
[43] *Daily Worker*, 26 January 1934.
[44] *Daily Worker*, 1 April 1932.
[45] I have only identified three cases: HB Lees-Smith, Cecil l'Estrange Malone, and Charles Roden-Buxton. i) The former government minister Lees-Smith told a Labour Party gathering in March 1932 that a 'desperate' Japan had an 'undoubted case against the rest of the world', and that if Britain was in the same position it would 'undoubtedly burst out somewhere, as [Japan] has done in Manchuria and Shanghai' (*Labour Monthly*, April 1932, 202, citing *Reynolds News*, 20 March 1932). ii) l'Estrange Malone co-wrote a book with D. M. B. Collier entitled *Manchukuo; Jewel of Asia* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936). While not pure propaganda, the book was broadly sympathetic to Japanese policy in Manchuria, which it viewed as progressive. From 1935 Malone was a paid agent of Japan and ran a pro-Japanese 'East Asia News Service' until 1941 (see TNA, KV2/1906 and KV2/1907). In 1945 Clement Attlee deemed Malone 'hardly suitable' for a peerage on the grounds that he had been 'an active propagandist for Japan when Japan attacked China' (Hull, Ammon papers, DMN/1/7, Attlee to Ammon, 29 August 1945). iii) Roden Buxton argued that Japan had legitimate economic grievances which should be appeased. He resigned as chairman of the Labour Party NEC's Advisory Committee on International Questions in 1937, in part over this issue (see Naylor, *Labour's International Policy*, 212–13; Rhodes House, Oxford, Roden Buxton papers, Mss Brit Emp. S. 405).

Nanking government was one subject that was widely reported in Britain. Even so, there were a number of extremely important developments in the mid 1930s, however little understood they might have been in Britain. These included the remarkable resurgence of the Chinese Communists, the growth of a national resistance to Japan, and the appearance of a new generation of talented news reporters who made the story more accessible to western readers.

Japan's remorseless aggression was ultimately counter-productive, as it eventually facilitated a halt in the Chinese civil war. Chiang Kai-shek had launched a fifth and final 'Encirclement campaign' against the 'Soviets' in southern China, advised by a German military mission, in April 1934. The Chinese Communists, realizing that their position was untenable, slipped the net in October. They embarked on the historic 'Long March' which brought them a year later, and with massive loss of life, to the remote north of Shensi province[46]. Here the Communists established a new base at Yenan, digging caves out of the soft loess plateau. The march brought the Communists close to the Japanese sphere of influence in China, and enhanced their claim to be defending China against aggression. Chiang Kai-shek now came under intense pressure from domestic opinion to concentrate on resisting Japan. In December 1936, while attempting to galvanize support for a new campaign against the Communists, he was briefly held prisoner by patriotic warlords in the 'Sian incident'. This confused episode ended with Chiang imprisoning his former captor, the 'Young Marshal' Chang Hsueh-liang, but accepting that resistance to Japan must now take priority. The war against the Communists was suspended and tentative steps taken towards renewing the United Front. Significantly, although the Chinese Communists had briefly celebrated (and probably encouraged) Chiang's apparent overthrow, the Soviet Union saw no other viable national leader for China and insisted that the crisis should be resolved peacefully. The *Daily Worker* declared Chiang's release a 'happy' outcome and lost no opportunity to trumpet the valuable role played by the Chinese Communists[47].

These events were reported with great difficulty in Britain by newspapers and journals on the left. The Long March, in particular, appeared as a series of fragments of information, conveying little sense of the epic narrative that was eventually to become so well known. The march was a stupendous—if costly—achievement, but not conducted with an eye to world opinion: no foreign journalists participated in it, and the Communist leaders were out of radio contact with the rest of the world (and above all with Moscow) from September 1934 onwards. The *Daily Worker* announced the Red Army's breakout on 15 November 1934, almost a month after the event, and by 11 February 1935 was already describing the

[46] Estimates as to the length of the 'Long March' vary greatly. This was partly because the march took such a meandering route, and also because there were a number of separate 'marches' by small groups of Communists. Dreyer, *China at war*, 198 merely says 'over 3,000 miles'.

[47] The incident remains shrouded in controversy: for a good review of the evidence, see Alexander Dallin and F. I. Firsov (eds), *Dimitrov and Stalin, 1934–1943: Letters from the Soviet archives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 106–9. For contemporary coverage, see *Daily Worker*, 28 December 1936, 18 January 1937, and the series of articles by R. Goodman in 17 June, 22 June, and 24 June 1937.

Communists' 'magnificent march' to the borders of Szechwan (which, it was assumed, was their final destination). Lack of hard information about the march or its purpose was compensated for with boastful claims that the Communists' manoeuvre had shaken 'the bourgeois world' and 'sent a thrill through millions upon millions of workers the world over…'[48]. One important fact that did capture the attention of the British left was the emergence of Mao Tse-tung as political leader of the Chinese Communists. Mao had consolidated his authority during the march, at the Tsunyi conference in January 1935. Although his name was still yoked to that of Chu Teh, leader of the Red Army, it was soon possible to see in outline the legend of Mao's leadership. Hence, an article of early 1936 described how the 'heroic leader of Red China, the ex-farm labourer, private soldier and village school-teacher, Mao Tse-tung, is directing all operations, political and military…'[49].

Mao's image in the west, and that of the Chinese Communists, was transformed by the publication of Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China* in the autumn of 1937. Snow, a radical American journalist who had worked for the Labour Party's *Daily Herald* since 1932, was fully aware that he was guaranteed a 'world scoop' when invited to visit Yenan in the summer of 1936. He was granted remarkable access to Mao and the other leaders, and conducted many hours of interviews. Mao presented Snow with a carefully fashioned autobiographical sketch as well as a first detailed account of the Long March. Even so, Snow initially found it very difficult to find a publisher for his manuscript. His British agent told him in June 1937 that '[i]nterest in Europe is so much greater', and that books on China had not done well[50]. However, the outbreak of war in China a month later, plus ecstatic reviews, ensured a remarkable level of interest when *Red Star over China* was published in Britain by Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club. As one reviewer put it: 'An unknown land has been discovered. Its name is Soviet China'. Another noted that a convincing narrative would now take the place of 'odd scraps of stories about Red China'[51]. Snow's 'discovery' of an anti-fascist movement that had succeeded against all the odds gave a tremendous fillip to the British left at a time when little other positive news was forthcoming. Gollancz described the book, which swiftly sold 100,000 copies, as 'infinitely the finest "recruiter" that the [Left Book] club has ever had'[52]. Such was the enthusiasm in Britain that Snow escaped with only a few strictures from reviewers about his failure to understand international Communist politics. In the United States, however, his criticism of Comintern policy in China during

[48] *Daily Worker*, 27 April 1935.

[49] *Daily Worker*, 3 January 1936, article by Richard Jebb. See also the article by Ralph Fox in the *Daily Worker*, 7 March 1936.

[50] Robert M. Farnsworth, *From vagabond to journalist: Edgar Snow in Asia, 1928–41* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 286.

[51] Julius Braunthal in *Tribune*, 15 October 1937 and Richard Goodman in *Left News*, 18, October 1937, 522. For other reviews, see *Daily Worker*, 12 October 1937, *New Statesman*, 6 November 1937, *New Leader*, 15 October 1937, *Daily Herald*, 11 October 1937, and *Left Review*, December 1937, 682–5.

[52] *Left News*, 18 October 1937, 521.

the 1920s (and, therefore, of Stalin) was treated far less leniently. The US Book Society (under pressure from the CPUSA) even cancelled an order for 1500 copies, and Moscow subsequently warned Mao against future dealings with 'bourgeois' journalists[53].

Snow was the most successful of a group of mainly American journalists who came to prominence in the 1930s, including Snow's wife Helen (who wrote as 'Nym Wales'), Agnes Smedley, Anna Louise Strong, and the New Zealander James Bertram. Their work was characterized by a passionate commitment to the Chinese (and, often, to the Chinese Communist) cause and a desire to present the conflict in an exciting and intelligible manner for the non-specialist reader. The best-known of these writers in Britain was Agnes Smedley, who wrote for the *Manchester Guardian* and whose work was also published by the Left Book Club. Despite her close involvement with Soviet intelligence in Shanghai—which has only recently been proved—Smedley was a free spirit, ill at ease with the Stalinist politics of the 1930s and utterly devoted to the Chinese resistance[54]. The British writer closest to this mould was Freda Utley, who had come to prominence in the late 1920s as an expert on Japan and the cotton trade. She had joined the Communist Party in 1928 but already by 1930 was suspected within the party of Trotskyist sympathies. Utley lived in the Soviet Union between 1931–6, when her Soviet husband was arrested and killed in Stalin's Terror. Returning to Britain, she cut her links with the Communist Party, wrote a string of books on Japan, and covered the war in China as a journalist in 1938. Her argument that the Japanese economy was exceptionally vulnerable to state and consumer boycotts provided important intellectual underpinning to the campaign for sanctions in 1937–9[55].

During the mid 1930s the short-lived Friends of the Chinese People (FOCP) kept British interest in China alive. This somewhat elusive organization grew out of the work of Reginald Bridgeman in the LAI, and his proposal in 1934 that a branch of the American FOCP should be established in Britain. It was duly launched in 1935 and its first—and only—substantive achievement was to hold a conference in London on 14 March 1936[56]. One of the luminaries of the FOCP was the Labour peer Lord Marley, who briefly became a leading advocate of China's cause in Britain. Marley was a former Labour politician who had stood for election unsuccessfully on six occasions. He was ennobled in 1930, and served as Labour

[53] Farnsworth, *Edgar Snow*, 315; for Moscow's warning, see Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the threat from the East, 1933–41; Moscow, Tokyo and the prelude to the Pacific War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 77.

[54] For Smedley, see Ruth Price, *The lives of Agnes Smedley* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and John Gittings, 'Agnes Smedley and the *Manchester Guardian*', <http://www.johngittings.com/id52.html> (consulted 16 June 2007). For Strong, see Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keysar, *Right in her soul: The life of Anna Louise Strong* (New York: Random House, 1983).

[55] For Utley, see her MI5 file at TNA, KV2/2153, and her memoirs *Lost Illusion* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949) and *Odyssey of a Liberal* (Washington: Washington National Press, 1949) which describes her 'Indian Summer' as a journalist in China in 1938. For her links with the CPGB, see TNA KV2/2153, 13 January 1941, note by R. Hollis.

[56] See the file on the FOCP at LHASC, LP, ID/CI/53, which is the only archival source on this organization.

Chief Whip in the Lords from 1930–7. He was also an inveterate fellow-traveller, and closely involved with a series of Communist front organizations promoting peace and anti-fascism. (Most notoriously, he publicly supported the creation of a Soviet homeland for the Jews at Birobidzhan in the Soviet Far East[57].) Marley had visited Shanghai in the autumn of 1933 to chair an 'Anti-War Congress' and had been shocked by the vicious harassment of the delegates by the KMT authorities, which had reduced the proceedings to the level of farce. On his return to Britain he presented a memorandum to the Labour Party's International Subcommittee distinguishing between the KMT regime ('fascist and terrorist . . . openly controlled by the Japanese') and the 'just and democratic' Chinese Soviets. However, his argument that Labour should cease to support the Nanking government was rejected—on advice from R. H. Tawney—on the grounds that, for all its faults, Nanking was the recognized government and needed help with economic reforms. The Labour Party also rejected Marley's suggestion that it should create its own China or Far East Committee in order to pre-empt the Communists. The FOCP ultimately filled the gap that Marley had identified[58].

The FOCP's stated objectives were to support China against external threat, promote its cause in Britain, and press the British government to abandon the 'unequal treaties'. However, its approach to Chinese affairs was clearly framed by a commitment to the Soviet Union. At the April 1936 conference, for instance, Marley praised Soviet determination to resist Japanese aggression, and his statement that the USSR was the 'greatest Power for world peace was warmly applauded'[59]. The FOCP's stated objective of resisting the intrigues of British imperialism in Sinkiang and Tibet again reflected Soviet security concerns. The organization was also strikingly inept at reaching out to potential sympathizers from a non-political background. When a noted expert on Chinese art was invited to become an Honorary Secretary, he soon resigned on the grounds that 'he had heard nothing about friendship to Chinese people and a great deal of enmity to Japan'. He also objected to the society's 'peculiar methods . . . of conducting their business', such as summoning him to meetings by telephone at one hour's notice[60]. The FOCP appears to have failed due to a lack of political subtlety at a time when Chinese politics were still bitterly divided—after all, what did it mean to be a 'friend' of the Chinese people when the KMT and the Communists were still

[57] For Lord Marley (Dudley Aman), see the entry in the *Oxford DNB* by Donald F. Bittner, and Nicole Taylor's 'The mystery of Lord Marley', *Jewish Quarterly*, 198 (Summer 2005) (consulted online, 21 August 2009).

[58] LHASC, Labour Party papers, ID/CI/53; Marley's 'Memorandum on the Far East' (undated) and report of the meeting of June 1934; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ponsonby papers, Ms Eng Hist c.675, Hugh Dalton to Ponsonby, 24 November and 9 December 1933. For Marley's account of his experiences in Shanghai, see *Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1933 and *Daily Worker*, 3 November and 4 November 1933. On his return to Britain he stated that the organization Friends of the Chinese People should be extended worldwide to arouse opinion against the 'intolerable state of affairs in the Far East' (*Daily Worker*, 24 November 1933).

[59] *Daily Worker*, 16 March 1936, *Daily Herald*, 16 March 1936.

[60] LHASC, LP, ID/CI/53, 2 April 1936, J. M. Bowie to William Gillies, describing the experiences of his friend Arnold Silcock.

locked in civil war? It is not surprising, therefore, that the FOCP disappeared soon after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, and gave way to a new and far more successful organization, the China Campaign Committee[61].

SINO-JAPANESE WAR I: JULY 1937–FEBRUARY 1938

Following a skirmish at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing on 7 July 1937, fighting escalated within a month into full-scale (if undeclared) warfare between Japan and China. This time Chiang Kai-shek had little choice but to fight, hoping that the powers would intervene on China's side[62]. In military terms, however, his forces—divided by factionalism and poorly equipped—were no match for their opponents. During the heavy Chinese defeat in the battle for Shanghai (August–November 1937), Chiang lost the modern core of his army. The capital Nanking fell in mid December, and many thousands of Chinese civilians were massacred in the ensuing 'rape' of the city. The morale boosting Chinese victory at Taierzhuang in April 1938 only served to punctuate a series of hard-fought defeats, culminating in the loss of Wuhan and Canton in October 1938. By 1939 a rough balance had been reached, whereby Japan controlled the major cities and the coast, but not the hinterland, while Chiang Kai-shek re-established his government in the distant inland city of Chungking, far up the Yangtze river. China had effectively lost the war—Kingsley Martin argued as much in the *New Statesman* as early as December 1937—but its remarkable resilience prompted Edgar Snow to describe it as 'the loser who will win'[63].

The coming of war hastened formal agreement on a 'second united front' between the KMT and the CCP. Much of the Red Army was now nominally integrated into the government forces as the celebrated Eighth Route Army, while the Communists' base in Yenan became a 'special' self-governing region. The new policy was in accordance with current Soviet interests in China, which required the Chinese Communists to participate in unified national resistance to Japan under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Stalin was wary of being dragged into the war and offered nothing more binding than a non-aggression pact between the two countries. The agreement was signed on 29 July 1937, although the USSR did also provide considerable military aid to the Chinese government during this phase of the conflict[64]. Despite Stalin's insistence on unity, however, there was little that he

[61] There are two final references to the FOCP in *Daily Worker*, 3 August 1937 and *Left News*, 18 October 1936, 519, where it is listed as an organization offering support for China. It was presumably wound up shortly afterwards.

[62] See Youli Sun, *China and the origins of the Pacific War, 1931–1941* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 87–91.

[63] *New Statesman*, 18 December 1937: 'to-day it is too late to save China'. For critical replies, see 25 December 1937 (Freda Utley) and 1 January 1938 (Lt Commander Edgar Young). Martin backpedalled in reply to Utley's letter, stating that China had been defeated 'for the time' and that it was too late to save it 'from the horrors of war'. Snow, *Scorched earth*, i. 147.

[64] See John W. Garver, *Chinese-Soviet relations, 1937–1945* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 37–50 and Haslam, *Threat from the East*, 92–4. Chiang Kai-shek would have preferred a mutual defence pact, guaranteeing overt Soviet intervention in the war.

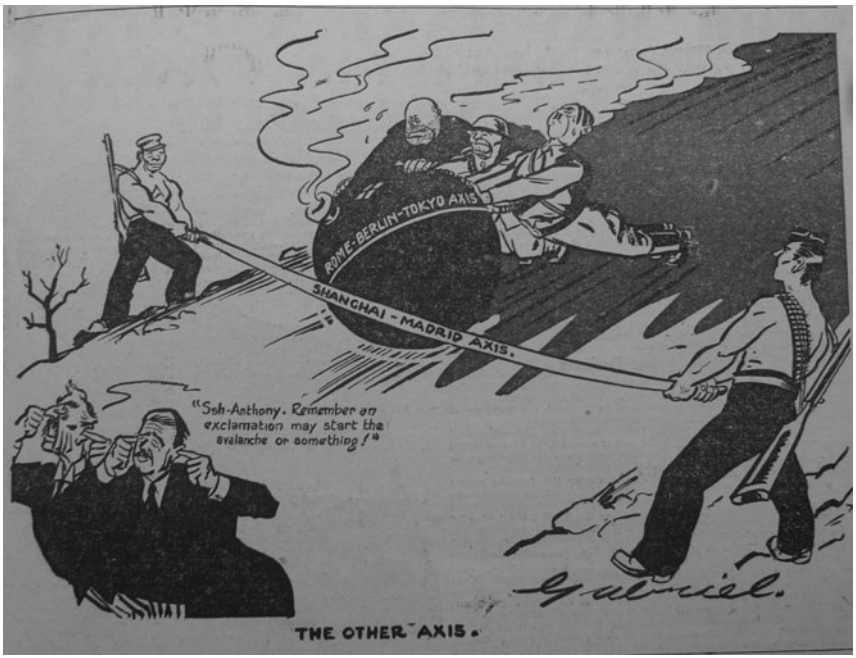

Fig. 6. The 'Shanghai–Madrid Axis' shows British appeasers how to resist German, Italian, and Japanese aggression
(Gabriel, *Daily Worker*, 24 Aug. 1937)

could do to prevent violent political tensions between the KMT and the CCP flaring up long before the defeat of Japan, and the united front never represented more than a lull in the civil war. The Soviet ambivalence towards the CCP at this time (which was sustained until 1949) was indicative of future tensions in the relationship.

Soviet policy in China also reflected the shift that had taken place in Communist policy internationally in response to the rise of Nazi Germany. The sectarianism of the 'Class against class' period gave way to a strategy of building the widest possible alliances (diplomatic, political, and cultural) to resist fascism and war. The new 'Popular Front' strategy was formalized at the 7th Congress of the Comintern in October 1935, although in many countries sectarianism had given way to more constructive policies some time before. The Sino-Japanese War constituted a significant element in international anti-fascist politics, second only in its global impact to the Spanish Civil War of 1936–9 (see Fig. 6). The new unity in China was warmly welcomed on the British left, where anti-fascism dominated the politics of the later 1930s. The only discordant voices were those of anti-Stalinists such as the American writer Harold Isaacs, who argued that the united front represented an abandonment of the Chinese Communists' revolutionary gains, sacrificed on

Fig. 7. British property attacked in China
(Gabriel, *Daily Worker*, 26 Aug. 1937)

the altar of Soviet foreign policy[65]. This line was supported by the ILP, which was increasingly at odds with the CPGB in the later 1930s, although subsequent events demonstrated that the Chinese Communists' concessions had been largely tactical[66].

Chiang Kai-shek's hopes for direct foreign intervention had failed to materialize, but the extraordinary level of international sympathy for the Chinese cause could not be denied. In Britain, China drew support not only from the left, but from members of all of the major political parties, as well as religious, business and cultural groups. In July 1939 Philip Noel-Baker told a Chinese friend that 'I cannot exaggerate the sympathy which exists for China in all parts of the House of Commons'[67]. Unlikely coalitions were fostered as divisive questions concerning Britain's imperial presence in China were temporarily set aside. For instance, many serving diplomats actively

[65] See *New Leader*, 20 March 1936 and 22 May 1936. Isaacs subsequently published *The tragedy of the Chinese revolution* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938) with a preface by Trotsky. For insight into the anti-Stalinist politics of this period, see the correspondence of the British Trotskyist Henry Sara with Frank Glass (in Shanghai) and Harold Isaacs (MRC, Mss 15D/3/5/1 to 15D/3/5/8).

[66] See *New Leader*, 5 March 1937 and 1 October 1937.

[67] Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/70, Noel-Baker to Chien, 5 July 1939.

supported the Chinese cause, as did the Bishop of Hong Kong[68]. A number of factors explain the breadth of this appeal. Perhaps most importantly, the issue could be presented with Manichean clarity as one of Japanese aggression and Chinese victimhood. In the words of the Labour MP James Griffiths, the conflict represented the 'mass murder of an ancient and cultured people who are fighting a new, dominant, imperial and cruel power'[69]. Likewise, the Transport & General Workers' Union condemned the 'outrageous attack upon the historically pacific nation of China'[70]. Harold Laski saw Japan's actions as possibly 'a turning-point for evil in the history of civilisation' and 'a deliberate effort on the part of a militarist autocracy to stifle a nascent Chinese democracy…'[71]. Unlike the Spanish Republic, moreover, the Chinese cause was untainted with revolutionary sentiment or anti-clerical violence. The new watchword was national unity, and Chiang Kai-shek's image in Britain was transformed. No longer a 'shifty bandit' or dictator, he was now more likely to be presented as a legitimate, Christian war-leader—even a new George Washington[72].

Another highly significant point was that Japanese aggression was perceived as 'fascist' aggression, and from the outset the Chinese cause was embraced as part of the international struggle against fascism. Hence, the bombing of Chinese cities was routinely described as a distinctively 'fascist' form of attack. In October 1937 the exiled Basque President José Aguirre sent the following message to a London rally in solidarity with China: 'Guernica, Durango and Bilbao were but the precursors of Canton and Nanking…'[73]. Despite all of these factors, however, solidarity with China lacked depth, and it was noticeable that interest dwindled from the spring of 1938 onwards, as the impact of the bombing faded and the European crisis intensified. Thereafter campaigning became more difficult, forcing the campaign to become more innovative.

There was a remarkably intense wave of support for China in Britain during the opening phase of the war, due largely to the heavy bombing of Shanghai, Nanking, and Canton in September 1937. (The 'rape' of Nanking was a far worse atrocity, but it was less visible and therefore the impact in Britain was less immediate.) The *Daily Worker* referred to the Nanking bombing as 'the most merciless and barbaric [aerial] bombardment ever known', while, a day later, it reckoned that Canton had suffered the 'world's cruellest air raid'. In an accompanying article, Harry Pollitt

[68] See for instance the role of the British consul John Alexander in the formation of the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (MRC, Mss 292/951/5, draft report of 28 February 1939). The British Ambassador to China, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr was well known as 'openly and sincerely pro-Chinese' (Epstein, *People's War*, p. 317, note 2). For Bishop Hall, see David M. Paton, *RO: The life and times of Bishop Ronald Hall of Hong Kong* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1985).

[69] *News Chronicle*, 4 October 1937.

[70] MRC, Mss 126/TG/1186/A/15, special session of GEC, 13 October 1937.

[71] Harold Laski, 'China and Democracy' in Hughes, *China Body & Soul*, 77, 82.

[72] *Daily Worker*, 31 May 1935; *Daily Worker*, 7 October 1937; MRC, Mss 292/951/5, letter signed by 20 bishops, 21 June 1939; Rhodes House, Oxford, FCB papers, Box 165, Charlotte Haldane, 'Report on the situation in China and the Far East' (1938).

[73] *Daily Worker*, 30 July 1937; *News Chronicle*, 6 October 1937. Of course, a blind eye had to be turned to the fact that Chiang Kai-shek enjoyed good relations with Nazi Germany until 1938! The German military mission was only withdrawn in May 1938 (see William Kirby, *Germany and Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984)).

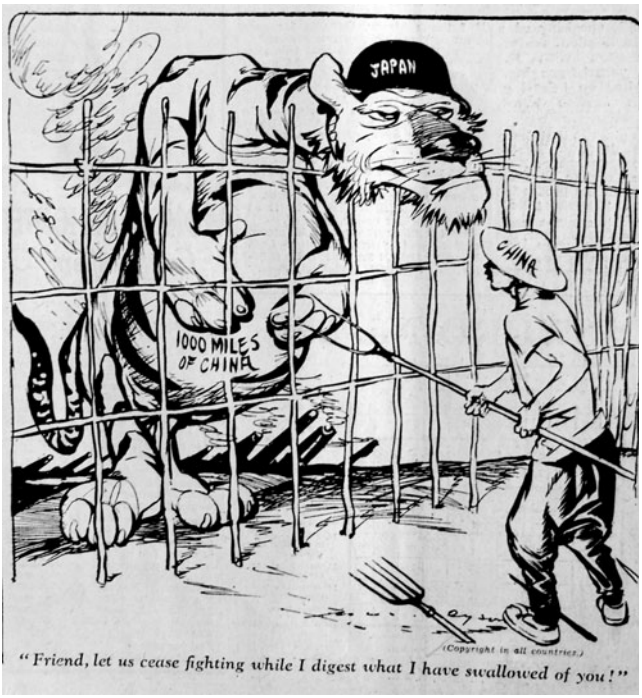

Fig. 8. The Japanese tiger pauses to digest China
(Dyson, *Daily Herald*, 3 Nov. 1937)

claimed that many who saw the news reels of the carnage 'fainted and vomited'[74]. When Pollitt alluded to the unprecedented anger felt by British workers over these events, the newspaper's disturbing editorial comment was: 'Heat that anger higher'[75]. Kingsley Martin commented that, unlike over Spain, British opinion was 'solidly on the side of the Chinese'[76], and there is interesting eyewitness corroboration of this in the correspondence of Philip Noel-Baker, the recently elected Labour MP for Derby. On 27 September he wrote that:

> . . . . there is no doubt that opinion is very deeply moved by the whole business, and that a demand for action is very well received. I say this after four nights of open-air meetings in the streets of Derby, which is prospering by the manufacture of aircraft. I found that the Chinese war was the only subject that reduced a street full of people, from children to grey beards, to a silence in which you could hear a pin drop[77].

[74] *Daily Worker*, 23 September and 24 September 1937.
[75] *Daily Worker*, 28 September 1937.
[76] *New Statesman*, 2 October 1937, 478.
[77] Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/64, Noel-Baker to Gerald Barry, editor of the *News Chronicle*, 27 September 1937.

A few days later Chang Pu-Lee of the China Institute in London wrote to tell Noel-Baker that he was gratified to see 'how public sentiment in this country has turned so liberally in favour of China'[78].

Although the parties of the left played their part, the *News Chronicle*, owned by Sir Walter Layton, initially took the lead in the campaign to restrain Japan. The liberal daily organized a 'National Protest' meeting in the Royal Albert Hall on 5 October 1937, at less than a week's notice, and launched a campaign for the boycott of Japanese goods. It was deluged with letters pledging support from 'people in all classes and conditions in life'. Eight thousand people attended the protest meeting, to be greeted by the short film 'Bombs on China', which was made all the more vivid by a powerful sound amplification system. The film was watched in silence apart from some 'half-smothered cries of sheer horror'. Layton had assembled a panel of highly respected speakers, representative of British public life, while Winston Churchill and many others sent telegrams of support. Professor Chang Peng-chun (who later met privately with Clement Attlee at the Labour Party conference) spoke movingly of how his university in Tientsin had been destroyed early in the war. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, speaking in an unofficial capacity, delivered the principal address. He said that the 'voice of conscience' demanded that they must appeal to Japan for restraint. Lang alluded to the possibility of economic sanctions, but emphasized that any action must be taken in concert with other states. Herbert Morrison, for the Labour Party, added that the United States must also be involved[79].

Conscience alone, however, proved an inadequate weapon. Despite President Roosevelt's speech calling for the 'quarantine' of aggressors (which was delivered on the same day as the Albert Hall rally), concerted international action was not forthcoming. The international conference which met in Brussels in November 1937, under the auspices of the 1922 Nine Power Treaty, offered nothing more than a verbal rebuke to Japan. In December, moreover, the United States accepted Japan's apologies for the recent sinking of the US gunboat *Panay* by Japanese aircraft. As the politics of 'national indignation'[80] ran out of steam, the focus of attention switched back to the Labour movement as the only organization that could potentially force a change of policy on the British government. Here, there was a clear distinction between the position taken by the leaders of the Labour movement and the Communist party. There can be no doubt that the Labour leaders were concerned about the threat posed by Japan. Walter Citrine, for instance, talked in private of the need

[78] Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/64, Chang Pu-Lee to Noel Baker, 5 October 1937.

[79] *News Chronicle*, 1–6 October 1937, *passim*. Morrison later broadcast to the USA appealing for an embargo on oil for Japan (*News Chronicle*, 11 October 1937). The best archival source for this meeting is Lang's papers, which show that the Archbishop forced Layton to remove any mention of sanctions from the resolution as the price of his participation (Lambeth Palace Library, Lang 6 and AC Don's diary, Mss 2865, entry for 3 October 1937). See also TNA CAB 23/89, Cabinet minutes for 6 October 1937, 8–9.

[80] Neville Chamberlain actually referred to a Labour Party demonstration on China in October 1937 as an 'indignation meeting' (letter of 16 October 1937 in Robert Self (ed.), *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, iv: *The Downing Street Years, 1934–40* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2005), 275–6).

to thwart Japanese domination of Asia, 'with the tremendous reinforcement of Fascist Imperialism and militarism that her conquests would entail'[81]. However, they strongly opposed any unilateral industrial action which would not only be illegal but would also weaken their own political authority. Accordingly, they were unwilling to go further than supporting a consumer boycott of Japanese goods, which Citrine freely admitted would be a mere gesture of sympathy for China[82]. The Communists argued that this was a counsel of despair, and that industrial action could still rouse the country and force the government into imposing an embargo on Japan[83]. Citrine and his colleagues did not relish the prospect of unofficial action by rank and file workers but, in reality, there was little prospect that they would lose control of the situation. They remained in a very strong position in the later 1930s, not only within the institutions of the British labour movement, but also within the international labour movement which, due to the rise of Fascism, was reduced to a British-dominated rump of mainly small and vulnerable European states. Although there were pockets of support for militant action on behalf of China amongst foreign trade unions—notably in Scandinavia—they lacked the strength to force British labour to abandon its more moderate policy[84].

In the meantime, the formation of the China Campaign Committee (CCC) offered a new—and highly effective—basis for solidarity with China. The committee embodied the inclusiveness of the Popular Front, and brought together groups that had been interested in China for some time (such as the League against Imperialism and the Friends of the Chinese People) with others drawn to China for the first time by the war[85]. The first meeting was convened at the end of August by Dorothy Woodman, the secretary of the Union of Democratic Control, who initially divided her time between running the two organizations. Woodman was also the partner of the highly influential journalist Kingsley Martin and—at this point—a Communist fellow-traveller[86]. The CCC was strongly supported by Victor Gollancz, who acted as chairman and provided financial subsidy[87]. Gollancz's

[81] MRC, Mss 292/951/7, Citrine's memorandum of 10 January 1938; more succinctly Citrine warned the US labour leader William Green that Japan might 'run mad' (ibid. 21 January 1938, report of Citrine's telephone conversation with W. Green).

[82] MRC, Mss 292/951/7, TUC press release, 18 October 1937.

[83] *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1937, CPGB Political Bureau statement.

[84] In December 1937 an emissary of the Chinese trade unions, Thomas Tchou, toured western Europe and Scandinavia and received significant trade union backing for a workers' embargo on Japanese goods. He received particularly strong support from the International Transport Workers Federation, which would have a pivotal role to play in any industrial action. However, when he came to Britain his calls for industrial action were easily rebuffed by Citrine (see *China Bulletin*, 4 (8 January 1938); MRC, Mss 292/951/7, report of interview, 21 December 1937, and Mss 292/951/5, General Council minute, 22 December 1937).

[85] On the origins of the CCC, see Clegg, *Aid China*, 13–23.

[86] For Woodman, see the obituary in *New Statesman*, 2 October 1970 and TNA KV2/1607.

[87] Clegg states that the CCC received a weekly subsidy of £100 from a donor known only to the officers (Clegg, *Aid China*, 56). He suspected that the money might have come from Dr C. C. Wang and the London Chinese Association, or from Gollancz. The latter seems plausible as Gollancz was clearly subsidizing the CCC in a number of ways. For instance, he directed the proceeds of libel actions to the CCC (MRC, Mss 157/3/LB/3/29, Gollancz to Harold Rubinstein, 6 May 1938), and in 1938 he offered the CCC 2s 6d for each new member recruited to the Left Book Club (*Left News*, May 1938). The information in Chapter 3, note 47 below appears to confirm the point.

Left Book Club, a mass movement with more than 40,000 members, was highly supportive of the Chinese cause and a number of its monthly book choices were on Chinese topics. Another important component was the International Peace Campaign (IPC), the British branch of a French-based movement which aimed at reviving the League of Nations and collective security. It was led by Lord Robert Cecil and Philip Noel-Baker, but was widely regarded as a vehicle for Communist influence within the peace movement. Many years later Noel-Baker recalled that the Communists 'utterly demoralised our activities [in the IPC] which would have been of great significance if they had played straight'[88]. However, he gave no hint of this at the time, and was cautiously upbeat about the possibilities presented by the China campaign. In a private letter of 30 September 1937, he wrote that 'many people are now engaged in a vigorous attempt to resuscitate the League and make it function over China. The effort may fail, but opinion here is very moved, and I hope that it is at least worth one more try'[89].

The CCC was later described by the former activist Mary Sheridan Jones as a 'magnet for experienced and talented people willing to help'[90], although it relied heavily on the enthusiasm of younger people like herself who were willing to devote themselves entirely to the cause. Both Arthur Clegg and Sheridan Jones, who held responsible positions in the campaign, were young Communists in their early twenties. Clegg, who had volunteered for Maude Royden's 'Peace Army' at the age of seventeen and then joined the FOCP, said that he thought only of China 'morning, noon and night'. Sheridan Jones later recalled these years as a 'demanding but not unhappy time' when, after a long day's work, she would often enjoy the company of Chinese intellectuals and students in a Chinese restaurant in Soho[91]. The CCC was far more successful than the FOCP at reaching out to the Chinese community in Britain[92]. There was some continuity as Professor Shelley Wang, a prominent Chinese exile, actively supported both organizations prior to his return to China—and untimely death—in 1939. However, Chinese platform speakers were now far more prominent: for instance, Pat Koo, a student in London and daughter of the prominent Chinese diplomat Wellington Koo, often represented 'young China' at CCC meetings. Moreover, members of the Chinese community in Britain were a highly visible presence at the rallies and demonstrations of the time[93]. Even so, while the community was mobilized as never before or since in opposition to Japanese aggression, there is no evidence of any formal attempt by the parties of the left in Britain to enlist Chinese support. There was a fleeting and intriguing reference to a CPGB

[88] Bodleian Library, Cripps papers, SC-39, 6 June 1972, Noel-Baker to Roger Eatwell.
[89] Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/64, Noel-Baker to 'Tommy', 30 September 1937.
[90] MML, Clegg papers, typescript by Mary Sheridan Jones, 1982, 1.
[91] Clegg, *Aid China*, 31; MML, Clegg papers, typescript by Mary Sheridan Jones, 1982, 7.
[92] Gregor Benton and Edmund Terence Gomez, *The Chinese in Britain, 1800-present: Economy, transnationalism, identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 260–1.
[93] See for instance the photographs in the *Daily Herald*, 18 October 1937, of Chinese protestors at the recent Trafalgar Square rally. On this occasion fifty Chinese men and women 'in bright coats' sang the Chinese anthem (*Daily Worker*, 11 October 1937).

'Chinese section' in June 1933, but it appears to have ceased to function prior to the Sino-Japanese war[94].

Many years later, Arthur Clegg's history of the CCC melded archival research with personal recollection to provide a comprehensive overview of the committee's activities. However, Clegg's reluctance to deal candidly with the committee's relationship with the Communist Party means that the book has to be read critically. He admitted that in the CCC office 'we were all Communists', and referred to having intermittent 'chats' with senior Communists such as Tom Bell and James Shields (both of whom had served as CPGB representative in Moscow). However, he concluded that 'there was no sense in which the Communist Party could be described as directing [the committee]'[95]. And yet in 1949 Charlotte Haldane, a journalist and former Communist who worked closely with the CCC in the late 1930s, openly described how a Communist Party 'fraction' had met in secret prior to committee meetings. Proof that these fraction meetings took place can be found in recently released British intelligence surveillance reports[96]. Haldane also said that she reported to a Communist Party 'China Bureau' on her return from China on CCC business in 1938[97]. No evidence survives of this bureau, but it is clear that the leading Communist Ben Bradley provided the institutional link between the Communist Party and the CCC. Although, according to Clegg, Bradley merely attended the committee's foundation meeting 'to show Communist support'[98], his role clearly went beyond this. For instance, the minutes of the Communist Party's Central Committee show that Bradley and Clegg attended in person in April 1938 and made a detailed report on the work of the CCC. Clegg, who claimed to have no memory of this meeting, merely commented that he sometimes went to King Street to provide information, but was 'never told what to do'[99]. However, one crucial piece of intelligence evidence contradicts this, as it indicates that it was Bradley who recruited George Hardy as a paid organizer to carry out the CCC's work amongst

[94] This 'section' wrote to the *Daily Worker* on 30 June 1933, complaining about the lack of coverage of colonial news. The paper also carried references to a group of 'Chinese Communist Comrades in Great Britain' (15 August 1933) and a Chinese Communist group in London (8 November 1933).

[95] Clegg, *Aid China*, 62–3.

[96] TNA, KV2/1028: in June 1938 George Hardy was said to be at a 'lunch hour fraction meeting' of the CCC. In a revealing comment about the conference of the International Peace Campaign, Clegg says that: 'Of course there was a "fraction" meeting [of Communist delegates] beforehand …' (Clegg, *Aid China*, 53).

[97] Charlotte Haldane, *Truth will out* (London: Right Book Club, 1949), 144, 163.

[98] Clegg, *Aid China*, 22. Bradley had come to prominence as one of the defendants in the 'Meerut trial' of trade unionists in India (1929–33). On return to Britain he served as secretary of the LAI. Jimmy Shields' MI5 file shows that on his return from the USSR in April 1938 he worked closely with Bradley on colonial issues (KV2/2801) and this suggests that there was more to Clegg's 'chats' with Shields than Clegg implied.

[99] LHASC, CPGB CC minutes, 23–6 April 1938. Clegg's contribution provided information on the situation in China and the work of the CCC, while Bradley's comments were more concerned with how the Communist Party could enhance the work of the CCC amongst industrial workers. It seems remarkable that Clegg—as a junior member of the CPGB—should not recall a meeting attended by Pollitt and other senior Communists.

the trade unions[100]. Despite Clegg's protestations and the fragmentary nature of the evidence, therefore, the committee's relationship with the Communist Party was clearly closer and more intricate than he was willing to admit[101].

The British left's interest in the war in China reached a peak in late 1937 and early 1938, when some dock workers took unofficial industrial action against Japanese shipping and the labour movement gave serious thought to the question of a boycott. The Communist Party had been urging transport workers to take action from October 1937 onwards, pointing to successful boycotts in Hong Kong and New Zealand. However, when action was finally taken it was spontaneous and unplanned[102]. In early December dockers in Southampton, led by the Communist Trevor Stallard, refused to unload 200 tons of Japanese cargo from the liner *Duchess of Richmond* and received the support of the local branch of the T&GWU[103]. The ship was eventually forced to return to Canada with the offending crates marked 'refused by Southampton dockers'. Although the Communist Party was slow to acknowledge that the blacklisted cargo actually consisted of Japanese 'Christmas toys and novelties'[104], the example of Southampton gave a powerful stimulus to further action. Most significantly, on 21 January 1938 dockers in Middlesbrough refused to load the Japanese steamer *Haruna Maru* with 400 tons of pig iron and 100 tons of steel. A week later they refused to load the same cargo onto the *Bhutan*. Some 1500 people attended a rally in support of the dockers at Middlesbrough town hall. When the *Haruna Maru* sailed for London, the CCC arranged waterfront meetings (attended by Southampton and Middlesbrough dockers as well as the venerable Tom Mann) to ensure that it was again turned away empty. Arthur Clegg also met with representatives of the local Chinese community in Limehouse to make sure that Chinese workers were not employed as casual labour. However, by now it was clear that such actions would not receive trade union support at the national level. When the Southampton dockers refused to unload the *Berengaria* in mid February, Stallard and other strikers were sacked and denied employment at the port until 1939. Apart from the isolated case of the

[100] TNA, KV2/1028: on 5 April 1938 Clegg rang Bradley, who said that he had George Hardy with him. Hardy was a member of the T&GWU and 'has a wide knowledge of China having lived there for many years'. Soon afterwards Hardy, who had worked for the PPTUS in Shanghai in the late 1920s, took up his position in the CCC.

[101] In 1939 a Catholic publication listed the CCC as an organization 'affiliated to or working in close connection with the Communist Party'. Clegg's later comment that this was a 'ludicrous' and McCarthyite allegation must, in the light of the above, be seen as disingenuous (Clegg, *Aid China*, 116; International Anticommunist Entente, *The Red Network: The Communist International at work* (London: Duckworth, 1939), 87).

[102] LHASC, CPGB CC minutes, 23–6 April 1938, Ben Bradley reported that the 'the action of the… Dock workers has been spontaneous and we [i.e. the CCC] have always come in at the end'; in a CCC memorandum of 15 July 1938 George Hardy also reported that the dockers' action was 'spontaneous' (MML, Clegg papers).

[103] The principal source on the industrial action in Southampton and Middlesbrough is *China Bulletin*, 5 (1 February 1938), 1–2, Clegg, *Aid China*, 40, 46–51, and Branson, *History of the CPGB, 1927–41*, 250–2. See also MML, Clegg papers, letter from Branson to Clegg, 27 January 1984, and the correspondence in MML, Branson papers, file A35.

[104] *News Chronicle*, 7 December 1937; acknowledged in *Daily Worker*, 24 January 1938.

Wyvern—the focus of a campaign in Newcastle in December 1938—the campaign of direct action against Japanese shipping was now over[105].

The dockers were lionized by the left[106], which also donated money to compensate them for some of the hardships that they had suffered. Stallard also received a letter of thanks from the Chinese Embassy, which he kept as a treasured possession[107]. However, the campaign had failed in its principal objective of rousing the labour movement to take concerted action. The action in these two ports had succeeded largely due to local conditions. For instance, in Southampton there was a strong T&GWU branch which had conducted a five-year struggle for full trade union organization, while in Middlesbrough there was unprecedented solidarity between the casual workers and the 'Number One' stevedores. Moreover, Ben Bradley observed that in both ports Japanese vessels were infrequent visitors—unlike London where 'as soon as they see casual labour taking their jobs, permanent jobs, [the dockers] become afraid'[108]. In any case, trade union leaders had no intention of being bounced by the rank and file into supporting action which would probably be illegal under the 1927 Trades Disputes Act. There were also wider concerns to think about. Following the Southampton action, the Federation of British Industry (FBI) contacted the TUC to warn that any disruption to the import of raw silk would cost British jobs. The message was passed on to Ernest Bevin who, in turn, told George Thomas of the *Daily Herald* that his paper should 'go slow' on the story[109]. Tellingly, the only point at which Bevin's union did intervene was when the Japanese NYK company employed unregistered dockers to handle two ships in London in February 1938. The company was forced to apologize, and undertook not to attempt this again[110]. Therefore, the campaign for a 'workers' boycott' ended with the trade unions vigorously reasserting their control over industrial politics. Bevin later commented that 'the thing really became a farce and

[105] A Chinese crew refused to sail the *Wyvern*, which was due to sail for scrap to Japan. However, it was eventually taken out by an Indian crew when the CCC refused to refund a £5 advance per crew member. It subsequently returned to port with engine trouble (see the report by George Hardy, 5 January 1939, MRC, Mss 292 951/7; I am grateful to Lewis Mates for references from *North Mail*, 17 and 22 December 1938; Clegg's account in *Aid China*, 104 does not mention the question of payment).

[106] See the poem in *Daily Worker*, 18 February 1938, and Clegg's dedication of a book to the dockers who 'at a time when Neville Chamberlain and others were writing a page of deepest shame in British history, held up the banner of freedom and friendship among men …' (Arthur Clegg, *The Birth of New China* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1943)). Kingsley Martin wrote that the dockers evoked the spirit of the London brewery workers who sent the brutal Austrian general Haynau packing in 1850 (*New Statesman*, 29 January 1938, 156).

[107] MML, Branson papers, A 35, typescript note by Alan Merson of his conversation with Stallard, 13 October 1982, 2.

[108] *Daily Worker*, 6 December 1937 and 22 January 1937; LHAC, Bradley's comments at CPGB CC, 23–6 April 1937.

[109] MRC, Mss 292/951/7, 6 December 1937, record of conversations by Miss McDonald. See also MRC, Mss 292/951/7, NCL memorandum of 21 March 1938, regarding the concerns of Macclesfield silk workers.

[110] *China Bulletin*, 6 (22 February 1938), 1–2. TNA, FO 371 22080, shows that the British government—despite pressure from the Japanese Embassy—was most reluctant to intervene during the *Haruna Maru* incident, preferring to rely on the trade unions to uphold their contractual agreements.

simply served as a text for a whole host of resolutions from various bodies not connected with the Trade Union Movement'[111]. The point was made explicit in a column by the ubiquitous George Thomas in the *Daily Herald*, in which he claimed that there was 'growing resentment' amongst transport workers at calls for industrial action from 'professors, clerks, shop assistants, housewives and book clubs' who faced no risk to their own livelihood[112].

During the same period a debate was unfolding, largely in private, over whether—and by what means—the labour movement could press the British government for an international boycott of Japan[113]. The options were reviewed in a memorandum produced by the Labour Party's International Department in November 1937, and over the next month the NEC and the Advisory Committee on International Questions turned this into concrete proposals. However, at a special meeting of the political and industrial leadership of the labour movement on 7 January 1938, the trade unions made clear their lack of faith in the proposals. Walter Citrine, with typical candour, argued that the policy was 'morally justifiable… [but] has no possible chance of success'. Any boycott would simply provoke an attack from Japan at a time of growing threat of war in Europe: in any case, there was no guarantee that other states—above all the USA—would take part[114]. Summing up the discussion three days later, Citrine conceded that there was nothing to be lost in urging strong action on the British government—even if there was little hope of success—so long as Britain was not isolated and due regard was taken of the risk to Britain's interests in the Far East[115]. Citrine himself favoured sanctions that were targeted on specific cargoes such as oil and war materials, and put this to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Foreign Minister Lord Cranborne when they met with representatives of the National Council of Labour on 25 January 1938. Citrine—who hastened to add that he was not making a threat—alluded to the recent dockers' action as evidence of 'a sentiment developing' which might make it impossible for the trade unions to avoid 'taking sectional action'. Chamberlain was unimpressed and argued that Britain's military weakness, combined with the lack of international consensus, made the sanctions proposals impracticable[116].

This rebuff—which was compounded by Citrine's failure to secure the promised support of the American Federation of Labour[117]—marked the end of the rather half-hearted attempts by the British labour leadership to pursue an international boycott. The proposal was not quite dead as it constituted a central demand at a conference organized by the IPC in London on 12–14 February 1938. Some 900

[111] MRC, Mss 126/TG/1186/A/16, Bevin's quarterly report to GEC, received 7 March 1938.
[112] *Daily Herald*, 15 February 1938.
[113] For an outline of the main decisions and meetings, see *Labour Party Conference Reports* (*LPCR*), 1939, 4–6.
[114] MRC, Mss 292/951/5, 7 January 1938, verbatim report of Citrine's comments.
[115] MRC, Mss 292/951/7, 10 January 1938, memorandum by Citrine.
[116] Ibid. 25 January 1938, report of meeting.
[117] Ibid. 21 January 1938, report of Citrine's conversation with William Green, AFL. For the AFL's changing position, see *Daily Herald*, 8 October 1937 and 26 January 1938.

delegates from a wide range of political backgrounds (with Herbert Morrison speaking again, albeit in a private capacity) gathered under the banner of 'Save Peace Save China'[118]. The conference agreed that a 'National Boycott Committee' should be established to emulate the famous 1935 Peace Ballot: this time every adult would be asked 'will you join in the boycott of Japanese goods?' However, no substantive action was taken to implement the ballot, and the proposal even attracted some surprising hostility[119]. In any case, by the spring of 1938 the situation in Europe—with Austria absorbed into Germany and the Spanish Republic facing defeat—had deteriorated so rapidly that little further thought could be spared for China.

SINO-JAPANESE WAR II: MARCH 1938–SEPTEMBER 1939

As the somewhat fevered dreams of bringing Japan to its knees by state or trade union action faded, the solidarity campaign in Britain now faced a long haul at a time when China was far less frequently in the headlines[120]. Although a handful of intrepid left wingers—including Christopher Isherwood, W. H, Auden, and the students Bernard Floud and James Klugmann—made the journey to China to witness the conflict at first hand, their ability to influence news coverage was minimal[121]. Even the devastating loss of Wuhan and Canton in October 1938 was overshadowed by the controversy over the Munich agreement. However, sympathy for China continued to grow as news slowly spread of the savage scale of the Nanking massacres[122]. The diary of an eyewitness reached Kingsley Martin in February

[118] For a detailed account of the conference, see *IPC Monthly Bulletin*, February–March 1938. The conference was greeted by mass demonstrations in China (Epstein, *People's War*, 152).

[119] *Daily Herald*, 14 February 1938; the Labour Party expressed tepid enthusiasm (International Subcommittee minutes, 10 February and 22 February 1938); for criticism, see *New Statesman*, 19 February 1938, 279 and NBKR 4/71, 17 February 1938, W. P. Crozier to Noel Baker. According to the CCC minutes, 7 March 1938, the proposed national canvas was postponed due to the Austrian crisis (Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/75).

[120] Although some dreams persisted well into 1938—for instance, the idea of a volunteer international air squadron (see the correspondence in Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/66).

[121] See Auden and Isherwood, *Journey to a War*; Floud and Klugmann took part in an international student delegation (see *Daily Worker*, 3 March 1938 and *New Statesman*, 21 January 1939, 86–7). On his return, Floud administered a project to send academic books from Oxford to Chinese universities (see Oxford University Archives, especially DC 83/1/1). He later became a Labour MP, and committed suicide in 1967 following allegations that he had acted as a 'talent-spotter' for Soviet espionage while at Oxford. MI5's suspicions had been sharpened by his visit to China with Klugmann, a prominent Communist (see Christopher Andrew, *The defence of the realm: The authorized history of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 538–41).

[122] It should be noted that the exact scale of the massacres remains a matter of controversy. The widely read book by Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) supports current Chinese claims that at least 300,000 were killed. However, a recent critical reappraisal suggests that only a figure of between 40–200,000 deaths is 'empirically supportable' (see Bob Tadashi Wakabayshi (ed.), *The Nanking Atrocity, 1937–8: Complicating the picture* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), esp. his chapter 'Leftover problems', here p. 362). It should be noted that the figures circulating in Britain, even in pro-Chinese sources, at the time were far lower than this. The CCC *China Bulletin*, 6 (22 February 1938), 9, gave an estimate of 10,000 deaths and at least 8,000 women raped, while the *Manchester Guardian* reported claims that at least 10,000 had been killed (29 January 1938).

1938 and, he explained, presented a horrific story of 'murder, rape and pillage. Particularly rape. About this the diary is monotonous…'[123]. The *Manchester Guardian* correspondent Harold J. Timperley played a leading role in bringing the massacre to wider attention. His book *What war means* (1938) was described by reviewers as cataloguing 'unspeakable beastliness' and the violation of the 'least common denominator of human decency'[124]. Timperley also obtained a short and 'rather terrible' film of the massacre, shot by a missionary, which was shown privately to MPs and offered by the CCC for private viewing at trade union conferences. Vincent Tewson, Citrine's deputy, described some scenes as 'positively ghastly'[125]. Japan's conduct was exposed to further opprobrium in Britain when the Japanese assistant military attaché slapped the CCC organizer Mary Sheridan Jones and tore up some leaflets during a poster parade in central London[126].

A revealing internal document in the middle of 1938 noted the difficulties that the CCC now faced. Public opinion was 'friendly' towards China, but there was no 'deep political conviction', and a recent week of activity had been poorly supported. The Lord Mayor's Fund for relief work in China had absorbed many activists who were interested primarily on humanitarian grounds, while Spain and the European crisis held the attention of the politically minded. In this 'second stage' of its work, the document recommended that the CCC should concentrate on three goals: building support for China in Britain, identifying medical and humanitarian relief projects to support in China, and applying pressure on Japan by a consumer boycott. This shift of focus was assisted by a change in attitude by the Communist Party. In January 1938, at the height of its campaign for a dockers' embargo, the *Daily Worker* had ridiculed the Labour movement's 'silly suggestion' of appealing to the 'general public…whoever they may be' not to buy Japanese goods. After all, who were the trade unionists if not the 'most powerful and important section of that general public'[127]? In the course of 1938, however, the party became more comfortable with the idea of a 'People's Boycott', which would, of necessity, be oriented towards women as consumers rather than towards industrial workers.

[123] *New Statesman*, 12 February 1938, 238.

[124] H. J. Timperley, *What war means: the Japanese Terror in China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938); for reviews, see *New Leader*, 5 August 1938, *Daily Worker*, 20 July 1938, and *New Statesman*, 23 July 1938. For Timperley, see John Gittings, 'Harold John Timperley (1898–1954)', <http://www.timperley.org> (consulted 2 May 2009), still accessible from the Wayback Machine Web archive: <http://web.archive.org/web/97801995703314/http://www.timperley.org/references/REF0019.HTM>, and *New Statesman*, 4 December 1954, 730. It should be noted that Timperley's objectivity became open to scrutiny when he took on a role as a paid adviser for the Chinese government (Clegg, *Aid China*, 76). When he briefed the FBI's China Liaison Committee, it was later noted by the Chairman, Sir G. MacDonagh, that Timperley's 'real object was propaganda for the Chinese Government' (see MRC, Mss 200/F/3/01/5, report of meeting, 1 June 1938).

[125] MRC, Mss 292/951/5, 4 May 1938, telephone conversation between Clegg and Miss Macdonald; Mss 292/951/4, 23 May 1938, Clegg to TUC, and 25 June 1938, George Gibson to Citrine; Mss 292/951/4, Tewson to Robert Willis, 6 July 1938. This was presumably the film made by the YMCA representative George Fitch, which had been smuggled out of Nanking (Chang, *Rape of Nanking*, 156–7).

[126] *Daily Worker*, 17 August 1938.

[127] *Daily Worker*, 3 January and 7 January 1938.

During 1938 the CCC was strengthened by the active involvement of Margery Fry as Vice Chairman. Fry was a highly respected academic of impeccable liberal credentials who—at least at this stage—was happy to work alongside the campaign's Communist activists even though she 'detested' Communism[128]. She felt a strong personal commitment to China due to her numerous Chinese students, and had been deeply impressed by her visit on behalf of the Universities China Committee in 1933. She was also the sister of the recently deceased Roger Fry, a great champion of Chinese art[129]. At the same time, the committee's work was reorganized and streamlined. George Hardy was employed to direct trade union work and Mary Sheridan Jones put in charge of the increasingly important boycott campaign, both under the overall supervision of Arthur Clegg. The CCC also provided the focus for a great deal of regional activity. Strong broadly based committees were set up in major cities such as Manchester and Edinburgh as well as, more surprisingly, Bournemouth, where a former student, Innes Herdan, took the lead. However, there was no pretence at central direction: in Dorothy Woodman's memorable phrase the CCC was a 'head with a loosely attached body'[130]. The committee also sought to raise money for aspects of relief work in China that were not addressed by the existing humanitarian funds. Such funds were currently placed at the disposal of the central government and did not reach the regions governed by the Chinese Communists. The CCC worked closely with the China Defence League, which was based in Hong Kong and administered by Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, and helped to establish an International Peace Hospital in the northern war zone in association with the IPC[131].

Despite the diversification of its activities, in 1938–9 the CCC was increasingly defined by the consumer boycott. This work had, of course, been going on since the autumn of 1937, but was generally seen as secondary to more directly political work. As the Political Bureau of the CPGB put it in October 1937: 'It is good to decide not to buy Japanese goods. It is better to bring the utmost pressure on the Government to stop supplying war materials to Japan'[132]. From the spring of 1938, however, those other political options were largely closed and the consumer boycott presented the only accessible weapon for damaging Japanese interests. As the CCC privately acknowledged in June 1938, the boycott was still 'the best central point of agitation'[133]. There were a number of reasons for this. Above all, the boycott campaign was a moderate and measured action that appealed to a wide range of social and political groups. Eye-catching parades of placard-bearing clergymen

[128] *New Statesman*, 16 December 1966.

[129] See Clegg, *Aid China*, 60; for Fry, see Enid Huws Jones, *Margery Fry: The essential amateur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966; York facsimile edn, 1990), and Hughes, *China Body & Soul*, 27–9.

[130] MML, Clegg papers, 16–18 July 1938, CCC conference; for local committees, see Clegg, *Aid China*, 36–7.

[131] See Clegg, *Aid China*, 65–8; Rhodes House, Fabian Colonial Bureau (FCB) papers, 164/1 and 164/2.

[132] *Daily Worker*, 2 October 1937.

[133] MML, Clegg papers, 'Memorandum on the work of the CCC', prepared by Policy Subcommittee, 30 June 1938.

and the wives of senior politicians became a familiar sight on Britain's high streets. The campaign not only drew on the prevailing sympathy for China, but also the less altruistic concern about Japan's dumping of cheap manufactured goods. When the FBI expressed concern to the TUC about the boycott of raw silk, its spokesman added that: 'So far as manufactured goods are concerned, it was all right to keep them out'[134]. Thus, although there were practical concerns about the effectiveness of consumer action—due to problems of product identification, or cases when the only alternative goods might be made in Germany—there was minimal opposition to the concept itself. The labour movement saw the boycott as a practical activity which could assuage its failure to change government policy, and the National Council of Labour instituted its own campaign in February 1938. In addition, the cooperative movement provided a very important ally amongst consumers, and was susceptible to democratic pressure from its members. In practice, however, the onus of implementing the boycott fell heavily on the cooperative movement's wholesale purchasers, who were also subject to pressure from shops and consumers to obtain goods at the cheapest prices. As one official put it, if they did not supply the goods 'then someone else will', and no useful purpose would be served by 'a transfer of trade from the cooperative movement to private trade which does not injure Japan'[135].

The boycott campaigners realized that the key to effective action lay with persuading 'the woman with the basket'[136] to exercise political choice in her shopping. They encouraged women to look for labels of origin and, where possible, to seek alternatives to Japanese products such as tinned salmon or crab meat. Children, too, were targeted, albeit somewhat heavy-handedly. A CCC leaflet, signed by an intimidating roster of adults, warned 'boys and girls' that if they used their Christmas money to buy Japanese toys they would actually be purchasing bombs to 'kill children and their parents in China'[137]. The major problem, however, concerned silk. Japan was said to produce 97 per cent of raw silk[138] and the artificial alternatives—prior to the advent of nylon—were not deemed to be very desirable. The tone used by campaigners was initially rather hectoring and showed little understanding of women as consumers. At the IPC conference on China, Philip Noel-Baker simply barked that 'women must for some time to come do without silk'[139]. A *Daily Worker* article instructed women readers that 'you will have to wear Lisle or artificial silk stockings', thereby forcing manufacturers to 'give you a really attractive "second best" '[140]. Letter writers to the left-wing press often expressed exasperation with women's attachment to silk. One wrote that '[w]e must win our women comrades away from silk stockings…'; another commented that 'the sacrifice is a small one

[134] MRC, Mss 292/151/7, 6 December 1937, record of conversation by Miss McDonald.
[135] LHASC, WG/JAP/12, R. A. Palmer (Cooperative Union) to James Middleton, 25 October 1937.
[136] *Daily Worker*, 26 January 1938.
[137] MRC, Mss 292/951/5.
[138] MRC, Mss 292/951/7, undated, 'Shopping guide for boycotters' by Jean Lyon.
[139] *IPC Monthly Bulletin*, February–March 1938, 26–8.
[140] *Daily Worker*, 4 July 1939.

after all' given that rayon and Lisle stockings were quite the equal of silk[141]. Repeated references to the United States, where a successful campaign had been waged to 'make Lisle the style', also showed British women in a negative light[142]. Increasingly, however, a more practical tone was being adopted. An article on the *Daily Worker*'s women's page made a case for rayon stockings so long as they were washed properly—'never mangled or wrung'[143]. The CCC's 'no silk' campaign, organized by Mary Sheridan Jones in February 1939, used imaginative methods, including a 'balloon barrage', to carry the message through the mainstream media. She recruited the actress Hermione Baddeley to appear at a public meeting 'to show a shapely leg in a rayon stocking'. Significantly, the campaign was also extended to include men who might be purchasing ties, scarves, and lined jackets[144].

If the boycott was the principal tactic of the British left in the later 1930s, it should also be noted that the left placed the defence of culture—both the ancient Chinese culture and the 'modern' culture of Republican China—at the very heart of its campaign against Japanese aggression. At a Trafalgar Square rally in October 1937, two Chinese girls held up a banner that read: 'Four thousand years of culture imperilled by Japanese imperialism'[145]. This represented a marked departure both from the 1920s, when culture had not been an issue, and the early 1930s, when some on the left had not been comfortable with the attempts to promote China's antiquity and cultural continuity. For instance, one Communist reviewer of the famous 1935 Royal Academy exhibition had noted that the exhibition ignored the real forces of regeneration in China, the Red Armies in Szechwan and Shensi. Only a victorious Soviet China, he went on, would place 'all that is vital in this great past' at the service of a new Chinese civilization[146]. By the later 1930s, however, the left was far more at ease with a cultural politics which routinely praised the qualities of the 'old' China while emphasizing the emergence of the 'new'. The heroine of a 1938 CCC pamphlet on the struggle of 'the world's oldest civilisation', for instance, was the emancipated young woman revelling in 'the freedom of bobbed hair, natural feet and the ability to make her own living'[147]. *Left Review*, which ran a special 'Chinese number' devoted to modern Chinese art, wrote that the new generation were not 'resting on the solid tradition of the past, but making that tradition the living stem from which their present life develops'[148].

[141] *Daily Worker*, 17 November and 28 November 1938. One suspects that 'T.M.' of Durham and 'A.T.' of Hendon were male.

[142] For the US campaign, see Lawrence B. Glickman, '"Make Lisle the style": The politics of fashion in the Japanese silk boycott, 1937–40', *Journal of Social History*, 38/3 (Spring 2005), 573–608; the *Daily Worker*, 22 December 1938, used the American slogan 'Silk stockings are bayonets'.

[143] *Daily Worker*, 4 November 1938.

[144] Clegg, *Aid China*, 103, citing Mary Jones' 1982 typescript; *Daily Worker*, 28 February 1939; MRC, Mss 292/951/5, CCC leaflet.

[145] *Daily Worker*, 18 October 1937.

[146] Richard Jebb in the *Daily Worker*, 28 November 1935; Clive Bell complained of a lack of true creativity in Chinese art since 1500 in the *New Statesman*, 11 January 1936.

[147] CCC, *China: The world's oldest civilisation fighting against Japanese imperialism* (1938).

[148] *Left Review*, January 1938, editorial, 701–2. The supplement on modern China was edited by Jack Chen.

The left's new emphasis on culture owed much to the changing image of China in the West during the 1930s. In literature, the American writer Pearl Buck's immensely popular novel *The Good Earth* (1931) had introduced a mass readership to Chinese rural life[149], while the West End success of Hsiung Shih-I's play *Lady Precious Stream* (1935) showed how traditional narratives could be reworked for a modern audience. Above all, the 1935 Royal Academy exhibition represented a turning point in popular appreciation of Chinese art, and, for many, stimulated a lifelong interest[150]. This transformation was encouraged by a Chinese government that understood the value of 'cultural diplomacy'. By 1935 Japanese intelligence was alarmed at the upsurge in activities—or, in its view, propaganda—promoting Chinese art and literature in Britain[151]. However, this development also reflected the central importance given to the arts in the anti-fascist politics of the period. Fascism was regarded as the enemy of culture, while culture was the core of national resistance. Hence, the graphic artist Jack Chen wrote that Japan was making 'Totalitarian War' on Chinese culture, targeting the 'progressive elements' such as modern civic architecture, the theatre, and the universities[152]. In China itself the United Front against Japan (and the relative relaxation in state controls that accompanied it) breathed new life into popular song and traditional arts. Woodcuts, in particular, were often reproduced to boost the campaign in Britain[153]. The CCC used exhibitions, plays and films as an integral part of its campaigning. The Australian Communist Jack Lindsay's poem for mass declamation, 'The Agony of China' (less celebrated than his 'On guard for Spain!'), was performed at the Phoenix Theatre, London, in December 1937. The CCC worked closely with the Artists International Association, which had been established in 1935. Jack Chen was a pivotal figure due to his involvement with both organizations and his connections with China and international Communism. Chen, who had lived for some years in Moscow and was the son of the former foreign minister Eugene Chen, became a globe-trotting purveyor of anti-fascist culture, feted in London, Paris, Moscow, and New York. He brought the art of Chinese resistance to

[149] See Peter Conn, *Pearl S Buck: A cultural biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Hilary Spurling, *Burying the bones: Pearl Buck in China* (London: Profile Books, 2010).

[150] Many decades later the writer Iris Murdoch wrote that she had been deeply interested in China 'ever since the 1936 [*sic*] exhibition. I very greatly look forward to the experience of visiting that extraordinary country' (1982 letter; SACU papers). Others who cited the exhibition as an influence included the Liberal politician Jeremy Thorpe (RS, Harold Thompson papers, C119, Thorpe to Thompson, 8 September 1972), the Labour peer Lord Ammon, who visited China in 1947 (*Peiping Chronicle*, 16 October 1947), and Denis Healey (*The time of my life*, 361).

[151] Bickers, *Britain in China*, 230–2; TNA KV2/1908, Japanese Naval Attaché to the Director of Naval Intelligence, 28 February 1935.

[152] *Daily Worker*, 28 October 1937, Jack Chen, 'China's new culture fights barbarism', with woodcuts by Hsin-Po and Chieh Tao.

[153] See, for instance, CCC and the Artists' International Association, *Five thousand years young—Modern Chinese drawings and woodcuts* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1937]), which was sold to raise funds for Chinese Medical Aid, and the six woodcuts by Chen Yin-Chao reproduced in Epstein, *People's War*.

be displayed in the western democracies, and returned to China to exhibit Spanish Republican posters in Canton[154].

By the summer of 1939 the left could look with some satisfaction at what had been achieved for China since July 1937. The mass rallies of the autumn of 1937 may well have had some deterrent effect on Japan, although the heavy bombing of Chinese cities resumed soon enough[155]. The boycott campaign had a limited economic impact, but the political impact was more tangible. In particular, the amendment of the Merchandise Marks Act in July 1939, sponsored in parliament by Noel-Baker, made it considerably more difficult for Japan to disguise the provenance of its goods. George Hardy of the CCC greeted the reform as a step in the right direction: 'the door must be slammed tight on all fraudulent methods used by Japan to evade the law'[156]. Such comments lend some support to Neil Redfern's recent criticism of the CCC, on the grounds that it sought to 'stoke up nationalist antipathy to Japan' and defended British imperial interests in the Far East. More generally he sees the campaign as proof that the Communist party was deeply uncomfortable with anti-colonial work and, after 1935, only too happy to subordinate this to anti-fascism[157]. Certainly, some on the far left were making precisely this point at the time. However, the CCC—Clegg's 'forgotten campaign' of the 1930s—deserves praise for achieving so much with such minimal resources and in the shadow of other, arguably more pressing, conflicts. It inhabited the world of practical politics, and defending China against Japanese aggression brought it into line with both the Chinese united front and public opinion in Britain. Japan's behaviour in China shocked and outraged British opinion: even so, there is plenty of evidence that CCC activists did their best to keep the debate focused on Japan's aggressive policies and to tone down anti-Japanese sentiments. The young Pat Koo, for instance, was described by Kingsley Martin as 'one of the best women speakers I have heard anywhere': humorous, not too emotional, and displaying no hatred for the Japanese people[158].

* * *

China returned to the headlines briefly in the summer of 1939, when Japan blockaded the British concession in Tientsin and demanded that British officials should hand over four Chinese partisans who had assassinated a collaborator. British opinion was deeply troubled, and Margery Fry and the lawyer Norman Bentwich mounted an unsuccessful bid to save the men using a writ of habeas corpus. By

[154] For Jack Chen, see the book by his widow Yuan-Tsung Chen, *Return to the Middle Kingdom: One family, three revolutionaries, and the birth of modern China* (New York: Union Square Press, 2008), esp. pp. 304–11; Epstein, *People's War*, 309.

[155] A claim made in a letter from Clegg to Archbishop Lang, 1 June 1938 (Lambeth Palace, Lang 6, 261).

[156] *Daily Worker*, 6 July 1939.

[157] Neil Redfern, *Class or Nation: Communists, imperialism and two world wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 92–5, 202.

[158] *New Statesman*, 13 November 1937, 787.

now, however, the focus of attention was inevitably closer to home. In mid August Hugh Dalton spoke for many on the left when he wrote that there was no need for a new statement on the Far East, adding that 'I am watching *Europe* day by day'[159]. The British government was spared further humiliation over Tientsin by the sea change in the international situation (of which the advent of war in Europe formed only a part) in late August and early September. Japan had been shocked by its defeat at the hands of the Soviet army at Nomonhan/Khalkin Gol on the Mongolian frontier (May–September 1939) as well as by the unforeseen Nazi–Soviet non-aggression pact of 23 August, and the threat of war in the Far East temporarily receded. In fact, although the Tientsin crisis further undermined Britain's standing in China, the British left was mistaken in believing that a 'sell-out' of China (or a 'Far Eastern Munich') was imminent. Britain's policy in the Far East was dictated by its military weakness and the vulnerability of Hong Kong and its other interests in China, but it was far less craven than its policy in continental Europe. China was never entirely forsaken. Indeed, the creation of the 'Burma Road' as an alternative supply route into southern China in 1938 was crucial to Chinese survival after the fall of Canton—and would soon offer a new focus for the concerns of the British left.

[159] MRC, Mss 292/951/4, copy of 14 August 1939, Dalton to 'Jim' [Middleton?]. For accounts of the crisis, see Bradford A. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1939: A study in the dilemmas of British decline* (Stanford & Oxford: Stanford University Press, 1973), 181–202, and Peter Lowe, *Britain and the origins of the Pacific War, 1937–41* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), ch. 3.

3

1939–1949: World War and the Coming of the People's Republic

WORLD WAR–CIVIL WAR

In 1951 Arthur Clegg, reflecting on the early days of the China Campaign Committee, wrote that fourteen years earlier a mere 'handful of people gathered in London to say China's cause was Britain's cause'. Yet in December 1941, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the whole nation 'knew that we had been right'[1]. It is hardly surprising that those who had supported China since the early 1930s should feel vindicated by the forging of a wartime alliance between Britain and China. However, the pattern of events was rather more complex than Clegg suggested. Much of the momentum that the China solidarity movement had built up since July 1937 was lost following the outbreak of war in Europe on 3 September 1939. As Margery Fry commented at the time, apropos a scheme to assist universities in China, '[w]e *must* try to keep [the project] alive—but how much shall we be able to keep alive in this war of extermination of the humanities?'[2] The momentum was not wholly regained even after Britain was finally dragged into the war in the Far East. The relationship between Britain and China certainly underwent profound—and generally irreversible—changes during the war, not only in a diplomatic and legal sense, but also in terms of British popular perceptions. China's stubborn resistance during eight years of war earned admiration in Britain, as well as recognition that this 'young-old' country[3] was making a break with its past. The text for a CCC wartime slide show noted that '[i]n Britain we are sometimes too apt to judge the Chinese race by the laundrymen and chop suey waiters we occasionally see' and offered, instead, images of Chinese pilots, technical students, and liberated women[4]. Likewise, Paul Potts—in a poem published in *Tribune* in 1944—wrote that: '. . . there is a new meaning in the word Chinese/in all the dictionaries of the West'[5]. There was some truth in this. However, from a British perspective China and its problems had—if anything—grown more remote as a result of the war and the multifarious challenges that faced Britain in the post-war

[1] *Daily Worker*, 27 January 1951.
[2] Bodleian Library, Oxford University Archives, DC 83/1/2, Fry to 'Warden', 23 September 1939.
[3] Bodleian Library, Mss Cripps 89, notes for a speech, Edinburgh, 5 February 1943.
[4] Hull, DEV/1/16, to accompany a 64-frame CCC slide show (n.d.).
[5] Paul Potts, 'For the Chinese', *Tribune*, 18 August 1944.

world. China did not recapture the full attention of the British left until the closing stages of the civil war in 1948–9.

'FLAMES ENCIRCLE THE EARTH . . .'[6]: AUGUST 1939–DECEMBER 1941

The war between China and Japan continued during 1939–41, although with somewhat less intensity[7]. Japan consolidated its gains of the previous two years, but was twice defeated in attempts to take the southern city of Changsha. Japan's principal challenge to Chiang Kai-shek was political rather than military as, on 30 March 1940, it unveiled the collaborationist regime of Wang Ching-wei in Nanking. The Chinese government's 'winter offensive' of 1939–40 demonstrated its continuing powers of resistance, but it lacked the military resources or the political will to mount further operations of this scale. Meanwhile, the Communists' largest offensive of the war, Chu Teh's '100 Regiments' campaign of August–September 1940, resulted in heavy losses. It was followed by bloody Japanese reprisals against the party's northern base areas, during which the population of the Communist-controlled zones fell from some 44 to 25 million[8]. These setbacks hastened the turn towards guerrilla warfare advocated by Mao Tse-tung, and also allowed the Communists to harbour their strength for the coming struggle with the KMT. Indeed, the most significant political development of this period was the widening breach between the Communists and the KMT, who accused the Communists of using the war to extend their sphere of control in rural China. In January 1941 part of the Communist New Fourth Army was attacked and destroyed by government forces as it withdrew north of the Yangtze. Although open civil war was averted, the 'New Fourth Army incident' signalled the de facto collapse of the second united front[9].

The British government, although preoccupied with the war in Europe, monitored the situation in the Far East with mounting anxiety. The sudden defeat of France and the Netherlands in May–June 1940 left their colonial possessions in Indo-China and the East Indies highly vulnerable to Japanese domination. And although Britain fought on, its empire in the Far East was visibly wilting. The garrison was withdrawn from Shanghai in the summer of 1940, and expatriate women and children were evacuated from Hong Kong. British officials, torn between the desire to support Chinese resistance and fear of provoking Japan, sent conflicting signals. A claim by Sir Robert Craigie, the British Ambassador in Tokyo, that Britain and Japan shared a common 'objective' while differing in their 'methods'[10] caused

[6] 'Flames encircle the earth, new peoples are drawn into the maelstrom' (Arthur Clegg, *World News and Views* (*WN&V*), 13 December 1941).

[7] Dreyer, *China at war*, 237–64; Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–1945* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003) assigns greater military significance to this period (chapter 6).

[8] Garver, *Chinese–Soviet relations*, 140.

[9] For a detailed account, see Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist resistance along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938–1941* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 511–616.

[10] *The Times*, 29 March 1940.

outrage in Britain and reinforced fears that the government was bent on appeasing Japan. Bemused critics branded Britain's policy as one of 'lurches and zigzags', born of 'lamentable weakness'[11]. In reality, however, Britain was now too weak to pursue a strategy of appeasement in the Far East, and ministers were well aware that any sell-out of Chinese interests would merely alienate the United States[12].

The USSR, meanwhile, continued to support Chinese unity and resistance, at least so long as there was any prospect of a Japanese attack on its own territory. In early 1941 both Stalin's emissary, General Chuikov, and the Comintern General Secretary, Georgi Dimitrov, urged the Chinese Communists to patch up the united front after the 'New Fourth Army incident'. Dimitrov told Mao that the CCP should 'do everything in its power to avoid the rift and the onset of civil war'[13]. However, the Soviet Union had greatly reduced its military aid to China following the Nazi–Soviet Pact. Eyewitness corroboration was provided by George Hogg, a young British volunteer working for the industrial cooperatives movement in the Chinese interior. He wrote that in 1940 he walked for days on the International Highway from Soviet central Asia and saw nothing but ordinary merchandise[14]. Military aid ceased altogether when the USSR signed a neutrality pact with Japan on 13 April 1941, thereby abrogating its 1937 treaty with China[15]. The pact with Japan proved of immense value to Stalin when Hitler's forces invaded the Soviet Union two months later, but it also made possible Japan's southward thrust in December. Accordingly the full-scale war between the USSR and Japan—the one conflict that many had viewed as a certainty during the 1930s—did not come until August 1945, when Soviet forces stormed into Manchuria and destroyed Japan's remaining field army. The principal consequence of the ending of Soviet aid to China—which was *never* acknowledged by British Communists[16]—was to make the Chinese government reliant on the United States for both military and diplomatic support.

The period between the Nazi–Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 represented one of the most divisive

[11] MRC, Mss 157/3/Doc/1/391, Margery Fry's comment during a CCC delegation to the Foreign Office, 10 May 1940.

[12] See Lowe, *Origins of the Pacific War*, 115–16.

[13] Haslam, *Threat from the East*, 153; Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2001), 20–1; Dallin and Firsov, *Dimitrov and Stalin*, 135.

[14] George Hogg, *I see a new China* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944/5), 117.

[15] See Youli Sun, *Origins of the Pacific War*, 122–30. According to Garver, *Chinese–Soviet relations*, 108, the Soviet Union notified China that no further military aid would be sent on 24 October 1941.

[16] On 14 April 1941 W. N. Ewer, commenting on the Japanese–Soviet pact in the *Daily Herald*, wrote that '[o]ne thing is sure. Russia's attitude to the China war is bound to change', and it would end material support for China. This was vigorously denied by Emile Burns in *WN&V*, 19 April 1941, 251. Likewise, in a message to the Chinese Communists to mark the fourth anniversary of the war, the CPGB stated that the Soviet government had remained the 'staunch friend' of the Chinese people and given them 'every possible assistance in their war against fascist aggression' (*WN&V*, 21/27 (5 July 1941), 429). In January 1941 Pat Sloan told the People's Convention that he blamed Britain for the 'closing of the Burma Road and the cutting off of Soviet supplies to China' (The People's Convention, *The People speak: The official report*, 1941, 35).

passages in the history of the British left. After a painful internal debate, the CPGB decided in late September 1939 to follow the new Soviet line and not to support Britain's 'imperialist' war with Nazi Germany. Rajani Palme Dutt, who temporarily took over the helm of the party from Pollitt during these troubled years, provided a theoretical justification for the new policy that cited the authority of, amongst others, Mao Tse-tung[17]. Even so, for most on the non-Communist left the Communist Party's new line, compounded by its support for the Soviet attack on Finland in the winter of 1939–40, was nothing short of a betrayal of anti-fascism. For those socialists committed to fighting the war the CPGB was now a discredited and unpatriotic party, outside of the wartime consensus. Some joked that it was the 'Picture Palace Party', with a 'brand new programme each week'[18]. Few complained when the Labour Party Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, banned the *Daily Worker* for most of 1941–2. The Communists' volte-face was particularly damaging to the cohesion of those organizations such as the Left Book Club, which had thrived during the heyday of the Popular Front. Indeed, the counter-attack against the new Communist line was led by Victor Gollancz, John Strachey, and Harold Laski: the very men who had worked most closely with the Communists until September 1939.

Such were the complexities of the left's politics in this period that China was one of the few subjects on which Communists and non-Communists were still able to cooperate with some of the inclusive spirit of the 1930s, albeit with increasing strain[19]. Sympathy for China's plight was undimmed in Britain[20], while the coming of war with Germany placed China's struggles since 1931 in a sharper perspective. The Chinese Ambassador's comment in June 1939 that 'the air is black with the wings of the chickens coming home to roost' achieved a sage popularity across all sections of the left (see Fig. 9)[21]. Likewise, the devastating effects of the Blitz, vividly recorded by Jack Chen for the *Daily Worker* and *Tribune*, evoked a new sense of shared suffering with China's heavily bombed cities[22]. For Communists, moreover, China's 'national revolutionary war against imperialism' was a 'truly democratic' struggle, and one that *did* deserve their support. According to Harry Pollitt, writing in September 1940, the horrors of the European war were 'nothing' com-

[17] *Labour Monthly*, March 1940, 137; see also the interview with Mao cited in the *Daily Worker*, 18 October 1939 in which he endorsed the Nazi–Soviet Pact.

[18] Kevin Morgan, *Against fascism and war: Ruptures and continuities in British Communist politics 1935–41* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 14 (citing the *New Leader*, 16 October 1942).

[19] See Martin, *Editor*, 178; and see below, pp. 89–91.

[20] There were occasional exceptions. For instance, on 9 August 1940 *Tribune* surprisingly published a defence of Wang's collaborationist regime. The article was seemingly motivated by anti-Communism, as the author claimed that Chiang Kai-shek was a puppet of the Soviet Union. (There was a riposte by H. J. Timperley on 16 August 1940.)

[21] *New Statesman*, 17 June 1939, 921; see also *Daily Worker*, 20 August 1940; *New Statesman*, 12 April 1941, 381; *New Leader*, 5 September 1940.

[22] *New Statesman*, 21 September 1940, 274, and 19 October 1940, 374; Philip Noel-Baker's speech in praise of Chinese civil defence in *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 12 June 1940, col. 1318; for Jack Chen's drawings, see *Daily Worker*, 25 November 1940 and *Tribune*, 20 September 1940.

Fig. 9. The 'chickens are coming home to roost'
('grac', *New Leader*, 5 Sept. 1940)

pared with the 'bloody agony' endured by China[23]. The non-Communist left agreed about the significance of China, although for different reasons. When Gollancz and George Orwell published wartime political programmes in late 1940 and early 1941, they both ranked support for China, as an ally in an anti-fascist war, closely behind greater freedom for India[24].

The left's suspicions about British policy towards China were heightened by developments in the spring of 1940. The formation of the puppet regime in Nanking provoked fears that Britain might extend diplomatic recognition as part of a general agreement with Japan, especially as it came only two days after Craigie's notorious speech in Tokyo. Moreover, in June 1940 the British government concluded an agreement with Japan whereby Britain denied the Chinese government access to its silver reserves held in the Tientsin concession. Both of these issues were raised by a CCC delegation which interviewed R. A. Butler at the Foreign Office on 10 May 1940[25]. Even more controversially, the British government announced

[23] *Daily Worker*, 8 July 1940 and 12 February 1940; Clegg later spoke of 'a war for independence by a semi-colonial country', *Aid China*, 120; *Daily Worker*, 12 September 1940.

[24] Victor Gollancz (ed.), *The Betrayal of the Left: An Examination & Refutation of Communist Policy from October 1939 to January 1941* (London: Left Book Club, 1941), 254; George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (February 1941) in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ii: *My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 119.

[25] Reports of the delegation are to be found in MRC, Mss 157/3/Doc/1/391 and in Hull, DEV 1/10.

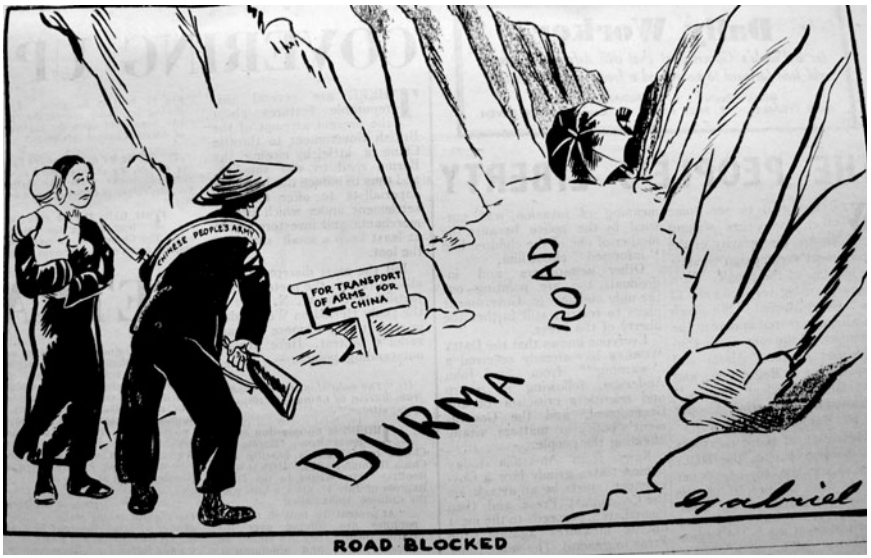

Fig. 10. Neville Chamberlain's umbrella blocks the Burma Road
(Gabriel, *Daily Worker* , 19 July 1940)

the temporary closure of the Burma Road for three months from 18 July 1940. The decision reflected Britain's gravely weakened position in the face of Japanese pressure during the weeks following Dunkirk and the collapse of French resistance. However, the left was quick to blame the powerlessness of the Labour ministers in the recently formed coalition government and to see this as a new victory for the appeasers who remained in the War Cabinet. A cartoon in the *Daily Worker*, for instance, depicted the Burma Road as blocked by Neville Chamberlain's infamous umbrella (see Fig. 10)[26]. The left also attached great significance to the British government's statement that the three-month closure of the road would be accompanied by diplomatic efforts to promote a peace settlement between China and Japan. This proposal understandably renewed fears of a Munich-style agreement. In fact, it was little more than a diplomatic fig leaf, and H. J. Timperley, a well-informed observer, was wise enough to recognize this. He came away from a further CCC delegation to the Foreign Office convinced that the British government was merely 'playing for time' with Japan[27].

The closure of the Burma Road generated a furore that was quite remarkable given the gravity of Britain's situation in the summer of 1940. One Communist film critic reported an upsurge in interest in China, and claimed that recent

[26] *Daily Worker*, 19 July 1940; see also *Tribune*, 19 July 1940. When the Burma Road reopened, the *Daily Herald* (which had done nothing to help the campaign) marked the event with a cartoon showing an umbrella in a rubbish bin (18 October 1940).

[27] Lowe, *Origins of the Pacific War*, 148. MRC, Mss 157/3/DOC/1/399, Timperley to Gollancz, 31 July 1940.

newsreel footage of the Chinese army had been received in cinemas 'with more enthusiasm than any I have seen since the war in the West began'[28]. Trades councils and Labour Party branches passed protest resolutions, although some local Labour parties were reluctant to criticize the wartime coalition[29]. Many of these protests were in response to an 'SOS' issued by the CCC on 19 July, which claimed that the British government was now openly 'conniving' with Japan to end the war in the Far East 'on Japan's terms'[30]. Heartened by the response, the committee issued a 'national resolution' on 22 August, calling for the immediate and unconditional reopening of the Burma Road. By 21 September the resolution had received the support of individuals and organizations representing over one and a quarter million people[31]. These public pressures were supported privately by—amongst others—the Archbishop of Canterbury, who warned the Foreign Secretary against 'placating Japan at the expense of China'[32]. The decision by the Cabinet to reopen the Burma Road from 18 October allowed campaigners to claim a victory, and with some justification as the Cabinet had been made aware of the extent of public feeling in Britain[33]. However, the decision owed far more to changing strategic realities than to domestic political pressure. Not only had Britain's military situation stabilized in the interim, but also Japan's actions in occupying northern Indochina and signing the Tripartite (or Axis) Pact with Germany and Italy had placed it more firmly in the camp of Britain's enemies. By the autumn of 1940, the pendulum of British policy had swung firmly back towards encouraging Chinese resistance. As the Foreign Secretary rather ominously told the War Cabinet on 3 October, in the 'new war situation' it was 'more important than ever that the China war should be kept going'[34].

Arthur Clegg's comment that the struggle to reopen the Burma Road was the 'last great campaign' of the CCC is apposite (although, arguably, only because the Communist Party prevented the committee from leading the campaign in support of the new-born People's Republic of China in 1949–50[35]). In many respects the Burma Road campaign represented a final flourish of the politics of the 1930s. The issue was still one of persuading a government dominated by appeasers to stand up to aggression. Hence, the Rev. Stanley Evans, when asked to address the Hampstead CCC in late August, instinctively linked the closure of the Burma Road to Britain's past 'betrayals' of Spain, Abyssinia and Czechoslovakia[36]. Moreover, the

[28] *Daily Worker*, 5 August 1940, article by 'J.M.'.

[29] Clegg, *Aid China*, 130; Andrew Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political organization in Second World War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 196–7.

[30] Copies in MRC, Mss 157/3/DOC/1/391 and MRC, Mss 292/951/5.

[31] Hull, DEV/1/16; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 September 1940.

[32] Lambeth Palace archive, Lang 177, Lang to Halifax, 23 July 1940.

[33] Clegg, *Aid China*, 133–4; Lowe's account in *Origins of the Pacific War*, ch. 5 makes almost no reference to political pressures in the formation of British policy over the Burma Road. However, it was certainly a factor in the discussions: see TNA, CAB 65/8/6 and CAB 66/11/28.

[34] TNA CAB 66/12/30, Memorandum of 2 October 1940 on 'The Burma Road Agreement', p. 2, accepted at War Cabinet on the following day.

[35] Clegg, *Aid China*, 132; see below, pp. 106–12.

[36] Hull, DEV/1/16, 14 August 1940, Marjorie Battock to Evans, and Evans's notes for a speech on 30 August 1940.

campaign was a moral one that drew heavily on pre-war sympathy for China and a sense of British honour and fair play[37]. Timperley, for instance, deplored the fact that British policy was 'stupidly' preventing petrol from reaching the Red Cross in China, and commented that the Chinese must be shown that Christianity did not 'stop this side of Suez'[38]. The campaign sparked a revival of British interest in China: the dormant Manchester solidarity committee was reactivated and a lively new one formed in Cambridge[39]. When the Burma Road reopened, Kingsley Martin was nonplussed to see Sir John Simon—reviled by the left as the villain of the 1931 Manchurian crisis—attend a reception at the Chinese embassy. Here, it seemed, was proof that China was suddenly 'fashionable'—or at least that Britain desperately needed allies[40]. Martin also took heart, a few months later, from the fact that many people were taking a CCC study course on China which cost 3 shillings. '[I]t is a curious and encouraging fact', he wrote, 'that . . . there is a large and growing public opinion which demands information about China'[41].

One of the most important issues facing the CCC after the reopening of the Burma Road was the plight of the many Chinese seamen sailing on British merchant ships[42]. At its peak the Merchant Marine employed some 20,000 Chinese sailors—many serving at great peril on oil tankers—who claimed that they suffered discrimination in pay, bonuses, and living conditions while in port in Britain. There was a series of strikes and violent confrontations with the police, as a result of which many Chinese sailors were jailed. For the British left, this was not simply an industrial dispute, but also evidence of China's demand for status as a wartime ally. In the words of the *New Statesman*, China was now displaying a 'new and conscious nationalism and . . . her people are no longer willing to be treated as coolies have always been treated in the past'[43]. The CCC worked with the National Union of Seamen (NUS) to help to establish a branch of the Chinese Seamen's Union in Liverpool, and a formal agreement guaranteeing equal treatment was eventually reached between the British and Chinese governments on 24 April 1942. However, the number of Chinese sailors in British employment declined precipitously over the following year when a change in regulations made it possible for them to jump ship—and seek better paid employment—in New York. The CCC's collaboration with the NUS appeared to have been successful, but a private letter from the union's National Organiser, Charles Jarman, shows that political divisions continued to bedevil even the most well intentioned of campaigns. Jarman told the Labour Party in June 1941 that he had broken off contact with the CCC because its activists had fomented disturbances amongst Chinese crews.

[37] See some of the individual responses cited in a CCC typescript for the period 20 July–12 August 1940 (Hull, DEV/1/16). For instance: 'I love China and was there for two years making pastel drawings of the Chinese. I feel disgusted with the way we are treating brave China'.

[38] Churchill College Cambridge, NBKR 4/78, 29 July 1940, Timperley to Noel-Baker; NBKR 4/81, Timperley to Chinese Ambassador.

[39] Clegg, *Aid China*, 136.

[40] *New Statesman*, 19 October 1940.

[41] *New Statesman*, 25 January 1941, 78. Students had the chance to win a £3 essay prize.

[42] See Whittingham-Jones, *China fights in Britain*, 4–28 and Clegg, *Aid China*, 138–41.

[43] *New Statesman*, 15 February 1941, 154–5 (author anon.—possibly Dorothy Woodman).

He concluded that the committee served the interests not of the Chinese seamen or the war effort, but of 'certain people of the extremist type'. However, the letter was written eight days after the German attack on the Soviet Union, and Jarman was hopeful that Communist attitudes may have changed now that even 'the [Conservative] Carlton Club is serving tea in samovars'[44].

In the spring of 1941, the political tensions within the CCC finally reached breaking point. Although Arthur Clegg alluded to these difficulties in his history of the committee, he downplayed their significance and blamed a clash of personalities as much as profound political disagreements. A closer examination of the crisis, however, shows that the question of Communist influence, which had not been made an issue prior to September 1939, now came close to tearing the committee apart. The first signs of discord concerned the Nazi–Soviet Pact. In late September 1939 Reginald Bridgeman wrote to Gollancz to express his concern that reference had been made to the 'Russian defection' at a recent CCC meeting. He assured Gollancz that neither the Nazi–Soviet Pact, nor the subsequent truce between the USSR and Japan, in any way represented an abandonment of Soviet support for China, and he believed that the meeting had accepted this explanation. In reply, however, Gollancz held his ground: 'surely . . . the temporary results of the present Soviet policy must be to make the Chinese position far more difficult? . . . I believe that we are making a mistake if we do not face that in our work'.[45] Bridgeman's argument was a legitimate one at the time—if mistaken—and Labour's Philip Noel-Baker also initially denied that the Nazi–Soviet Pact would be to China's disadvantage[46]. Even so, the Communist Party's new line clearly placed relations between Communists and non-Communists within the committee under considerable strain. In January 1940, for instance, Gollancz stated that the CCC must free itself of all Communist influence, and that the contracts of all Communist employees such as George Hardy, the industrial organizer, should be terminated[47]. Two Communists, Clegg and Mary Sheridan Jones, continued to work for the CCC, but Clegg's usefulness was blunted in May 1940 when he was jailed for two months for publicly calling for Indian independence[48]. A further indication of

[44] LHASC, LP/ID/CI/52, Jarman to Shepard, 30 June 1941.

[45] MRC, Mss 157/3/Doc/1/389 & 390, Bridgeman to Gollancz, 24 September 1940 and reply, 27 September 1940. Clegg provides a rather incomplete account of this episode. He fails to note that Bridgeman had left the meeting early, and that his comment that 'no one dissented' with the explanation of Soviet policy is, therefore, second-hand. He also states that '[w]ith this discussion out of the way, it was not raised again', without referring to Gollancz's letter in reply. Clegg himself later described the Nazi–Soviet Pact as 'realistic' and 'sensible' (Clegg, *Aid China*, 120–1).

[46] Churchill College Cambridge, NBKR 4/70, 22 September 1939, Noel-Baker to Tuan Sheng-Chian (Kunming): 'I cannot believe [the Soviets] desire the victory of Japan in the East'.

[47] TNA KV2/1028, 8 January 1940, Special Branch report. Clegg later stated that a reduction in staff was necessary due to the end of the secret monthly £100 donation, and this lends further weight to the argument that Gollancz was the mystery donor (above, Chapter 2, note 87). He adds that Hardy was 'not really surprised' to be sacked (*Aid China*, 123).

[48] Clegg, *Aid China*, 131. Clegg's Communist mentor Ben Bradley was jailed for 3 months at the same time. Clegg recalled in his poem 'Remembrances/Ben Bradley' how 'Later/we went to prison together/myself as green/as they come/-he took it calmly/tipping me off/to various wrinkles' (Arthur Clegg, *Pictures of the Thirties: A Letter to Mary* (London: Reality Press, 1975), 18). Bradley's letters from jail (LHASC CP/IND/BRAD/7/3) shed disappointingly little light on this intriguing episode.

political tension came in April 1940 when Margery Fry sought office space for the CCC from the Universities' China Committee. She admitted that her committee '*is* in a sense political', and that most of those involved with it were ' "left" in sympathy'. 'I may tell you, *in confidence*,' she added, 'that we have had some trouble to prevent it being nobbled by people whose friendship for Russia seemed more active than for China'[49].

Matters came to a head at the CCC's annual general meeting in late March 1941. Clegg attributed the timing of the crisis to the tensions surrounding the ban on the *Daily Worker* and the New Fourth Army incident. (He also blamed Margery Fry for a souring of personal relationships amongst key activists[50].) However, an equally plausible explanation would be the Communist Party's decision to organize its 'People's Convention' on 12 January 1941, which called for a 'people's government' to work for a 'people's peace'. The Convention greatly angered Gollancz and pushed him towards a complete break with Communism. His most bitter attack on Communist 'revolutionary defeatism', a book entitled *The Betrayal of the Left*, was published at the same time as the CCC AGM[51]. Prior to the general meeting the CCC's officers, Gollancz, Fry, and Lord Listowel, issued a joint letter in which they warned that the organization's governing council was sharply divided over issues such as 'the value for world progress of a British victory over the Axis powers'. They threatened to resign if the committee merely became a vehicle for the 'blackening of Britain's admittedly faulty record, or the uncritical exaltation of the USSR'. They also complained that the Communist minority was manipulating the committee by the use of a 'special whip' and packing the council using measures of 'doubtful constitutional correctness'[52].

The dispute erupted onto the floor of the meeting, where Gollancz is said to have told his opponents bluntly that—in effect—'the fact that they were communists was the reason for the split'[53]. Hostilities paused for a brief visit by the Chinese Ambassador, who assured delegates that the KMT and Chinese Communists were striving to reconcile their differences. When the discussion resumed, according to a Special Branch informer, Lt Commander Edgar Young (a leading proponent of the People's Convention) led a majority at the meeting in welcoming the officers' resignation. However, Jack Chen described this turn of events as a 'catastrophe', while the Indian nationalist Krishna Menon implied that all sides were 'bickering like children'. Eventually the officers were persuaded to withdraw their resignations and a new council was appointed, but the essential unity and trust within the committee had been badly damaged. A weary letter from Dorothy

[49] TNA, FO 371/24701, F 3003, 18 April 1940, Fry to Sir Neill Malcolm. Despite writing in confidence, Fry's letter was copied to the Foreign Office, which agreed that the CCC should not be supported—even though it 'has its uses from the F.O. point of view' (A. L. Scott, 30 April 1940).

[50] According to Clegg: 'Perhaps there was also something personal in it'. He claims that Fry took a dim view of Mary Sheridan Jones' close relationship with two young Chinese men in the Cambridge committee, and that this sparked a heated row between him and Fry (*Aid China*, 137–8).

[51] See Gollancz, *Betrayal*.

[52] Copies of the letter are in MRC, Mss 157/3/DOC/1/228 and Hull, D40, 2/7.

[53] This paragraph is based on the Special Branch report of the meeting, 29 March 1941, TNA KV2/1607.

Woodman to the Oxford professor and sinologist E. R. Hughes hints at this disenchantment: 'To cut a long story short, we have re-formed the China Campaign Committee.... For the time being, at any rate, I think that this should be quite satisfactor[y] and we have certainly now got a Committee which represents the interests of the members.'[54] Despite Clegg's claim that these differences soon 'blew over'[55], the CCC never fully recovered. In the short term, however, it was saved from further division by the German attack on the Soviet Union which, overnight, brought the Communist Party wholeheartedly behind the war effort.

THE 'CINDERELLA' OF THE UNITED NATIONS[56]: 1942–1945

On 6 December 1941 the *New Statesman* asked of Japan: 'Will it ever strike?' On the following day Japanese aircraft attacked the US Pacific Fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor, while other units began a victorious advance into Malaya, Burma, the East Indies, and the Philippines. The British empire in the Far East collapsed with devastating speed. The Shanghai International Settlement was occupied immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor and Hong Kong fell after a brief struggle on 25 December. The much-vaunted British fortress of Singapore surrendered on 15 February 1942, and the whole of Burma had been overrun by the end of April, definitively closing the Burma Road. Britain had suffered a military and strategic disaster, but the political implications were also breathtaking. Kingsley Martin was far from alone in proclaiming the end of the 'White Man's Empire' in Asia, and prophesying the rise of new Asiatic powers to take its place[57]. Meanwhile, China's situation appeared to have been transformed[58]. Suddenly, after four and a half years of fighting alone, it was an ally of Britain and the United States in the war against Japan, and Chiang Kai-shek a war leader alongside Churchill and Roosevelt. When the three men met in Cairo in November 1943, they agreed that Japan must return all of its conquests in China, including Formosa/Taiwan (which had been seized in 1895), and that Korea should become independent[59]. The wartime alliance also forced the western powers to re-evaluate their bilateral relations with China for the first time since 1931. On 11 January 1943 the British government signed a landmark treaty, abolishing its extraterritorial rights and the 'unequal treaties'. Significantly, however, the future of Hong Kong was left to be resolved after the war.

[54] Oxford University Archives, DC 83/1/2, Woodman to Hughes, 7 May 1941.
[55] Clegg, *Aid China*, 138.
[56] *New Statesman*, 9 October 1943, 227.
[57] *New Statesman*, 7 March 1942, 157.
[58] See John W. Garver, 'China's wartime diplomacy' in James C. Hsiung and Steven I. Levine (eds), *China's bitter victory: The war with Japan, 1937–1945* (New York & London: East Gate, 1992), 4–27.
[59] As the Soviet Union was still at peace with Japan, China's relationship with the USSR was more complicated. In November 1943 Churchill and Roosevelt met Chiang Kai-shek in Cairo immediately prior to their 'Big Three' meeting at Tehran, as Stalin did not wish to provoke Japan.

The British left had been a principal supporter of China since 1925, and now that China was an embattled ally it surely had the opportunity to lead an even greater solidarity campaign. Hsiao Ch'ien, who arrived in Britain in 1939, commented that after December 1941 China 'began to exist in the eyes of the British'[60]. For a number of reasons, however, both the popular support for China in Britain and the role of the left were heavily constrained. Perhaps the most significant point was that China only played a marginal role in the war after Pearl Harbor. Not only was the war in Europe deemed more important than that in the Far East, but even within the Asia–Pacific theatre China had relatively little to contribute. British strategy focused on defending India and retaking Burma (the *sine qua non* for the resumption of large-scale aid to China), while the United States took the attack to Japan by 'island hopping' across the Pacific. The USA did bomb Japan from bases in China, but the value of these operations declined once it became possible to fly long-range bombers from the Pacific islands. Moreover, Chiang Kai-shek's government was not only too weak to pose a military threat to the Japanese forces on the mainland, but even lacked the resources to defend its own territory. China suffered serious reverses during the Japanese 'Ichigo' offensive that started in April 1944, and a number of US airbases were lost. Many of China's best units, meanwhile, were committed to the battle for Burma, while others were blockading the Communist base areas in the north. China's war effort, therefore, received relatively little attention in Britain. The comparison with the situation in the United States was striking: there, the outspoken General 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell, the US commander sent to work with Chiang Kai-shek, and Claire Chennault's volunteer pilots captured the public imagination[61].

This was hardly the Asian war that the British left had envisaged. There were three distinctive elements—even items of faith—which shaped the left's approach to the war in the Far East, and China played a central role in all of them. First, it was argued that the war against Japan would be won by the mobilization of China's vast resources rather than by an 'endurance race' across thousands of Pacific islands, especially as the bulk of Japan's army was still on Chinese soil[62]. As Arthur Clegg wrote in 1943, an armed and united China would 'destroy the whole Japanese military power in the Pacific as nothing else could'[63]. Secondly, the left saw the war in Asia as a war of liberation, not only from Japanese rule but also from Western imperialism. By this reading the British renunciation of extra-territorial rights in China was merely a welcome first step towards a 'crusade that rouses the whole East'[64]. In reality, however, the British government's principal objective was still to recover Britain's economically valuable Asian colonies—even if, paradoxically, the

[60] Ch'ien, *Traveller*, 76. See also the comment that China was now 'dawning on the British mind' as a member of the United Nations, *New Statesman*, 28 February 1942, 138.

[61] The best-known accounts are Annalee Jacoby and Theodore White's *Thunder out of China* (New York: William Sloane, 1946) and Barbara Tuchman's *Stilwell and the American experience in China* (New York: Bantam, 1972); for a bracing critique of Stilwell's role, see van de Ven, *War and nationalism*, 19–63.

[62] *Daily Worker*, 11 September 1942 and 2 April 1943; *Tribune*, 4 September 1942.

[63] Clegg, *Birth of New China*, 78.

[64] *Daily Worker*, 12 January 1943.

war could only be won by mobilizing the resources of India and thereby hastening Indian independence. Britain's American allies joked with some justification that S.E.A.C. (Lord Louis Mountbatten's South East Asian Command) was an acronym for 'Save England's Asiatic Colonies'[65]. Finally, the left was convinced that the British ruling elite continued to display a colonial mentality, and that this prevented China from being treated as an equal ally. Kingsley Martin reported in April 1943 that many Chinese in London were offended by Churchill's patronizing references to China's wartime role in a recent speech[66]. Archbishop William Temple commented privately that Churchill sympathized deeply with China but was 'quite incapable of regarding an Asiatic as an equal partner with a European', or of regarding the war in the East as equal in importance to that in Europe[67].

Political factors also limited the impact of China in Britain during the war. The Labour movement, united behind the coalition government, gave little thought to China beyond questions of direct interest to Britain such as the fate of Hong Kong[68]. Of the Labour Party's leaders only Stafford Cripps, who had visited China in 1940 after his expulsion from the Labour Party, took a special interest in China's struggle[69]. Although some local Labour parties did engage in solidarity work with China, this was only a 'pale reflection' of the enthusiasm displayed for Soviet Russia[70]. The energies of the Communist Party, of course, were focused on support for the Soviet Union and, given that Stalin was desperate to maintain the peace with Japan until victory over Germany was assured, China was accorded a low priority in its work[71]. Due to the ban on the *Daily Worker* (which was lifted in September 1942), it is difficult to reconstruct Communist attitudes towards China in detail during this crucial period, but a CPGB International Committee document for November 1943 gives a good indication of the party's priorities. This document stated that Britain and the USA had 'properly decided' to deal with Hitler first, and was critical of demands by KMT propagandists in 1942 for a 'Pacific first policy'. It concluded that the Communist Party's principal goal should be to offer practical assistance to 'unity and democratic forces' inside China[72]. The Communist Party's relative neglect of China was compounded by a shortage of news—especially from the regions controlled by the Chinese Communists—and the problems imposed by China's sheer physical isolation. In March 1944, for

[65] Christopher Thorne, *The Far Eastern War: States and societies* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1986), 219; Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten armies: Britain's Asian empire and the war with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2005).

[66] *New Statesman*, 3 April 1943, 221.

[67] Lambeth Palace, Temple 11, 22 June 1943, Temple to Rev. Ronald Allen. Churchill also thought that it was an 'absolute farce' that China could be treated of as a great power, and would be a mere 'faggot vote' for the USA (van de Ven, *War and nationalism*, 42).

[68] See below p. 103 and 103 note 121.

[69] For Cripps in China, see Peter Clarke, *The Cripps version: The life of Sir Stafford Cripps, 1889–1952* (London: Penguin, 2003), 145–66; Bodleian Library, Mss Cripps 89, Cripps' notes for a speech in Edinburgh, 5 February 1943.

[70] Thorpe, *Parties at War*, 204.

[71] Thorne notes the striking lack of Communist interest in the Far East in late 1941, *Far Eastern War*, 5, esp. note 15.

[72] LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/54/04, p. 12.

instance, the *Daily Worker* reported a speech by Chou En-lai that had been given as long ago as August 1943, the text of which had only just been obtained[73]. Whereas Communists serving with the British army in India greatly strengthened the British left's links with the subcontinent during the war, China, by contrast, seemed more remote by 1945[74].

The China Campaign Committee adapted to meet what it called 'present realities' following Britain's entry into the war in the Far East. In a policy statement issued in August 1942, it accepted that the absolute priority now was to strengthen the alliance with China. It was no longer appropriate for its speakers to be so 'fiercely critical' of British government policy, although the committee reserved the right to challenge any lingering 'imperialist heritage' or assumptions of white 'superiority' in government thinking[75]. The CCC continued to be regarded with some suspicion by the Foreign Office: one official blamed the fact that he had recently been challenged about the Opium Wars at a private party on its malign influence[76]! In many respects, however, it was a more subdued organization after 1942. Arthur Clegg became editor of the Communist Party journal *World News and Views* and joined the party's Colonial Committee, while Mary Sheridan Jones was seconded to humanitarian work for China. Dorothy Woodman devoted much of her time to running an organization that supported the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives. In political terms, moreover, the government's rush to end Britain's privileges in China had deprived the CCC—and the left as a whole—of one of its principal (and easiest) targets. The nationalist agenda set in the 1920s had been largely fulfilled, albeit due to the exigencies of war.

During the latter years of the war, the CCC was overshadowed by the British United Aid for China Fund (BUACF)[77]. The initial impetus for this national humanitarian appeal came from the Bishop of Hong Kong, R. O. Hall, who had been on a lecture tour abroad when Japan struck. He persuaded Lady Isobel Cripps, the wife of Sir Stafford, to chair the appeal, which was launched with a radio broadcast on 7 July 1942 and a service at St Paul's Cathedral on the following day. Originally intended as a short-term appeal to raise a £250,000 'birthday present' for the Chinese Republic by 10 October, the BUACF eventually outlasted the war. It proved highly successful at generating financial support for China (almost £1.5 million had been raised by January 1945), and also made considerable efforts to educate the British public about China's plight. The fund benefited from the wholehearted backing of the British labour movement, which publicly admitted in March 1943 that China's struggle was not as 'insistent upon public attention as the bravery of the Chinese nation deserves'[78]. The National Council of Labour launched

[73] *Daily Worker*, 18 March 1944.
[74] Branson, *History of the CPGB, 1941–51*, 65–6.
[75] Copies in Hull, DEV/1/16; Rhodes House, FCB papers, Box 165.
[76] TNA, FO371/35846, note of 18 May 1943 by A. L. Scott.
[77] There is an overview of the BUACF in Whittingham-Jones, *China fights in Britain*, 60–4. It was initially known as the United Aid for China Fund, but changed its name to British United Aid for China in 1945 to avoid confusion with fundraising bodies in the USA.
[78] MRC, Mss 292/951/8, NCL circular, 23 March 1943.

an appeal in August 1942, and by the time that this was closed in mid 1947 it had raised some £134,515, principally from trade unions and cooperative societies[79]. The labour movement became closely identified with the campaign and two senior trade unionists were appointed to represent the TUC as Vice Presidents. Moreover, there was none of the diffidence shown in labour's support for the Soviet Union, and rank and file workers were instructed to participate in one of over 400 local BUACF committees rather than establish their own.

The CCC immediately agreed to work with the BUACF, although with some reservations. Margery Fry wrote to her sister that the new fund 'is of a very different colour from our old campaign, yet we make part of it, and *must* cooperate'[80]. The problem stemmed from the fact that the BUACF represented a coalition of over 70 religious, business, and humanitarian organizations, within which those on the left were heavily outnumbered. Arthur Clegg later complained that it was merely 'the old British Fund [established in 1937] refurbished with the missionary element even more influential'. It was, he added, an 'utterly conformist and establishment body' which treated his colleague Mary Sheridan Jones 'unjustly' when she was seconded from the CCC to organize the BUACF's local campaigns[81]. Behind these remarks lay a persistent complaint that the fund was not non-political, as it claimed, but openly supportive of the KMT. The funds were distributed by a committee in Chungking that included Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the British Ambassador, and predominantly went to support educational, health, and refugee projects in government-controlled areas. Moreover, BUACF literature could justly be accused of being politically naive and sentimental. Kingsley Martin said in April 1943 that the Chinese in Britain disliked a BUACF poster showing 'little Wong holding out his bowl to be filled with rice or coins'. One leaflet depicted the Chinese people at the start of the war in 1937 as 'busy only with good… under the great leadership of Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek', while another from 1945 glossed a speech by Chiang with a reference to the 'Chinese Communist problem'. Some of its literature also had a markedly religious flavour, and emphasized the Christianity of Chiang and his wife[82].

Despite these problems, the BUACF did present significant new opportunities for the left. It encouraged the grass roots of the labour movement to take an active interest in China for the first time since the Burma Road campaign. Letters received by the TUC described, for example, the activities of a female shop steward in the

[79] Undated 'Final statement' in MRC, Mss 292/951/9. The cooperative societies had donated £73,059 and the trade unions £40,428. This included a donation of some £23,000 from the miners' federation.

[80] Jones, *Margery Fry*, 209.

[81] Clegg, *Aid China*, 145–8; MML, Clegg papers, typescript by Mary Sheridan Jones. She soon left the BUACF to work in a factory, and later helped to establish the New China News Agency in London.

[82] *New Statesman*, 3 April 1943, 221; BUACF literature in MRC, Mss 292/951/8. The leaflet 'A debt too deep for words' referred to China as 'a land inspired by Christianity…' (However, the CCC also issued religious appeals, such as the letter of 22 June 1939 signed by twenty bishops which stated that China was struggling for freedom 'under a Christian leader, whose prayers are giving him strength…', MRC, Mss 292/951/5). For criticism that the BUACF publicity was too sentimental, see Cambridge UL, Needham papers, C.29, 21 May 1945, Elsie Fairfax-Cholmely to Lady Seymour.

Piston Ring factory in Lymington and the canteen committee on the battleship HMS *Ramillies* (which raised £50 for China and another £50 for the USSR[83]). From an early stage, moreover, at least some of the money raised *did* go to the left's two favourite Chinese causes, the industrial cooperatives and the International Peace Hospital (which was located in a Communist-controlled region). In 1947 it was reported that about 9 per cent of all funds had gone to projects in the Communist areas[84]. And while the BUACF continued to support Chiang long after his popularity had waned, it should be noted that during 1942–3 he was still being treated with considerable respect by the left in Britain. His portrait was routinely displayed at rallies alongside those of the 'Big Three', and Chiang Kai-shek's momentous visit to India in February 1942 earned him kudos as a true anti-imperialist[85]. Most importantly, the national organization of the BUACF offered a structure within which the CCC could reach a far wider audience. In March 1944 Margery Fry commented that as many as one million people had seen the CCC's travelling exhibition on China in the last 18 months[86]. As a measure of the CCC's success, in May 1943 the 'old China hand' Sir John Pratt launched a bitter attack on its influence within the BUACF. He claimed that the CCC's literature consistently portrayed Britain's actions in China as a 'disgraceful record of fraud and force' and bred 'ill will and suspicion between England and China'. Pratt, who had been involved with Chinese affairs since 1898, felt that Britain's record throughout these years had been essentially 'sympathetic and constructive': during the Korean War, however, he would emerge as the most outspoken critic of British policy[87].

During the final two years of the war, the British left became increasingly exasperated with Chiang Kai-shek's regime. Despite the benign image propagated by the BUACF, Chiang was now generally seen as at best incompetent, at worst a corrupt dictator presiding over a collapsing economy and more interested in defeating the Communists than the Japanese[88]. In February 1943 the *New Statesman* had commented that the news from Chungking was 'so depressing that we have hesitated to write about it without detailed confirmation'[89]. Yet such niceties were soon forgotten and a few months later an article called for 'the truth about the corruption, the black market, [and] the growth of totalitarian methods . . .'[90]. China's military defeats in 1944, and its inability to protect

[83] MRC, Mss 292/951/8, 18 October 1942, Mrs E. Mayne to TUC; 11 November 1942, copy of letter from P. H. Wadge to Lt Commander Wheeler.

[84] MRC, Mss 292/951/8, BUACF Finance and General Purposes Committee, 19 November 1942; MRC, Mss 292/951/9, BUACF, *Monthly Review*, August 1947. By 1944 £46,000 had been given to the industrial cooperatives (Whittingham-Jones, *China fights in Britain*).

[85] *Tribune*, 27 February 1942 and 6 March 1942.

[86] Hull, DEV/1/16, 13 March 1944, CCC circular letter.

[87] TNA, FO 371/35846, especially 12 June 1943, Pratt to Margery Fry. It should be noted that the Ministry of Information could find no evidence of 'undue influence' by the CCC—indeed, it concluded that its activities were 'considerably curtailed' within the BUACF (ibid. 19 May 1943, Vere Redman to Pratt). Peculiarly, given the tone of Pratt's intervention, he was Chairman of the Cambridge CCC.

[88] See van de Ven, *War and nationalism*, 1–3.

[89] *New Statesman*, 20 February 1943, 118.

[90] *New Statesman*, 9 October 1943, 227.

the US airfields, heightened the criticism. In November 1944 *Tribune* reported that China was 'in disgrace', and that the regime had clearly lost the support of the left in Britain and the United States. The paper noted that with the sacking of Stilwell, following his public disagreements with Chiang Kai-shek, the China story was 'only just beginning'[91]. Chiang had clearly lost the propaganda battle, although in recent years historians—with greater access to archival sources—have taken a more sympathetic view of his record and the very difficult situation that he faced. Far more emphasis is now placed on the immense dislocation caused by the war with Japan—the millions of refugees and the shattering of economic capacity—as well as the gulf between the expectations of China's allies and the small amount of assistance that they were willing or able to provide. The contemporary distinction between the KMT and the Communists' attitude to the war also appears increasingly false: neither was in much position to confront Japan militarily and preferred to await its defeat by the allied powers[92].

British left-wing commentators at the time, however, were not inclined to sympathy. To compound matters, although the chaos in government-controlled areas of China was highly visible, news from the Communist zones was almost unavailable until Chiang Kai-shek lifted a restriction on journalists visiting the region in 1944. Thereafter a stream of stories, notably the work of Gunther Stein for the *News Chronicle*, presented a glowing account of the Communist Party's wartime role. Stein's most interesting source was Michael Lindsay, the son of A. D. (later Lord) Lindsay, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, and a leading anti-appeaser. Michael Lindsay had taught at Yenching University near Beijing since 1937 and became an active supporter of the Chinese resistance. Following the outbreak of war in December 1941, he and his wife, Hsiao Li, fled to the Communist-controlled areas where they remained—eventually settling in the Communist 'capital' of Yenan—until the end of the war[93]. Lindsay's ability to mend and operate radios made him a valued technical adviser to the guerrilla armies, and meant that he was far more than a passive observer. Lindsay was neither a Communist nor a typical fellow-traveller. He made numerous attempts to share his unique knowledge of this neglected front with British and US intelligence, and he was not shy to offer criticisms of the Yenan regime to the

[91] *Tribune*, 3 November 1944, 3, 6–7.

[92] For a helpful overview, see Rana Mitter and Aaron Moore, 'China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory and Legacy', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45/2 (published online, 10 February 2011). Diana Lary and Stephen R. MacKinnon emphasize the sheer scale of suffering and disruption during the war with Japan in their edited collection *Scars of War: The impact of warfare on modern China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001). For other new perspectives on China during the war, see Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary, and Ezra Vogel (eds), *China at War: Regions of China, 1937–45* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) and van de Ven, *War and nationalism*.

[93] See Michael Lindsay's richly illustrated *The unknown war: North China 1937–1945* (London: Bergström and Boyle, 1975). There is a vivid first-hand account of the Lindsays' flight in Claire Band and William Band, *Dragon fangs: Two years with Chinese guerillas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1947). See also Hsiao Li Lindsay, *Bold Plum: With the guerrillas in China's war against Japan* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, 2007).

Communist leaders[94]. In particular, he drew a sharp distinction between the unnecessary bureaucracy at Yenan and the more open, plural, and efficient government in frontline areas. In a lengthy interview with Stein, he presented Communist rule in these areas as tolerant and undogmatic, resting on 'democratic and progressive local governments' which ensured '100 per cent cooperation from the people'[95]. But he gave no indication here of the bitter 'rectification campaigns' of 1942–4, whereby Mao had imposed ideological discipline on the party, or of the growing cult of Mao's thought and personality[96]. Meanwhile Stein, like Edgar Snow before him, seems to have fallen under Mao's spell during exhaustive interviews with the Communist leader. He described Mao as 'a broad, full-blooded peasant-intellectual . . . unconventional and easy-going'[97]. Both Stein and Lindsay concluded that Chinese Communism was developing very differently from typical Stalinist rigidity and subservience to Moscow: in Stein's words, 'Marxism has been made Chinese'[98].

These observations (which became a commonplace far beyond the confines of the British left) formed part of a continuing debate in the West about the nature of Chinese Communism that lasted well into the post-war years. The debate can be traced back at least to the publication of *The tragedy of the Chinese revolution* by the American Trotskyist Harold Isaacs in 1938. Freda Utley wrote in response that the Communists' decision to revive the united front meant that there were no more Bolsheviks in China, but only Mensheviks. The Communists, she argued, had ceased to be a revolutionary party and should, instead, be seen as peasant-based radicals, committed to 'agrarian and administrative reform, not agrarian revolution'[99]. Utley, who subsequently moved far to the right, must have come to regret this view. However, during the latter stages of the war the idea that the Communists were mere 'agrarian reformers' proved highly influential amongst British journalists and diplomats, although Edgar Snow, for one, had no truck with it[100]. On 25 January 1945 a *Times* editorial, explicitly influenced by Michael Lindsay's writings, declared that: 'The Yenan system is not communism; it resembles an

[94] In the McCarran hearings, Lindsay said that his 30,000 word paper on 'What's wrong with Yenan' was circulated to 'friends in the higher ranks of the Communist organisation' (*Hearings before the Subcommittee to investigate the administration of the Internal Security Act and other internal security laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Second Session on the Institute of Pacific Relations*, Part 14, 2 May and 20 June 1952 (Washington, 1952) [cited hereafter as 'McCarran hearings'], 5372). Although the document has been lost, there is a brief summary in Lindsay, *Bold Plum*, 325–6.

[95] Gunther Stein, *The Challenge of Red China* (London: Pilot Press, 1945), 'The testimony of an Oxford man', 294–304, here p. 302.

[96] See Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The untold story* (London: Vintage, 2007), 300–29.

[97] Stein, *Red China*, 4.

[98] Stein, *Red China*, 114.

[99] *New Statesman*, 28 January 1939, 130–1. The very similar language in an earlier *New Statesman* editorial (7 January 1939, 4–5) suggests Utley's influence. Utley's comments were rebutted by James Bertram, a more orthodox Marxist, in the *New Statesman*, 11 February 1939, 208–9.

[100] Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 5–6. In 1941 Snow reported that the British Ambassador Clark-Kerr thought that the Chinese Communists were 'Keir Hardieans' and 'nineteenth-century agrarian democrats'—but Snow was adamant that 'their religion remains international socialism' (*Scorched earth*, i. 277).

agrarian democracy'[101]. This emollient view of the Chinese Communists had been encouraged by two significant developments during the war. Stalin's decision to dissolve the Comintern in May 1943 reinforced a belief that the Chinese Communists would henceforth pursue their own political agenda rather than Moscow's. In addition, the evolution of Mao's political thinking, from *The New Democracy* (1940) to his call in 1945 for coalition government with the KMT, indicated that the Communists were by no means committed to the immediate revolutionary seizure of power, let alone a rapid transition to socialism.

The number of Britons remaining in China during the war was relatively small but, as the case of Michael Lindsay suggests, their experiences could still prove influential for the British left. Indeed, William Band, Lindsay's colleague at Yenching, and his wife Claire also travelled with the Chinese guerrillas, and published an account which presented the Eighth Route Army in a distinctly humane and democratic light[102]. Other notable individuals—all of whom would have a part to play in Anglo-Chinese relations after the war—included Peter Townsend, Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, and William Empson. Townsend travelled to China with the Friends Ambulance Unit in late 1941, and worked with the Chinese Industrial Cooperative movement until his return to Britain in 1951. Hilda Selwyn-Clarke suffered internment when she opted to stay in Hong Kong with her husband Percy, the chief medical officer. She returned to Britain, where she became heavily involved in support for China, in 1945. Empson had arrived in China to teach at the National Peking University in August 1937, and migrated with the university to the South West of China until his return to Britain in January 1940. After wartime service with the BBC he returned to teach in Beijing with his wife Hetta between 1947 and 1952. George Hogg, who went to China as a journalist in 1938, but found his true métier running one of the CIC 'Baillie' technical schools, would doubtless have also become an influential figure after the war. However, he died from tetanus in July 1945 at the age of thirty, after a minor injury playing basketball with his students[103].

By far the most significant sojourn in wartime China, however, both culturally and politically, was that of Joseph Needham. Needham had pressed to be allowed to visit China from 1939 onwards, and was finally invited by the British Council to direct a new 'Sino-British Scientific Co-operation Office', based in Chungking. Both Needham and his wife Dorothy were well-known figures on the British left, and he required security clearance from British intelligence for this posting: on this occasion it was granted, although in 1949—unknown to Needham—his

[101] The CCC had published one of Lindsay's reports as the pamphlet *North China Front*; see also *New Statesman*, 13 January 1945, 20.

[102] Band and Band, *Dragon fangs*; *Tribune*, 29 October 1948.

[103] For Townsend, see the obituary in *The Guardian*, 28 July 2006; for Selwyn-Clarke, see Mervyn Horder, 'The hard-boiled saint: Selwyn-Clarke in Hong Kong', *BMJ*, 311 (August 1995), 492–5, and Percy Selwyn-Clarke's memoir 'Footprints' (typescript in Rhodes House, Mss Brit. Emp S.470); for Empson, see the excellent two-volume biography by John Haffenden, *William Empson*, i: *Among the mandarins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and *William Empson*, ii: *Against the Christians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); for Hogg, see James MacManus, *Ocean devil: The life and legend of George Hogg* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008). His story has been dramatized in the movie *The children of Huang Shi* (2008).

prospective appointment as British Council representative in China was vetoed. He served in China from 1943–6 with considerable success, travelling to the remotest corners of 'free China' to meet and encourage Chinese scientists. The fact that he combined his diplomatic duties with his own ground-breaking historical research—and also managed to involve his wife and lover in the project—raised the hackles of some colleagues[104]. However, Needham was not easily discouraged by what he deemed to be personal spite. By the time of his eventual return to Cambridge in 1948, fresh from helping to establish UNESCO, he was set to become not only the most celebrated British sinologist, but also the most significant British supporter of China during the troubled decades ahead[105].

VISIONS OF A 'NEW CHINA'

In the summer of 1945, the *New Statesman* published a prescient article on the new situation confronting the Western powers in Asia following the defeat of Japan. 'For the future of the world', it argued, 'the pattern of Asia has now become more important than that of Europe. Here are the great centres of population, the greatest sources of wealth, the greatest untapped markets, and probably the greatest dangers to world peace. At the centre is the problem of China'[106]. A year and a half later, 27 left-wing Labour MPs sent a New Year message to China couched in very similar terms: 'We believe that the future destiny of the world lies in the Far East and that in this destiny China will play a vital part'[107]. For Asia, therefore, the post-war years appeared to be rich with promise. Japan's bid for supremacy had failed, but it had still succeeded in shattering the prestige of the European empires. India, Pakistan, and Burma all gained independence from Britain in August 1947, and British forces only defeated the Malayan insurgency (1948–57) because the guerrillas drew most of their support from the rural Chinese minority. Attempts by France and the Netherlands to reclaim their colonies could only postpone the independence of Indonesia (1949) and French Indochina (1954). In these circumstances many British socialists began to attach a far greater significance to Asia. Kingsley Martin, for instance, wrote that, for him and Dorothy Woodman, the focus of their 'world was to shift from Europe to Asia quite soon after the ending of the war'[108]. Woodman founded and edited the journal *Asian Horizon* (1948–1959), although Burma, rather than China, became her abiding interest[109].

[104] See Lawrence Picken's memorandum to the British Council cited in Winchester, *Man who loved China*, 160–1.

[105] Winchester, *Man who loved China* is particularly good on Needham's wartime travels in China. For Needham's security vetting, see TNA, KV2/3055. See also Joseph and Dorothy Needham, *Science outpost*.

[106] *New Statesman*, 18 August 1945 (unattributed), 103.

[107] *CCC Newsletter*, 7 January 1947, 1. The letter went on to call for economic and agrarian reform: signatories included David Rees Williams, Richard Crossman, Michael Foot, and Konni Zilliacus.

[108] Martin, *Editor*, 322.

[109] KV2/1607, in an interview of 28 November 1949 she described herself to an MI5 interrogator as a 'rather dull member of the Labour Party' who would like to live in Burma.

The situation in China was particularly novel and unpredictable. None foresaw that Mao's ragged armies would take power only four years after the end of the war with Japan, nor that Chiang Kai-shek would squander the strong political and military position that he still enjoyed in 1945. The attitude of the Soviet Union seemed to support this assessment as Stalin, having been granted his territorial and strategic objectives in China at the Yalta conference in February 1945, signed a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Nationalist government on 14 August. Stalin advised the Communists to join a coalition government with the KMT and, although he also quietly encouraged them to strengthen their positions in northern China, the *Daily Worker* was forced to deny that the Chinese Communists had been abandoned[110]. The immediate post-war years, therefore, offered a window in which the more moderate elements of the British left, buoyed up by the Labour Party's landslide election victory in July 1945, had a significant role to play in rethinking Britain's relationship with China and the Far East. The Fabian Society and the Union of Democratic Control both organized well-attended conferences examining these issues in 1946[111]. The CPGB, by contrast, adopted an approach more narrowly focused on the Chinese Communists, albeit one that was eventually vindicated by their victory in the civil war.

The renewed interest in China stemmed not only from the need to understand a rising new 'power', but also from the belief that during eight years of war China had undergone profound social and cultural transformation. The most familiar cliché on the left at this time was that a 'new China' had emerged: that the war had given rise to a new national unity and pride, as well as promoting popular self-government, honesty in public life, gender equality, and economic cooperation[112]. The icons of this 'new' China were the scattered workshops of the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (under their slogan '*Gung-ho*'/'work together'), the village democracies of northern China, and the mud-spattered labourers of the Burma Road[113]. The British left was excited by the prospect that China was finally breaking with a feudal, corrupt past, and the promise of a fresh start also gave meaning to the miseries that the Chinese people had suffered since 1931. The question now confronting the left, however, was which Chinese political party or movement could galvanize this 'new China' most effectively, and which most deserved its support?

There were essentially three political options for the British left after 1945, of which the first two require little elaboration. One, backing the KMT—which was still a coalition containing some leftist elements—attracted no support at all. Chiang Kai-shek had lost what little credibility he still enjoyed on the left by

[110] *Daily Worker*, 28 & 29 August 1945.

[111] See BLPES, Fabian papers, J/61/13 (February 1946); University of Sussex, Kingsley Martin papers, 13/6 (re UDC: September 1947); see also CUL, Needham papers, C 35, 29 July 1946, Anne F. J. Roy (Fabian International Bureau) to Needham about a proposed conference on China and the Far East.

[112] For the Communist areas, see *New Statesman*, 14 August 1943, 101–2, and 13 January 1945, 20. For the broader usage see, for instance, Robert Payne, *Chungking diary* (London: William Heinemann, 1945), pp. vi, 8–9.

[113] Hogg, *I See a new China*, on the CIC; Chiang Yee, *The men of the Burma Road* (London: Methuen, 1942).

publishing a hyper-nationalist book entitled *China's Destiny* in 1943, and by the end of the war he was (again) regarded in some quarters as a quasi-fascist[114]. In February 1946 a senior official in the Labour Party emphatically ruled out an informal proposal for fraternal relations with the KMT on the grounds that it had abandoned the democratic and socialist principles of Sun Yat-sen and was in danger of becoming a 'totalitarian political machine no longer responsive to the needs of the people'[115]. The second possibility, advocated solely by the CPGB, was to give full support to the Chinese Communists, initially in their demand for a share of power and, latterly, in their quest for outright victory over the KMT. This approach, exemplified in a briefing paper by Arthur Clegg in December 1946, treated the Chinese Communists as the true representatives of the movement for a 'democratic, united and independent China' and the 'finest expression of Chinese patriotism and culture'. Conversely, the paper portrayed the United States (to some extent backed by Britain) as the principal obstacle to a peaceful settlement[116].

A third option, that enjoyed some support on the non-Communist left[117], was to reject the logic of civil war and back those groups calling for pluralism and reform, such as the China Democratic League (CDL) and the KMT 'Revolutionary Committee'. This alternative path in Chinese politics, which emphasized democracy and human rights, was understandably attractive in Britain at a time when outright Communist victory appeared unlikely and KMT rule was increasingly unpalatable. It was particularly appealing to British intellectuals who tended to view Chinese affairs through the prism of close personal friendships rather than party politics. Support for a middle way between Communism and the KMT also complemented a number of British political initiatives at this time which promoted a negotiated political settlement and the introduction of western-style institutions into China. For instance, two cross-party parliamentary delegations were sent to China (in 1943 and 1947), and the textile workers' leader Ernest Thornton joined a Board of Trade mission in 1946 to investigate the state of Chinese trade unionism. Ultimately, however, the 'third road' proved to be an illusion. Neither the KMT nor the Communists were interested in compromise, and the result was ever-greater polarization. Hsiao Ch'ien, who had returned to China at the end of the war in order to promote democratic change though the journal *Ta Kung Pao*, later accepted that he was 'too much a liberal. . . . I wanted to be a "neutral" not realising that there wasn't or couldn't be such a thing.'[118] The Chinese government

[114] See articles by Hewlett Johnson and Arthur Clegg in the *Daily Worker*, 7 March 1944 and 4 May 1944.

[115] LHASC, LP/ID Box 1, 18 February 1946, Secretary to Dr Wou Sao-fong. However, there was some limited sympathy for the KMT in Labour's ranks during the Cold War. In 1956 George Dallas, a former member of the Labour NEC, founded a 'Friends of Free China' in support of the KMT regime on Taiwan (see Steve Tsang, *The Cold War's odd couple: The unintended partnership between the Republic of China and the United Kingdom, 1950–1958*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 42–4).

[116] LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/22/05, Arthur Clegg, 'Information report on China'.

[117] See, for instance, *New Statesman*, 13, 20 January, and 10 February 1945, 93–4; LHASC, LP/ID Box 1, 18 February 1946, Secretary to Dr Wou Sao-fong.

[118] MML, Clegg papers, 18 February 1980, D. Bryan to Clegg, citing a letter from Hsiao Ch'ien. Ch'ien, *Traveller*.

banned the CDL in October 1947, and when it was later reconstituted in Hong Kong it was as a close ally of the Communist Party[119]. Likewise, the government cracked down on the Chinese Association of Labour, which was associated with the TUC through the World Federation of Trade Unions. Its leader Chu Hsueh-fan fled to Hong Kong in 1946 and, after surviving an alleged attempt on his life, eventually joined the Communists in north China. Ernest Thornton returned from China convinced that the government was a 'Kuomintang dictatorship, corrupt and inefficient'. While unimpressed with the standard of Chinese trade unionism, he found the Communist workers' leader Liu Ning-i 'a most sober minded and likeable person', and wrote a letter of recommendation for him when he visited Britain[120].

The non-Communist left had a particular interest in the future of Hong Kong. Prior to the end of the war many had assumed—as argued in a paper by the Labour Party Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions—that the colony was not defensible and would have to be returned to China. If Britain did seek to reclaim Hong Kong it would soon be driven out by strikes and boycotts, thereby losing both 'face' and trade[121]. The British government's swift and decisive action to retake the colony in August/September 1945 scotched this argument, but posed the new question of how a basis of lasting consent for British rule could be built amongst the Chinese population. The situation was complicated by the fact that during 1945–9 the colony was a cockpit for political conflict between the KMT and the Chinese Communists. The role of Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, who had returned from Hong Kong to Britain to divide her time between working for the Fabian Colonial Bureau and the CCC, was particularly significant at this point. She acted as a valuable channel between the British government and her many friends in Hong Kong (including both reform-minded colonial officials and left-wing Chinese politicians), and was in no hurry for Hong Kong to be returned to China. Her position was that reformist British rule was preferable to that of the KMT's 'Gestapo', and in 1948 she told her Chinese friends that they must cooperate with the British against the KMT 'if you wish us to keep Hong Kong until the democratic forces have triumphed in China'[122]. She praised the practical improvements in health and education that had been achieved since 1945 and argued that this must be

[119] See Marina Svensson, *Debating human rights in China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 187–96; Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive encounter: The Chinese Civil War, 1946–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 55–6.

[120] LHASC, LP/ID Box 6, 16 January 1947, inter-departmental memorandum; MRC, Mss 292/951/2, 1 March 1947, Thornton to E. Bell.

[121] Rhodes House, FCB 152/1, ACIQ paper 252 A, May 1943, plus accompanying papers. The British government, however, only briefly contemplated relinquishing Hong Kong during the war, and in November 1944 Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee publicly signalled a commitment to reassert Britain's authority (see Steve Tsang, *A modern history of Hong Kong* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 129–32).

[122] MML, Clegg papers, letter fragment of February 1946. Selwyn-Clarke wrote that she disagreed with her 'old Socialist friends' such as Lord Marley, Fenner Brockway, Frank Horrabin, and Lord Faringdon who had no interest in the future of Hong Kong and thought that it should be returned to China; MML, Clegg papers, 16 February 1948, HSC to Mr Sa.

accelerated in the 'uncertain period' before a final decision was taken on the colony's future[123].

The willingness by colonial administrators to contemplate change, reinforced by the less deferential '1946 outlook' amongst the Chinese population, fostered a situation in which the left could press for wide-ranging reforms and expect a hearing from the British government. After all, Lord Listowel, who was appointed as Minister of State at the Colonial Office in January 1948, remained, for the time being, the President of the CCC. In 1946 the Fabian Colonial Bureau's call for Hong Kong to become a 'model of a progressive democratic community' was answered positively by the backbench Labour MP David Rees Williams, who said that the colony could soon be a 'little model state' under a Chinese governor. (Rees Williams became a junior minister at the Colonial Office in October 1947[124].) Although projects for establishing democratic government ultimately came to nothing[125], there was still abundant scope for social reform. One positive consequence of the 1946 trade mission was the government's appointment of Ken Baker as trade union advisor in Hong Kong, with the task of encouraging the development of trade unionism in the 'proper way', free from infiltration by Communists and the KMT[126]. However, Baker soon came to feel that the combination of an increasingly repressive and anti-communist colonial administration, the lack of support from Whitehall, and the impact of the Cold War, made his work almost impossible[127]. He was deeply disappointed by the reluctance of Lord Listowel, during his visit in April 1948, to meet progressive Chinese political groups, and became convinced that the Labour government was scared of offending the United States. By July 1949 Bishop Hall described him as 'lonely and discouraged'[128]. Again, the left's good intentions were coming to nothing. As Margaret Watson, a colonial administrator and active Fabian, wrote to Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, it was a 'hopeless task' in current circumstances to 'impose Socialist colonial ideas from above'[129]. By the late 1940s Rees Williams's repeated reference to Hong Kong as the 'shop window of democracy in the Far East' was just as meaningless as Bevin's description of the colony as the 'Berlin of the East'[130]. Hong Kong only remained a British colony because of its economic value to China and because, for the time being, it suited both the Communists and the KMT to preserve it as a neutral base for their political operations[131].

[123] Michael Lindsay papers, draft memorandum by Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, June 1949.

[124] Rhodes House, FCB 152/1, 27 November 1946, FCB to Arthur Creech Jones; *New Statesman*, 25 January 1947, 66–7.

[125] See Steve Tsang, *Democracy shelved: Great Britain, China and attempts at constitutional reform in Hong Kong, 1945–1952* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[126] MRC, MSS 292/951.5/1, correspondence between Sir Leslie Boyce and Sir Stafford Cripps.

[127] See for instance, Rhodes House, FCB papers, 152/3, 6 April 1948, Baker to Rita Hinden, and July 1948, copy of his letter to Bishop Hall.

[128] MRC, MSS 292/951.5/1, 6 July 1949, Hall to Vincent Tewson.

[129] MML, Clegg papers, 7 February 1947, 'M' to Hilda Selwyn-Clarke.

[130] *New Statesman*, 25 January 1947, 66–7; Rhodes House, FCB 152/1, 26 April 1949, Colonial Office press release.

[131] In December 1946 Mao told a British journalist that he did not seek an early return of Hong Kong (Tsang, *History of Hong Kong*, 153).

The polarization of the post-war years also affected the BUACF. Lady Isobel Cripps made a triumphant visit to China in October–November 1946, during which she visited Chiang Kai-shek and flew to Yenan on an American plane to meet Mao Tse-tung. There were comical aspects to the story—her departure was commemorated in verse by the Chinese Ambassador, and her demands (supported by her husband) for the British government to fly her party to China provoked a testy exchange of letters between Clement Attlee and his Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin[132]. Even so, the warmth of her reception was genuine and the business of the mission was serious[133]. Lady Cripps wanted the fund to continue but was aware that a combination of the civil war in China and mounting criticism in Britain necessitated a new basis for its work[134]. The key member of the party, therefore, was the Australian public servant Eleanor Hinder who had worked in China since the 1920s and who had been seconded from UNRRA at Lady Cripps's request. Hinder's proposal was that the fund should abandon short-term relief work in favour of long-term support in education and training. In effect, the intention would be to share Britain's expertise in social welfare by seconding civil servants to work with China's Ministry of Social Affairs. If possible, the scheme would be extended to the authorities in the Communist-controlled areas as well. The proposal was endorsed by the British government despite initial hostility from Bevin who asked: 'Is China short of money to do this herself? We have tremendous troubles here at home'[135]. Hinder's plan eventually failed due to the increasing paralysis of the Nationalist government and the continuing decline in fundraising in Britain. However, the idea was preserved in the Sino-British Fellowship Trust, which was established under Lady Cripps's chairmanship in 1949 with the intention of allowing Chinese students to study in Britain[136]. Yet, even in decline, the left's animosity towards the fund remained palpable. An MI5 phone tap in 1949 caught Dorothy Woodman complaining that she was about to go to a BUACF meeting for the first time in 18 months. It was only still in existence, she said, because 'Isobel's face must be saved' and 'if she could break the whole thing up she would do so'[137].

[132] Bodleian Library, Attlee papers, dep. 40. The Ambassador predicted that: 'Millions of *Changs* and *Wangs* with open arms/The Albion maiden envoy will embrace/whose rare benevolence and natural charms/profoundly touch the heart of an ancient race' (Bodleian Library, Cripps papers, SC-26).

[133] For accounts of the Cripps mission and its aftermath, see the typescript by Cripps's daughter Peggy in Bodleian Library, Oxford, Cripps papers, SC-26 and TNA FO 371/53667/53668/53669 & 63311.

[134] The criticism was threefold: 1) that a 'huge percentage' of the funds went to the Chinese treasury; 2) that too little went to the Communist-controlled areas; and 3) that the fund relied overly on emotive appeals that created a poor image of modern China. For the first point, see John Blofeld (who formerly worked in the British embassy), *Red China in Perspective* (London: Allan and Wingate, 1951), 154–5. For examples of BUACF publicity, see *The Times*, 13 January 1945 and 24 January 1947. See also TNA FO371/63313.

[135] TNA FO 371/63311. For Hinder's career, see the entry by Meredith Foley and Heather Radi in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, online edition.

[136] The trust still exists: see the Sino-British Fellowship Trust, *Report and Survey, 1947–1994* (East Sheen: 1994). I am grateful to Anne Elizabeth Ely for providing me with this report.

[137] KV2/1607, intercept of 17 February 1949.

THE CIVIL WAR AND THE ECLIPSE OF THE CHINA CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

The Chinese civil war was conducted on an epic scale[138] but, until its final stages, went largely unnoticed in Britain. To the outside observer it was an amorphous conflict, with no sharply defined beginning and a protracted endgame. China's decline into all-out civil war accompanied the breakdown of negotiations for a political settlement during 1945–6, and was accelerated by the sudden withdrawal of Russian forces from Manchuria in March 1946. Although the Communists suffered serious reverses, above all the loss of their 'capital' Yenan in March 1947, the decisive struggle for Manchuria turned steadily in their favour during 1947–8. Britain's Labour government, which had a surfeit of pressing issues to deal with, gave little attention to China in the immediate post-war years. It broadly adhered to the Moscow declaration of December 1945 which committed Britain, the USA, and the USSR to a policy of non-intervention in Chinese affairs. However, it was content to let the United States—which provided large-scale, if intermittent, support to Chiang Kai-shek—take the lead. It took the *Amethyst* incident in the summer of 1949 (when a British frigate was attacked by Communist forces on the Yangtze) to awaken public interest. Even the left was short of reliable information from China, and did not have a seasoned journalist *in situ* until the arrival of the *Daily Worker*'s Alan Winnington in March 1948. The outcome of the war had become clear by the spring of 1949 when, following a humiliating Communist defeat in a parliamentary by-election, Harry Pollitt commented that: 'We may not have won St Pancras, but we've got China'[139]. As Chinese Communist forces occupied Nanking and Shanghai in April–May 1949, both the British government and the British left scurried to make important decisions about how to relate to a 'new China' governed by the Communists and 'leaning towards' the Soviet Union.

In essence, however, the left had formed its view long before the civil war entered its concluding phase. Crucially, for the reasons explored above, it had rejected Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT and accepted—albeit in some cases reluctantly—that the Communists had earned the right to represent the new, 'democratic' China. It was particularly important that the KMT was seen as the aggressor, as the perceived failings of the KMT regime far outweighed any doubts about the Communists' intentions. In January 1947 Lord Lindsay told the House of Lords that the Nationalist government made even Franco's despised Spanish regime look 'liberal, democratic and civilized', while a year later the Labour MP Major Wilfred Vernon contrasted the 'efficient, humane and democratic' opposition parties with the 'tyrannical, inefficient and thoroughly corrupt' KMT[140]. The Chinese Communists, meanwhile, continued to be seen as moderate socialists at the head of a democratic united front. The British Council representative in Shanghai told Ernest Thornton that the Communists

[138] The best account is in Westad, *Decisive encounters*; see also Dreyer, *China at war*, 312–49.

[139] Alison Macleod, *The death of Uncle Joe* (Woodbridge: Merlin, 1997), 16. The by-election in St Pancras North was on 10 March 1949.

[140] *Hansard, Parl. Debs (Lords)*, 23 January 1947, cols 123–4; 23 January 1948, cols 580.

contained 'many of the best types of Chinese', such as the urbane Chou En-lai. Thornton was also repeatedly told by British and American observers in 1946 that the 'so-called "communists" were not communists of the Russian type, but were primarily agrarian reformers'.[141] Although this interpretation was no longer accepted within the Foreign Office after 1946, it continued to be a widely held view on the left—although how far British Communists actually believed it is open to question. William Rust, editor of the *Daily Worker*, wrote in his review of 1948 that western commentators were wrong to see the Chinese Communists as 'pink' rather than red. 'Mao Tse-tung' he added 'is not Chinese for [Herbert] Morrison'[142].

As the Chinese Communists moved towards victory, they took practical steps to improve their relations with Britain and the CPGB. Alan Winnington was sent to China by Harry Pollitt not primarily as a journalist, but rather to advise the Chinese Communists—at their request—on press relations[143]. Conversely, the artist and journalist Jack Chen, who had spent most of the war in Britain and then reported on China for *Reynolds News* in 1946–7, was asked to return to Britain by the Chinese Communist Party. He took Raymond Wong with him to establish the New China News Agency (Xinhua) in London, where they joined forces with Samuel Chinque, a Communist Party member and the former leader of the Chinese seamen in Liverpool. Chen also, as we shall see, acted as an emissary for the CCP to the British left[144]. Meanwhile, from April 1949 onwards Arthur Clegg and Reginald Bridgeman participated in a committee chaired by the left-wing Labour MP John Platts Mills to establish a new organization intended to promote 'peaceful relations and trade with the new China'[145]. The committee convened a Britain–China conference in early December 1949, which was attended by more than 300 delegates from trade unions, trades councils, and political organizations[146]. One notable absentee was Bertrand Russell who refused to support the conference and pointedly told Bridgeman that he doubted if he would be in sympathy with its aims. He later wrote that he 'felt desolated' at the triumph of the Communist revolution and feared the destruction of 'what I had found delightful and admirable in China'[147]. However, the conference did have

[141] MRC, Mss 292/951/1, Thornton's report.

[142] *Daily Worker*, 31 December 1948.

[143] Alan Winnington, *Breakfast with Mao: Memoirs of a foreign correspondent* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), 61–2. According to Winnington, Pollitt told him that: 'You could double as a correspondent'. Winnington's first report was published in the *Daily Worker*, on 15 July 1948.

[144] Jack Chen, *Inside the Cultural Revolution* (London: Sheldon Press, 1975), 44–8; disappointingly, Yuan-Tsung Chen, *Return to the middle kingdom*, has little to say on this period in Chen's life; TNA KV2/996 demonstrates Chen and Wong's links to the left-wing Labour MP Wilfred Vernon. For Chinque, see LMA, Chinque papers, LMA/4520/03/01/018 (typescript memoir by Gwong Wha, 1 December 2004), 7–8.

[145] The best source on the conference and formation of the BCFA is Hull, DBN 21/4. See 25 May 1949, circular by Neil Stewart, referring to a meeting in the previous month. The committee included the Communist trade unionist (and later Maoist) Reg Birch. See also Clegg, *Aid China*, 176–7.

[146] For a detailed account, see the Special Branch report in TNA HO 45/25583, 865004/196. The report claimed that the hall was only two-thirds full, and that 'it was only when references were made to the USSR and the Communist Party that the audience showed any great enthusiasm' (p. 14).

[147] Hull, DBN, DBN 21/3, Russell to Bridgeman, 27 October 1949; Bertrand Russell, *Unarmed victory* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 71.

the support of the new Chinese authorities, as one Chinese delegate was heard to say that: 'I may soon be on the Embassy staff'. (Although, in fact, a Chinese diplomatic presence was not established until 1954[148].) A more immediate outcome of the conference was the formation of the permanent Britain–China Friendship Association (BCFA), and new members were offered commemorative badges and mounted pictures of Mao Tse-tung[149].

These developments clearly had significant implications for the future of the China Campaign Committee. The leaders of the CCC realized that they must broaden the committee's work, or even make a new start, but were not given the opportunity to do so[150]. Not only had the CCC been bypassed within Britain, but, in a remarkable fall from grace, it was even treated in later years with hostility by the People's Republic of China[151]. Clegg, in his history of the CCC, was highly critical of its final years, although given his own role in its demise his account cannot be regarded as wholly impartial. He depicted it as an organization which had ceased active campaigning and which had 'dangerously altered its function' by acting as a channel between the Labour government and China. 'Its final blunder', he concluded, 'was to allow itself to be used as a catspaw by the Foreign and Colonial Offices'[152]. This charge clearly referred to serious political disagreements during 1948–9, but may also have reflected deeper suspicions which Clegg did not detail in his book. For instance, as early as 1943 he appears to have believed that Dorothy Woodman was 'an agent'—presumably of the British government[153]. He undoubtedly disapproved of the direction in which Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, with her Hong Kong contacts and links to the Colonial Office, was leading the committee. Although Clegg offered no full explanation of why the CCC had to be replaced, the answer surely lies in two contrasting

[148] Special Branch report in TNA HO 45/25583, p. 15. There were said to be 20 Chinese present at the conference. The man was identified as 'Sam Ching': this was presumably Samuel Chinque (Chen Tian Sheng). (See obituary in *The Guardian*, 17 December 2004.) In 1955 'Sam (CHEN)' was identified as the principal contact between the CPGB and the Chinese legation—according to Betty Reid 'old Sam came in [to CPGB headquarters] from time to time' (TNA, KV2/2046, summary of surveillance dated 19 March 1955).

[149] Hull DBN 21/4, 5 January 1950, Dribbon to BCFA members.

[150] Michael Lindsay papers, 30 January 1949, Woodman to Lindsay; TNA, KV2/1607, 21 February 1949, phone conversation between Woodman and Lindsay.

[151] Clegg reports that the CCC was deemed to be a 'reactionary organisation' in China during the Cultural Revolution, *Aid China*, 181; however, a letter in his papers suggests that the 'slur' against the committee occurred far earlier. Tien Ju-kang, who was active in the CCC in 1946–8, told Clegg that: 'Unfortunately, when I went back to China in 1950, owing to various reasons and to my great surprise, the nature of the CCC was regarded as doubtful by the official circles' and he was placed under surveillance for many years. Even now, he went on, his relationship with the CCC 'needs clarification' and he hoped for evidence to 'allay the suspicion attached to me' (see his letters to Clegg dated 10 July 1980 and 26 July 1980, MML).

[152] Clegg, *Aid China*, 172, 178.

[153] KV2/1607, 10 February 1943, records the following conversation between Pollitt and Clegg. 'Pollitt: "So what you're hinting is that she's an agent". Clegg: "Er, yes. I think she's a very different kind of person from what she was four or five years ago" '. Clegg was probably correct to harbour suspicion about an intelligence service 'mole', although not necessarily with regard to Woodman. The fact that MI5 had access to CCC minutes indicates that it was receiving some help from inside the committee.

comments in his book: the first was that the committee had *not* 'outlived its usefulness', and the second that it 'committed suicide'[154]. In effect, as the new Communist era dawned in China, the CCC refused to play its allotted role of offering uncritical support.

This was far from apparent, however, during the early phase of the civil war. Michael Lindsay became the new chairman of the CCC on his return from China. To the frustration of his colleagues, he promptly departed in September 1946 to lecture at Harvard until the middle of the following year. However, he eventually proved to be a reasonably effective leader, especially in parliamentary circles where he benefited greatly from his father's expertise and contacts. (He also primed his father to make a number of significant speeches on China in the House of Lords.) As the civil war intensified the CCC began to mobilize an increasing number of MPs, not only those on the Labour left such as Major Vernon, but even Conservatives with connections to business interests in China. Michael Lindsay's position at this time was highly supportive of the Chinese Communists, portraying them in 1948 as genuinely tolerant and able to deal with opposition without resorting to 'Russian-style secret police terrorism'[155]. A further indication of the CCC's growing support for the Chinese Communists came in the middle of 1948 when it debated a new policy statement. Although the document was not wholly to the liking of Clegg and Bridgeman, it clearly expressed a lack of confidence in the KMT government and called for Britain to make contact with the Communist authorities in northern China. With a nod to the fate of the Democratic League, an amendment asserted that 'as a fundamental human principle, people of all political viewpoints should be protected from persecution'[156]. A draft of the statement was published in the Chinese press and embarrassed those members of the government still associated with the CCC. On the recommendation of the Foreign Office, and with little encouragement needed, Lord Listowel duly resigned as president[157].

As late as the middle of 1948, therefore, the committee appeared to be still in step with the Chinese Communists, although the political pressures on it were intensifying. In his evidence to the US congressional McCarran hearings on Internal Security in 1952, Michael Lindsay stated that at 'the end of 1948 or beginning of 1949' Jack Chen had called for the CCC to give its full support to the Chinese Communists and the Liberated Areas. Lindsay presented this as a decisive moment in the history of the CCC: 'We [i.e. the officers—Lindsay, Dorothy Woodman, and Hilda Selwyn-Clarke] could not commit ourselves to unconditional support and felt that we served a more useful purpose for Sino-British friendship by remaining independent. Most probably as a result of this reply… Mr Jack Ch'en and

[154] Clegg, *Aid China*, 172, 177.

[155] *New Statesman*, 3 April 1948, 274.

[156] A copy of the final published version is in Rhodes House, FCB Box 165. For drafts and proposed amendments see Hull, DBN/21; Michael Lindsay papers, comments of 23 May 1948 by Jack Chen.

[157] See TNA, FO 371/69638. The FO also said that it recommended the resignation of Philip Noel-Baker as Vice President.

members of the British Communist Party organised the Britain–China Friendship Association in 1949…'[158]. It should be noted that a letter of August 1948, written by Lindsay to a leftist Chinese contact, not only gives a slightly earlier date for this incident (the middle of 1948) but also suggests that the committee's initial response was far less decisive. Lindsay's comment at the time was that Selwyn-Clarke, Woodman, 'and I all felt that there was a lot to be said for this. The only real hope for China was a complete victory for the C. P'[159]. Although the exact sequence of events is unclear, however, the interpretation expressed by Lindsay at the McCarran hearings was doubtless genuine, and it seems very likely that at some point in the latter months of 1948 the committee explicitly refused to provide the level of commitment that both the British and Chinese Communist parties were now seeking.

During 1949, under Lindsay's leadership, the independence of the CCC was expressed increasingly pointedly—and idiosyncratically. In March 1949 Lindsay won the support of a cross-party group of MPs for a statement that called for the British government to reach an understanding with the 'new regime in China', or run the risk of losing China to the Communist side in the Cold War. Lindsay's drafting is evident in the comment that there was some chance of success given that 'the Chinese are probably the most reasonable Communists and the British the most reasonable non-Communists'. The Foreign Office dismissed Lindsay's analysis of the Chinese Communists and in particular his reference to the Western powers' 'continued lack of any response to [their] offers of friendly cooperation'. A Foreign Office official correctly minuted that 'the Chinese communists have never made any advances to us, and in any case our policy is to do business with them and carry on as usual *if* they will let us'[160]. Indeed, since December 1948 the British government had been determined to preserve its business and diplomatic interests by keeping 'a foot in the door', but for the Communist authorities the first priority was relations with the Soviet Union rather than the Western powers.

Despite this rebuff Lindsay still believed that he could play a central role in the new pattern of Sino-British relations. His father apparently visited the Foreign Office and suggested that Lindsay should be sent as an 'unofficial emissary to the Communists [who could] bring us back the whole truth'[161]. In the autumn of 1949 Michael Lindsay and his wife did finally return to Beijing, albeit sponsored by the Institute of Pacific Relations and the *New Statesman* rather than the British government. By now bilateral relations had been placed under strain by a concatenation of the *Amethyst* incident, the British decision to reinforce the Hong Kong garrison, and the outbreak of the Malayan insurgency. Lindsay took with him a controversial statement from the CCC which, while deprecating the latest

[158] 'McCarran hearings', 5413. I am very grateful to Susan Lawrence for drawing my attention to this source.

[159] TNA KV2/1607, 29 August 1948, Lindsay to Kung P'eng.

[160] TNA, FO 371/75747.

[161] TNA, FO 371/75747, 29 March 1949, comment by Esler Dening, who added that: 'When I suggested [Michael Lindsay] might not discover the whole truth, but only the party line, his lordship replied "Rubbish"'.

emergency regulations in Hong Kong, called on China to play a constructive role in resolving these questions through peaceful negotiation[162]. This was too much for Arthur Clegg, who was already involved in planning the Britain–China conference, and regarded Lindsay's mission as futile. In his view, the officers of the CCC had finally abandoned the organization's guiding principle: 'the defence of China against imperialism'[163]. During his visit Lindsay reported positively on the new China in a series of articles and saw 'good reason to hope . . . that China will become a genuinely democratic society'[164]. There is no record of how the CCC's statement was received by the Chinese Communist leadership to whom Lindsay still had privileged access. However, Clegg's negative assessment of Lindsay's visit is supported by an interesting first-hand source. Hetta Empson, who had returned to Beijing with her husband after the war and even applied to join the Chinese Communist Party, wrote to a friend that: 'I thought Michael Lindsay was pretty awful, all he did here was to say how stinking Soviet Russia is and I rather think he won't be invited to come again. . . . [He] got very cagey whenever British foreign policy was brought up. He seems to be some kind of a mouldy Liberal intellectual . . .'[165]

During the closing stages of the civil war, the *Amethyst* incident, more than Lindsay's optimism, pointed to the impact that China would have on Britain in the immediate future. The frigate was shelled by Red Army artillery on 20 April 1949 while sailing up the Yangtze to Nanking, and heavy casualties were suffered on both sides. Its eventual escape downriver at the end of July captured the public imagination and turned opinion against the Chinese Communists[166]. The British sailors were portrayed as heroes in the press—including the Labour Party's *Daily Herald*—in a way that British Communists (as the historian Raphael Samuel later recalled) simply could not share[167]. The incident again painted the British Communists as unpatriotic, as Harry Pollitt found out when he ill-advisedly decided to fulfil speaking obligations in Devon on 22–4 April. Given that he was due to address meetings in Dartmouth and Plymouth, both strongholds of the Royal Navy, the decision was brave but foolhardy. Peter Kerrigan, a former commissar with the International Brigades who acted as Pollitt's bodyguard, left a graphic

[162] The statement was actually drafted by Hilda Selwyn-Clarke (Michael Lindsay papers); see also Hull, DBN/21.

[163] Clegg, *Aid China*, 176.

[164] See Lindsay's articles in *New Statesman*, 12 November 1949, 540–1; 26 November 1949, 608–9; 10 December 1949, 683–4; and 24 December 1949, 751. However, Lindsay struggled to provide the 'colour' on the Chinese Communist 'big shots' that Kingsley Martin was hoping for. In a letter to the *New York Nation*, while attempting to sell the rights to Lindsay's articles, Martin conceded that Lindsay was not an 'exciting' journalist, but noted that his reports would be unique (see Sussex University, *New Statesman* papers, Kingsley Martin's correspondence, letter dated 13 June 1949).

[165] Haffenden, *Empson*, ii. 693 (Sheffield University, Empson papers, 5/60, 19 November 1949, Hetta Empson to 'Dick').

[166] For a detailed account, see Malcolm H. Murfett, *Hostage on the Yangtze: Britain, China and the Amethyst crisis of 1949* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

[167] *Daily Herald*, 2 November 1949; Samuel wrote that 'to us the *Amethyst* was an imperialist gunboat', (Raphael Samuel, *The lost world of British communism* (London: Verso, 2006), 48).

account of the resulting fracas. He claimed that Pollitt briefly held the crowd's attention in Dartmouth 'with a brilliant statement of the Party position and the facts on the victorious advance of the Chinese Revolution'. Whatever his oratorical powers, however, it is clear that the Communist leader was fortunate to escape serious injury at the final meeting as enraged sailors kept up a barrage of bricks—the rubble from Plymouth's wartime bombing[168]. The *Amethyst* incident also hardened the attitude of the Labour government over Hong Kong and, on 5 May 1949, the Cabinet approved the dispatch of 30,000 troops to the indefensible colony. In an opinion poll taken on 28 November 1949, a clear majority of the British public—and even Labour supporters—opposed recognition of the Chinese Communist government[169].

* * *

On 1 October 1949 Mao Tse-tung declared the formation of the People's Republic of China in Tiananmen Square. The defeated Chiang Kai-shek retreated with the remnants of his army to the sanctuary of Taiwan where, under US protection, he proceeded to establish a surprisingly successful and durable state. For British Communists, the victory of Mao and his followers was the occasion for wonder and celebration. Here was a revolution second only in magnitude to that of 1917, which would transform the balance of international power and guarantee the end of imperialism in Asia. Harry Pollitt welcomed China's adhesion to the Soviet-led 'Peace Bloc' and pledged his party to work for the closest possible relations with the new China, although he added that China was still a backward country and that Socialism was still a long way off[170]. For Tommy Jackson, a 70-year old Communist, this was a moment of political fulfilment: 'The Red Flag flies in triumph: mine eyes have seen it!'[171] For Arthur Clegg, meanwhile, the victory meant that for 'Chang from the foundries', the Chinese everyman, 'the end of the dying is in sight'[172]. Non-Communists were less certain. Dorothy Woodman admitted that the Communists were more honest than the KMT, but privately feared that their 'rather crazy ideas' might alienate the Chinese intelligentsia[173]. Even so, the historic significance of the events in China could not be disputed. When the *Daily Herald* asked eight prominent people to rank the top ten events of 1949, two (Harold Laski and the Methodist leader Donald Soper) placed the 'Chinese Communist victories' first—ahead of the Soviet atom bomb, the formation of NATO, devaluation, and even the 'acid bath murders' of John George Haigh. Laski noted that the Chinese revolution 'changes the whole temper and tempo in the Far East'[174]. It

[168] LHASC, CP/IND/MISC/18/07, undated ts, 'Harry Pollitt and the "Amethyst" '.

[169] Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 162. The figures were 29 per cent in favour, 45 per cent opposed: amongst those intending to vote Labour the figures were still 34 percent in favour and 37 percent against.

[170] *Daily Worker*, 26 September 1949.

[171] *Daily Worker*, 22 August 1949.

[172] *Labour Monthly*, January 1949, 21–2; see Clegg also invoked 'Chang' in his *New China, New World* (London: Birch books, 1949), 34.

[173] TNA KV2/1607, phone tap of 22 March 1949.

[174] *Daily Herald*, 28 December 1949. The Labour MP Frederick Elwyn Jones ranked China fourth, and the Soviet bomb first.

was a world turned upside down. As Palme Dutt caustically observed about the *Amethyst* affair, a century after the Opium War 'the citizens of London are called on to line the streets to celebrate the escape of a gunboat from China'[175]. With the Royal Navy driven from Chinese waterways and British soldiers confronting 'youthful [Communist] fanatics' on the barbed wire perimeter of Hong Kong, China was set to test the British left as never before[176].

[175] *Labour Monthly*, January 1950, 2.
[176] *Daily Herald*, 28 October 1949.

4

1950–1953: The Sino-British Crisis

AGNES SMEDLEY'S ASHES

Perhaps the most poignant moment at the Britain–China Conference in December 1949 was a brief—and in the event valedictory—speech by Agnes Smedley. The great American radical who had recently come to Britain, in poor health and fleeing harassment by the US authorities, died in an Oxford hospital on 6 May 1950. The juncture was a significant one as the guerrilla fighters that she had joked and danced with thirteen years earlier in Yenan were now the leaders of the world's most populous country. Mao, Chou En-lai, and, above all, Chu Teh honoured her passing, but in the future they would look to apologists such as Rewi Alley and Anna Louise Strong to convey their story to the wider world[1]. When Smedley was cremated there was a further poignancy. The mourners were led by Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, her old friend from the days of the China Defence League in Hong Kong, and Arthur Clegg, who would be present a year later when her ashes were buried in Beijing. By 1950 these two had come to represent very different aspects of the British left's relationship with the 'new China'. For Clegg, a Communist and prime mover in the Britain–China Friendship Association, the formation of the People's Republic signified not only a decisive break with China's past but also a dramatic shift in the balance of the Cold War. For Selwyn-Clarke, on the left wing of the Labour Party, enthusiasm for the new China was tinged with apprehension as to how an untested revolutionary state would behave on the world stage. Such differences may have seemed briefly irrelevant at Smedley's funeral, but, following the outbreak of the Korean War barely a month later, could no longer be avoided. Between 1950 and 1953, relations with China not only became a central question within national politics, but also a significant cause of division within the British left[2].

[1] Strong was expelled from the Soviet Union as a 'Titoist' in 1949 and cold-shouldered by the Chinese Communists until the mid 1950s (see TNA KV2/3043; Strong and Keyser, *Right in her soul*. For Alley, see Anne-Marie Brady's *Making the foreign serve China: Managing foreigners in the People's Republic* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) and *Friend of China: The myth of Rewi Alley* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

[2] For Smedley's funeral and the burial of her ashes, see Price, *Agnes Smedley*, 411–18, and TNA KV2/2208. Her final article (on the continuing Nationalist air raids on China from Taiwan) was published in the *Labour Monthly*, July 1950, 302–4.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: 1950–1951

In December 1949 Marian Ramelson, a Communist trade unionist from Leeds, alighted in China after crossing Russia on the Trans-Siberian railway. The cost of sending her to attend an Asian women's conference—£250—had been raised from political sympathizers, and Ramelson was accorded the honour of being the first British representative to greet the People's Republic in Beijing. Her visit coincided with the Britain–China conference in London which was, she noted, '[v]ery well received. Made front page China press…'. On her return to Britain she spoke to more than forty meetings, and 10,000 copies of a pamphlet describing her experiences were printed by the Communist Party[3]. As British businessmen, missionaries, and academics began to leave a China that no longer welcomed them, Ramelson was the first of the new wave of British visitors. During the next decade many more would follow her on official delegations, while others came to live and work as translators and journalists. At a time when bilateral relations between Britain and the PRC remained cold and unformed, the early 1950s represented the moment for the British left, and above all for the Communist Party, to act as a point of contact between the two countries.

The new decade had started optimistically. The Labour government recognized the People's Republic on 6 January 1950, and expected to progress to full diplomatic relations[4]. Its reasons were essentially pragmatic—Britain wanted to protect Hong Kong and its commercial interests in China—but Ernest Bevin was also hopeful that China could be weaned away from dependence on the Soviet Union. Here, however, the foreign office had miscalculated, as Mao's primary objective was to forge an alliance with the Soviet Union. He was already in Moscow when Britain extended recognition, and a Sino-Soviet treaty was eventually signed on 14 February 1950. The Soviet Union offered generous military and economic support, although the clauses granting it a lease to the port of Dairen, as well as mineral and railway rights in Manchuria, indicated that this was still not quite—as the *Daily Worker* claimed—China's first 'equal treaty'[5]. By contrast, Britain's overtures were almost an embarrassment to China, and a number of thorny issues—most notably the continuing presence of a British consulate on Taiwan and the PRC's demand for China's seat at the UN—delayed negotiations over full diplomatic relations. Although Britain voted for the PRC's accession to the UN for the first time in September 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War made further diplomatic progress impossible in the short term. Relations did improve in 1954, but ambassadors were not finally exchanged between Britain and the PRC until 1972.

[3] LHASC CP/CENT/EC/02/01, report on women's work for June 1949–April 1950, 3, 4; *Daily Worker*, 19 January 1950; Marian Ramelson, *British woman in new China* (Watford: Farleigh Press, 1950). Ramelson's diary/scrapbook, with some photographs, is at LHASC CP/IND/MISC/5/7. She was the representative of the British Committee of the Women's International Democratic Federation.

[4] For the steps leading to recognition, see David C. Wolf, '"To secure a convenience": Britain recognizes China—1950', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18/2 (April 1983), 299–326 and R. Ovendale, 'Britain, the United States and the recognition of Communist China', *The Historical Journal*, 26/1 (1983), 139–58.

[5] *Daily Worker*, 16 February 1950.

Accordingly, the outline of the left's position during the 1950s and 1960s was discernible from an early stage and changed little thereafter: Britain, it was claimed, should have full diplomatic and trading relations with the PRC, and China—reunited with Taiwan—should take its rightful place at the UN.

Until the culmination of the Sino-Soviet split in 1964, the Britain–China Friendship Association (BCFA) played the principal role in organizing the British left's solidarity with the People's Republic. The association organized regular delegations to China (as well as a smaller number of return visits), published pamphlets, and convened public meetings and rallies. It was hardly a mass movement, but at its peak it had over 2,500 individual members[6] (principally in London) as well as a large number of institutional affiliations with trade unions and cooperative societies. Apart from its size, the BCFA differed in two other significant respects from the China Campaign Committee, which was defunct by the end of 1950. First, it had a much stronger and more direct link with the Communist Party. In June 1953 the Communist Party's International Department made clear that it was 'responsible for the political direction of the work of the [BCFA] and for consultation on all important problems'[7]. The BCFA's secretary, Jack Dribbon, was a party member who had joined the CPGB as early as 1921 and had previously been active in the Friends of the Soviet Union[8]. Despite denials that the BCFA was a Communist 'front', the TUC saw it as simply one more means by which the Communist party purveyed 'bogus' friendship to Soviet satellite states[9]. The Labour Party placed it on its list of 'proscribed organizations' in February 1953, although it was agreed that this should not prevent Labour MPs from joining BCFA-organized visits to China[10]. One victim of the proscription was Jim Mortimer, a future General Secretary of the Labour Party, who was excluded from party membership until 1958 for refusing to resign from the association[11]. Secondly, there is some evidence that the BCFA received financial support from the Chinese Communists. When a Chinese 'goodwill' mission arrived in October 1950, the Foreign Office noted that its leader had declared $12–13,000 to customs, and that this may well have gone to the BCFA, which was suddenly 'rolling in money'[12]. A less direct form of subsidy came from state-sponsored Chinese cultural activities in Britain. In 1956 Alan Winnington noted the success of a touring team of variety artists, and added that: 'I suppose the Association is doing well out of it'[13].

Two of the pillars of the BCFA were Derek Bryan and his Chinese wife Hung-ying. Bryan had worked in China with the British consular and diplomatic service

[6] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20, suggests a peak of 2,698 members in 1955, declining to 1,428 in 1956.

[7] LHASC, CP/CENT/PC/02/16, for discussion at Political Bureau on 25 June 1953.

[8] LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/PERS/2/4 (Dribbon's personal file).

[9] MRC, Mss 292951/10, R. Boyfield to Gordon Cree, 19 January 1950.

[10] MRC, Mss 154/8/13, Crossman diary, 26 February 1953.

[11] J. E. Mortimer, *A life on the left* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1998), 119–21. Mortimer was on the BCFA Executive Committee, and later Vice Chairman.

[12] TNA, FO 371/83330, 9 October 1950 memorandum by A. A. E. Franklin.

[13] LHASC, CP/IND/BRAD/7/7, Winnington to Ben Bradley, 15 October 1956. For later examples of sponsorship by such means, see below, pp. 210 and 210 note 166.

since 1933, and met Hung-ying on one of Joseph Needham's scientific expeditions in December 1943. She had studied Chemistry at Margery Fry's Oxford college, Somerville, in the early 1930s, and habitually referred to Fry as her Confucian 'Heavy Father'[14]. After 1945 the couple had watched the disintegration of the KMT regime from the British embassy in Nanking, and were sympathetic to the new order. Hung-ying wrote excitedly and at length to the Needhams to describe the arrival of the 'happy', 'healthy', and disciplined young Communist soldiers in April 1949[15]. Her strong support for the People's Republic and her anti-Americanism, shared—firmly but less volubly—by her Quaker husband, doomed Bryan's diplomatic career[16]. In 1951, while on leave in Britain, he was offered a posting to Peru as Commercial Secretary, with no prospect of a return to China. He chose instead to take early retirement. While living in Cambridge, where Derek studied for an unfinished doctorate on the Taiping rebellion, the Bryans became deeply involved in the lively local committee of the BCFA. Under Hung-ying's steely tutelage the mild-mannered former diplomat became an effective committee chairman and public speaker in defence of China[17].

For the British left the first impressions of the People's Republic were wholly positive. Marian Ramelson reported that 'China is free. That fact lights up the East as a blazing sun'[18]. The picture presented at this stage was of a practically minded regime forging national unity and embarking on timely—but hardly utopian—social and cultural reforms. The fact that one of the early legislative measures, the Marriage Law of May 1950, challenged centuries of inequality and abuse tended to support this view. According to BCFA speakers' notes from 1950, the 'New China' stood for land for the peasants, shorter hours and higher wages for workers, trade union rights, 'votes for all', and radical improvements in literacy and health[19]. Arthur Clegg, who led the first BCFA delegation in April 1951, encountered a land of 'smiles, dances and song…where the common people rule and are now…steadily advancing to Socialism'[20]. George Hardy, who accompanied him, and whose clandestine work in Shanghai during the 1920s was duly honoured, was so struck by the changes afoot that he sensed that 'my life had been rightly spent'[21]. To the outsider, meanwhile, China's teeming revolutionary enthusiasm was still

[14] Innes Herdan, *Liao Hongying: Fragments of a life* (Dereham: Larks Press, 1996), 58; CUL, Needham papers, C49, 6 September 1950, Hung Ying to Dorothy Needham.

[15] CUL, Needham papers, C47, Hung-ying Bryan to Joseph and Dorothy Needham, 12 June 1949. Needham later arranged for the letter to be published anonymously in *Asian Horizon*, 2/2 (Summer 1949), 20–7.

[16] See CUL, Needham papers, C 49, Hung-ying Bryan to Dorothy Needham, 6 September 1950. An enclosed extract of a letter from Derek to his mother (5 September 1950) shows that he had come to question Britain's involvement in the Korean War.

[17] Peter Townsend papers (in the possession of Catherine Townsend); in a letter to Townsend of 9 February 1953, Hung-ying said that that her husband was an excellent chairman, who did not 'um, err, "well" and did not shake his legs'. See also her letter to Townsend, 30 October 1953, advising him on how to improve his talks on China.

[18] *Daily Worker*, 25 January 1950.

[19] LHASC, Hannington papers, undated, but early 1950.

[20] Britain–China Friendship Association, *Britons in China* (London: BCFA, 1952), 9.

[21] Hardy, *Stormy years*, 245–55; see also BFCA, *Britons in China*, 6–7, and *Daily Worker*, 22 May 1951.

inspirational rather than threatening. Jack Brent, a Communist who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, was very taken with a picture of a lecture being delivered to a mass of students at a Beijing college. He told a friend: 'That's the sort of education classes we want. Just imagine a class that size on . . . the *British Road to Socialism* [the Communist party's new programme]—filling Trafalgar Square!'[22]

These cheerful and pacific images were soon to be challenged by China's intervention in the Korean War in the autumn of 1950 and by the increasing radicalism of the Chinese revolution. Before examining these subjects in detail, however, two formative episodes must be discussed. The first was the Chinese occupation of Tibet in October 1950. Although China was reasserting a historic claim to sovereignty, its actions still planted the troubling thought that the People's Republic could act as an aggressor. Kingsley Martin's biographer, C. H. Rolph, wrote that Martin's 'former esteem for the Chinese' did not survive the 'universal disgust' at their invasion of Tibet[23]. This was probably overstated as there is no evidence of such a strong reaction in Britain at the time. Indeed, the British left was broadly sympathetic to China's actions in Tibet. According to an argument that was to be rehearsed many times in years to come, China had not only carried out a justifiable act of national unification, but also liberated a people who were—in the words of Martin's partner Dorothy Woodman—'little more than serfs, working in a feudal theocracy'[24]. It fell to the *Daily Herald*, on the right of the Labour Party, to express concern for how Tibet's 'queer customs' would fare under Chinese rule[25]. More typical was the view of Arthur Clegg, that Tibet's relationship to China was akin to that of Wales to Britain, or Alan Winnington, who reported that 'Tibet has decided to return peacefully to the Chinese motherland . . .'[26]. Even Michael Lindsay, in a book published in 1955 that was otherwise highly critical of China's world role, saw some truth in the claim that Tibetans had been freed from a 'conservative and superstitious native government'. He concluded that China's action, while 'hard to justify', was motivated by 'old fashioned nationalism' rather than aggression[27]. However, there were some signs of discomfort. The *Daily Herald* claimed that British opinion saw China as guilty of an unprovoked attack against a small nation[28], while *Tribune*, the newspaper of the Labour left, criticized China for 'extraordinary political blundering'. Tibet, in its view, was of little value, and the invasion had merely alienated India[29]. This latter point is significant, as the true importance of the invasion for the British left was that it punctured the idea of post-colonial 'Asian' solidarity. Future Himalayan crises—notably the Sino-Indian war of 1962—would force some to choose between the two rising Asian powers.

[22] Stanley Harrison, *Good to be alive: The story of Jack Brent* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954), 86. Brent died soon after the publication of *The British Road to Socialism* in January 1951.
[23] Rolph, *Kingsley*, 319.
[24] *New Statesman*, 4 February 1950, 120–1.
[25] *Daily Herald*, 24 January 1950.
[26] *Daily Worker*, 8 November 1950 and 28 May 1951.
[27] Michael Lindsay, *China and the Cold War: A study in international politics* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1955), 31.
[28] *Daily Herald*, 7 November 1950.
[29] *Tribune*, 3 November 1950.

The second incident concerned the Chinese 'goodwill' delegation of October 1950. This group of academics and intellectuals was led by the Communist trade union leader Liu Ning-yi, who had made a number of visits to Britain in recent years[30]. It was not an 'official' inter-governmental delegation, as the invitation—to attend a rally to celebrate the first anniversary of the PRC on 1 October—came from the BCFA. The visit was extended until the end of October to allow the delegates to attend large and enthusiastic public meetings and civic receptions across Britain, as well as to visit coal mines and universities[31]. Neither the Foreign Office nor the Labour Party was consulted in advance, and both were understandably eager that the delegates should be exposed to non-Communist opinion. An invitation to attend the Labour Party conference was declined, although a 3-hour lunch meeting was eventually arranged with members of the NEC on 23 October. Hugh Dalton (as chair of the International Committee) and Aneurin Bevan led the Labour representatives. At the end of the meeting, Liu Ning-yi read out a prepared statement, which was simultaneously released to *Tass* and the *Daily Worker*. Liu contrasted the warmth of the delegates' reception in Britain with the British government's foreign policy that was 'in practice unfriendly towards New China'. He also warned—at a time when Chinese 'volunteers' were already crossing the Yalu river into Korea—that 'we willl not stand aside' in the Korean War. In reply, a nettled Dalton stated that the delegates had not been allowed to hear 'real' British opinion, and compared their experience to that of a Labour Party delegation to China organized by the KMT![32]

What is most interesting about this episode is the way in which it was misconstrued. Non-Communists took the manner in which the delegation was handled as evidence that the Communist Party was claiming ownership of the Chinese cause. The BCFA, they believed, had rigged the visit to ensure that the delegates would only meet Communists and fellow-travellers: one Labour MP feared that the delegates would become mere 'parade horses for the C.P.'[33]. No-one felt this more acutely than Michael Lindsay, who had agreed to become a Vice President of the BCFA, and who was involved with the tour as a translator. He became convinced from an early stage that the delegation was not about 'friendship' at all, and he was dismayed at the 'gross discourtesy' shown by delegates to non-Communists[34]. He

[30] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 62; above, p. 103; *Daily Worker*, 30 May 1950.

[31] For a detailed report of the tour, see *Britain–China Friendship News*, 6 October–November 1950.

[32] The best account of these events from a Labour Party perspective is the letter from Morgan Phillips to Bevin, 8 November 1950 (TNA FO371/83330; copy in LHASC, LP/GS/INT/2/2). See also TNA FO 371/83330. The lunch was attended by Michael Lindsay and his wife. See also *Daily Worker*, 24 October 1950.

[33] Michael Lindsay papers, John Paton to Lindsay, 23 September 1950. (Paton had used the same phrase in a letter to the Foreign Office on 18 September 1950.)

[34] One event that had to be cancelled (when Liu was called away to Prague at short notice) was a China Campaign Committee conference on 'The significance of the New China', scheduled for 28 October. Although the reason given was genuine, it should be noted that in September Jack Dribbon of the BCFA had complained that the CCC intended to 'cash in' on the delegation and 'steal' the limelight by organizing its own meeting rather than working through his association. One can assume that he was not unhappy at its cancellation (TNA, KV2/1607, surveillance of 5 September 1950). In the event this was the last public meeting ever organized by the CCC.

decided that the Communists' methods should be publicly exposed, and found a willing accomplice in Guy Wint at the *Manchester Guardian*, who agreed that Beijing must be made to realize that it had been 'had' by the CPGB[35]. It was, of course, tempting to blame the Communist-dominated BCFA and to continue to believe in a benevolent, naive, and easily misled 'New China'. There can be no doubt, however, that the infant People's Republic knew what it was doing. The members of the delegation were carefully selected, and the writer Hsiao Ch'ien, who had many friends in left-wing British literary circles, was excluded from it at the last minute[36]. It was also clear to the Foreign Office that Liu's hostile statement was merely delivering the party line[37]. Ultimately, the purpose of the delegation was to consolidate the PRC's relations with its most loyal British supporters rather than to improve relations with the governing Labour Party.

The dispute over the delegation demonstrated how the whole nature of 'friendship' with China had been redefined by the formation of the People's Republic, and Michael Lindsay was the principal casualty of this new dispensation. On 2 January 1951 his exposé was published in the *Manchester Guardian*, alleging that the BCFA only wanted friendship 'in so far as it could be obtained on Communist terms and in forms that fitted the theses of Communist propaganda'. In fact, in a moment of high farce, Lindsay had been persuaded by Joseph Needham (President of the BCFA) to withdraw the article, but his letter to Wint to this effect failed to arrive until six months later![38] The affair bruised feelings on all sides and, after a difficult meeting with the BCFA officers, Lindsay resigned from the association. He left Britain soon afterwards to take up a chair at the Australian National University, and inherited his father's title on Lord Lindsay's death in March 1952. By the 1970s he had come to believe that the Nationalist regime on Taiwan not only protected the traditional Chinese way of life, but that it offered greater freedom and prosperity than Mao's China[39]. Lindsay's departure from the political scene, rather like the death of Agnes Smedley, signalled the end of an individualistic approach to 'friendship' with China, based on personal relationships forged in the war with Japan[40]. For instance, when Hilda Selwyn-Clarke objected to Lindsay's draft article for the *Manchester Guardian* she suggested that, instead, he should

[35] Michael Lindsay papers, Wint to Lindsay, 30 October 1950. Lindsay had started to plan for 'what to do if the delegation has been made a complete failure for promoting Sino-British understanding' in early October. He suggested that an 'exposure' might be published in *Picture Post*, or broadcast to China via the Voice of America (5 October 1950, Lindsay to Woodman).

[36] TNA, FO371/83330, memorandum by A. A. E. Franklin, 9 October 1950; Hsiao Chien, *Traveller*, 178.

[37] TNA, FO371/83330, 1 November 1950, note by A. A. E. Franklin; Lindsay later learnt that Liu Ning-yi had already decided who he wanted to meet before coming to Britain (Lindsay, *China and the Cold War*, 15).

[38] Michael Lindsay papers, Wint to Lindsay, 17 June 1951.

[39] Lindsay, *Unknown war* (unpaginated). The Lindsays returned to the PRC in 1973. Hsiao Li later recalled that on a subsequent lecture tour of North America, Australia and New Zealand audiences were often extremely hostile to her view that the Cultural Revolution was a form of 'collective madness' (Lindsay, *Bold Plum*, 352).

[40] Although Joseph Needham's relationship with China had a similar origin, he was always careful not to preach to the Chinese government.

voice his concerns directly to Chou En-lai. Lindsay did draft such a letter in the autumn of 1951, recalling his private conversations with Chou in 1949, although it is not clear whether it was sent[41]. However, in February 1951 his father *did* publish an 'open letter' to Mao Tse-tung in the *Manchester Guardian*, appealing to the Chinese to pursue negotiation rather than becoming a mere 'tool of Russia'. Mao did not reply, and it was left to Palme Dutt—Lord Lindsay's former student at Balliol College—to take up the cudgels on his behalf[42]. The Chinese Communists were clearly not swayed by sentiment: as they went to war with the United Nations in Korea they sought practical and unquestioning support, rather than advice, from their 'friends' in Britain.

PEACE WITH CHINA? 1950–1953

On 25 June 1950 North Korean forces—supported by Stalin and (more hesitantly) by Mao—swept across the 38th parallel into the South. Their rapid initial success was halted when the UN Security Council (in the temporary absence of the Soviet Union) voted to sanction military intervention. Eventually some 12,000 British soldiers served in Korea alongside the much larger US contingent, under the supreme command of the American General Douglas MacArthur. The UN intervention checked the invasion and then, following the Inchon landings in mid September, bundled the North Korean forces back across the border. A war to defend South Korea against aggression now became, in effect, a war to liberate North Korea from Communism. As the UN troops advanced northwards through North Korea and towards China's border on the Yalu river, Mao persuaded his Politburo that China, in turn, must intervene. On 26 November, after weeks of probing, Chinese 'volunteers' crossed the Yalu in large numbers and routed MacArthur's columns. It was a humiliating defeat, if not quite the 'Waterloo' for the West in Asia that Palme Dutt swiftly proclaimed[43]. By the middle of 1951 the front line had stabilized at roughly the pre-war border, although intermittent heavy fighting persisted until the armistice was signed in July 1953. The war transformed China's international standing by consolidating its alliance with the Soviet Union and ensuring it access to advanced Soviet weaponry. Mao's China had stood up to the most powerful 'imperialist' states, albeit at immense human cost[44]. There were also other costs to consider. On 27 June 1950 President Truman deployed the US Seventh Fleet to defend Chiang Kai-shek's regime on Taiwan. This pre-empted an anticipated Chinese assault on the island and ruled out Taiwan's reunification with China for the immediate future. Moreover, the UN vote in February 1951 to brand China as an 'aggressor' (which was supported by Britain after bitter debate

[41] Michael Lindsay papers, M. Lindsay to Chou En-lai, 22 September 1951.
[42] See the correspondence in the *Manchester Guardian*, 7, 10, 14, 17, 24 February 1951.
[43] *Labour Monthly*, January 1951, p. 6.
[44] Two million Chinese fought in Korea, of whom 152,000 were killed and 230,000 wounded (Westad, *Decisive encounters*, 323).

within Cabinet) exposed it to damaging economic sanctions. In the short term, at least, the war appeared to have cemented China's place within the Communist 'camp'[45].

At the time even this brief outline of the Korean War would have been bitterly contested within the British left. Some—by no means only Communists—refused to accept that the war had started with an attack by North Korea, and many more did not view China as an aggressor. Yet, against the left's sympathy for China had to be weighed the fact that Britain was, in effect, at war with the PRC in Korea. More than a thousand British soldiers were killed in the conflict, and almost as many were taken prisoner. New, sinister, and almost demonic images of the Chinese became commonplace, such as the fanatical human 'wave' attacks at the battle of the Imjin river, and the alleged 'brainwashing' of POWs. The impact of the war on the left was, therefore, complex, and opened up for debate not only Britain's relations with China, but also its relations with the United States, the hopes invested in the United Nations Organization, and the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Within the Labour Party, which remained in government until October 1951, the prevailing response was to see North Korea as an aggressor which must be resisted through the UN according to the principle of collective security. In a broadcast at the start of the war Prime Minister Clement Attlee warned that 'the fire that has been started in distant Korea may burn down your house', and presented the conflict as part of a 'world-wide conspiracy' against the democracies[46]. This argument drew strength from analogy with the 1930s, and in particular from the fact that Manchuria—where the democracies had failed to resist aggression in 1931—bordered Korea[47]. Although a small number of left-wing Labour MPs opposed the war from the start, there were more on the left—such as Michael Foot—who strongly supported the UN action[48]. Foot's *Tribune* even backed the government in pushing on across the 38th parallel, with a view to reuniting Korea after free elections had been held[49]. However, there was mounting unease within the Labour Party about MacArthur's conduct of the war, and certainly no stomach for a wider war with China. These concerns came to a head when, at a press conference on 30 November 1950, President Truman appeared to indicate that nuclear weapons may be used to check the Chinese advance. Attlee flew to Washington on 3 December, under pressure from cabinet colleagues and Labour backbenchers,

[45] The literature on the Korean War is vast. On Britain's role, see Callum MacDonald, 'Great Britain and the Korean War' in Lester H. Brune (ed.), *The Korean War: Handbook of the literature and research* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1996), 104. Jon Halliday and Bruce Cumings present an interesting reappraisal in *Korea: The Unknown War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), although Halliday subsequently took a much more critical line on Chinese policy in Korea in Chang and Halliday, *Mao*.

[46] *Daily Herald*, 31 July 1950.

[47] The United Nations Association even issued a pamphlet entitled *Korea must not be another Manchuria*!

[48] Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power; 1945–1951* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1984), 424–5. Only the Welsh Labour MPs S. O. Davies and Emrys Hughes voted against the government on 5 July 1950.

[49] *Tribune*, 6 October 1950; for Bevin's thinking, see Alan Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin*, iii: *Foreign Secretary, 1945–51* (London: Norton, 1983), 813.

and cheered on his way with Munich-like calls of 'God speed' in the press[50]. The five days of talks restored harmony to Anglo-US relations, although Attlee failed to convince Truman and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson that concessions should be made to China over UN membership and Taiwan. Attlee returned with private verbal assurances about the use of the atom bomb, which Truman (to Acheson's dismay) had even referred to as a 'joint possession of the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada'. However, the rather grander claim that Attlee had stopped Truman from using the atom bomb against China swiftly entered Labour Party mythology: by 1967 Paul Johnson was referring to it as the kind of received wisdom that was no longer worth arguing against[51].

Despite Attlee's démarche, the costly war was proving increasingly damaging to his government. Support for the war, even when it had been going well, was noticeably more robust amongst Conservative than Labour voters[52]. By January 1951, with mounting casualties and little prospect of imminent victory, polls suggested that almost one in two Britons favoured an immediate end to the fighting. Only a quarter wanted to carry on with the war[53]. Kenneth Younger, a foreign office minister on the left of the party, noted in his diary that within the labour movement '[n]o one really feels it is our war… [it] is simply a US-Chinese quarrel'[54]. Fears were commonly expressed that if the war were allowed to spread it might shatter the unity of both the labour movement and the Commonwealth[55]. Differences within the Labour government came to a head in late January over the US resolution at the United Nations to brand China as an aggressor. The measure was successfully resisted at cabinet on 25 January, where the opposition was led by Bevan, Younger, and (from the sidelines) John Strachey, but a modified resolution was endorsed on the following day. Despite the absence of Bevin—ill and close to death—a powerful case for keeping in step with the United States was made by Morrison, Hector McNeil, and, above all, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Gaitskell, who privately threatened to resign over the issue[56]. The preponderance of opinion within the Labour movement was clearly against the US resolution:

[50] *Daily Herald*, 4 December 1950; Pimlott, *Political diary*, 494 (30 November 1950). For Attlee's mission, see Morgan, *Labour in Power*, 426–31, Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 461–7, and Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers: The war and post-war memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Earl Attlee* (London: Heinemann, 1961), 233–40.

[51] *New Statesman*, 13 October 1967, 462.

[52] A poll of 4 October 1950 showed that 63 per cent approved of sending troops to Korea, but approval was lower amongst Labour voters (58 per cent) than Conservatives (73 per cent) (Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 167).

[53] Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 168.

[54] Kenneth Younger's diary, 9 January 1951, 7, consulted with thanks to Professor Geoffrey Warner.

[55] *New Statesman*, 2 December 1950, 529; *Tribune*, 1 December and 15 December 1950; Younger diary August 1950.

[56] Pimlott, *Political diary*, 503; Philip M. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell: A political biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), 243–4. Gaitskell reflected in his diary that the decision of 25 January might have had 'the most fatal consequences on Anglo-American relations…'. Strachey was Secretary of State for War but did not have a cabinet seat. During 1950–1 he wrote numerous papers warning against war with China and Russia (Michael Newman, *John Strachey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 123–5).

Foot and other MPs wrote to tell Attlee, apropos opposition in the constituencies, that they had never seen 'anything so strong since 1945'[57]. The socialist academic G. D. H. Cole even stated that if Britain 'gets dragged into war with China by the Americans, I shall be on the side of China…'[58]. However, Britain was by now far too reliant on the United States for the defence of Europe for Labour ministers to feel able to take a stand on China.

The attitude of the Communist Party towards the war was in many respects a mirror image of Labour's. Above all, the Communists argued that the war had actually been started by the South Korean ruler Syngman Rhee, encouraged by a US administration that was seeking a land base for an attack on China. As proof of the United States' hostile intentions they pointed to the security that Truman had immediately extended to Chiang Kai-shek's regime on Taiwan. The Communists also read the lessons of history differently: for them, the Labour government was guilty of appeasing the rampant 'Yankee imperialists'[59]. The true aggressors were the 'war-crazed atom-gangsters of Wall Street' and MacArthur, the 'God-Almighty Yankee Dictator of Tokio and Washington'[60]. As the war progressed, the Americans were accused of unleashing a 'sadistic fury' on Asiatic people through atrocities against civilians and the use of bacteriological warfare against both Korea and China.

The war deepened the sense of isolation that Communists in Britain felt at the height of the Cold War, and there was even talk of the party being driven underground[61]. However, they received some unexpected support. In particular, the 'old China hand' Sir John Pratt became the leading critic of the claim that North Korea had started the war. He argued that the Security Council had decided to treat North Korea as an aggressor without any evidence and merely on the word of the United States, and he eventually came to state unequivocally that the South had started the war with a sudden attack which 'took the North Koreans by surprise'[62]. Pratt spoke frequently at BCFA meetings, and was a thorn in the flesh for his former colleagues at the Foreign Office, who feared that he still commanded authority with the British public. Kingsley Martin was staggered by this apparent role reversal. In the 1930s Pratt had been a strong supporter of Sir John Simon and had attacked those who backed China against Japan as Communists: now Pratt was a 'near Communist' himself[63]. In fact, Pratt was no Communist, but a strong supporter of the People's Republic of China, which he saw as disciplined and hon-

[57] Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan*, ii: *1945–1960* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975), 313, footnote.

[58] *New Statesman*, 3 February 1951, 121. When Hugh Seton-Watson asked if he was advocating sabotage, Cole clarified his position: he would wish for a Chinese victory and 'refuse to co-operate in furthering a Chinese defeat' (*New Statesman*, 17 February 1951, 186, and 24 February 1951, 216.

[59] *Daily Worker*, 5 July 1950; *Labour Monthly*, January 1951, 8.

[60] *Daily Worker*, 1 July and 3 July 1950; *Labour Monthly*, January 1951, 4.

[61] Callaghan, *Crisis and Conflict*, 143, citing an interview with Frank Watters.

[62] See *Manchester Guardian*, 13 March 1951; Sir John Pratt, *Korea: The lie that led to war* (London: BCFA, December 1951). The historian Brian Porter attended one of Pratt's meetings (see the account in *Rise of Communist China*, 95).

[63] University of Sussex, *New Statesman* archive, 13/1, 5 February 1951, Martin to James Christie.

est compared to the previous KMT regime. He was also—like many former diplomats—saddened by Britain's loss of international authority since the war, and harshly critical of the government's support for an ill-informed US policy in the Far East[64].

Despite the gulf that separated Communists from much of the Labour left on questions such as the origins of the war or the allegations of germ warfare, there was still a great deal that united them. There was widespread agreement, for instance, that all-out war with China would have disastrous consequences and that the 'insolent' MacArthur—who treated the war as an anti-Communist crusade—was a menace[65]. Even the Labour leadership moved to the left on Korea once Churchill's Conservatives had taken office, although it remained the prisoner of its own conduct of the war while in government[66]. In the opening phase of the conflict, however, there was no focus for the anxieties of those on the non-Communist left who feared that under American leadership the Korean War was leading towards a war with China. Although in December 1950, Pollitt—evoking 'Hands off China' in the 1920s—pledged to Mao that the CPGB would mount a campaign against war with China[67]. Communist leadership was unacceptable to those who were still loyal to the Labour government and to the ideals of the United Nations. This position—to support a war against North Korean aggression but to oppose full-scale war with China—formed the basis for the 'Peace with China' campaign.

Peace with China (PWC) grew out of a meeting called by the National Peace Council at the Kingsway Hall, London, on 27 November 1950[68]. The speakers included Tom Hopkinson (who had recently been sacked as editor of *Picture Post* over his magazine's coverage of Korea), Kingsley Martin, and the left-wing Labour MP and journalist Tom Driberg, who was just back from the war zone. Martin—who was the prime mover—described it as a 'strictly non-Communist affair', intended to encourage Attlee and Bevin to take a firmer line against MacArthur. He already saw in it the glimmerings of a 'national movement against war with China'[69]. A further public meeting to launch the Peace with China Council on 8 January 1951 was packed, despite minimal publicity, and required an overflow[70].

[64] See his letter to *The Times*, 11 August 1950, and article in the *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1950.

[65] *New Statesman*, 11 November 1950, 413.

[66] For instance, Labour's attempt to censure Churchill, for allegedly warmongering during his speech to the US Congress of 17 January 1952, collapsed when Churchill revealed that the Labour government had secretly agreed to support the US bombing of Chinese airfields in certain circumstances (*Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 26 February 1952, cols 969, 973, 974). Crossman noted that Morrison, the former Foreign Secretary, was 'horribly hoisted on his own petard' (MRC, Mss 154/8/10, diary entry for 26 February 1952).

[67] *Daily Worker*, 2 December 1950. 4 December 1950 reports a 'No war with China' campaign amongst trade unionists.

[68] For a good overview of the campaign, see Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 156–61. This remains the only published treatment of PWC.

[69] *New Statesman*, 25 November 1950, 493–4, and 2 December 1950, 534. BLPES, National Peace Council papers, 9/1, executive committee minutes, 7 December and 19 December 1950.

[70] *New Statesman*, 13 January 1951, 29.

Peace with China spread rapidly throughout Britain, and some 40 local committees had been formed by mid March[71]. Truman's decision to dismiss MacArthur in April 1951 greatly reduced the fear of open war with China, and the movement's fortunes fluctuated thereafter. However, the decision by the newly elected President Eisenhower in February 1953 to 'unleash' Chiang Kai-shek's forces to attack mainland China gave it a new lease of life. As late as 1 April 1953, some 2,000 people came to hear Nye Bevan on his return from the Far East[72].

The movement drew support from a number of different—often overlapping—constituencies. The National Peace Council initially funded PWC's campaign office, although it terminated its financial responsibility in September 1951. Christian pacifists, including the Methodists Dr Donald Soper and the Rev. Henry Carter (who died in June 1951), played prominent roles. Kingsley Martin was soon made aware that on PWC platforms his dry political speeches represented a 'come-down from the heights of pacifist oratory'[73]. PWC also received a great deal of support from the left wing of the Labour Party, including Lords Stansgate, Faringdon, and Chorley, the Labour MPs Reginald Sorenson[74], Tom Driberg, Barbara Castle, Kenneth Younger, and Richard Crossman, and a number of members of staff of the *New Statesman*. Partly due to lack of endorsement by the TUC, however, it appears to have not had much support amongst the trade unions[75]. The non-Communist remnants of the China Campaign Committee, Margery Fry, Hilda Selwyn-Clarke, and Dorothy Woodman, brought their experience of working with China as well as—at least in the first two cases—their strong anti-Communism[76]. There was also some cross-party representation at the local and national levels, and the Conservative MP Norman Bower (who resigned his seat in May 1951) served on the executive committee. Kingsley Martin categorized PWC supporters as 'ordinary, non-doctrinaire people who just think war in our time crazy and wicked'[77]. However, Crossman gave a rather more colourful account of a meeting in March 1953: it was 'a wildly, enthusiastically, pacifistically, fellow-travellerishly anti-American audience, and the speakers played up to them'[78]. Its audiences were certainly unpredictable. When Kenneth Younger,

[71] *New Statesman*, 10 March 1951, 266.

[72] BLPES, NPC papers, 9/1, Council minutes, 10 June 1953; Crossman diary, 1 April 1953.

[73] Sussex University, *New Statesman* archive, 12/15, 26 February 1951, Martin to Mrs E. Crosskey.

[74] Sorenson's son had died while working as an aid worker in China in 1947 (see TNA FO 371/63313).

[75] MRC, Mss 292 951.9/1, the TUC position was that unions and trades councils should work through the United Nations Association.

[76] In his evidence to the McCarran hearings, Michael Lindsay said that Peace with China was 'organized' by non-Communist members of the CCC ('McCarran hearings', 5412), although the evidence does not suggest that they played such a central role in its formation. He also said that he spoke at some of its meetings, although in a later paper he denied that he was 'associated' with it (M. Lindsay papers, 'Section (7)', 1958). The division between Peace with China and the BCFA was not quite as clean as Lindsay remembered, as Dorothy Woodman remained on the Management Committee of the BCFA.

[77] *New Statesman*, 17 February 1951, 177,

[78] MRC, Mss 154/8/13, Crossman diary, entry for 3 March 1953.

now in opposition, stated that the UN was not aiming 'to undo the Chinese revolution' but defended the role of British troops in Korea, he was met with cries of: 'Who sent them there? . . . This is a peace meeting!'[79]

In political terms, the defining characteristic of Peace with China was its anti-Communism. On 27 February 1951 the executive committee agreed that no known Communist or sympathizer should be invited to speak on their platforms, and that speakers should not contradict the Council's policy statement (as laid out in the pamphlet *The Peril of World War*). Given that this document stipulated that 'the United Nations rightly denounced North Korea as an aggressor', it was clearly intended to exclude those such as Pratt and Lt Col Nicholas Read-Collins (a former member of MacArthur's staff in Japan) who did not concur[80]. This policy gave rise to considerable animosity between Pratt and Kingsley Martin, whom Pratt appears to have held personally responsible for it. At one point Martin threatened to sue Pratt for publicly claiming that his reporting of the Korean War had misled the British people and lacked 'courage and honesty'[81]. Pratt had a point, as it was evident that Martin harboured doubts about the origins of the war and even conceded that North Korea, having been provoked into action by the South, was only guilty of a 'technical aggression'[82]. Not for the only time in his career, Martin's position was pragmatic rather than principled. He was unwilling to allow the war's origins to be debated within Peace with China as it would be 'fatal' if the movement were to be branded as 'Communist'[83], and it would prevent it from influencing the Labour leadership, which had already made up its mind on this issue. As Martin put it in March 1952: 'I believe that this battle can be fought effectively as Peace with China, and that . . . MacArthur was in effect the aggressor against China'. To return to the origins of the war would, therefore, be a mere distraction, and would unnecessarily limit the campaign's potential impact[84]. There was also a personal dimension to Martin's refusal to allow Communist participation. In a private telephone conversation with Jack Dribbon of the BCFA, Martin harked back to how the Communists in the China Campaign Committee 'just pushed us around and played your game and divided us up quite deliberately'[85]: Despite Martin's best efforts to limit Communist influence in Peace with China,

[79] *Daily Herald*, 5 March 1952. The episode is also described in Crossman's diary.

[80] BLPES, Chorley papers, 3/7, minutes of meeting. Remarkably, this appears to be the only surviving internal document of the PWC. I have been unable to find a copy of the pamphlet, but the key points are set out in *Manchester Guardian*, 9 January and 15 January 1951. In a letter of 4 May 1951, Kingsley Martin also said that the PWC excluded Communists from its central and local committees (Sussex University, *New Statesman* papers, 12/15, Martin to L. S. Ralph). At the executive committee on 27 February 1951, Hilda Selwyn-Clarke and Lord Faringdon raised the question of speakers 'putting forward views indistinguishable from those of the Communist Party, particularly Colonel Reid-Collins (sic) . . .'. See also SOAS, Pratt papers, PPMS 5, 10 March 1951, Read-Collins to Pratt; HLRO, Stansgate papers, ST/262/9, 1 March 1951, Pratt to Stansgate.

[81] Sussex, *New Statesman* archive, 13/1, *passim*.

[82] Sussex, *New Statesman* archive, 12/15, 19 October 1951, Martin to J. Scott Matheson and 5 April 1951, Martin to L. Barrett.

[83] Sussex, *New Statesman* archive, 12/15, 23 February 1951, Martin to J. Scott Matheson.

[84] Sussex, *New Statesman* archive, 12/15, Martin to D. N. Pritt, 5 March 1952.

[85] TNA KV2/2093, 5 December 1950.

however, the Communists still appear to have infiltrated it successfully. Surveillance reports indicate that the party had two informers—ex-Communists—on the committee who had said that they would 'work for "us" '[86].

In a sense, Peace with China was more concerned with peace than with China, and it suspended its activities in the summer of 1953 in the knowledge that two of its objectives—Chinese admission to the UN and unification with Taiwan—had still not been achieved. Many of its members later surfaced in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and it has also been claimed that PWC brought together a group of Labour MPs who would later campaign against the Vietnam war[87]. From the outset Kingsley Martin had argued that the principal task of PWC was to make the Labour government's message on Korea audible to the American people, 'above the din of the American press and radio'. He even went so far as to claim that the movement had 'something to do' with MacArthur's dismissal, in the sense that the US administration was well aware of the lack of allied support for the Supreme Commander[88]. This is what the US Ambassador referred to as the 'quiet satisfaction' that many in Britain felt from their 'unjustified belief' that they had played a part in securing Macarthur's removal[89]. Perhaps the best that can be said on this point is that PWC contributed to the mounting concerns of the US authorities, who certainly kept an eye on its activities[90]. Polls showed that British opinion—unlike that in America—heartily approved of MacArthur's sacking[91]. There is no doubt, however, that the movement enjoyed significant success in mobilizing the 'idealistic and Left-wing elements of British radicalism'[92] against war with China. This was something which neither the Communists (hamstrung by their interpretation of the Korean War) nor the Labour Party leadership (constrained by the responsibility of office) were able to achieve. Members of the Britain–China Friendship Association sometimes dreamed of forming a united front with the misled—but 'sincere and active'—supporters of PWC. But in reality the two groups had little in common[93].

[86] TNA KV2/2093, report for 5 February 1951. One of the informers was identified as 'Jack Mendelsohn', who later sat as a Labour MP from 1959 until his death in 1978.

[87] Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 161; William Warbey, MP, *Vietnam: The truth* (London: The Merlin Press, 1965), 53. Warbey had joined Labour MPs Harold Davies, Lena Jeger, Ian Mikardo, and John Baird on a mission to Vietnam in May 1957, stopping for talks with Chou En-lai in Beijing.

[88] Manchester Guardian, 9 January 1951; University of Sussex, *New Statesman* archive, 13/1, 26 February 1952, Martin to John V. Allen, Stanley & Co. Crossman later made a similar claim (*Manchester Guardian*, 3 March 1953).

[89] *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1951, Europe: Political and economic developments*, Vol. IV, Part 1, p. 941, Ambassador to Secretary of State, 11 May 1951.

[90] *FRUS, 1951, Europe: Political and economic developments*, Vol. IV, Part 1, p. 919, on 14 March 1951 the Ambassador reported a 'recent marked falling-off in 'peace with China council' meetings'; according to Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 161, the US Embassy sent officials to attend major PWC events.

[91] Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 169.

[92] Porter, *Rise of Communist China*, 160.

[93] TNA HO 45/25583, 865004/196. 12 April 1951, Special Branch report on the BCFA's first AGM, 7 April 1951. Although a number of speakers made this point in general discussion, it is surely significant that the secretary did not allude to it in his summing up.

DEFENDING CHINA: 1950–53[94]

Peace with China always maintained a critical distance from China's actions in the Korean War. Its leaders openly 'deplored' Mao's decision to intervene in the conflict, and criticized China's diplomatic ineptitude prior to the UN resolution branding it as an aggressor[95]. This meant that there was still space for a campaign that defended China without any such qualifications. The basis for such a campaign was already in place both in Britain—with the BCFA—and in China. Alan Winnington, who had spoken at the Britain–China conference in December 1949, returned to Beijing soon afterwards, having collected 'some additional British Communists' to work with him[96]. They formed the nucleus of a small but dedicated cluster of British leftists in the Chinese capital, which included Michael Shapiro (a former Communist member of the London County Council) and four veterans of the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War: Dave Springhall, David Crook, Nan Green, and Patience Darton. Springhall was a former senior Communist who had been expelled from the party following his conviction for espionage in 1943. His 'exile' in Beijing, where he lived with his wife Janet, allowed him to continue to do political work while maintaining the fiction of his disgrace. He died in Moscow in 1953. David Crook was no stranger to China as, having been recruited by Soviet intelligence while in Spain, he had been sent to Shanghai in 1938 to spy on the American Trotskyist Frank Glass. After wartime military service with the RAF in Ceylon and Burma, he returned to China with his wife Isabel, the anthropologist daughter of Canadian missionaries, to carry out research into land reform in 1947–8. At the request of the Communist authorities the couple subsequently devoted themselves to establishing the teaching of English in Beijing[97].

Winnington's initial task—which he carried out with aplomb—was to write upbeat articles about social and economic progress in the 'new China', and to cultivate links with the Chinese leadership[98]. On 20 June 1950 he met Mao and other senior Communists at a supper party. Mao was 'very fit and full of questions' about the current international situation and Anglo-Chinese relations[99]. However, the outbreak of the Korean War five days later transformed Winnington's mission. He and Shapiro were uniquely placed to report from North Korea but, in so doing, they exposed themselves to considerable physical and professional risk. The Korean War was a vicious conflict: atrocities were committed by both sides and civilian casualties were heavy. Winnington believed—with some justification—that there

[94] Some of the themes in this section are developed more fully in my article 'The courage of Galileo: Joseph Needham and the "germ warfare" allegations in the Korean War', *History*, 86/284 (October 2001), 503–22.

[95] *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January and 20 January 1951.

[96] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 106.

[97] For Crook's career, see *The Autobiography of David Crook*, <http://www.davidcrook.net/simple/chapter9.html>, p. 5 (consulted 29 July 2007).

[98] See, for instance, *Daily Worker*, 24 April 1950, 5 June and 7 June 1950.

[99] Sheffield University, Winnington papers, D58, notebook; these notes do not accord with Winnington's later recollection that 'the talk was all about land reform and industrial construction' (Winnington, *Breakfast*, 108).

was a 'truth' about the conflict that the British public was being denied[100]. The problem was that the war was the focus for one of the most intense propaganda struggles of the Cold War. Every aspect was bitterly contested, and both sides engaged in claim and counter-claim. The Communist world was still in the throes of the international 'peace campaign', which had been launched in 1948 with the intention of portraying the United States as an aggressor. Within Britain, meanwhile, the recently established Information Research Department (IRD) of the Foreign Office was dedicated to rebutting Communist claims, and subtly undermining those who made them[101]. This was a time of heightened suspicions and doubtful loyalties: the Soviet spies Burgess and Maclean 'disappeared' in mid 1951, and British civil servants were being subjected to increasingly intrusive security vetting. By actively siding with North Korea and China, therefore, Winnington was exposing himself to claims that he was acting in an unpatriotic, even treasonable, manner. Winnington and the Australian Wilfred Burchett were the only journalists to cover the protracted armistice negotiations from the Communist side, and Winnington became used to British correspondents asking him 'how he felt about covering a war with his own countrymen fighting on the other side'[102].

Winnington's extravagant language—such as his claim that the USA was guilty of creating a 'Belsen' in Korea—only had a limited impact in Britain. He was, after all, a well-known Communist who wrote for the *Daily Worker*. Increasingly, however, the 'truth' from behind the lines in Korea began to emanate from less tainted sources. Monica Felton, who travelled to Korea as part of a commission established by the Women's International Democratic Federation, was a longstanding member of the Labour Party and the chief executive of the Stevenage New Town Corporation. John Platts-Mills, the left-wing Labour MP who claims to have helped persuade her to join the commission, described her as 'well on the way to her damehood'[103]. Felton was deeply shaken by her experiences in Korea and, in a broadcast from Moscow on her journey home, alleged that American forces were guilty of Nazi-style war crimes. On returning to Britain she was vilified in the press, sacked from her £1500 a year job by Hugh Dalton (the Minister for Local Government), and briefly investigated by the Director of Public Prosecutions for a possible charge of treason. For much of the British left, however, she was a heroine: a defender of the national conscience akin to Emily Hobhouse during the Boer War. Her deeds were praised in verse by the left-wing laureate Jack Lindsay, and eighty Labour MPs came to hear her speak at a hastily convened meeting[104]. Felton's sacking was not the only intimation that dissenting voices were being suppressed in the summer of 1951. As we have seen, Derek Bryan was the victim of

[100] See Alan Winnington, *I saw the truth in Korea*, a pamphlet published by the *Daily Worker*, September 1950.

[101] See Tony Shaw, 'The Information Research Department of the British Foreign Office and the Korean War, 1950–53', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34/2 (April 1999), 263–81.

[102] *Daily Herald*, 26 July 1951.

[103] John Platts-Mills, *Muck, silk and socialism: Recollections of a left-wing Queen's Counsel* (Wedmore, Somerset: Paper Publishing, 2002), 332.

[104] *Daily Worker*, 16 June, 19 June, and 21 June 1951.

constructive dismissal by the Foreign Office at precisely this time. Esther Henrotte, a Communist who worked for the Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society and had joined the first major BCFA delegation to China, was suspended for her prolonged absence without leave. She had returned home wearing the ubiquitous grey-blue cotton clothes of the Chinese cadres, and proclaiming China's desire for peace[105]. A month later the new Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison, dismissed Sir John Pratt from the seat on the Universities' China Committee which he had occupied for twenty years. As with Felton, the sacking was clearly politically motivated. Pratt was the appointee of the Foreign Secretary, and his incessant attacks on British policy towards China had become a political embarrassment. To add to Pratt's woes, the *Daily Mail* played on the fact that his youngest brother was the Hollywood actor 'Boris Karloff' (aka William Henry Pratt) to imply that Sir John was a 'corrupt figure akin to the film world villain'[106].

The two issues which placed representatives of the British left in the greatest jeopardy were their contacts with British prisoners of war and the allegations of 'germ' warfare. During the Korean War, 978 British prisoners were held in Chinese-run camps along the south bank of the Yalu river. The treatment of allied POWs was closely studied after the war, and gave rise to allegations in the United States of Chinese 'brainwashing'. The most controversial aspect of the affair in Britain was the role played by the left-wing visitors to the camps, who were named in a 1955 Ministry of Defence (MOD) 'Blue book' as Winnington, Shapiro, Monica Felton, the lawyer Jack Gaster, and Wilfred Burchett. Opinions over the purpose of these visits differed sharply. Winnington claimed in his memoirs that he went there selflessly—and against the instructions of the *Daily Worker*—to protect the British prisoners from possible reprisals following the American suppression of a revolt in the Koje POW camp[107]. Felton's visit was also apparently humanitarian, as, during her second and longer visit to China and Korea, she came away from the camps with over 150 letters for the prisoners' families. According to the MOD, however, Winnington's main role was that of a 'visiting propagandist', who sought to influence the political views of selected prisoners below the rank of sergeant[108]. Shapiro came in for even sharper criticism, as it was alleged that he had questioned British prisoners and even threatened to have one man shot. As for Felton, the MOD correctly claimed that her activities formed part of a Communist party campaign in Britain to mobilize the prisoners' families against the war. The prisoners' letters were forwarded to relatives along with a covering letter encouraging them to join lobbies and rallies against the war organized by the National Assembly of Women (of which Felton was the chairman[109]).

[105] *Daily Worker*, 9 June and 20 June 1951; feature article in *Daily Worker*, 29 June 1951; Henrotte had joined the party in 1926 and visited the Soviet Union in 1930 (CP/CENT/PERS/3/03).

[106] For Pratt's sacking, see TNA FO 924/231 and FO 924/232.

[107] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 159–60.

[108] Ministry of Defence, *Treatment of British Prisoners of War in Korea* (London: HMSO, 1955), 26–7.

[109] MOD, *Treatment of British Prisoners*, 28–30. This is confirmed by TNA HO 45/25583.

Although no charges were ever brought against the five visitors, all suffered in differing ways as a result of their activities in Korea. Winnington was denied a new passport in 1954, and lived in virtual exile in China and East Germany until it was restored in 1968. Shapiro was advised by the Communist Party not to return to Britain in 1955. He remained in China and—still deemed 'odious' by the *Daily Telegraph*—died there in 1986[110]. Felton received the dubious consolation of the Stalin Peace Prize in April 1952, and a later traveller en route to China encountered an 'almost unrecognisable portrait' of her gracing a park in Irkutsk[111]. She eventually left Britain and lived in India until her death in 1970.

The subject remains both emotive and controversial[112]. In defence of Winnington and his colleagues it can be argued that they at least represented a point of contact between the prisoners and their families at a time when no other channels of communication were open. It should also be noted that some prisoners were susceptible to political persuasion, and the MOD conceded that about forty returned home as 'convinced Communists'[113]. One former marine, Andrew Condron, even chose to settle in China after the war, although he cut an increasingly forlorn figure prior to his return to Britain in 1962[114]. However, Winnington's private papers present a rather damning picture of his involvement with the POWs. They suggest that the account that he gave of his decision to visit the prisoners was highly misleading, and far less altruistic than he claimed[115]. They also make clear that, despite the undoubted warmth that he felt for the prisoners, he approached them as a hard-headed political journalist, determined to turn their story to the full advantage of the Communist party's campaign against the war. For instance, he told Burchett that the best approach to 'the propaganda fight' was to make the prisoners 'react. This is the stuff that knocks the nails in, as I have seen from the [Daily] Worker. They run every line of prisoner protests and this in turn helps the movement that is developing in England among the POW's relatives'. Burchett, he went on, should not simply describe the prisoners, but encourage them to 'write, agitate and make news'. Winnington urged him to obtain pictures of the prisoners with banners saying 'Let's go home' as '[a]gitational stuff rings the bells in Britain right now'. Winnington also corresponded with 'progressive' prisoners,

[110] LHASC, CP/CENT/PERS/06/07 (Shapiro's personal file); *Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1986.

[111] Desmond Donnelly, *The March Wind: Explorations behind the Iron Curtain* (London: Collins, 1959), 34.

[112] As recently as 2007, the online journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist–Leninist), honouring the 91st birthday of Jack Shapiro, wrote that his brother Michael had worked with the POWs to 'persuade them to repent of their crimes' (*Proletarian online*, issue 20 October 2007, accessed on 24 February 2009).

[113] MOD, *Treatment of British Prisoners*, 35.

[114] See Winnington, *Breakfast*, 196–8; Condron published a series of articles in the *Daily Express*, between 15 and 19 October 1962. James Cameron describes meeting Condron in Beijing in 1954 in *Mandarin Red: A journey behind the 'bamboo curtain'* (London: Michael Joseph, 1955), 271–4.

[115] In Winnington, *Breakfast*, 160. Winnington indicates that he went to the camps to protect the British prisoners following the outbreak of violence in the Koje camps, and the capture of the American commandant (which took place on 7 May 1952). However, on 22 April 1952 Winnington had written to Derek Kartun at the *Daily Worker* that 'I will certainly visit the POWs on the way back, whenever it is, and send you a fat dollop of stuff and plenty of photos'.

expressing the hope that they would present a positive view of the new China on their release, and offering advice on how to win over their more sceptical fellow POWs. He wrote to one prisoner about 'their new experience in the hands of the Chinese volunteers, who are as you well know real comrades and not captors except in a technical sense'[116].

Alan Winnington later became convinced that he had been victimized by the British authorities for his part in exposing America's use of 'germ warfare'[117]. Allegations of bacteriological warfare first emerged in North Korea in May 1951, and a formal accusation was made against United States forces by Chou En-lai in February 1952. The story immediately polarized opinion on Cold War lines, although the outlandishness of the allegations, which suggested that American airmen were dropping containers of infected insects, voles, and pancakes across northern China and Korea, also invited ridicule. From the outset the main problem concerned the lack of hard evidence. In July 1952 Harry Pollitt wrote to Alan Winnington and 'stressed the importance of first-hand BW [bacteriological warfare] material', but this was difficult to obtain[118]. As China refused to invite an impartial body such as the International Committee of the Red Cross to carry out an investigation, its claims had to be taken in good faith. This was supplemented by the often questionable evidence obtained by the journalists. For instance, Wilfred Burchett's claim to have actually witnessed a 'germ warfare' attack was unsubstantiated. Winnington interviewed captured American airmen and publicized their confessions in the *Daily Worker*, but they recanted as soon as they were released in 1953[119]. The fact that some of these interviews were actually conducted by Burchett but published in the *Daily Worker* under Winnington's by-line—because 'they obviously prefer to cover really vital BW stuff with their own man'—hardly enhances their credibility[120].

In the spring and summer of 1952, a succession of recent visitors to northern China and Korea returned to Britain claiming to have obtained evidence of 'germ warfare'. In April there were press conferences by Jack Gaster, who had been part of a delegation sent by the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, and Dr James Endicott, chairman of the Canadian Peace Council, whose visit to Manchuria had convinced him that 'large-scale bacteriological warfare is being carried out'[121]. In July Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, entered the fray. Johnson had been interested in China ever since his first visit in 1932, when he had witnessed the smoking ruins of Chapei, and he had been associated with the

[116] Sheffield University, Winnington papers; I am grateful to Professor Colin Holmes for allowing me to consult this very important collection.

[117] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 149.

[118] Sheffield University, Winnington papers, 12 July 1952, Winnington to Burchett. Pollitt's original letter does not appear to have survived.

[119] *Daily Worker*, 24 May 1952; Wilfred Burchett, *Passport: An autobiography*, (Melbourne, Aus.: Thomas Nelson, 1969), 221.

[120] Sheffield University, Winnington papers, Winnington to Burchett, 12 July 1952.

[121] *Daily Worker*, 23 April and 25 April 1952. For Endicott, see the biography by his son Stephen Endicott, who has also written (with Edward Hagerman) *The United States and Biological Warfare: Secrets from the early Cold War and Korea* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998).

Friends of the Chinese People in the mid 1930s[122]. Now, he returned from seven weeks in China bearing a protest against 'germ warfare' signed by representatives of all of the Chinese churches. His claim that Chinese children were collecting infected insects with chopsticks was mocked even in the *New Statesman*[123]. However, the Dean—protected by a numinous self-belief—merely drew strength from such humiliation. Indeed, although he was seen as an absurd figure by his critics, many on the left were eager to hear his message. The BCFA swiftly sold 55,000 copies of his pamphlet containing the Chinese Christians' appeals, and some 4,000 people paid between 1/6d and £1-1-0 to hear him speak at a rally in the cavernous Empress Hall. Special Branch noticed that 'the interest of the audience quickened most noticeably' when he got onto 'germ warfare', and that this—rather than his general reflections on Christianity in the new China—was 'obviously what they had come to hear'[124].

The sceptical reception that greeted the initial claims of 'germ warfare' merely accentuated the need for proper scientific investigation, and in April 1952 the World Peace Council announced that it would organize an international scientific commission (ISC) for this purpose. Joseph Needham, who had already stated at a public meeting in late April that he believed the Chinese allegations to be true, eventually emerged as the unofficial leader of the commission. Needham was initially reluctant to join the ISC as he realized that, as a biochemist rather than a microbiologist, he was not qualified to make a scientific judgement. However, as no leading British scientists came forward, he decided to go in a 'liaison' capacity, which soon developed into full participation. Needham was well suited for a liaison role, given that he knew the Chinese language and was well acquainted with the Chinese scientific community from his wartime experiences. Indeed, his participation owed much to his claim that, while serving in China in 1944, he had studied—and been convinced by—Chinese medical evidence of Japanese bacteriological warfare. His suspicion was that the US authorities had acquired Japanese expertise in this field at the end of the war, and were continuing the experiment in Korea[125]. However, Needham's recollection of this episode was strangely hazy, and no trace of a report that he claimed to have submitted to the British Embassy at the time could be found. This exposed him to the criticism that he had turned what was—at best—a chance meeting with a Chinese scientist in 1944 into something that enhanced his own standing. Not for the last time, Needham's 'terrific sense of his own importance' proved something of a political liability[126].

The ISC was at work in China for more than two months, which included nine days spent in North Korea. Although the commission visited sites of alleged attacks

[122] *Daily Worker*, 14 April 1932, 19 July 1932, and 7 March 1944; he had originally gone to China due to the famine there (see correspondence in Lambeth Palace library, Lang 109, 290–301).

[123] *New Statesman*, 12 July 1952, 33, 34; the ridicule did not fade with the passage of time: see *New Statesman*, 11 September 1954, 286, and 25 September 1954, 362.

[124] *Daily Worker*, 9 July 1952; Hewlett Johnson, *I appeal* (London: BCFA, 1952); for a Special Branch report of the rally on 14 September 1952, see TNA HO 45/25583 865004/196.

[125] International Scientific Commission report, 11; *New Statesman*, 12 December 1953, 762.

[126] For a hostile account, see John Clews, *Communist propaganda techniques* (London: Methuen, 1964), 253; for the comment about Needham's vanity, see KV2/3055, 24 January 1951.

and questioned eyewitnesses, no research visits were permitted to any sites of new 'attacks'. Accordingly, the commission's work principally entailed checking—and, ultimately, validating—the work of the Chinese scientists. Such was Needham's faith in the scientists' judgement that he told a press conference on his return that he was convinced—to an acceptable '95–98 per cent' probability—that germ warfare had taken place[127]. However, as Ruth Rogaski has argued, he displayed no understanding of the changing context for scientific inquiry within the People's Republic. The Chinese scientific community had been mobilized by the regime to confront the alleged bacteriological warfare just at the time when 'the first wave of Thought Reform Campaigns [see below] hit China's research and academic institutions'[128]. In this situation, the fact that Needham knew many of the Chinese scientists personally, and that many were internationally trained, was no guarantee of their reliability. His critics were correct, therefore, to see the 665-page ISC report (which Needham drafted) as by no means offering definitive proof of American 'germ warfare'.

Needham's political naivety left him ill-prepared for the hostile reception that he received on his return to Britain in September 1952. Some criticism came from sceptical friends on the left, such as Kingsley Martin and the scientist Bill Pirie. Martin had initially thought that the allegations deserved investigation, for which he was viciously attacked in the *Washington Post*, but he later found Needham's report wholly unconvincing. 'Many of these Chinese germs', he concluded, 'have snow on their boots'[129]. Much of the hostility, however, was orchestrated by the Foreign Office IRD which attempted—as the British embassy in Beijing had recommended—to discredit Needham with 'discreet publicity'. The IRD gave hostile briefings to MPs, journalists, and academics, and even attempted to persuade the officers of the Royal Society to take action against their errant Fellow[130]. Needham's principal support came from the Communist Party and the BCFA, which organized a gruelling nationwide programme of public meetings for him. This not only promoted Needham's findings, but also the work of the BCFA. The secretary Jack Dribbon was delighted, for instance, that Needham was able to speak to a meeting at Leeds University as the BCFA had made little progress in Yorkshire outside of Sheffield[131].

Needham's career was seriously damaged by his role in the 'germ warfare' affair. According to Simon Winchester he suffered a dramatic 'fall from grace' within the academic community that was only arrested by the publication of the first volume of *Science and Civilisation of China* in August 1954[132]. He also

[127] *Daily Worker*, 27 September 1952.

[128] Ruth Rogaski, 'Nature, annihilation and modernity: China's Korean War Germ-warfare experience reconsidered', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61/2 (May 2002), 381–415, esp. pp. 402–5.

[129] *New Statesman*, 12 April 1952, 425, 27 December 1952, 773, and 3 January 1953, 14; the *Washington Post* (9 May 1952) saw Martin's call for an investigation as 'a pathetic and rather frightening example of the logical degradation to which the fellow-travelling mind is prepared to descend in order to believe what it wishes to believe'.

[130] KV2/3055, 10 July 1952, Lamb to Foreign Office. See Buchanan, *Courage of Galileo*, 513–20.

[131] Imperial War Museum, Needham papers, 80, 9 December 1952, Dribbon to Needham.

[132] Winchester, *Man who loved China*, 216.

suffered some political harassment. He was, for instance, blacklisted from visiting the United States until the 1970s, and steps were taken to exclude him from the MOD's Committee on Overseas Scientific Relations on which he had sat since 1948[133]. Needham never wavered in defending the findings of the ISC report, and towards the end of his life even proclaimed himself '100 per cent' certain of American guilt. Likewise, Winnington appears to have genuinely believed the allegations at the time and never recanted[134]. However, Soviet documents released since the end of the Cold War leave little room for doubt that the evidence to support the allegations was concocted by the Chinese, with Soviet support[135]. Interestingly, there is some evidence to suggest that the British Communist leaders—who in early April 1952 had protested at the 'incontrovertible facts' of germ warfare[136]—were themselves wary of the campaign and fearful of pressing their claims too far. A few weeks later Jack Gaster was given instructions by Peter Kerrigan as to the drafting of a resolution about bacteriological warfare (possibly for that autumn's TUC conference). In order to ensure success, 'it should not be specifically stated that Americans had definitely used germ warfare in Korea. The resolution should call on all nations to condemn and outlaw its use'. When Gaster objected, Kerrigan added that 'there had been a very full discussion on it, and that that was HARRY [Pollitt]'s proposition'[137].

THE PROBLEM OF REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE

In June 1952 Aneurin Bevan told a Labour Party rally that: 'We believe that the Chinese should be allowed to consolidate their revolution. . . . That should be made clear to our friends in America.'[138] During the Korean War, however, the Chinese Communists did not only consolidate the revolution, but deepened it, leaving no aspect of political, social, and cultural life unaffected. The Communists succeeded in mobilizing Chinese society as never before in a series of mass campaigns around issues such as land reform, public health, and anti-corruption. Support for the Chinese revolution remained widespread on the British left, and was bolstered—as Bevan's speech suggests—by US hostility towards the PRC and continuing Ameri-

[133] TNA, KV2/3055.

[134] On 22 April 1952 Winnington wrote to his parents that 'I have seen germ war. Make no mistake, this will be proved to the world . . .'. On 27 June 1952 he told Harry Pollitt that the evidence was 'conclusive' and that 'truth will out' (both in Sheffield University, Winnington papers). See also Winnington, *Breakfast*, 149–58.

[135] See Kathryn Weathersby, 'Deceiving the deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang and the allegations of bacteriological weapons use in Korea', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 11 (1998).

[136] *Daily Worker*, 1 April 1952, statement by the Executive Committee.

[137] TNA KV2/1559, phone tap of 29 April 1952. A resolution against bacteriological weapons, moved by the Association of Scientific Workers, was carried at the TUC Congress in September 1952 by 3,797,000 to 3,528,000 votes (*TUCCR*, 1952, 383–6).

[138] *Daily Worker*, 17 June 1952.

can support for the detested KMT regime on Taiwan. Even so, the violence inherent in the revolution could not be overlooked, and, even at this stage, the issue began to raise difficult questions not only in the liberal press but also amongst some elements of the non-Communist left.

The process of land reform, whereby the power of the landlords was broken and their land redistributed to poorer peasants, had been underway in Communist-controlled areas since the mid 1940s, but intensified throughout China during 1950–2. At the time, most first-hand British accounts accepted that some revolutionary violence was an inevitable concomitant of radical land reform, and that any excesses were primarily due to the harshness of landlord rule. In 1947–8 David and Isabel Crook had the opportunity to carry out eight months of research in the 'Liberated' northern village of Ten Mile Inn. Their sympathetic account, which was not published until 1959, showed how the Communists mobilized the 'middle' peasants against their wealthier neighbours, while seeking to channel the violent passions that were being unleashed. After one 'speak bitterness meeting', where villagers were encouraged to denounce landlords and wealthy peasants for their crimes, four men were stoned to death 'with a brutality which feudalism itself had bred in them'[139]. The power of the landlords was not broken only by physical violence, but also by social ostracism. One of David Crook's abiding memories was of 'once well-off peasants wearing humiliating patches of cloth on their backs inscribed with the words "Struggle Object" '[140]. In another significant eyewitness account, Peter Townsend described how a landlord was 'struggled against' for three days by a group of villagers before the Communists brought the process to a close. The landlord was then sent for trial and shot. Townsend wrote that 'his death was the logical end of a tyranny'. 'No one', he continued, 'hid the fact that violence occurred [in the land reform], but violence was not part of policy. The landlords were to be destroyed as a class, not as individuals unless they had committed "blood crimes" '[141]. In fact, violence in all of its forms *was* inherent in the process, as even Michael Shapiro acknowledged in his widely read book published in 1958[142]. While no exact figure can be put on the number of lives lost during the land reform, some historians have estimated as many as between two and five millions deaths[143]. Even with the elimination of the landlords, however, the land reform was far from complete. Most

[139] Isabel and David Crook, *Revolution in a Chinese village*, 150–2. The Crooks arrived in the village in November 1947. They were based near the village where the American writer William Hinton carried out his research, later published as *Fanshen*.

[140] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 9, p. 5. There are photographs of these 'struggle objects' in Isabel and David Crook, *Mass movement in a Chinese village*, 186.

[141] Townsend, *China Phoenix*, 140–9, 153. See also Townsend's *In China now* (London: Union of Democratic Control, 1953), 8–12, and his article in the *New Statesman*, 11 October 1952, 410–11.

[142] Michael Shapiro, *Changing China* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1958), 45–6. Shapiro conceded that 'some violence was inevitable. Yet surprisingly few landlords were killed'. Although he gives no number, his suggestion that one landlord was condemned to death for every two or three *hsiang* (a unit of rural administration averaging 2,500 people during the land reform) indicates that many thousands must have died.

[143] Jasper Becker, *Hungry ghosts: China's secret famine* (London: John Murray, 1996), 35; Craig Dietrich, *People's China: A brief history* (2nd edn, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 69.

peasants still owned small plots and lacked access to modern tools, and the Communists' longer-term goal remained the collectivization of agriculture.

In 1951–2 the Communist Party unleashed a new wave of popular mobilizations to achieve greater political control and, in some of the more ambitious infrastructure projects, to attempt to control nature itself[144]. A campaign against counter-revolutionary activity (which remained particularly widespread in the recently liberated south) resulted in mass arrests and trials, and between 500,000 and 1 million executions[145]. Meanwhile, the Communist Party sought to bring three distinct social groups under closer political and ideological control. The 'Thought Reform' campaign represented an attempt to 'remould' intellectuals and academics by means of constant self-criticism and indoctrination in 'Mao Tse-tung Thought'; the 'Three Antis' campaign was aimed at rooting out corruption and 'bureaucratism' in the rapidly expanding ranks of the party; while the 'Five antis' campaign completed the subordination of business to the state. By the end of the Korean War, therefore, the party's grip on power—in every sphere—had been greatly enhanced. Alan Winnington and his colleagues in Beijing felt that they, and their comrades in Britain, had much to learn from the Chinese Communists' style of revolutionary activism. They praised the discipline, team work, and 'freedom from narrow sectarianism' that they encountered—and above all the 'skilful and natural [use] of the weapon of criticism and self-criticism[,] far beyond anything we imagined existed'[146]. Michael Shapiro reported in June 1951 that for the first time in his Communist career he was making a 'personal detailed examination of [his] own ideological development': a process that the Chinese comrades referred to as 'cheng feng' or 'clean wind'. The foreign Communists, he added, felt welcomed, absorbed, and 'more than half Chinese already'. They were at present 'in the throes of a heated discussion' about a privately made film of the life of Wu Xun—a nineteenth-century social reformer—which had recently been strongly criticized by Mao[147].

What were left-wing British commentators to make of this new order in China, with its combination of quasi-constitutional authority and continuing mass mobilization? Desmond Donnelly, a maverick Labour MP who took part in a BCFA delegation in August–September 1952, was impressed—like most visitors—by the improvements in public health and hygiene. But he also thought that the mass trials of landlords by villagers resembled 'lynch law', and that children were spying on their parents for signs of counter-revolutionary activity. He returned home convinced that China might overtake the USSR as the centre of world Communism, but also that the Communist regime was 'totalitarian'[148]. A more common view at

[144] See Rogaski, 'Nature, annihilation and modernity', and Judith Shapiro, *Mao's war against nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[145] Dietrich, *People's China*, 72.

[146] LHASC, CP/IND/GALL/07/07, 12 December 1950, Winnington, Shapiro, Janet & Dave Springhall to William Gallacher.

[147] LHASC, CP/PERS/06/07, Shapiro to Jack Gaster, 5 June 1951.

[148] *Daily Herald*, 29 September 1952; *New Statesman*, 11 October 1952, 421 (and rebuttal by another member of the delegation in 25 October 1952, 472); for an entertaining account of the

this stage, however, was that temporary harsh measures were justified by the continuing threats of invasion and subversion. Arthur Clegg wrote that the PRC was a 'dictatorship' only for supporters of the KMT and landlords, while Basil Davidson, who had accompanied Donnelly, reported that dictatorship was essential to suppress the thousands of 'armed adherents of the old regime' still at large[149]. As for the new structures of government, one left-wing Labour MP warned 'timorous' socialists not to be put off by the absence of traditional appurtenances of democracy such as 'a Speaker, a Mace and a Committee of Privileges', while another said that the 'nearest British parallel' to the appointed People's Consultative Conference was the Labour Party Conference[150].

The question of revolutionary violence was, of course, hardly unfamiliar ethical territory for the British left. The Chinese revolution, and especially the land reform, evoked very clear parallels with the brutal Stalinist destruction of the wealthier peasants (or 'Kulaks') in the late 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, Emrys Hughes, a Labour MP who visited both the Soviet Union in the 1930s and China in 1952, was—by way of contrast—impressed by the 'overwhelming' peasant support for the Chinese government and the relatively low level of violence against landlords[151]. There were also echoes of the left's denial of the terrible Ukrainian famine of 1931–2 in the strong repudiation of claims that China was suffering food shortages in the spring of 1950. Alan Winnington was later hailed as the man who exposed the 'faked' famine story, although a private letter from Hetta Empson in Beijing told a different story: 'The famine seems to be well in hand'[152]. The British left was clearly predisposed to sympathize with the Chinese revolution, even if only, as Basil Davidson put it, because of 'the misery of its opposite'[153]. Yet how much revolutionary violence did this justify, and—while the PRC was clearly not a Westminster-style democracy—exactly what kinds of guarantees of freedom and personal security should it be expected to provide?

The role of Kingsley Martin is particularly interesting when considering these dilemmas, as he clearly attempted to strike a balance between sympathy for and criticism of the Chinese revolution. In April 1952 he wrote to Peter Townsend, who had recently returned from China, about a possible series of articles for the *New Statesman*. Martin noted that 'another stage of the revolution has obviously arrived and serious people, sympathetic to China, are very much worried about the

delegation, see Donnelly, *March Wind*, 19–56. Michael Lindsay had reached a similar conclusion a year earlier ('Totalitarianism and the New China' in *The Listener*, 31 May 1951). His argument was that the Chinese bureaucracy was inherently totalitarian.

[149] *Daily Worker*, 19 September 1952; Davidson, *Daybreak*, 36. Davidson was an independent-minded socialist who had taken over the UDC from Dorothy Woodman, and became a renowned expert on Africa.

[150] BFCA, *Britons in China*, Foreword by Sydney Silverman, MP; Geoffrey Bing, *M.P. in New China* (London: BCFA, 1953).

[151] *New Statesman*, 22 November 1952, 605.

[152] *Daily Worker*, 10 April and 15 July 1950; Sheffield University, Empson papers, 5/82, Hetta Empson to 'comrade', 10 April 1950. For coverage of the famine, and its denial by the Chinese authorities, see *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March and 6 April 1950.

[153] Davidson, *Daybreak*, 12 (citing a dictum of the radical journalist Henry Nevinson).

way things are going'. What should be the 'Socialist attitude', he went on, to the 'problems that arise over liberty of all sorts in China', the growth of anti-western sentiment, and 'the really fantastic propaganda that now comes from Peking'. The time for 'lyrical' articles was past: 'Do you feel that you can, if necessary, write critically about the New China?'[154] Here, Martin's candour was laudable, but on other occasions his approach could seem offensively glib. In August 1952 he asked in his 'London Diary' column whether the latest BCFA delegation to China would look into the one and a half million 'enemies of the people' who were thought to have been executed. 'Were these executions really necessary? Would it not have done to disarm obstinate followers of Chiang?' Martin's throwaway comment appeared to indicate (in the words of the *Evening Standard*) a 'cold-blooded' lack of humanity towards the victims of the regime. Martin's column drew a sharp reply from his old friend and mentor Leonard Woolf, who asked him under what circumstances such executions could be 'really necessary'? The rebuke rankled and when the dispute flared up again in 1963, Martin told Woolf that he had assumed that Mao had taken this 'appalling action' due to the danger of an invasion (which would have resulted in many more deaths) and the restoration of an 'evil' regime. He believed that he had acted with 'some courage' in asking the delegates to investigate further[155].

This incident formed part of an unedifying game of numbers and semantics about the level of violence in the Chinese revolution, which at times suggested that the British left had learnt nothing from its encounter with Stalinism in the 1930s. On 14 October 1952 the *Manchester Guardian* (which had already gained the reputation of being highly critical of Communist China) drew attention to the following statement by a government minister: 'In the past three years we have liquidated more than two million bandits'. Even the Nazis and the Bolsheviks, it commented, had taken longer to slaughter their opponents in such numbers, and had been far more reticent about divulging the figures. The *Daily Worker* replied that this was an error in translation: 'liquidation' did not mean that the 'bandits' had been killed, but rather that they had been successfully reformed into 'new human beings'[156]. Likewise Geoffrey Bing, a Labour MP and barrister, reported that bandit gangs were '"liquidated" by being dispersed and by being rehabilitated'. The only executions were of gangsters, although these were now being

[154] Townsend papers, in private possession of Catherine Townsend, 3 April and 2 May 1952, Martin to Townsend. In his second letter Martin pointed out that much had already changed since Townsend left China and warned that readers 'may think that we are ignoring less happy subsequent developments about academic freedom and so on'. Martin eventually published articles by Townsend in the *New Statesman*, 11 October, 25 October, and 8 November 1952.

[155] *New Statesman*, 30 August 1952, 229; 6 September 1952, 256–7, 265; 13 September 1952, 281. The row was reignited by the publication of Edward Hyams's *The New Statesman: The history of the first fifty years, 1913–1963* (London: Longmans, 1963), 282–3: see the correspondence between Martin and Woolf in the Woolf papers, Part III, University of Sussex, letters of 24 and 26 April, and 7 May 1963. Woolf stated that Martin was still 'completely confused' about the incident. See also Frederic Spotts (ed.), *The Letters of Leonard Woolf* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 437, 450–1.

[156] *Daily Worker*, 15 December 1952. See also Lapwood and Nancy Lapwood, *Through the Chinese revolution* (Letchworth: People's Books Cooperative Society, 1954), 146.

presented in Britain as 'martyrs to the cause of Western liberty and democracy'[157]. Kingsley Martin—perhaps surprisingly—returned to the theme when he visited China in 1955. He concluded that even if the figure of two million deaths since the formation of the PRC was accepted, this was small compared to the violence of previous years, and that the Chinese regime had, if anything, been 'economical in the matter of killing'[158]. As late as 1970 Joseph Needham wrote to correct an entry in the most recent edition of the *Guinness Book of Records*, which claimed that 20 million had been executed in China in 1951–5. He said that liquidation merely implied rehabilitation in labour camps. In any case, he reasoned, he had attempted to find out the number of executions himself in 1952, and if the repression had been on the scale indicated it 'would have been impossible for me to obtain the answers which I did…'[159].

* * *

Concerns about the level of violence—and the justifications that were offered for it—did not overly trouble the British left during the early years of the Chinese revolution. For the time being, an awareness of the evils inherited from China's past, plus the hostility of the United States towards the PRC, largely served to insulate China from criticism. Indeed, the Korean War could be seen as representing a peak in the British left's support for China, with different elements on the left contributing in very different, but ultimately complementary, ways. Enthusiasm for China was widespread across the British left, and was surprisingly robust given that Britain was fighting a limited war with China in Korea. Occasional outbursts on the right wing of the Labour Party, which presented the People's Republic as bent on Nazi-style expansionism, were wholly unrepresentative[160]. On the left, the small Independent Labour Party, which had become defined precisely by its anti-Stalinism, was equally unrepresentative in attacking the 'orgy of mass executions' in China, and the arbitrary justice meted out against 'spies' and other alleged enemies by the 'People's Courts'[161]. However, after a few years of relative stability in the mid 1950s, the trajectory of the PRC's future development ensured that this level of support and interest could not be maintained. There was no further mobilization of the non-Communist left to match the 'Peace with China' movement, while the support of British Communists was steadily undermined by the protracted Sino-Soviet dispute.

[157] Bing, *M.P. in New China*, [11].

[158] *New Statesman*, 7 May 1955, 635.

[159] SACU papers, Needham to editor, 28 February 1970. This correspondence was typical of SACU's attempts to rebut hostile comments about China at this time.

[160] *Daily Herald*, 5 January 1951 claimed that China was planning to organize a 'gigantic fifth column' of Chinese in South East Asia, who would play the role of Hitler's *Volkdeutsch*. See also editorial on 6 January 1951. The Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt developed this theme in the *Daily Herald*, 18 January 1952, and in his book *Southwards from China* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1952).

[161] *Socialist Leader*, 16 June and 7 July 1951.

5

1953–1964: The British Left and the New China

THE 'GOLDEN YEARS'

Despite the ever-present threat of war with the Nationalists on Taiwan and their American sponsors, the years immediately following the Korean War offered a period of relative peace and stability for China. The Communist regime, now more secure at home, established a new constitution in 1954 and emerged as a power on the international stage. Alan Winnington recalled that the first half of the decade was known as the 'Golden Years' of the People's Republic[1]: a period of new-found prosperity prior to the mayhem of the 'Great Leap Forward' and the disasters that accompanied it. For the Chinese people, however, the respite was brief, and the distinction was not a sharp one. As early as 1955–6, Mao (against the advice of many of his colleagues) embarked on a new campaign of popular mobilization in the countryside that swept most of the peasants into advanced cooperative farms. This 'High Tide of socialist transformation' also brought private business under state control and was accompanied by a harsh new campaign against independent-minded intellectuals. Mao, who had until recently said that collectivization would take 'many years', announced in January 1956 that the socialist revolution would be completed in the next three years 'or so'[2].

These were certainly 'Golden Years' for the British left's relationship with the 'new China'. The left was united as never before or since in its enthusiasm and admiration for the People's Republic. During this period of relative openness there was a spate of delegations to China, which included senior representatives of both the Labour and Communist parties, as well as groups of businessmen, artists, lawyers, and peace campaigners[3]. Many of the major trade unions also sent delegations, although the TUC declined an invitation in 1957[4]. Conversely, there was a new vogue for Chinese culture in Britain, whether woodcuts of revolutionary scenes, touring classical theatre and opera, an exhibition of modern Chinese art at

[1] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 177–8.
[2] *Tribune*, 8 October 1954; *Labour Monthly*, March 1956, 107.
[3] Three of these delegations are discussed in detail in Wright, *Passport to Peking*.
[4] *Tribune*, 20 December 1957. For the trade union delegations, see LHASC CP/IND/BRAD/7/6 (concerning the 1956 Amalgamated Engineering Union delegation) and Hull, DAR (2)/5/106 (report on the South Wales NUM 'Mission to China', 1955).

Fig. 11. Woodcuts mark the fifth anniversary of the PRC
(Geoff Miller, *Labour Monthly*, Oct. 1954)

Foyles, or a new Chinese bookstore at Collets[5]. When Nye Bevan arrived in China in 1954, he dazzled his hosts by telling them that he had purchased (and doubtless read) the first volume of Mao's *Selected Works* in London prior to his departure[6]. Across the British left, however, there were unspoken qualifications. For most Communists, the Chinese revolution would always be 'the second greatest socialist revolution'[7], and conflict between the People's Republic and its mentor and patron, the Soviet Union, was unthinkable. As Harry Pollitt observed during his visit to China in 1955, 'only a fool will believe that there is any chance of separating' the USSR and China, or that China would seek to emulate the independent path taken by Yugoslavia[8]. For non-Communists on the left, meanwhile, it was essential that China should remain a force for *peaceful* international change. They were far

[5] According to Jack Dribbon of the BCFA, some 10,000 people visited this exhibition of work by Ch'i Pei Shih and Hsu Pei Hung (Sheffield University, Winnington papers. Dribbon to Winnington, 25 May 1955); see also *Daily Worker*, 21 January 1955); for Chinese literature, see *Tribune*, 9 July and 29 October 1954; for theatre and opera, see *Daily Worker*, 24 October 1954 and *Labour Monthly*, June 1956, 287.

[6] *Tribune*, 15 October 1954; *Daily Worker*, 6 January 1954 reports the publication of this volume.

[7] R. Palme Dutt, *Whither China?* (Watford: Farleigh Press, 1967), 1.

[8] *Daily Worker*, 22 April 1955.

more comfortable with a China that was the victim of Japanese or US aggression than with a potential aggressor, let alone a nuclear-armed one. Yet these were precisely the challenges that China eventually posed.

Such concerns lay in the future. For the moment it appeared to British Communists that the emergence of the PRC was a gigantic windfall for the international Communist movement, and that Mao Tse-tung was a genius in the tradition of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. The publication of his translated writings in Britain allowed Communists to pay tribute to Mao's brilliance. For Arthur Clegg, they revealed a man both omniscient and caring: 'at one moment penetratingly analysing China's problems, at the next bothering about whether people are getting enough salt to eat with their dinners'[9]. Professor Benjamin Farrington, an Irish-born classicist who visited China in 1952, praised Mao's 'extraordinary grasp of the detail of concrete social reality', the freshness of his Marxist thought, and his ability to harness the heroism of ordinary people[10]. The proof lay in the quickening pace of the Chinese revolution, and Mao's highly ambitious plans for agriculture were welcomed as 'breathtaking' at the Political Committee of the CPGB in February 1956[11]. Even Palme Dutt, who later became the sternest Communist critic of Maoism, was deeply enthused by Mao's 'high tide' and his plan to increase greatly the numbers (and skills) of China's intellectuals. Where now, Palme Dutt asked, were all the 'wiseacres' in the British press who had talked condescendingly about an immutable China? This 'sweeping and majestic reconstruction under the impetus of the drive to socialism' should inspire the labour movement in Britain[12].

China's most eye-catching achievement during this period was its role at the Geneva talks on Indo-China in May–June 1954, where Chou En-lai won 'top marks' for his diplomacy. China's international standing was greatly enhanced, although the agreed Vietnam-wide elections were blocked by the United States and the country was, in effect, partitioned. Clegg reported that 'none can doubt that here is a new Great Power whose influence in the world will grow and extend for peace. None can doubt either . . . that the stand of People's China alongside the Soviet Union makes the force of peace the strongest in the world'[13]. Kingsley Martin went even further: China had emerged at Geneva 'as a world Power—potentially the greatest Power in the world'[14]. After the conference China was no longer a pariah in the non-Communist world, and it built on its success by playing a leading role—in close association with India—at the Band-

[9] *Daily Worker*, 6 January 1954.

[10] In fact, Mao never allowed social reality to stand in the way of revolutionary idealism. See Farrington's reviews of successive volumes of Mao's *Selected Works* in *Labour Monthly*, May 1954, 238; October 1954, 479–80; September 1955, 429; and May 1956, 238–9. For Farrington, who chaired the Britain–China conference in 1949, see <http://www.communistpartyofireland.ie/s-farrington.html> (consulted 16 December 2009).

[11] LHASC, CP/CENT/PC/02/25, George Matthews's notes of meeting on 2 February 1956, 3–4.

[12] *Labour Monthly*, March 1956, 107–9.

[13] *Daily Worker*, 6 May 1954. See also the statement by Political Committee of the CPGB, *Daily Worker*, 24 July 1954.

[14] *New Statesman*, 4 December 1954, 728.

ung conference of African–Asian states in April 1955[15]. Chou also took the opportunity to improve bilateral relations with Britain at Geneva, where he held private meetings with Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and with Harold Wilson, a Labour MP on the left of the party with a particular interest in East–West trade[16]. A Chinese chargé d'affaires finally arrived in London in October 1954 (to be greeted with flowers by the BCFA), hard on the heels of the first official PRC trade delegation in June.

China's increasing international stature—albeit still outside of the United Nations—was matched by social reforms and huge infrastructure projects at home. There were undoubted achievements in education and health, and, for foreign visitors, the visible improvements in hygiene and social behaviour became the hallmark of the 'new China'. Clement Attlee, who had travelled widely in Asia, told a press conference in 1954 that it was a new experience for him to find an Eastern bazaar with 'no flies, no smells and everything clean'[17]. His delegation also reported that the Chinese Communists had 'eliminated bribery, pilfering, graft and corruption'[18]. Other visitors to China were struck by the humility of their hosts. One trade unionist commented that a Chinese steel mill was 'pretty poor stuff', and that the criticism of British steel workers travelling with his party was eagerly listened to[19]. Robin Page Arnot, who attended the 8th Congress of the CCP in 1956, noted that the secret of the Chinese Communists' success was their 'continuous drive against arrogance, arbitrariness, rashness, self-sufficiency, self-conceit, subjectivism, sectarianism, [and] bureaucracy . . .'[20]. Above all, foreign visitors were impressed with the unity and enthusiasm that they encountered in China. Dora Russell, who had returned to attend a women's congress in 1956, spoke of the 'simple goodness radiating in all directions'. As a pacifist she was deeply moved by the May Day parade, where there were no weapons or military vehicles on display, but only colourful parades of marching civilians. She recalled how during a release of doves as part of a peace demonstration, one fell into a ditch. As if in a 'fairy tale', a Red Cross boat went to its assistance, and '. . . in a moment, the little creature was rescued and in safe hands'[21]. This bird was fortunate: in 1958 China's sparrows—branded as seed-eating 'pests'—were almost eliminated by a popular mobilization during the Great Leap Forward.

The internal development of China, from the construction of a railway across the Gobi desert to plans for a new Chinese alphabet, and from the peasants'

[15] China was only present at India's insistence; but at the conference Chou En-lai outshone Nehru (see John W. Garver, *Protracted contest: Sino-Indian rivalry in the twentieth century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 117–20).

[16] Wilson had been President of the Board of Trade, 1947–51. His account of the meeting is in the *Manchester Guardian*, 3 June 1954.

[17] *Daily Worker*, 3 September 1954.

[18] Labour Party NEC minutes, Draft report on the 1954 delegation to China.

[19] John Horner, 'My six hundred million friends', in *Labour Monthly*, January 1955, 30.

[20] *Labour Monthly*, February 1957, 71.

[21] *Daily Worker*, 12 June 1956. Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree*, iii: *Challenge to the Cold War* (London: Virago, 1985), 203; I am also grateful to Jean Gulliland for sharing her recollections of this delegation (interviewed by the author, 13 September 1999).

'clamour' for collective farming to the 'bloodless' demise of small private business, was faithfully recorded for readers of the *Daily Worker* by Alan Winnington[22]. Winnington made his name by undertaking a number of pioneering journeys to the fringes of Chinese-controlled territory, where he reported on the impact of the revolution in Tibet and (in the later 1950s) amongst the remote hill peoples of South-East China[23]. Although this work has retained a certain 'anthropological' value as a record of vanishing cultures, it is important to recall that Winnington was first and foremost a Communist. As he told Harry Pollitt in 1960: 'Anything worthwhile I have been able to do with my life was as a result of the Party and of my all too belated discovery of Marxism'[24]. Accordingly, he took for granted the benefits that socialist modernity—as represented by integration with the People's Republic—would bring to these benighted regions. In 1955 he wrote that Tibet would 'reach socialism, but not the hard way; not through capitalism or colonial oppression, but as part of China, at her own pace, in her own way'[25]. China's subsequent abandonment of this gradualist policy in favour of 'great-nation' Han arrogance in the late 1950s was one factor in Winnington's mounting dissatisfaction with the CCP[26]. However, his disagreement was ultimately with the pace rather than the direction of change.

Winnington, who married Esther Cheo Ying, a British-raised employee of the Xinhua (New China) News Agency[27], remained at the centre of an expanding British community in Beijing. Nan Green arrived in 1954, with her husband Ted Brake, a trade unionist and journalist. She had been inspired by the 'euphoria' of a first, short visit to China as an interpreter in 1952–3. On her return to Beijing she worked for the journal *China Reconstructs*, where one of her tasks was to 'polish' articles—in particular, to ensure that they always concluded with a fulsome tribute to the Soviet Union. Green wholeheartedly supported the Great Leap Forward, but was deeply distressed by the 'inhuman' Chinese attitude to the threat of nuclear war and returned to Britain in 1960. She left behind Brake, who took over from Winnington as the *Daily Worker* correspondent and remained in post until the mid 1960s[28]. The question that all expatriates faced in the later 1950s was, as David

[22] *Daily Worker*, 11 January, 14 January, and 31 January 1956; 31 May 1956.

[23] In addition to his journalism, Winnington also published two books, *Tibet: Record of a journey* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1957) and *The slaves of the Cool Mountains* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1959; new edn, London: Serif, 2008).

[24] Sheffield University, Winnington papers, 8 March 1960, Winnington to Pollitt. With typical consideration Pollitt had remembered Winnington's 50th birthday: the semi-retired Communist leader died soon afterwards.

[25] *Daily Worker*, 28 December 1955 (the last of a series of articles 'that will hold you spellbound', that started on 3 December 1955). See also his account of the advent of modernity amongst the Norsu people in Winnington, *Cool Mountains*, esp. pp. 120–2.

[26] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 227–40.

[27] Esther Cheo Ying, who is of mixed British–Chinese parentage and upbringing, has written a fascinating memoir: *Black country to Red China* (1980; London: Vintage, 2009).

[28] Nan Green, *A chronicle of small beer* (Nottingham: Trent Books, 2004), 162, 173–212; for Nan Green's endorsement of the Great Leap Forward, see LHASC, CP/IND/MONT/12/5, Green to Ivor Montagu, 2 June 1959. Brake's obituary is in *The Guardian*, 10 December 1993. He was Nan Green's second husband: her first, George Green, was killed in the Spanish Civil War.

Crook put it, 'how much should we try and merge with Chinese society and how much should we retain of our British identity'[29]. Winnington and Green were ultimately unwilling to make such a commitment, but others were. Joshua Horn, for instance, was another new arrival in 1954. He and his wife had decided to move to China after watching a film of bare-foot Chinese peasants building a dam at immense personal risk[30]. Horn, along with Michael Shapiro and other 'Holier than Mao' Britons (in Nan Green's memorable phrase[31]) remained loyal to Chinese Communism right through the travails of the 1950s and 1960s.

During the 'Golden Years', criticisms of China on the British left were largely—but not completely—muted. Kingsley Martin, who visited China in March 1955, became increasingly concerned that the regime seemed bent on repeating Stalin's mistakes of the 1930s by collectivizing agriculture too rapidly. He also expressed alarm at the imposition of stifling ideological conformity, and warned that intellectuals such as Hu Feng (whose imprisonment became something of a cause célèbre in the western press) were being subjected to 'an unpleasant suggestion of the Inquisition'[32]. Martin was particularly disappointed at the frosty reception that he received from an unnamed Chinese intellectual that he had known well in Britain (presumably Hsiao Ch'ien), who appeared to have 'shaken off the dust of the West in rather ungenerous terms'. Martin clearly failed to understand the tremendous political pressures that Chinese intellectuals—and especially those with links to the West—were now under[33]. The other issue that caused concern was China's burgeoning population. Clement Attlee raised this during his meeting with Mao in 1954, and later expressed his fear that the Chinese government was actively encouraging a potentially unsustainable 'fruitfulness' amongst its citizens. He concluded—in a phrase that caused considerable offence on the left in Britain—that China was hoping to 'make up in quantity what it lacks in quality, in order to achieve a position of power in the world'[34]. However, many on the left refused to see population growth as a problem, either for practical reasons (because China still had vast under-populated areas[35]), or for ideological ones. Joan Robinson, a young Cambridge economist who visited China in 1953 wrote that it was 'bubbling with

[29] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 11, pp. 13–14.

[30] J. S. Horn, *'Away with all pests': An English surgeon in People's China* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), 26.

[31] Green, *Small beer*, 183.

[32] Kingsley Martin's reports on his visit to China are in the *New Statesman*, 7 May, 14 May, and 21 May 1955. See also *New Statesman*, 10 September 1955, 290. Hu Feng was later identified as an early example of a 'prisoner of conscience' by the nascent Amnesty International, and his was one of nine cases described in Peter Benenson, *Persecution 1961* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 135–49.

[33] *New Statesman*, 21 May 1955. Martin's notebook indicates that he visited Hsiao Ch'ien on 19 March 1955 (Sussex University, Kingsley Martin papers, 9/15). However, Martin later reported that he had spoken to both Hsiao Ch'ien and another writer that he had known in Britain (Fei Hsiao Tung) during this visit (*New Statesman*, 9 November 1957, 598).

[34] Article by Attlee, *New York Times* (*NYT*), 13 September 1954.

[35] Townsend, *China Phoenix*, 360; in the *Daily Worker*, 21 September 1954, Sam Russell said that the leaders of the PRC thought that it was better to invest in increasing production than 'spending time and money on ideas for mass birth control'.

babies', but that birth control was 'too much associated with a pessimistic, defeatist, anti-Marxist view of life'[36].

Chinese Communism faced severe challenges—both internal and external—during 1956. In February the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, denounced Stalin's crimes at a closed session of the 20th CPSU Congress. Mao must have drawn some satisfaction from Khrushchev's 'secret speech' as the Chinese Communists had themselves been the victim of some of Stalin's 'gross errors' of judgement[37]. However, he resented Khrushchev's lack of consultation, and the attack on Stalin's 'cult of personality' implicitly threatened his own position. In addition, Mao did not wish the attack on Stalin to be pressed too far as he wanted to preserve the authority that Stalin had enjoyed within the world Communist movement. He privately evaluated the positive and negative aspects of the late Soviet leader's rule as 70:30 in Stalin's favour[38]. In all, the episode greatly diminished Mao's respect for Khrushchev, and sowed the seeds of their future rivalry. In January 1957 Chou En-lai embarked on an unprecedented tour of Eastern Europe after the suppression of the Hungarian uprising by Soviet forces. The ostensible goal was to help to restore unity, but the mission clearly marked China's emergence as an independent force within world Communism. Within China, meanwhile, the dislocation in the countryside caused by Mao's 'High Tide' began to cause falling production and peasant unrest. Serious divisions opened up within the Chinese leadership, pitting the radicals led by Mao, who wanted to press ahead even faster with the socialist transformation of Chinese society, against pragmatists embedded in the party and state machinery. This conflict was ended, for the time being at least, by the decision to embark on the Great Leap Forward in December 1957.

These domestic tensions within China went largely undetected by the British left which, accordingly, was ill-prepared for the Great Leap. The CPGB was, of course, itself deeply distracted by the remarkable events of 1956. Some 9,000 party members resigned in the ensuing turmoil, sales of the *Daily Worker* fell by 20 per cent, and there was unprecedented questioning of the party's policies and methods[39]. However, the subsequent debates about the future of Communism revolved around Stalinism and the Soviet Union rather than China. The 'first new left' of Communist dissenters—unlike the younger 'new left' of the 1960s—was not particularly interested in China as a 'third world' alternative to Soviet Communism[40]. Moreover, the Communist Party had rather neglected China during the mid 1950s. The party had proposed Ernest Brown—a political has-been—to work for

[36] KCC, Joan Robinson papers, i/5, July 1953 typescript, 34–5.

[37] *Daily Worker*, 6 April 1956, provides the official CCP response to the speech.

[38] Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet split: The Cold War in the Communist world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 50.

[39] Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, 76–7; for the impact on party members, see Macleod, *Death of Uncle Joe*.

[40] There was little discussion of China in the *Universities and Left Review*, which was launched in the spring of 1957 and was a principal forerunner of *New Left Review* (1960–). For the context, see Michael Kenny, *The first new left: British intellectuals after Stalin* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995) and Lin Chun, *The British new left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

the London office of the Xinhua News Agency in 1950, despite his lack of journalistic ability, and then elevated Brown to chair its Far East/Asia Committee in 1955. Evidence provided by British intelligence surveillance of this committee suggests that Brown (who died in 1960) failed to inject energy or enthusiasm into this increasingly important area of the party's international work[41]. Even visitors to China had little inkling of what was to come, and continued to perceive a country that was forging ahead on the basis of rational domestic policies and close alliance with the Soviet Union. The left-wing Labour MP Ian Mikardo, who visited China in the autumn of 1956, reported that China was run by a unique political system—neither a parliamentary democracy nor a totalitarian state—that was characterized by popular consultation at every level. It was, he went on, very like a British nationalized industry, such as the National Coal Board[42]. Such homely analogies could not begin to describe the sheer ambition and unpredictability of the next stage in the Chinese revolution. For the British left, a sense of wonder at China's achievements would soon give way to bewilderment, and eventually disbelief.

THE LABOUR PARTY DELEGATION AND THE FIRST STRAITS CRISIS: 1954–5

The Labour Party embarked on its most sustained attempt to engage with revolutionary China during 1954–5. At the 1953 party conference, a resolution was passed calling for a 'goodwill' visit to the Soviet Union and China, and an invitation was duly received from the PRC in May 1954. After a brief internal tussle over the cost and composition of the delegation[43], the NEC agreed that Clement Attlee should lead a group of senior figures in the party. He was to be accompanied by Morgan Phillips, the party's General Secretary, Wilfred Burke and Dr Edith Summerskill (both representing the PLP), and Sam Watson, President of the Durham miners and Chairman of the NEC's International Subcommittee[44]. To the surprise of the Foreign Office, Michael Lindsay—now a 'bitter and rather astute critic' of the PRC—and his wife were invited to act as interpreters[45]. Attlee's principal companion, however, was to be Nye Bevan, the champion of the Labour left, and a powerful critic of Attlee's leadership during the bitter current dispute over German rearmament. Bevan—intellectually voracious and genuinely interested in applied socialism—relished this encounter with Chinese

[41] See TNA KV2/3198 & 3199.

[42] *Tribune*, 21 September 1956.

[43] MRC, Crossman diary, 8/15, entries for 19 May and 26 May 1954. The Chinese had originally invited a large party of 30 to 40 delegates.

[44] The full delegation was Attlee, Burke, Summerskill, Watson, Bevan, Phillips, and the trade unionists Harry Earnshaw and Henry Franklin. For an official account, see Morgan Phillips, *East meets West: A pictorial story of the Labour Party delegation to the Soviet Union and China* (London: Lincolns-Prager, 1954) and the Labour Party journal *Fact* (October 1954). The fullest description is in Wright, *Passport to Peking*.

[45] TNA FO 371/110247/7.

Communism. He kept the only diary of his life during the visit, and made the most of the opportunity to address the Chinese People's Consultative Conference on the philosophical differences between British and Asian socialism[46]. He also took to probing his hosts with an often uncomfortable directness. Once he asked local party officials why the works of Kropotkin and other well-known writers were not made available to workers: he was told that they were 'not suitable'. (Out of this exchange, Attlee coined the often-repeated phrase 'a curtain of ignorance'[47].) On another occasion, Bevan went round the table during an official dinner to find out how many children each of their hosts had, and discovered that the average was two. His point was that the Communist leaders clearly practiced birth control but refused to preach it to the peasant masses due to a dogmatic reading of Marx[48].

Bevan's was a domineering presence, and one fellow delegate later discerned the 'voice of Mr Attlee but the hand of Bevan' in the statement issued by the delegation when it left China[49]. But this was unfair on Attlee. While it was evident that the Labour leader shared much common ground with the left on China—as his parliamentary speech of 14 July 1954 concerning Taiwan made clear—he was by no means the left's prisoner[50]. He remained on the alert against the Communist regime's 'eyewash', and, during a three-hour meeting with Mao, was extremely frank in his criticisms of the Soviet Union[51]. Above all, Attlee remained convinced that the Chinese revolution was driven by nationalism as much as by Communism, and he made no secret of his intention to test the strength of China's relationship with the Soviet Union. During an extended stop-over in Moscow, it soon became apparent that the new Soviet leader Malenkov and his colleagues felt some 'anxiety' about the delegation's true purpose. Morgan Phillips reported that '[i]t was felt that we may be attempting to drive a wedge between Communist China and the Soviet Union'[52]. Bevan shared this concern, and complained about Attlee's conduct to fellow left-wing members of the NEC on his return. He privately told Richard Crossman that Attlee was a 'dirty little traitor' who would 'play up China and be hostile to Russia', even though the Chinese were currently the 'more dangerous and aggressive' of the two[53]. He had a similar conversation with Barbara Castle, who was about to visit China in a separate delegation of Labour MPs. Bevan found the Soviet leaders easier to deal with than the dogmatic, insular, and

[46] Foot, *Bevan*, 444, 447. According to Foot, Bevan turned the event into an 'old-fashioned Marxist study circle'; the text of his speech is in *Tribune*, 3 September 1954.

[47] *NYT*, 10 September 1954. Without acknowledging the source, the phrase recurs in the title of Felix Greene's *A curtain of ignorance: China; how America is deceived* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964).

[48] Foot, *Bevan*, 446–7; *Tribune*, 8 October 1954.

[49] TNA FO 371/110247/24. 26 August 1954, report by Trevelyan to Foreign Office.

[50] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 14 July 1954, cols 483–8; the Bevanite MP Ian Mikardo said that Attlee's criticisms of US policy in Asia repeated 'almost word for word' what his colleagues had been saying for the last three years (*NYT*, 18 July 1954).

[51] *NYT*, 29 July and 3 September 1954. Attlee was responding to a comment from Mao that he should pass on a number of proposals for reducing tension to the US administration.

[52] Labour Party NEC minutes, 20 September 1954, 'Delegation to China', 1.

[53] MRC, Mss 154 8/16, Crossman diary, entry for 1 October 1954.

overly intellectual Chinese. In his view, Malenkov might be a 'machine man', but Mao's judgement was questionable[54]. Problems would therefore have to be solved by going over the heads of the Chinese—for instance, while in Moscow Bevan appealed in vain to the Russians to seek a compromise whereby the PRC would be allowed to join the UN but would not be given a seat at the Security Council[55].

These tensions aside, the visit to China went reasonably smoothly. The worst moment came on a tour of industrial Manchuria where the delegates, whose Panama hats made them look like the 'seedier characters from a Somerset Maugham short story', found it difficult to muster any enthusiasm. Attlee commented that Mukden had a 'gray aspect, with some of the grimness of the industrial towns in the north of England'. Morgan Phillips was appalled at the standard of new workers' housing and told British diplomats that he had not expected to see 'the Gorbals being erected with pride in the twentieth century'[56]. However, the delegates also found much to admire in 'new China'. Attlee noted that 'you have here a Government that is incorruptible . . . that has done some very remarkable pieces of work', and which had earned 'the goodwill of the peasant population' by its concern for their welfare. In Shanghai he was struck by the 'stern, almost puritanical code' of public morality, leavened with the 'gaiety' of thriving theatres and cinemas.[57] Bevan conceded that China was a dictatorship, but added that there was more liberty (and certainly more religious liberty) than in Britain 'in the days of Cromwell'. A government struggling against great odds was making considerable advances in areas such as health, flood prevention, and crime[58].

The delegates' constant reference to the absence of flies in China became the object of some ridicule in the British press. This provided a modicum of revenge for the journalists sent to cover the visit, who had been treated with a peculiar indifference by Attlee and his colleagues[59]. According to one source the journalists thought that, as the delegates were earning large sums by writing their own articles, they 'did not want to have competitors too near them'[60]. Attlee, for instance, wrote a series of articles which were syndicated in the American press. Despite the hostility directed at the delegates in the United States, where Attlee was accused of 'appeasement', the articles enjoyed a high profile. On arriving in Chicago, Richard Crossman noticed that the vans of the *Chicago Daily News* carried the banner 'READ CLEM ATTLEE ON INSIDE CHINA'. The paper used the articles as its

[54] Bodleian Library, Castle papers, Ms Castle 4, diary entry for 20 September 1954.

[55] According to Summerskill, this idea was quashed by Malenkov's rival Khrushchev: Edith Summerskill, *A woman's world: Her memoirs* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 181.

[56] George Stafford Gale, *No flies in China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), 82; *NYT*, 10 September 1954; TNA FO 371/110247/20. It should be noted that Attlee found the new housing preferable to the 'miserable mud hovels' in which many still lived.

[57] *NYT*, 3 September, 9 September, and 14 September 1954.

[58] *Tribune*, 22 October 1954.

[59] Gale, *No flies in China* provides an entertaining account of the delegation from a journalist's point of view. His book was described as the work of a drunken, 'decadent liberal' in *Tribune*, 22 April 1955. The delegates' poor press relations were also commented on in the *Daily Worker*, 19 August 1954, and in TNA FO 371/110247/19.

[60] Humphrey Trevelyan, *Worlds apart: China 1953–6, Soviet Union 1962–5* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1971), 118. Trevelyan was the British chargé d'affaires in Beijing during the visit.

main news story throughout the week. Crossman later commented that many Americans were 'tremendously interested' in the delegation and 'almost grateful' for it: 'as if' by visiting China 'Brit. Labour were doing for them the dirty work they dare not do themselves'[61].

The delegation gave the Labour leaders a new understanding of the permanence of the Communist regime and its potential role in the world. According to Morgan Phillips's draft report:

> China knows she is a great Asiatic power. She knows she is right in the centre of the diplomatic field. She intends to remain there. The Government is backed by the intellectuals and the middle and professional classes. It is there to stay. It is therefore important for the free world to formulate a practical policy and do its utmost to secure a better understanding and encourage a greater development of trade. . . . She will remain a member of the Cominform, but she will seek her own independence and strive for the leadership of all Asian countries[62].

In addition, some of the delegates seem to have been personally affected by their experiences. Edith Summerskill was said to have been so influenced by the improvement in conditions for women in the PRC that she was subsequently far less clearly identified with the right wing of the Labour party[63]. The BBC expressed private concern that Attlee's views on his return might be 'over-optimistic', and suggested that the solid trade unionist Sam Watson should be asked to give a broadcast as a 'useful counterweight'[64]. The visit also suggested a new maturity on the part of the Chinese Communists in their dealings with the Labour Party, compared to the disastrous 'goodwill' mission in 1950. As the Chinese government entered the diplomatic arena, it realized the value of the support that a sympathetic Labour Party could offer, even in opposition. During the subsequent 'Straits crisis', for instance, the Labour Party's backing carried far more weight than that of the Communist party, and a BCFA delegation to the Foreign Office was greeted with thinly concealed contempt[65]. This time, therefore, it was the turn of the British Communists to feel some discomfort. Sam Russell, who was sent by the *Daily Worker* to cover the delegation, was happy to report positive stories such as the rehabilitation of counter-revolutionary prisoners and the surge in heavy industry, but he was quick to criticize Attlee for his 'impertinent' criticisms of the Soviet Union (which were also attacked in *Pravda*). There was, he claimed, no evidence of Soviet 'exploitation' of China,

[61] MRC, Crossman diary, 8/16, 9 September 1954; Bodleian Library, Castle diary, entry for 20 September 1954.

[62] Labour Party NEC minutes, draft report. The Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) was established in 1947.

[63] *Daily Worker*, 2 June 1956; there is a detailed account of the delegation in Summerskill, *Woman's world*, 177–99.

[64] TNA FO 371/110248/30. Interestingly, Crossman noted in his diary that at the Labour Party conference Watson had given Attlee a 'tacit rebuke' for being too pro-Chinese in his speech (MRC, 8/16, 1 October 1954).

[65] See TNA, FO 371115304. One Foreign Office official complained that they were simply treated to the Communist party line, and that Dora Russell, who accompanied the BCFA secretary Jack Dribbon, was a 'squalid and unattractive woman' (3 March 1955).

and Attlee was misguided to think that he could split China and the USSR. However, Russell's comment that China's industrialization was 'thanks only' to Soviet assistance merely served to emphasize the very Sino-Soviet tensions that Attlee had identified[66].

The outbreak of the first 'Straits crisis'[67] almost immediately after the delegates' departure provided an early test of Labour's sympathies. The principal issue was the future of Chiang Kai-shek's regime on Taiwan, and the extent of the United States' commitment to defending it. Mao challenged American resolve by shelling two heavily fortified islands, Quemoy and Matsu, which were under KMT control and lay just off the Chinese mainland. The timing of the crisis (which began on 3 September 1954) also coincided with the formal establishment in Manila of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which was a major element in the US strategy for the regional containment of China[68]. In the event, the crisis merely served to consolidate American support for Chiang Kai-shek, and a Mutual Defence Treaty was signed between the USA and his Republic of China (ROC) on 2 December 1954. Although the treaty did not extend to the offshore islands, in a subsequent message the United States agreed to defend them if this was deemed necessary for the security of Taiwan. When the Chinese government realized that the Eisenhower administration was willing to contemplate war over the islands, it ended the confrontation in February 1955.

The Labour party was consistently hostile to the KMT, and held the view that under the 1943 Cairo declaration Taiwan and the other islands belonged to the PRC. Attlee had a strong record of outspoken comment on this subject, and in a broadcast in September 1953 he stated that Chiang Kai-shek's 'discredited faction' should give up its UN seat to the PRC. In July 1954 he told parliament that it was time that Chiang was 'pensioned off', and that most of his 'ageing forces . . . would be glad to return to China'. He also warned American 'hotheads' not to contemplate a war to put the KMT leader 'back on his throne'[69]. Not surprisingly, therefore, Attlee gave a strong lead against Britain being dragged into a 'civil war' by its American ally during the Straits crisis. His position—as stated in an interview in the *Daily Herald* on 31 January 1955—was even described as being 'extreme' in some quarters, although it was essentially the same line as that taken by Churchill's government[70]. Attlee—backed by the public oratory of Bevan, Crossman, and Summerskill—appeared to have met the Communist

[66] *Daily Worker*, 3 September, 14 September, and 24 September 1954. Attlee was responding to a comment from Mao that he should refer a number of proposals for reducing tension to the US administration. Harris, *Attlee*, 521.

[67] For a good account of the crisis, see Quiang Zhai, *The dragon, the lion and the eagle: Chinese–British–American relations, 1949–1958* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994), ch. 8. See also Michael Szonyi, *Cold war island: Quemoy on the front line* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42–9.

[68] SEATO was a regional defence alliance of limited efficacy. It combined the United States, the European colonial powers (Britain and France), and Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines.

[69] *Daily Worker*, 21 September 1953; *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 14 July 1954, cols 483–8.

[70] *New Statesman*, 5 February 1955, 159; MRC, Crossman diary, 8/17, 28 January 1955.

party's challenge to 'speak for Britain' against the threat of war[71]. The only complication was that since the 1953 conference Labour's policy had been to call for the 'neutralization' of Taiwan, whereby Chiang and his forces would be sent into exile, the island placed under UN trusteeship, and the islanders left to decide their own destiny. This policy was intended to facilitate a peaceful solution, and in Attlee's view Taiwan 'naturally belong[ed] to the Chinese'[72]. However, any suggestion of Taiwanese independence was—and remains—unacceptable to the PRC. The *News Chronicle* observed that Attlee's proposals 'upset the Chinese Communists, infuriated the Chinese Nationalists, annoyed Washington and outraged the *Daily Mail*'[73]. They also enjoyed far from overwhelming support within the Labour Party itself. A poll of more than 100 Labour candidates carried out by the BCFA during the May 1955 general election campaign showed that 49 per cent favoured the immediate return of Taiwan to China, while the rest supported various forms of neutralization[74].

'SMILING MR TSAO OFFERS £100 MILLION'[75]: TRADING WITH CHINA IN THE 1950s

From 1949 onwards the prospect of trade with the People's Republic of China not only united the left, but also helped it to forge some unlikely alliances. There were two distinct issues involved. In part, this was simply the long-standing belief in the near-miraculous economic opportunities that a developing China might offer to Britain. The statement issued by the Britain–China conference in December 1949, for instance, saw 'equal and friendly relations' as the means to 'open up for us one of the greatest potential markets in the world'[76]. However, there was a further consideration, as trade with the PRC was severely limited by the commercial restrictions imposed on trade with Communist states during the Cold War. China was not only covered by the 'COCOM' list of 1949–50, which prohibited the sale of goods of strategic importance to the Soviet Union and its allies[77], but was also the target for specific controls under the UN resolution of 1951 which branded it as an 'aggressor'. Trade, therefore, became highly politicized, and attacks on the embargo were often justified in terms of the commercial opportunity that Britain

[71] *Daily Worker*, 31 January and 7 February 1955.

[72] *Daily Worker*, 3 September 1954, reporting Attlee's press conference on 2 September 1954. This phrase is not reported in the *NYT* account, 3 September 1954. As explained in 1961, Labour's policy was 'not two Chinas but China and a freely chosen [non-KMT] Formosan Government, if that should be the people's wish' (Labour Party, *China and the West* (1961), 26–7).

[73] Cited in Harris, *Attlee*, 525. The only group happy with the party's position was a group representing Formosa's native population: see the letter from Thomas Liao, 'President of the Formosan government in exile in Japan', to Gaitskell, 11 September 1959, in LHASC, Labour Party, China correspondence, 1959–62.

[74] Sheffield University, Winnington papers, Dribbon to Winnington, 25 May 1955.

[75] *Daily Worker*, 14 July 1954: headline during the first PRC trade delegation to Britain.

[76] Hull, DBN 21/4.

[77] The Paris-based 'Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Security Export Controls' was intended to extend the US Export Control Act of 1949 across NATO member states.

was foregoing. In 1952 the leader of the Burnley Weavers' Association claimed that China's demand for machinery could 'abolish unemployment' in the engineering industry if the embargo was lifted[78]. Likewise, Alec Horsley, a Quaker businessman who visited China in 1952, said that Britain might have 'no worries for the next twenty years' if it resumed unrestricted trade[79]. The prospect of greater trade had a strong resonance in manufacturing areas that thought that they might stand to benefit. For instance, local conferences to promote trade with China were organized in both Coventry (by the local Labour movement) and South-East London. When workers at a factory in Basildon making agricultural equipment faced redundancies, the workers decided to make direct contact with the Chinese, Soviet, and Indian trade representatives[80].

Some voices urged caution. A TUC Research Department memorandum in 1954 pointed out that what China currently wanted was heavy engineering and capital goods, which would be covered by the embargo on exports of strategic value and, in any case, were already selling well in other markets. Moreover, China was able to supply little that Britain wanted. Processed eggs and oil seeds would not compensate for pre-war export commodities such as tungsten and tin, which were now required for China's internal needs. The long-term credits needed to promote Anglo-Chinese trade were restricted by political considerations and by the priority given to Commonwealth countries[81]. In fact, between 1950 and 1954 China only attracted 0.17 per cent of British exports, mainly raw materials[82]. Trade was also threatened by the increasingly adverse environment within China after 1949. Although many British businesses had chosen to remain, the combination of high taxation, greater labour regulation, and political hostility created intolerable pressures on them[83]. On 20 May 1952 the British government announced in Parliament that most British companies were leaving China (in many cases for Hong Kong). When Barbara Castle met the survivors of the British community in Shanghai in 1954, she was disappointed to find them to be overseas traders 'of the worst type', full of stories of a 'reign of terror' in the city. One told her that there were posters at the ends of streets with the names of those who had been liquidated—but that these had been taken down during Attlee's recent visit[84]. Any commercial expansion, therefore, would clearly require new and more sympathetic businessmen, and this again offered opportunities for the left.

In April 1952 an international conference to promote East–West trade was organized in Moscow under the auspices of the World Peace Council. Lord Boyd Orr, a Nobel laureate and founding director of the UN's Food and Agriculture

[78] *Daily Worker*, 25 February 1952, citing Harold Dickinson, who had visited China with the BCFA: see his report on the Chinese textile industry in *Britons in China*, 20–2.

[79] *Daily Worker*, 9 May 1952. Horsley, of North Dairies Ltd, was later the Treasurer of SACU in the 1960s.

[80] MRC, Mss 11/3/8/11, Coventry Borough Labour Party papers (conference of 28 April 1955); *Daily Worker*, 1 and 8 July 1957; *Daily Worker*, 10 July 1956.

[81] MRC, Mss 292 951/2, D. Bowers to Bell, 9 August 1954.

[82] Clayton, *Imperialism revisited*, 140.

[83] Boardman, *Britain and the PRC*, 77–84.

[84] Bodleian Library, Castle diary, 30 October 1954.

Organization, led a 28-strong British delegation which included MPs, trade unionists, and businessmen[85]. As a result of the conference, the British Council for the Promotion of International Trade (BCPIT) was established under Boyd Orr's presidency. Although some deals were struck with the Chinese representatives in Moscow—mainly for the export of wool tops to China—the BCPIT envisaged that Anglo-Chinese trade would now be put on a completely new footing, and routed primarily through the East Berlin offices of the Chinese National Import–Export Corporation (CNIEC). Boyd Orr's international reputation gave weight to the BCPIT, but commercial expertise was provided by a number of Communists with experience of business and international organization[86]. Roland Berger, the BCPIT's Director, was a former UNRRA official who had worked for the UN in Poland in the later 1940s. His work within the BCPIT was deemed so sensitive by the Communist Party that the career of his wife Nancy, a 'capable woman and a political one too', was deliberately held back for fear of jeopardizing it[87]. Berger worked closely with two businessmen, Jack Perry and Bernard Buckman, who jointly took over the London Export Corporation (LEC) in July 1952 and acted as the official British agents of the CNIEC. Perry was proud of his background as a Jew from the East End who had fought Mosley's Blackshirts and, despite a curtailed education, built up a successful garment business[88]. He had served for 18 months as the British representative on the preparatory committee for the Moscow conference, and was the secretary to the British delegation. Buckman had been the secretary of the London committee of the BCFA during 1950–2. He later recalled that he decided to give up a good job and invest in the LEC at the request of Chi Chao-ting, the man who was said to be 'the principal architect . . . of closer relations between China and the United Kingdom'[89]. Within the LEC, Perry and Buckman were assisted by Stephen Bodington, a Marxist economist who had been purged from the civil service in 1951 and wrote in left-wing journals under the pseudonym 'John Eaton'[90].

This core of dedicated and well-connected entrepreneurs created a fertile environment for business links with China. Although a few businessmen had travelled

[85] The full delegation is listed in Percy Timberlake, *The 48 Group: The story of the icebreakers in China* (London: 48 Group Club, 1994), 4.

[86] The following passage draws on TNA, FO 371/105128; as well as the obituaries of Stephen Bodington (*The Guardian*, 1 January 1990) and Jack Perry (*The Guardian*, 2 January 1997); see also Graham Perry's reminiscences of his father on the China–Britain Business Council website, 'Profile: Jack Perry': <http://ols.cbbc.org/the_review/50th/3.html> (consulted 14 January 2008). Perry and Buckman were also involved in a similar organization entitled the International Traders' Association.

[87] TNA KV2 2526, recorded comments by Betty Reid, 9 November 1953 and 30 September 1955. For 'Nan' Berger, see her obituary in *The Guardian*, 27 July 1998. According to TNA KV2/2046, in the mid 1950s she worked closely with Betty Reid in the important work of compiling biographies of CPGB members for internal security vetting.

[88] In the 1970s he is said to have told a group of American businessmen with Ivy League educations that: 'I am a Jew. I left school at 13 and educated myself' (*The Guardian*, 2 January 1997).

[89] Graham Perry, 'Jack Perry'; the quotation concerning Chi's role is taken from Joseph Needham's contribution to a memorial meeting for Chi, held in London on 5 December 1963 (National Library of Scotland, Acc 6545, Lord Boyd Orr papers, Box 2).

[90] LHASC, CP/CENT/PERS/1/03.

on to Beijing after the Moscow conference, the most significant step was the so-called 'Icebreaker' mission of June–July 1953[91]. The representatives of sixteen British companies took part in this enterprise which was organized by the BCPIT (which took a commission of 0.25 per cent on all business deals concluded) and led by Berger, Perry, and Buckman. The mission resulted in a 'business agreement' with the CNIEC for trade worth £15 million in each direction, and the companies then set up a China Trade Committee to turn this agreement into contracts. Although the eventual volume of business was smaller than had been agreed, not least because many of the contracts were for embargoed goods, increasing numbers of companies were brought in to meet the demand, and they formed the basis of the '48 Group' of companies trading with China. When the returning businessmen were questioned by Board of Trade officials, one of them pointed out that Berger and his colleagues had 'studiously avoided politics' during the mission, while another commented that: 'If they are Communists they manage to disguise the fact successfully'.

Although Berger realized that any hint of political manipulation would soon scare off the businessmen, the political impact of the 'Icebreaker' mission and the initiatives that led up to it was still considerable. The Chinese government had succeeded in breaking the hold of the established trading companies, as well as organizations such as the China Association and the FBI, which were seen as 'unfriendly' to China. Berger and his colleagues were personal beneficiaries of this commercial revolution (by 1954 Berger was said to be being paid a consultancy fee of £1000 by a group of businesses), but their success was hard-earned. Perry's son recalled how his father went to China for two months each year, and worked hard at building a good personal relationship with men of influence such as Chi Chao-ting. These new commercial links were deeply resented by long-established traders. At the time of the Moscow conference, John Keswick of Jardine Matheson wrote that: 'It is irksome that these ridiculously uninformed businessmen should go hob-nobbing with the Chinese at a time when we are being squeezed to death by them'[92]. This animosity was shared in establishment circles, and there is some evidence to suggest that the fact that a number of these businessmen were Jewish fuelled this resentment[93].

The British government was placed in a quandary. It disliked the BCPIT as a Communist 'front' organization, more concerned with propaganda than trade[94],

[91] This passage is based on TNA, BT 11/6131, and Timberlake, *48 Group*, 15–22.

[92] James Tuck-Hong Tang, *Britain's encounter with revolutionary China, 1949–1954* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 160.

[93] The Foreign Office noted that Perry was formerly known as Isador Perisky (TNA FO 371/105127); a Home Office file on the 'Progressive Businessmen's Forum', with which Berger, Perry, and Buckman were also involved, contains this comment: 'Their membership seems to consist exclusively of the landed gentry of this realm, with earthy names such as Horowitz, Grunbaum and so forth, whose activities would appear to be, like those of Buckman and Perry, centred around the clothing trade' (HO 45/25583, PFD Tennant of the FBI to C. H. Baylis, Board of Trade, 20 March 1954).

[94] See Eden's response to an 'inspired' (i.e. planted) Parliamentary Question in *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 6 November 1953, col. 4 and 18 November 1953, cols 164–5; TNA FO 371/105128.

and resented the manner in which some businessmen were willing to work with it for profit. At the same time, it was wary of offending non-political businessmen who had not broken the law in pursuit of legitimate custom. When Anthony Eden referred to the BCPIT as 'commies' during a meeting with Sir Alfred Owen, the owner of the Midlands manufacturer Rubery Owen, Sir Alfred is said to have snapped back: 'If you take care of the politics, we will take care of the trade'[95]. Moreover, the government realized that if it took action against the BCPIT it could be charged with simply favouring the 'old China houses' against an 'equally legitimate' group of businessmen[96]. In any case, there was not enough evidence to allow government officials to make damaging allegations against the BCPIT—for instance, they suspected, but could not prove, that the commissions on trade were being used to 'swell Communist party funds' in Britain[97]. Accordingly, a twin-track policy was pursued. An official trade organization—the Sino-British Trade Council (SBTC)—was set up in 1954, with support from the China Association and the FBI, as the basis for reciprocal relations with China. Meanwhile, businessmen were politely warned off links with the BCPIT and its associates, and guided towards working with the SBTC. (Hostile information was also passed to 'selected contacts' in the Labour Party[98].) However, many businessmen continued to prefer the connections with the 'new China' offered by Berger and Perry to the now outdated methods of the 'old China hands'. When a Chinese trade delegation visited Britain in the summer of 1954, it pointedly spoke to both official and unofficial groups.

The British left's promotion of trade can be seen as one of its principal successes in its relationship with China, and had far-reaching consequences. The BCPIT mounted an effective political campaign, helped by the continuing threat of unemployment in the mid 1950s[99]. It received active support from Labour MPs, and even from the Liberal peer Viscount Elibank, who had fought against the Boxer rebels. Meanwhile, the expertise of Berger and his colleagues demonstrated to adventurous businessmen that a profitable trade with China was possible. Although the left continued to campaign around this issue in the late 1950s, it was increasingly pressing on an open door, and Ian Mikardo muttered that the critics of the embargo were suddenly becoming 'respectable'[100]. The Macmillan government unilaterally relaxed trade restrictions in May 1957 and Rubery Owen moved swiftly to negotiate a substantial contract for the export of tractors. By the early 1960s British firms were holding regular trade fairs in China, with the support of

[95] Timberlake, *48 Group*, 13; TNA FO 371/110145, memorandum by J. Galsworthy, 27 August 1954.

[96] TNA FO 371/110145, comment by P. F. de Zulueta, 14 July 1954.

[97] TNA FO 371/105128, minute by T. A. K. Elliott, 16 November 1953.

[98] TNA FO 371/105128, memorandum of 16 December 1953. (This related to a letter from Hugh Dalton expressing the concerns of the Cambridge economist Richard Kahn at the description of the BCPIT as a Communist 'front'.)

[99] LHASC, CP/CENT/PC/03/05, paper by CPGB International Department on the anti-embargo campaign, May 1957, which noted that 'there is no ground here more favourable for a sustained campaign' enlisting the support of trade unions and business.

[100] *Tribune*, 15 March 1957.

the British government, and the Chinese placed a high-profile order for civilian airliners. To a large extent, therefore, trade had been taken out of the political arena in Britain.

However, it proved difficult to divorce commercial relations between Britain and China entirely from wider political considerations. In February 1958 Harold Wilson visited China, partly to meet senior figures in government (including a second interview with Chou En-lai), and partly to promote a British process for making chipboard. While visiting a factory Wilson noticed banners that read 'work for the good—to catch up with Britain in 15 years'[101]. His visit had coincided with the early phase of the Great Leap Forward, when Britain was identified as a convenient target for economic rivalry during the next three five-year plans. In November 1957 Mao had claimed that China would overtake Britain in steel production in 15 years[102]. The 'surpass Britain' campaign was in full swing when Richard Crossman visited China in September. At one exhibition he was informed that China had already surpassed Parker's Quink ink, as well as 'the British thermos flask, the British piston and the British points system on the railway'. Everywhere he saw a Chinese product displayed with a 'singularly dirty or broken object called "British quality" by its side'. Crossman privately admitted that his 'Britishness had been stirred' by the anti-western propaganda during his visit. British pride was presumably somewhat restored, therefore, when Crossman was shown the new Chinese 'East wind' family car—and its door handle fell off[103].

THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD: 1958–1962

From 1957 onwards the ability of the British left to read developments in China declined sharply as events became ever less predictable. The relatively judicious policies adopted at the 8th Congress of the CCP in the autumn of 1956 were, for instance, swiftly overturned. The decision by Mao to encourage greater criticism of the regime in May 1957 offered a foretaste of the turbulence to come. Mao had first coined the slogan 'Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools contend' a year earlier, and his motive for suddenly promoting an apparent liberalization at this juncture remains unclear. Ostensibly he was demonstrating the stability of Chinese Communism in comparison with the disorder that had recently gripped Eastern Europe, but once it became clear that the criticism was getting out of control Mao claimed that he had set a cunning trap for the 'poisonous weeds' amongst the intellectuals. Mao's speech of February 1957 'On the correct handling of contradictions among the people', which provided a theoreti-

[101] Details of the visit are in Bodleian Library, Ms Wilson, c.872.

[102] This was first reported by Winnington in *Daily Worker*, 5 February 1958. The 'surpass Britain' campaign had arisen from a 'boasting contest' between Mao and Khrushchev at the Moscow conference of Communist parties in 1957. In the course of 1958, the period in which Britain was due to be overtaken was reduced to a mere three years (see Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*, 84).

[103] MRC, Mss 154/8/30, Crossman diaries, entries for 4 September, 7 September and 15 September 1958.

cal context for his actions, was only published in the West in June. It was immediately seized upon by left-wing commentators such as Isaac Deutscher and Basil Davidson as proof that Mao had completely rejected Stalinism in favour of a genuinely open form of socialism[104]. In fact, this was precisely the moment at which the 'One Hundred Flowers' campaign turned into a conventional attack on 'Rightist' elements, and thousands of intellectuals were jailed or deported to remote corners of China. One victim was Kingsley Martin's friend Hsiao Ch'ien, whose persecution barely ceased until after the Cultural Revolution[105]. Other cases, including those of Ting Ling (China's leading female novelist and a recipient of the Stalin prize), Professor Ma Yinchu, (an advocate of birth control), and Fei Hsiao Tung (another of Martin's acquaintances) also caused concern amongst China's supporters[106]. In January 1958 Paul Hogarth, an artist who had recently toured China, wrote to Alan Winnington:

> What goes with Ting-Ling and Fei Hsiao-t'ung? Keep being asked and no one knows the answers or even part of it. The Arts & Sciences c[o]mm[i]ttee of the BCFA have requested officially ages ago. Silence. Meanwhile, the impression is growing among all kinds of people that it is going sour[107].

When Ivor Montagu raised Ting Ling's case with the Vice Minister of Culture in the early 1960s, he was told that she had become the 'banner of the opposition'—but he was assured that she would not be forced to do manual labour[108].

The 'rectification' of the intellectuals and the muzzling of all criticism created ideal conditions for Mao's hugely ambitious 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958. His intention was to end China's economic backwardness at a stroke by a combination of mass popular mobilization and the large-scale utilization of simple technologies. The abiding image of the Great Leap is one of myriad small backyard furnaces, producing steel out of scrap metal in homes and workplaces. As Winnington reported in the autumn of 1958, 'everyone is talking steel, dreaming steel…'[109]. However, Mao's ultimate goal was to complete the socialist transformation of Chinese society through the creation of 'People's Communes' (both rural and urban), which would become the basis for all economic and social life. The Communes would fulfil Mao's most cherished ambition: to break down barriers between manual and mental work, between city and countryside, and between agriculture and industry. In effect, Mao had rejected the pragmatic, statist, expert-led model of socialist development promoted by the Soviet Union in favour of sheer revolutionary will. Indeed, at a time of

[104] See the articles by Basil Davidson (*Tribune*, 21 June 1957) and Isaac Deutscher (*New Statesman*, 29 June 1957, 829). Alan Winnington described the 'full gale of debate' in China as 'the biggest mental shake-up I have seen', with bureaucracy as the principal target (*Daily Worker*, 21 and 22 May 1957).

[105] Hsiao Chi'en was criticized for his relationship with Martin (Ch'ien, *Traveller*, 197). Martin expressed his concern over his fate in the *New Statesman*, 9 November 1957, 598.

[106] For the persecution of Ma Yinchu, who was only rehabilitated (aged 98) in 1979, see Shapiro, *Mao's war against nature*, 36 ff.

[107] Sheffield University, Winnington papers, Hogarth to Winnington, 11 January 1958. For Hogarth's visits to China, see Wright, *Passport to Peking*, esp. pp. 414–48.

[108] LHASC, CP/IND/GOLL/06/03, undated typescript of 'Conversations in China' by 'I.M.'.

[109] *Daily Worker*, 1 October 1958.

rising tension and competition with the Soviet Union, Mao bragged to Khrushchev in mid 1958 that China would be the first to reach a state of true communism[110].

The campaign appeared to start well. Steel production soared, and there was a bumper harvest in 1958, despite the government's insistence on already discredited Lysenkoist methods in agriculture, such as deep ploughing and close sowing. Within a few months in the late summer of 1958, most Chinese peasants joined some 24,000 new Communes. The Crooks, for instance, found that Ten Mile Inn, the site of their field work in the late 1940s, had amalgamated with 33 other 'high level cooperatives' to form the new Yangyi Commune[111]. By the end of 1958, however, the Great Leap was already faltering, as the Chinese economy struggled to cope with the immense disruption that it had caused. Most of the backyard steel was worthless, and the Crooks later discovered that all of the cooking utensils at Ten Mile Inn had been melted down to feed the furnaces[112]. Ever more absurd quotas and the inefficient allocation of labour to meet the targets exacerbated the damage caused by the new farming techniques. In the absence of criticism the regime pressed on, and Mao survived an unprecedented challenge to his authority at the Lushun party conference in mid 1959. However, the disastrous consequences of his Great Leap would soon become apparent.

During the first year of the Great Leap Forward, the response of the British left was extremely positive. This was partly because the few first-hand accounts indicated that unprecedented developments were indeed taking place in China. With the benefit of hindsight Alan Winnington wrote in his memoirs that the Chinese people were caught in a 'mad vortex by infantile agitation', and that Mao's daring was 'half way to madness'[113]. However, there was nothing to indicate this in his ecstatic reports for the *Daily Worker*, which compared the Great Leap to 'daybreak in a planetarium. Things here seem to be faster and bigger than life'. Winnington gamely reported the ever higher production figures, and endorsed Mao's bucolic vision of a 'green and pleasant China, dotted with factories' in which the traditional gaps between city and countryside 'are being steadily closed'[114]. As for the dangerous innovations in agricultural practice, he claimed to have seen fields planted so densely 'that rabbits cannot enter'[115]. Winnington's favourable impression of the People's Communes was confirmed by Richard Crossman, whose visit to China in the autumn of 1958 coincided with their formation. Crossman visited a number of communes and found the experience exhilarating. He was deeply impressed by the self-confidence and initiative that the peasants had

[110] Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*, 87.

[111] *Labour Monthly*, January 1960, 42–6, and February 1960, 88–93. They subsequently wrote a book about *The first years of Yangyi Commune* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

[112] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 11, p. 8.

[113] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 204–5.

[114] *Daily Worker*, 2 April 1958; 16 May 1958. His private correspondence is just as effusive. For instance, on 10 June 1958 he wrote to Mabel Farrell that: 'Over here things are bounding along and there's no doubt at all how fast Socialism is going to develop in China. It's hard to keep abreast of the situation mentally' (Sheffield University, Winnington papers).

[115] *Daily Worker*, 15 September 1958: see Becker, *Hungry ghosts*, for the staged photograph of children standing *on* a field of wheat.

displayed in establishing the Communes, and came to believe that the movement was a genuinely spontaneous one, far preferable to Stalinist coercion. He wrote in his diary: 'What extraordinary feats of political education the Chinese Communists have achieved in the countryside! What energies they have unleashed!'[116] Crossman was hardly a 'fellow-traveller' (he had edited *The God that Failed*, a canonical anti-Communist text, in 1950), and his articles in the *New Statesman* were later seized on by China's supporters as proof of the spontaneity of the movement to create the Communes[117]. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that left-wing commentators based in Britain shared the initial euphoria. In *Labour Monthly* Robin Page Arnot claimed that the Chinese had—with 'revolutionary spirit' alone—achieved increases in production which were far in excess of the highly mechanized British economy. Palme Dutt wrote that the Chinese were truly 'storming heaven': 'the age-old famines of China have vanished forever with the coming of Communism'[118]. Thomas Balogh, an economist and adviser to the Labour government in the 1960s, argued that the Chinese had 'eliminated' rural underemployment. The growth of small-scale rural industry was 'incontestable and awe-inspiring'[119]. A paper submitted to the January 1959 Executive Committee of the Communist Party contrasted the 'gigantic advances' in Chinese industrial and agricultural production with the anticipated economic crisis in the capitalist world[120].

The attacks mounted against the Great Leap Forward by some of China's enemies merely stiffened the left's support. For instance, on 14 November 1958 President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, accused the Chinese Communists of 'imposing mass slavery on 650 million people', and a flood of similar criticism ensued in the US press[121]. Shortly afterwards the *News Chronicle* ran a headline story by Boris Kidel on 'Mao's land of slaves', placing special emphasis on the alleged destruction of family life in the highly regimented Communes. The fact that most journalists were not based in China (many operated from Hong Kong, and Kidel was his paper's Vienna correspondent) meant that their stories—although often broadly correct—could be easily discounted. Moreover, Kidel's crude comment that China's new civilization was in fact 'the civilisation of the ant heap' smacked of the 'yellow peril' of the early part of the century[122]. Even so, the sheer incredibility of some of the claims coming out of China was beginning to erode confidence on the left. In early January 1959 the *Daily Worker* published a letter that challenged some of Winnington's figures for grain yields, and—most unusually—asked its correspondent to reply. Winnington commented that he had

[116] MRC, Mss 154/8/30, Crossman diary, entry for 12 September 1958.
[117] *New Statesman*, 27 September 1958, 403–4; 10 January 1959; and 17 January 1959, 64–6; Michael Shapiro in *Marxism Today*, December 1958.
[118] *Labour Monthly*, November 1958, 488–91; January 1959, 7–8.
[119] *New Statesman*, 29 November 1958, 750–1.
[120] LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/06/04, paper for 10/11 January 1959.
[121] Greene, *Curtain of ignorance*, 152.
[122] *News Chronicle* & *Daily Dispatch*, 25 November 1958. The article was strongly attacked as shoddy journalism in *Tribune*, 28 November 1958.

been 'somewhat dubious about the claim made at this particular commune', but recalled that the peasants had been growing winter wheat 'as close as a lawn' across a vast area. He added that goals were now more modest, but that communes would continue to strive for 'fantastically high yields' despite the strain on manpower and soil preservation[123]. When the scientist and peace activist J. D. Bernal visited China in October 1959, he is said to have expressed private scepticism about the official statistics, although by this time even the government was admitting to errors in calculating such 'unprecedentedly large crops'[124]. A more typical response was that of the fellow-travelling lawyer D. N. Pritt: despite statistical mistakes caused by 'plain exuberance', an increase of 35 per cent in production during the year (instead of 100 per cent as originally stated) was still a 'colossal' achievement[125]. Harry Pollitt who, along with Bernal and Pritt, had attended the PRC's 10th anniversary celebrations in Beijing, told the Communist Party's executive on his return to Britain: 'They are going places. What will it be like in another ten years?'[126] The Chinese, he added, appreciated the 'brotherly aid' of the Soviet Union.

In fact, the Great Leap Forward had dealt a devastating blow to China's economy. Per capita grain production did not return to 1957 levels until 1973[127], and there was famine throughout rural China from 1960 to 1962. Although the exact death toll may never be established, the most recent account (based on available archival sources) claims that a minimum of 45 million perished during these terrible years, with the highest mortality in 1960[128]. The famine was largely hidden from foreign eyes, apart from moments such as the arrival of large numbers of refugees at Hong Kong in May 1962. This allowed the Chinese government to attempt to conceal the scope of the disaster by pursuing a number of different strategies. The first was to claim that China had not suffered a man-made catastrophe, but rather three years of drought, flood, and other 'natural calamities' (compounded by the withdrawal of Soviet assistance in July 1960). The fact that these calamities had

[123] *Daily Worker*, 7 January 1959 and 17 March 1959. The letter was written by F. W. Gladwell, who deserves credit as the first to spot the emperor's lack of clothes!

[124] Andrew Brown, *J. D. Bernal: The Sage of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 403–4; *Daily Worker*, 27 August 1959. Brown's source is a 2001 interview with Bernal's son Martin, who was studying in China in 1959. However, I have found no archival evidence to suggest any doubt in J. D. Bernal's mind at the time, and plenty of evidence that he was impressed by the Great Leap Forward (see CUL, Bernal papers, L61 and L62). It is also worth noting that in the mid 70s, Martin Bernal distanced himself from the critical views that he had expressed at the time. In the *New Statesman*, 2 May 1975, 598/9, he wrote that whereas he and fellow students had seen the Great Leap Forward as a disaster, 'we would never have foreseen that in the long run the communes and rural industry would have been major successes'.

[125] *Daily Worker*, 1 October 1959.

[126] *Daily Worker*, 18 November 1959.

[127] Dietrich, *People's China*, 141.

[128] Frank Dikötter, *Mao's great famine: The history of China's most devastating catastrophe, 1958–62* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 333; see also Becker, *Hungry ghosts*. According to Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*, there were 310 thousand deaths in 1959, 13.5 million in 1960, and 4.68 million in 1961 (pp. 117 and 195). Even Mao's defenders, such as Mobo Gao, do not seek to deny that the famine killed millions, but instead concentrate their fire on Chang and Halliday's estimate of 38 million deaths and the question of Mao's personal culpability (*The battle for China's past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 85–6; Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, 533).

apparently been successfully managed by the authorities, therefore, reflected well on the government. Secondly, foreign friends of China were asked to rally to the government's defence. Edgar Snow returned to China for the first time since the 1940s, and proclaimed in his book *The Other Side of the River: Red China Today* that there had been no famine. Other prominent supporters of the government's line were Anna Louise Strong and Felix Greene, the US-based cousin of Graham Greene who became one of the most effective advocates of the Chinese cause both in print and in television documentary films[129]. The government also used prominent figures unconnected with the left to present its message. Both Malcolm MacDonald, son of the former Prime Minister and an expert on South East Asia, and Viscount Montgomery of Alamein came away from China denying that anyone had died of starvation. Montgomery went as far as to state that the only malnutrition that he had witnessed was in Hong Kong[130]. However, although the government had successfully hidden the true situation, the Great Leap Forward was effectively at an end by 1961, and Mao's reputation amongst his peers was severely dented. During 1961–2 Deng Xiaoping and other pragmatists in the leadership reversed agricultural policy and imported food to alleviate the famine.

These events had a powerful impact on the British expatriate community and—for those who chose to remain—bound them even closer to the Chinese revolution. In 1958 David and Isabel Crook returned from leave in Britain to be sent—with fellow staff and pupils—for three weeks of agricultural labour in a remote village. David Crook found the work and the contact with the peasants 'a sort of redemption': harvesting sweet potatoes was 'tough going', but it was poetic justice for Britain's pillage of China[131]. Crook was aware of the subsequent 'hard years', but he placed most of the blame on adverse natural conditions. When he mentioned in a letter home that students and teachers were cooking the leaves of elm trees for extra vitamins, the comment was censored. Thereafter Crook, who at this time 'felt bound more than ever to be loyal and unquestioning', publicly denied that anyone had died of starvation[132]. In their annual circular letter for 1961, the Crooks admitted that China had experienced another hard year, but pointed out that in the 'old China' millions would have died[133]. Margaret Turner, another foreign resident of Beijing, who remained in contact with Peter and Rose Townsend, was less reticent about the difficult conditions. At the end of 1962 she described the considerable improvements during the year. In the local cooperative store, for instance, the shelves were now 'overflowing' with biscuits, cakes, and candies, whereas a year ago 'there just weren't any'. Clothing was still difficult to

[129] See Strong's article in *Labour Monthly*, February 1963, 79–83, and the review of *Red China Today* by Basil Davidson, *Tribune*, 21 June 1963.

[130] *Daily Worker*, 5 November 1962 and 6 October 1961.

[131] See David Crook's articles in *Labour Monthly*, January 1959, 42–6, and February 1959, 92–6; Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 11, pp. 8–9.

[132] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 11, p. 10. He had submitted the letter voluntarily for censorship within his department.

[133] Hull, DAR 2/49, 12, David and Isabel Crook to Robin and Olive Page Arnot, received 11 December 1961.

obtain, and cotton cloth was 'highly rationed'[134]. The British surgeon Joshua Horn, who had embraced the Great Leap Forward in his own medical work, felt that China had emerged 'sorely tested' but strengthened by the difficulties experienced in 1959–62. In a private letter of March 1962 he detected a mood of 'unbounded confidence': the Chinese people were now convinced that they would 'arrive at their Socialist destination on schedule'[135]. As the situation continued to ease, Michael Shapiro wrote in 1963 that there were 'wads of good, cheap food on the market'. However, foreigners had always been protected from the worst of the shortages and enjoyed a life of relative privilege. Shapiro and his wife lived in a 'lovely one storey bungalow, with its own garden'. They paid no rent or bills, and the house was kept clean, allowing them to concentrate on their work 'without many household worries'[136].

The failure of the Great Leap Forward, no matter how it was explained, inevitably affected China's standing in the eyes of the British left. When the Labour Party established a working party on China's relations with the West in 1960, the draft report was heavily criticized by the party leader Hugh Gaitskell. In particular, he pointed out that the favourable account of China's economic growth in the first paragraph was incomplete without reference to the recent 'agricultural catastrophe'[137], and the report was duly amended. At the same time the *New Statesman* seized on the 'natural calamities' as a vindication for the Soviet Union's warnings that the pace of the Great Leap Forward, compounded by the inexperience and 'grandiloquent theory' of the Chinese leadership, would result in disaster. As a consequence, Communism now offered a far less attractive model to other developing Asian economies, and China stood in need of western aid. In the words of Paul Johnson, Kingsley Martin's successor as editor, China was no longer a 'magnet' in Asia[138]. Equally noticeable, however, was a decline in the coverage of China in Marxist journals in the early 1960s, which reflected not only the confusion surrounding the fate of the Great Leap, but also a new reluctance to spring to China's defence at a point when the Sino-Soviet dispute was gathering momentum[139]. Above all, the Great Leap taught the British left a vital lesson in the dangers of credulity. In 1957 Malcolm MacEwen, a former *Daily Worker* staff member who had quit the party over the Hungarian uprising, wrote that the Soviet Union and

[134] Sheffield University, Townsend papers, letter from 'Margaret' [Turner], 8 December 1962.

[135] Hull, DAR (2)/1/26, Joshua Horn to Robin Page Arnot, 8 March 1962; Horn, '*Away with all pests*'.

[136] Neil Redfern, 'Michael Shapiro in China', *Communist History Network Newsletter*, 11 (Autumn 2001), 5, <http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/chnn/CHNN11MSC.html> (consulted 3 December 2001), cites Shapiro's private correspondence. See also Shapiro's article in *Comment*, 29 June 1963, 406–7.

[137] LHASC, Labour Party archive, working party papers, Gaitskell's comments, 11 January 1961. In the published version, it was acknowledged that 'the droughts of 1959 and 1960 have been a serious setback' (Labour Party, *China and the West*, 3).

[138] *New Statesman*, 6 January 1961, 5, and 25 May 1962, 752.

[139] *Marxism Today*, the new discussion journal of the CPGB, published two long articles by Michael Shapiro in 1958–9, but thereafter carried no Chinese news outside of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Likewise, Palme Dutt's *Labour Monthly* carried no major reports on China in this period apart from Anna Louise Strong's 1963 denial of the famine cited in note 129 above.

China still deserved the support of the left, but that this must 'never again be [in] the blind and uncritical' style of the past. A year later his gushing praise for the Great Leap Forward, the People's Communes and the 'wisdom' of the Communist leadership suggested that he had not heeded his own advice[140]. But many more would.

'LET A HUNDRED MUSHROOMS BLOOM'[141]: CHINA, INDIA AND THE BOMB, 1958–1964

In November 1957 Mao visited Moscow for the second and last time. Greatly excited by the recent launch of the Soviet 'Sputnik' satellite, he told an international gathering of Communist leaders that the 'East wind is prevailing over the West wind'. Less advisedly, he proclaimed that the prospect of a nuclear war held no terror for him: 'if the worst came to the worst and half of mankind died, the other half would remain while imperialism would be razed to the ground and the whole world would become socialist'. He went on to describe US imperialism as a 'paper tiger' which—although it possessed the atom bomb—would be 'overthrown', just as Hitler and Chiang Kai-shek had been[142]. Such bravado was unwelcome to Mao's Soviet hosts who were now advocating 'peaceful co-existence' with the West and, only a month earlier, had agreed to help China to acquire an atom bomb by 1959[143]. The transformation of China from a loyal lieutenant of the Soviet Union into a truculent rival was already underway, although the Sino-Soviet split did not come to full fruition until 1963–4. The impact of the split will be considered in detail below; however, we will first consider a series of episodes in China's external relations which profoundly influenced the response of the British left.

On 23 August 1958 China resumed its shelling of the offshore islands Quemoy and Matsu. Ostensibly, Mao was applying pressure for a resolution of the Taiwan question and expressing China's solidarity with the peoples of the Middle East following the recent US intervention in Lebanon. However, the crisis also rallied domestic support for the Great Leap Forward and marked a return to radicalism in China's foreign relations, serving to demarcate China's revolutionary policy from the Soviet Union's quest for better relations with the West. Khrushchev felt compelled to support China even though, humiliatingly, he had not been consulted about the bombardment during his recent visit to Beijing. The British left again rallied to China's side in the second 'Straits crisis', although this was as much due

[140] *Universities and Left Review* (Spring 1958), 19 and (Summer 1959), 125–7.

[141] Cartoon in the *New Statesman*, 3 September 1960, 291, ridiculing Mao's views on nuclear war.

[142] For the text of Mao's speech on 18 November 1957, see Michael Schoenhals, 'Mao Zedong: Speeches at the 1957 "Moscow Conference" ', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 2/2 (1986), 109–26, here pp. 115, 119, 120.

[143] Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*, 74–7; Dietrich, *People's China*, 118–19. Mao's views on the positive outcome of a nuclear war are well recorded and in keeping with earlier (and later) comments: however Felix Greene claimed that they had been invented by a hostile Tito (*Curtain of ignorance*, ch. 11).

to the growing fear of nuclear war as to sympathy for China's actions: the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had been launched in February 1958. Suddenly, the British public, who until recently may have thought that Quemoy was a 'new detergent or a Spanish swear-word'[144], realized that the dispute might trigger a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers. Accordingly, the crisis galvanized action across the labour movement. Hugh Gaitskell, who had become Labour leader in 1955 and was on the right of the party, took the position that 'we should not support, still less participate in, any war to defend the islands'[145]. Likewise, the TUC General Council sent a delegation to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to call for a peaceful settlement to the dispute, while reaffirming China's lawful claim to the offshore islands[146]. This was, however, the last time that the British left united in such wholehearted support for China, and was also the last time that the Communist Party deployed the slogan 'Hands off China'. Subsequent crises—centred on China's relations with India—were more complex and more divisive. Mao, meanwhile, was again thwarted by the United States' resolute support for Taiwan, and found a novel way to calm the crisis. Communist batteries continued to pound Quemoy from October 1958 until December 1979, but only on alternate, odd-numbered days[147].

In March 1959 the People's Liberation Army crushed a Tibetan revolt and the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, fled to take up asylum in India. This brought to a close a period of successful cooperation between China and India, during which the Indian Prime Minister Nehru had recognized China's claim to sovereignty over Tibet in return for an (undefined) measure of Tibetan autonomy[148]. The arrival of thousands of Chinese troops on India's borders, as well as the renewed revolutionary assault on Tibet's Buddhist culture that followed the rebellion, inflamed nationalist sentiment in India and revived longstanding disagreement over the 2,200 mile-long Sino-Indian border. China had never ratified the 1914 Simla Convention, which established the eastern section of the border on the Himalayan crests (the so-called 'McMahon line'). Accordingly, China laid claim to substantial territory under Indian control on the southern Himalayan slopes above Assam. At the western end, meanwhile, India became particularly concerned about China's occupation of the remote and barely populated Aksai Chin plateau (historically a part of Ladakh). China built a road across the strategically valuable plateau which, when completed in 1957, became the main route connecting China and Tibet. India claimed ownership over the region and there was a series of border clashes in the summer and autumn of 1959. This otherwise obscure conflict was

[144] *Tribune*, 12 September 1958.

[145] *Daily Worker*, 13 September 1958.

[146] MRC, Mss 292 951/3. The file shows that the TUC received considerable support within the labour movement, and from CND, for its stance. One correspondent from Llanelly Trades Council compared the situation on Taiwan to the IRA controlling the Isle of Man, or the US allowing 'the colour [*sic*] people' to set up a government defended by Russia on Newfoundland. A graphic in the *Daily Worker* actually compared Taiwan to the Isle of Wight (15 September 1958).

[147] Szonyi, *Cold War Island*, ch. 6, here p. 76.

[148] For the context, see the very helpful analysis in John W. Garver, *Protracted contest*, esp. chs 2–4.

given greater significance by the Soviet decision to declare neutrality between its ally, China, and India, at a time when Khrushchev was seeking closer links with Nehru and the Non-Aligned movement.

So far, the Tibet crisis had made little impact on the British left. There was some concern in *Tribune* at the 'wholesale slaughter' in Tibet, and a sense that China had abandoned statesmanship for a 'silly' or even 'fanatical' policy[149]. Kingsley Martin met the Dalai Lama in 1960, and later mused that the Chinese may seek to 'destroy Tibet as a nation, as Hitler tried to wipe out Poland'[150]. Hugh Gaitskell commented privately on the 'horrifying repression' that had taken place since the revolt in 1959[151]. However, none of this translated into political support for Tibet. When Victor Gollancz was invited to support a new UK Tibet Society in 1959, he declined on the grounds that he already had too many 'causes' to support[152]. The prominent left-wing Methodist Donald Soper admitted that the Chinese had embarked on the 'wrong sort of revolution' in Tibet, but added that some kind of revolution 'may still be necessary' in a land dominated by 'primitive Buddhism'[153]. In Communist circles, moreover, there was complete support for China's actions. Despite his later criticisms of Chinese chauvinism, at the time Alan Winnington presented the Tibetan revolt as a final attempt by the serf-owning elite to cling on to their feudal privileges. The Chinese action had merely hastened the liberation and modernization of Tibet: 'ordinary Tibetans who have seen lorries, tractors, aircraft, [and] penicillin have glimpsed the future and don't want to return to the past'. Most 'articulate Tibetans' simply wanted to 'find some way into the twentieth century'[154]. There was some relief in Beijing (as Nan Green told Ivor Montagu) that, thanks to the abortive rebellion, 'the reform can begin and the people's sufferings end'[155]. Moreover, despite Soviet neutrality in the ensuing border dispute with India, British Communists still took China's side. The *Daily Worker*, for instance, denied that China was guilty of aggression or international troublemaking[156].

The 'smouldering frontier' (as Dorothy Woodman termed it[157]) continued to bedevil Sino-Indian relations, especially once India learnt about China's road across the Aksai Chan plateau. During 1961–2 Prime Minister Nehru instituted a 'forward policy' in the disputed regions, using military patrols and outposts to assert India's claims. After months of tension, a brief war broke out on 20 October 1962, in which the ill-prepared and outnumbered Indian forces were routed by a surprise Chinese offensive. On 19 November China declared a unilateral ceasefire and pulled its victorious forces back to within their pre-war positions.

[149] *Tribune*, 3 April, 10 April, 4 September 1959.
[150] *New Statesman*, 9 April 1960, 512–14.
[151] LHASC, Labour Party archive, working party papers, Gaitskell to D. Ennals, 12 January 1961; Labour Party, *China and the West*, 11.
[152] MRC, Mss 157/3/OV/1/47, 7 July 1959, Miss Lois Lang-Sims to Gollancz, and reply, 9 July 1959.
[153] *Tribune*, 24 April 1959.
[154] *Daily Worker*, 1 April 1959; *Labour Monthly*, May 1959, 213–18.
[155] LHASC, CP/IND/MONT/12/5, Green to Montagu, 2 June 1959.
[156] *Daily Worker*, 11 September 1959.
[157] *New Statesman*, 9 March 1962.

The international context was now very different from that in 1959. China had been involved in more than two years of heated polemics with the Soviet Union, which now backed China primarily because it needed its support in the Cuban missile crisis. The war's outcome made it clear that China was, in Kingsley Martin's phrase, 'cock-of-the walk' in Asia[158]. But the price was high: the war drove India into the arms of Britain and the United States and damaged China's standing amongst its supporters in Britain.

Many on the British left felt equally committed to China and India, and the war evoked twin emotions of puzzlement and grief[159]. The left-wing Labour MP Sidney Silverman wrote that it would be 'almost the supreme tragedy' if war between these two particular countries were to wreck hopes for world peace, while for Palme Dutt, speaking at a memorial meeting for Nehru in 1964, it was a 'tragic temporary conflict between brothers'[160]. The pain was heightened by the war's apparent futility: for *Marxism Today*, this was a 'senseless, tragic and unnecessary' conflict; for Philip Noel-Baker, it was 'grotesque' to see conflict over 'barren rock'. As one couple wrote to the *Daily Worker*, surely China would be willing to give up 'an odd mountain or two' in order to secure a peaceful settlement[161]. Such frustrations were understandable, and they also illustrate just how difficult it had become to divine China's intentions by the early 1960s. The articles written at the time in left-wing journals were based on pure speculation about China's motives in the border war. Indeed, a Labour Party information paper issued in early November weighed up the merits of no less than five separate theories. It concluded that it was 'highly probable' that China's goal was ideological, and that it was determined to prevent the rival Indian model of economic development from succeeding[162].

The war forced the Labour Party to make a choice between the two emerging Asian powers, and it sided decisively with India. On 24 October 1962 the NEC condemned China's 'brutal and unprovoked attack', and a week later, during the debate on the Queen's Speech, both Gaitskell and Harold Wilson denounced China as guilty of 'simple naked aggression'. Wilson was now the Shadow Foreign Secretary and—his dalliance with China at an end—he told the House that there could be 'no doubt' where 'our active sympathies and our interests lie in this matter'. India was a member of the Commonwealth and deserved military and economic assistance, possibly on a lend-lease basis[163]. Other senior Labour figures such as Jennie Lee, the widow of Nye Bevan, and Philip Noel-Baker made clear their dismay at China's actions. Noel-Baker told the Chinese foreign minister,

[158] *New Statesman*, 1 February 1963, 149.

[159] Many on the left had been involved in campaigns for *both* China and India in the 1930s and 1940s, while Indian activists in Britain, such as Krishna Menon (India's Defence Minister in 1962), had strongly supported China against Japan in the 1930s (see Clegg, *Aid China*, 33).

[160] *Tribune*, 30 November 1962; *Labour Monthly*, July 1964, 319–20.

[161] *Marxism Today*, December 1962, 353; Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/88; *Daily Worker*, 16 November 1962. (In 1959 Khrushchev had ridiculed China for risking conflict with India over 'a few square kilometres of barren land', Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 81.)

[162] Labour Party International Department information paper, 5 November 1962.

[163] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 30 October 1962, cols 21–2; 31 October 1962, cols 152–3. For the NEC response, see UCL, Gaitskell papers, C241, D. Ennals to Gaitskell, 27 November 1962.

during a private meeting in Beijing, about 'the strong feeling against China that had been aroused' in the West[164].

The Communist Party was placed in an awkward position by its strong links to the Indian Communist party and the Soviet Union's lukewarm support for China. On 30 October the Political Committee issued a measured statement which called for negotiations to resolve the border dispute, but also denied that China was guilty of aggression. The blame for the crisis was placed on US imperialism, which—it was alleged—had encouraged Nehru's 'forward policy'[165]. China's decision not to press its military advantage in November allowed the Communist Party to praise its self-restraint and also to attack the Labour Party for fomenting war[166]. However, the party was far from united. The *Daily Worker* offered a forum for readers' letters in which the full range of views was published. One letter criticized the Chinese leaders for 'erring politically, morally and psychologically', while another wrote that the fighting was 'pure madness'[167]. Yet the party was open to attack from both sides. Willie Gallacher was rather pained when Michael Shapiro in Beijing accused the CPGB of not springing to China's defence. He told Shapiro that he had 'knocked hell out of' a trade unionist who had brought a resolution condemning China to Paisley Trade Council. Gallacher had argued passionately against siding with 'American, British and Indian imperialist exploiters against a working class country where the capitalists and landlords had been banished forever'[168]. The conflict also caused problems within the BCFA. The Marxist historian Victor Kiernan wrote that the 'silly Sino-Indian War' ended the enjoyable activities of the BCFA's Edinburgh branch, 'because our members were divided'[169]. According to the BCFA Secretary Jack Dribbon, many members throughout Britain could not understand why China should 'bother to fight about some barren land', and, he added, matters were made more difficult because the BCFA had previously promoted an 'all-white' image of Nehru. He told the association's President, Joseph Needham, that '[w]e had a great deal to do to convince our members of where the major responsibility rests for the present dispute'[170].

The conflict was also the occasion for a final intervention in Chinese affairs by Bertrand Russell. The ninety-year-old Earl saw both the Cuban missile crisis (which came to a head on 28 October) and the Sino-Indian clash as potentially leading to nuclear war, and he engaged in urgent correspondence with world leaders to appeal for peace and negotiation. Although he acknowledged that he could not resolve

[164] For Lee, see *Tribune*, 30 November 1962 and *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 20 November 1962, col. 1009. She later spoke of Nehru's 'betrayal' by China (*Tribune*, 5 June 1964); Churchill College, Cambridge, NNBKR 4/88, note of 19 December 1962.

[165] *Daily Worker*, 31 October 1962; LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/03/07, Information sheet No. 16, 8 November 1962.

[166] *Daily Worker*, 23 November 1962.

[167] *Daily Worker*, 1 November 1962 (letters from R. O. Mann and S. Mulready).

[168] Hull, DAR (2)/1/26, 25 January 1963, Gallacher to Shapiro.

[169] Victor Kiernan, 'The unrewarded end', *London Review of Books* (17 September 1998), 13–15. But the Edinburgh Branch was still in existence a year later, calling for 'friendly criticism' of China (see CUL, Needham papers, K 188, 28 October 1963, Dribbon to Needham).

[170] CUL, Needham papers, K 173, 12 November 1962.

the complexities of the disputed Himalayan frontier, Russell was impressed by China's ceasefire and withdrawal, and concluded that it was 'more anxious to put an end to the conflict' than India. He was doubtless impressed by a highly respectful and measured letter—very much in line with his own thinking—that he received from Chou En-lai[171]. Whatever the merits of Russell's 'individual initiative' during the crisis, his work was spectacularly undone in early 1963 when he sent his personal secretary Ralph Schoenman on an ill-judged 'diplomatic' mission to Beijing, bearing letters from Nehru. Schoenman, an American radical, was accompanied by the British peace campaigner Pat Pottle, who had recently been released from jail for his anti-nuclear activities. In short order the two young men antagonized their Chinese hosts, were subjected to a quasi-trial, and accused by Chou En-lai of being 'running dog lickspittles of the American Imperialists'. When Russell repudiated Schoenman shortly before his death in February 1970, he specifically alluded to his secretary's mishandling of the Beijing mission: 'I have never been able to recover the warmth and friendliness formerly accorded me by the Chinese Government'. Russell referred to 'Ralph's infamous folly in China' but, as Ray Monk argues, the deeper folly was surely shared with Russell himself[172].

The border war marked a turning point for the British left's relations with China. The People's Republic had forsaken the goodwill with which the left had greeted its actions since 1949. Henceforth a minority would dedicate themselves to its cause, but the majority were more sceptical. In an article published soon after the war, Kingsley Martin described China as being led by an 'able, unscrupulous and indoctrinated elite', locked by international isolation into a prison 'where, in doctrinaire ignorance, she can imagine plots for everyone's destruction'. The message, of course, was that only international engagement—and above all UN membership—could avoid the prospect of a dangerous, nuclear-armed China[173]. More damagingly, China's policy also exposed it for the first time to ridicule on the left. At the end of 1962 *Tribune* published a rather weak spoof letter from Chou En-lai in which he declared 1963 a 'year of liberation' under the banner 'Better dead than not red'. Calais would be returned to Britain, and the borders of Germany restored to provide 'living space'. The 'letter' provoked a furious denial from the Chinese Foreign Minister, and a complaint to the Foreign Office from the Chinese chargé d'affaires. The incident reinforced a (justifiable) view that *Tribune* was hostile to the PRC and favoured the Soviet Union and India: but it also indicated that the spell of the 'new China' over the British left had been broken[174].

This was confirmed by the reception of the news that China had exploded its first nuclear device on 16 October 1964, the day after Harold Wilson led the Labour Party to victory in the general election. Unlike the Soviet bomb in 1949, this development was long anticipated, and it was even claimed that the Conserva-

[171] Russell, *Unarmed victory*, 70, 91–2.

[172] 'The Russell memorandum' was published in the *New Statesman*, 11 September 1970, 292–3. Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell, 1921–70; The ghost of madness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 450–3.

[173] *New Statesman*, 1 February 1963, 149–50.

[174] *Tribune*, 28 December 1962 and 4 January 1963. *Tribune* took some pleasure in this diplomat's subsequent recall as a 'deviationist' during the Cultural Revolution (*Tribune*, 31 March 1967).

tive Prime Minister Alec Douglas Home had hoped that the Chinese test would come in time to boost his election campaign'[175]. (In fact, the election shock was provided—too late for Douglas Home—by the fall of Khrushchev on 14 October.) The news of the test was received coldly on the left. Mao's comments about the positive consequences of nuclear war, repeated more luridly in his polemics against the Soviet Union, were widely seen as ignorant and abhorrent[176]. In 1962 *Tribune* had described news that China might have a bomb as akin to 'lumps of ice placed, one by one, against the spine'[177]. China's action, therefore, was seen as a dangerous proliferation and as a blow to the Test Ban Treaty of 25 July 1963, which, along with a few other states, China had pointedly refused to sign. J. D. Bernal, as Chairman of the World Council of Peace, issued a statement expressing his 'deep regret and concern' at China's test. The *Daily Worker* also expressed regret, and stressed that the nuclear strength of the Soviet Union was sufficient to 'shield the Socialist camp'[178]. The test strengthened the prospect that—as Mervyn Jones had quipped in *Tribune*—the United States could become the first country 'massacred by a people in whose existence they refuse to believe'[179]. The only saving grace, it seemed, was that China's bomb would increase pressure for general disarmament and for China's admission to the UN.

THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE: 1958–1964

The Sino-Soviet dispute had its roots in the mid 1950s, when a new Soviet leader's attempt to bring a fresh direction to international Communism collided with Mao Tse-tung's pretensions to assume the mantle of ideological leadership. Such tensions were understandable and—as we have seen—had long been predicted in some form within upper echelons of the Labour Party. Even so, for most British commentators it was counter-intuitive to imagine that the Sino-Soviet alliance—the 'greatest anti-systemic power assembled so far during the capitalist era'[180]—might actually be allowed to collapse. As late as 1960, discord between the USSR and China was described as being like an argument between Siamese twins, and Malcolm Muggeridge warned that talk of a split was merely an anti-communist fantasy[181]. Such observations were reinforced by the apparently successful attempts to resolve differences at the international Communist meetings in Moscow in 1957 and 1960, as well as by the numerous public protestations of 'unbreakable friendship' between China and the Soviet Union[182].

[175] *Tribune*, 9 October 1964; *New Statesman*, 9 October 1964, 524.

[176] LHASC CP/CENT/EC/07/04, John Gollan told the Communist Party Executive Committee on 10 November 1960 that if (as Mao predicted) 300 million Chinese would die and another 300 million live: 'It would be some victory!'

[177] *Tribune*, 31 August 1962.

[178] CUL, Bernal papers, Box 60, E.1.5; *Daily Worker*, 17 October 1964.

[179] *Tribune*, 12 April 1963.

[180] Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Brothers in arms: The rise and fall of the Sino-Soviet alliance; 1945–1963* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

[181] *New Statesman*, 12 November 1960, 718, and 20 August 1960, 234.

[182] *Daily Worker*, 3 July 1962, citing Khrushchev.

At the time Western observers tended to attribute the dispute to divergent national and geopolitical interests that were merely cloaked in ideology. However, in recent years historians have placed much greater emphasis on the central role of ideology in not only framing, but also providing substance to, a dispute which had, after all, started as a disagreement between Communist parties rather than states[183]. In other words, Mao's increasingly direct and public attacks on Soviet 'revisionism' were not part of a recondite theoretical squabble, but were central to the debate over the future direction of world Communism. Mao saw himself as the heir to Lenin, and the dispute was essentially about the relevance of Leninism in a changing world. The key questions turned on the use of violence: was war with imperialism inevitable, and was a peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism possible? However, on both sides ideology inevitably reflected political realities. For instance, China—excluded from the UN, without nuclear weapons until 1964, and prevented from reclaiming Taiwan—had far less to gain from 'peaceful coexistence' than the more developed Soviet Union, and far more to gain by offering revolutionary leadership to the developing world. Nor can ideology explain every twist in the protracted dispute. After all, it was Mao, the arch anti-imperialist, who allowed the foreign colonies of Hong Kong and Macao to prosper on China's doorstep, while Khrushchev, the advocate of 'peaceful co-existence', stumbled into the Cuban missile crisis. Personalities also played an important role. If Mao was the architect of the split, he was ably assisted by Khrushchev's often inept response to his provocations. The Soviet leader's decision to withdraw 1400 Soviet technicians in July 1960 was a blunder which reduced Soviet leverage in China, and offered Mao a convenient scapegoat for the failure of the Great Leap Forward[184]. In many respects, therefore, confusion was the hallmark of the Sino-Soviet dispute, and this extended to the highest levels. In January 1963 Khrushchev told the new leader of the CPGB John Gollan that 'we don't understand what [the Chinese] want . . . [their] position is confusing and inconsistent'[185]. A columnist in *Tribune* chortled that 'China is following a Trotskyist policy, but is called Stalinist. . . . Confusing isn't it!'[186]

For all the gravity of the dispute, the impact on the left in Britain was relatively limited. As one commentator put it, China's anti-Soviet polemics were of no significance to the British labour movement: 'There are so few who think differently that they could be accommodated in a telephone kiosk'[187]. Indeed, there was a small minority for whom Mao Tse-tung's leadership offered a beacon for world revolution, and during 1963–4 a number of new organizations were created which either promoted solidarity with China or 'anti-revisionist' Communist politics.

[183] A number of very significant recent contributions make use of new archival sources: Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*; Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*; Westad, *Brothers in arms*; Dan Lui Li and Yafeng Xia, 'Competing for leadership: Split or détente in the Sino-Soviet Bloc, 1959–61', *International History Review*, 30/3 (September 2006), 544–73, emphasize the limited détente between China and the Soviet Union in 1960–1.

[184] Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*, 176.

[185] Lüthi, *Sino-Soviet split*, 227.

[186] *Tribune*, 5 January 1962.

[187] *Tribune*, 10 April 1964.

Most Communists, however, were dismayed to see the Sino-Soviet alliance collapse, but there was no doubt that—when required—the CPGB would side with the Soviet Union[188]. This position was not simply due to blind loyalty to Moscow, as the British leaders were well aware that their own party programme (the *British Road to Socialism*) was just as 'revisionist' as Khrushchev's policies. John Gollan told the Executive Committee in September 1960 that to apply the Chinese line in Britain 'would mean a complete revision of the strategy of The British Road . . . [the Chinese view] *is wrong*. It would be disastrous'[189]. Non-Communists on the left, meanwhile, did not feel such an acute sense of personal involvement (or threat). For them, the dispute was the source of fascination, even vindication, tempered with alarm about China's future world role. Although the Labour Party did not take a formal position, there were undoubtedly elements on the Labour left who saw the Soviet leadership as far less dangerous than the Chinese and openly hoped that Khrushchev would 'win' the dispute[190].

British Communists had made a heavy emotional and political investment in the Chinese revolution, and they greeted the dispute (and the grotesque language with which it was often conducted by the Chinese) with incomprehension. Willie Gallacher strained to understand why a section of the international Communist 'army' should open fire on the (Soviet) vanguard. He later denounced the Chinese Communists as 'traitors' to the international movement[191]. The course of events also made leading Communists look rather foolish. Palme Dutt, for instance, had claimed in 1959 that Western critics simply did not understand the 'socialist cooperation' between China and its 'mighty ally', the USSR. Later, when he sought to explain the split, he blamed the 'subjective and arbitrary trends' within Chinese Communism after 1956, but made no reference to his own initial praise for the Great Leap. He still hoped that this 'unhappy abnormal phase' in the history of the Chinese Communist Party would end with China's return to the fold[192]. The British Communist Party's formal policy was to refrain from direct involvement in the dispute for as long as possible, while actively promoting reconciliation between the two parties. In 1962 the CPGB joined with four other Communist parties in calling for a new Moscow conference to resolve differences, and in January 1963 the Executive Committee appealed for international Communist unity (while defending the Chinese against the 'slander' that they were warmongers). Gollan and George Matthews (the editor of the *Daily Worker*) subsequently visited Beijing in

[188] The initial silence led some to suspect, rather implausibly, that the leadership leant towards the Chinese side (*Tribune*, 2 September 1960). The *Daily Telegraph* also claimed to detect a powerful anti-Khrushchev group within the leadership of the CPGB (29 March 1963).

[189] LHASC CP/CENT/EC/07/04, Gollan's report, 19.

[190] See the editorial comment in the *New Statesman*, 5 July 1963, 1, and in *Tribune*, 5 July 1963. The most prominent advocate of this position in *Tribune*, Raymond Fletcher, who was elected as a Labour MP in 1964, was later accused of being an agent for both Soviet and Czech intelligence (see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin archive* (London: Penguin, 2000), 526–7).

[191] LHASC CP/IND/GALL/01/06, Gallacher to Shapiro, 17 April 1963; Gallacher made the same point at the CPGB EC on 14/15 September 1963; LHASC, CP/IND/GALL/03/02, Gallacher to 'Johnny' [Gollan?], 17 April 1964.

[192] *Labour Monthly*, January 1959; Dutt, *Whither China*, 2, 12; *Morning Star*, 21 January 1967.

February 1963 and—appealing for caution and the avoidance of further polemics—held meetings with Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping[193]. However, the party could not sit on the fence indefinitely. At the Executive Committee on 14 September 1963, a resolution was passed which accused the Chinese of abandoning the positions agreed at the 1960 Moscow conference, and repudiating their arguments point by point. The resolution was passed by 41 votes to one: the sole opponent was the trade unionist Reg Birch[194].

While the leadership hardened its position, public discussion of the dispute within the party took place only in relation to its symptoms—such as China's rejection of the Test Ban Treaty and the future of the BCFA—rather than the underlying causes. It was noticeable, for instance, that the *Daily Worker* offered no 'forum' for readers' views on the dispute itself, whereas it did on the nuclear test ban in 1963. The CPGB Political Committee had welcomed the test ban and regretted the Chinese attacks on it. (The Chinese saw the treaty as a fraud which would create a nuclear monopoly, and even a 'US-Soviet alliance against China'[195].) A bitter polemic between Moscow and Beijing raged during August 1963, and at the end of the month the *Daily Worker* published a collection of reader's views, which included a number of letters in defence of the Chinese position. One correspondent criticized Palme Dutt's 'old Moscow-can-do-no wrong doctrine' on the issue[196]. The leading supporter of the Chinese position was Michael McCreery, who argued that the people of Asia 'well know' that the only way to deter the United States was through the possession of nuclear weapons—not by relying on the Soviet Union for their defence. In November the Communist Party's London District Committee expelled McCreery and seven others for organizing an opposition group[197]. A 'Maoist' breakaway had started, albeit on a very modest scale: the implications will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

The ramifications of the Sino-Soviet dispute were most apparent—and felt most painfully—within the Britain–China Friendship Association. Activists such as the Secretary Jack Dribbon had dedicated themselves for more than a decade to promoting China's cause, yet they now found themselves at odds with many of their members (by no means all of whom were Communists) and even with the Chinese government. Dribbon complained privately of 'a devilish lot of emotion and not as much reasoning as there should be' amongst the members[198]. His solution was to attempt to ignore the dispute while concentrating on uncontroversial issues such as China's admission to the UN. This position was enshrined in October 1963 in

[193] *Daily Worker*, 14 January 1963; for the Gollan/Matthews delegation, see *Morning Star* 13 June 1966 and LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/02/05.

[194] For the handwritten notes of this important meeting, see LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/09/07; LHASC CP/IND/GOLL/05/04 contains the typescript of a detailed refutation of Gollan's report in support of the resolution. The full resolution was published in *Comment*, 28 September 1963, 14–18.

[195] *Daily Worker*, 1 August and 5 August 1963.

[196] *Daily Worker*, 30 August 1963, letter from Fred Dallas.

[197] See Lawrence Parker, *The kick inside: Revolutionary opposition in the CPGB, 1960–1991* (n.d. [2007]), 15; *Daily Worker*, 20 November 1963.

[198] CUL, Needham papers, K 187, Dribbon to Needham, 7 October 1963.

a highly contentious 'Policy Statement' that was passed by the National Committee. According to the statement, unity must be maintained at all costs, and it would be 'disastrous' for the BCFA to be dragged into the 'inter-Party Communist controversy'[199]. Wal Hannington, a veteran Communist activist and trade unionist, gave an insight into the thinking behind this document when he noted that friendship associations were not the 'custodians' of Marxist–Leninist theory, and that the BCFA was 'not the British section of the C.P. of China!'[200] However, by 1963 many of the association's one thousand members thought differently. In particular, they believed that China must be defended not only against the West, but also against Soviet 'slanders'. Both sides realized that these tensions must come to a head at the annual general meeting in May 1964.

Crucially, as the dispute deepened Joseph Needham began to take a more active role in the BCFA. As President he retained the watchful support of Dribbon and the other officers, but his Cambridge branch was also one of the largest and most pro-Chinese in the association. By mid 1963 he had come to the conclusion that the divergences of policy between China and the Soviet Union went 'much too deep to be overcome soon…'[201] and was openly siding with China, In August 1963 he published a defence of the Chinese position on nuclear war, concluding with an impassioned plea: 'From nuclear weapons as the guardians of rich men's possessions, Good Lord, deliver us'. The letter was prominently reported by the Xinhua News Agency, and Needham received a personal note of thanks from the office of the Chinese chargé d'affaires[202]. Needham's response to the dispute was initially that of an academic: he offered to edit a collection of documents in order to educate the British public. For reasons that remain unclear, the Chinese government blocked this proposal and preferred to use their own Foreign Language Press. However, Needham was undeterred and pursued the idea of a BCFA 'white paper' in association with experts such as EH Carr and Owen Lattimore. At Carr's suggestion he went as far as asking Brian Pearce, a Trotskyist historian, if he would be willing to write a 'jargon-free pamphlet' for the BCFA. Pearce was sympathetic, but the plan fell through when he insisted on taking the story all the way back to the clash between Trotsky and Stalin in the 1920s[203]. Hardly surprisingly, Dribbon thought that this intervention would favour the Chinese case, and succeeded in blocking Needham's offer.

[199] The statement was passed by 24 to 4, with 2 abstentions. See CUL, Needham papers, K 188, minutes of meeting and letter from Dribbon to Needham, 28 October 1963. A copy of the statement is in LHASC CP/IND/HANN/11/08.

[200] LHASC, Hannington papers, undated notes for a speech [1964].

[201] CUL, Needham papers, K 184, Needham to Philip Unwin, 1 July 1963.

[202] *New Statesman*, 9 August 1963, 166–8; CUL, Needham papers, K 184, letter dated 19 August 1963. Needham later said that he had received no help from the Chinese authorities, but that the letter had given 'the essence of their position' (CUL, Needham papers, K 187, Needham to Dribbon, 14 October 1963).

[203] CUL, Needham papers, K 184, Needham to Philip Unwin, 13 August 1963; for the 'white paper', see correspondence in K 187. Needham wrote to Pearce on 2 February 1964: 'You are of course too learned a theoretician already, and I see now that the thing would not be interesting for you'. Pearce's obituary is in *The Guardian*, 11 December 2008.

In the spring of 1964 the Cambridge branch actively prepared for a 'showdown' at the AGM, which they anticipated Dribbon and Palme Dutt would pack with their supporters. Janet Christie, the branch secretary, even rehearsed for her speech by asking friends to provide a chorus of boos and catcalls.[204] To add to the pressure on Dribbon, he received a letter from the Chinese authorities which complained that the Policy Statement concealed the truth about China and made it impossible for the BCFA to carry out its primary function[205]. At the meeting, on 9 May, Needham delivered what he saw as a conciliatory presidential address. He acknowledged that the Policy Statement was an attempt to address a 'cruel' dilemma, but argued that they now faced an 'inescapable duty' to ensure that the Chinese case was widely known. Turning to the central issue of conflicting loyalties, he suggested that those who sided with Russia were taking the 'European' side without making the attempt to understand the Chinese position. 'Have we thought we were in love with China', he asked, 'when what we were really in love with were our own political preconceptions? Have we really nothing to learn from the Chinese?' He concluded by again appealing for an 'objective' account of the dispute, and added that BCFA members who could not associate with a 'mere objective statement of the political beliefs of our Chinese friends' should consider their position[206].

When it came to the vote, however, Dribbon's preparations paid off. The Cambridge resolution for the abandonment of the Policy Statement was defeated by 197–95, following interventions by the leading trade unionists Percy Belcher and Mick McGahey[207]. Palme Dutt was later heard to say: 'Well, we managed that meeting well and carried all our resolutions'[208], but it was a pyrrhic victory. Needham wrote to the chargé d'affaires that the 'west wind' had prevailed by two to one, and that the new National Committee was 'almost wholly pro-western'. The future of the association was now 'extremely doubtful', although no decision would be taken without 'careful consultation'[209]. In fact, many BCFA members had already made alternative arrangements. Derek Bryan, along with Hung-ying and a number of close associates, set up a 'China Policy Study Group' in 1963, dedicated to presenting China's policies within Britain. After the AGM Bryan also steered the BCFA's Arts and Sciences Committee into open confrontation with the association's leadership[210]. Meanwhile, numerous local 'Friends of China' committees

[204] CUL, Needham papers, K 191, Janet Christie to Needham, 10 March 1964; K 194, Janet Christie to Needham, 12 May 1964.

[205] CUL, Needham papers, K 193 copy of letter from Chen Jung-chi (Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) to Dribbon, 2 March 1964. The letter also levelled detailed allegations against Dribbon's handling of the BCFA. In his reply (19 March), Dribbon warned that any involvement in the dispute would split the association and 'play into the hands of the enemies of China'.

[206] CUL, Needham papers, K 193, manuscript of address.

[207] *Daily Worker*, 11 May 1964; CUL Needham papers, K 194, Needham's comments on AGM agenda. (He noted that the vote might have been 120–172 'if Janet [Christie] not so provocative'.)

[208] Herdan, *Liao Hongying*, 114.

[209] CUL, Needham papers, K 194, Needham to Hsiung hsiang-hu, 10 May 1964.

[210] LHASC, CP/IND/HANN/11/08, BCFA minutes for 17 June 1964, and Dribbon to Hannington, 10 September 1964.

were beginning to spring up. Although the Britain–China Friendship Association limped on until the early 1970s, it had been fatally wounded at the May 1964 meeting.

* * *

For a whole year between February 1960 and February 1961, the Labour Party's working party subjected China's new relations with the West to strenuous reassessment. It brought together a talented and eclectic group of academics, journalists, and politicians, and benefited from the critical but engaged interest of Hugh Gaitskell. The report concluded that China's remarkable economic development and its rapid emergence as a potential world power meant that 'the extent to which we are able to live together with China in the 60s may largely determine the future peace of the world'. This was a constructive and, in many respects, optimistic document, and certainly not the 'anti-socialist propaganda' marked by 'cold war' thinking that some on the left claimed[211]. China represented a challenge, but one which Britain—and above all a future Labour government—appeared well placed to meet. And yet the promise of the new decade remained unfulfilled. China appeared to shrink away from the positive role allotted to it, and became instead the *enfant terrible* of international politics. Whether the deciding factor was the Sino-Soviet split (for Communists), India (for the Labour Party), or the Chinese bomb (for pacifists), the People's Republic ceased to enjoy the broad-based support of the British left. Within Britain, China would now have to look to a small minority on the revolutionary left.

[211] Labour Party, *China and the West*, 4. The papers related to the working party, including drafts of the report and various specialist papers, are in the LHASC, Labour Party archives. The principal experts in the working party were Evan Luard (who was currently writing his book, *Britain and China* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962)), the journalist Roderick MacFarquhar, and the eminent sinologist Victor Purcell. Both Luard and MacFarquhar subsequently became Labour MPs. For a hostile critique, see Elsie Fairfax-Cholmeley in *Labour Monthly*, February 1962, 84–8.

6

1964–1976: Cultural Revolution

THE FINAL SHOCKS

To the surprise of some Western observers, the Sino-Soviet dispute did not end with the fall of Khrushchev in October 1964: in fact, after a brief lull, it intensified and expanded to encompass territorial as well as ideological issues. In March 1969 Chinese and Soviet border forces clashed, with significant loss of life, on a disputed island in the Ussuri river. Although all-out war was avoided, by the early 1970s China saw the 'social imperialist' USSR as the principal threat to its security, and began to seek an unlikely rapprochement with the United States. This unprecedented enmity between the two leading Communist states posed a new challenge for the British left, and it was now no longer possible to perceive any single narrative in the left's relationship with the People's Republic. British Communists were deeply disappointed by the unwelcome turn in Sino-Soviet relations, and—officially at least—largely ignored China until the death of Mao in 1976[1]. The Labour Party, meanwhile, as the party of government during 1964–70, had to deal with the temporary collapse in Britain's relations with China due to the Cultural Revolution and the Vietnam War. The only group that was receptive to China's message at this time was the emerging far left, for whom the People's Republic came to epitomize a 'Third World' revolution in the Leninist tradition. For the small core of British Maoists in particular, the impact of political developments half a world away was direct and palpable. For many on the left, however, the impact was more at the level of style and fashion. Hence, the ubiquitous Mao caps and badges, and the 'Little Red Book' of Mao's aphorisms: the new iconography of Chairman Mao that was famously mocked in The Beatles' song 'Revolution' (1968). After 1964, therefore, the British left was forced to adapt to yet more shocks emanating from revolutionary China, and the PRC made ever greater demands on its dwindling group of loyal supporters. If China was now the focus for the attention of a vocal minority, for most on the British left these years marked the end of any special relationship with the Chinese revolution.

[1] See, for instance, the almost complete absence of coverage in Communist party journals, such as *Marxism Today* and *Labour Monthly* after 1964. The *Daily Worker* (which became the *Morning Star* in 1966) relied on Reuters for its coverage of China.

'CRAZY DAYS': BRITAIN AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

In the bitter aftermath of the Great Leap Forward the pragmatists in the Communist Party leadership, notably Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, came to the fore, restoring order, economic growth, and, most importantly, food to the shops. In Liu's case the term 'pragmatist' is used advisedly, as he was an orthodox and loyal Communist who had supported Mao in launching the Great Leap Forward. However, his loyalty had been shaken when he visited his home village in April 1961 and witnessed the impact of famine at first hand, and he became increasingly outspoken in his criticism of Mao's methods. Liu, who had replaced Mao as head of state in 1959 and also served as Vice Chairman of the party, appeared to be in the ascendant in the early 1960s, while Mao bided his time in semi-retirement. The relative calm of this period was, however, deceptive, as Mao retained immense prestige, and powerful revolutionary currents were still at work within Chinese society. The People's Liberation Army was steadily radicalized under the control of Mao's ally Lin Biao during the early 1960s and extolled as a model for Chinese society. Indeed, the 'Little Red Book' was first published in 1964 for ideological education within its ranks. Mao also sponsored the emergence of his wife, the former actress Jiang Qing, as a ferocious critic of 'bourgeois' tendencies within the arts and popular culture. Internationally, meanwhile, the rapid expansion of US military involvement in Vietnam during 1964–5 not only intensified a conflict close to China's borders, but also raised the threat of all-out war between China and the United States. In the event, however, while the Chinese leadership made a significant contribution to the defence of North Vietnam between 1965 and 1970 (including, at its peak, a military presence of some 150,000 personnel, largely in auxiliary roles) it was careful to prevent the conflict from escalating[2].

The storm broke within China during 1966 when Mao and his supporters instigated the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'[3]. Although the Cultural Revolution was formally concluded at the ninth party congress in April 1969, it dominated Chinese life until Mao's death in 1976. British observers at the time struggled to make sense of a period of tumult without precedent in the Communist world (if not within modern Chinese history). Put most crudely, the Cultural Revolution could be seen as an attempt by an ageing leader to restore his authority over his rivals within the party and state bureaucracy by mobilizing other forces in Chinese society—above all the young, who flocked to join the 'Red Guards'. One point in support of this interpretation was Mao's willingness to restrain the radicals once his leadership had been secured. However, the Cultural Revolution was far too large and complex to be ascribed to Mao alone. Many shared Mao's conviction that the People's Republic faced a stark choice between a new revolution that would preserve the unique, egalitarian qualities of Chinese Communism, and a more conventional ('revisionist')

[2] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, ch. 8, and esp. pp. 221–6. See also Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[3] For a good recent overview, see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's last revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2006).

developmental path based on expertise and social hierarchy. Mao, therefore, used his personal mystique to unleash powerful—and potentially uncontrollable—forces. His antics, whether swimming the Yangtze to prove his physical fitness or inciting critics of the party leadership to 'Bombard the headquarters', appealed above all to the young, who seized the opportunity to emulate the revolutionary achievements of their parents. Mao—by now well into his seventies—became an unlikely icon of generational revolt for radical youth in both China and the West.

A traumatized Chinese elite eventually came to regard the Cultural Revolution as the 'Ten Years' Disaster', and the price of Mao's 'triumph' was undoubtedly extremely high. The careers of many senior party officials, administrators, and intellectuals were destroyed, and a number were driven to suicide or died through ill-treatment at the hands of the Red Guards. Liu Shaoqi, branded a 'capitalist roader' and a 'Chinese Khrushchev', died in 1969 under house arrest, while Deng Xiaoping was stripped of power and worked as a lathe operator. Thousands—possibly millions[4]—more perished as the factional fighting spun out of control, and there were periods of conflict verging on civil war in some regions. Schools and universities ceased to function as places of learning, and the economy suffered serious dislocation as managers were replaced with workers' committees. Moreover, in response to Lin Biao's call for the smashing of the 'Four Olds' (ideas, culture, customs, and habits), the cultural heritage of China (and, even more grievously, Tibet) was vandalized. The Belgian writer Pierre Ryckmans ('Simon Leys'), who travelled extensively in China in 1972, everywhere found ancient sites closed, damaged, or used for other purposes[5]. When Mao reasserted control in 1969—dispatching millions of former Red Guards to the countryside to work amongst the peasants—he was left uncomfortably reliant on his newly appointed heir Lin Biao and the PLA. Even so, although the Cultural Revolution is often remembered as a period of extreme anarchy, it was experienced by many at the time as a genuine revolution. Hence the exhilaration felt by the Red Guards massed in Tiananmen Square, as well as by many foreigners living in China. Sidney Rittenberg, a US citizen resident in China since 1946 who played a prominent role in the Cultural Revolution, later recalled that '[w]e were caught up in a shining and powerful drama. Our hopes for a future of democracy and freedom were so bright that they blinded us to the realities around us'[6]. Sophia Knight, a young British graduate who had taught in Shanghai since 1965, found the Cultural Revolution 'a great and thrilling thing—history in the making'[7]. The historian W. J. F. Jenner, who had lived in

[4] The death toll during the Cultural Revolution is still debated: Chang and Halliday claim as many as 3 million violent deaths between 1966–76 (*Mao*, 664–5).

[5] Simon Leys, *Chinese shadows* (first published 1974; Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1978).

[6] Sidney Rittenberg and Amanda Bennett, *The man who stayed behind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 361. Unusually, Rittenberg was allowed to become a member of the Chinese Communist Party.

[7] Sophia Knight, *Window on Shanghai: Letters from China, 1965–67* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967), 222. For other British eyewitness accounts of the Cultural Revolution, see John Collier, 'The Cultural Revolution in Canton', Parts 1 & 2, *New Left Review*, 1/48 (March–April 1968) and 1/50 (July–August 1968); John and Elsie Collier, *China's Socialist Revolution* (London: Stage 1, 1973); article by Jacob Ecclestone (unidentified press cutting of January 1967 in CCA, NBKR, 4/96); script of Kurt Mendelssohn's BBC broadcast on 'China's Cultural Revolution', 20 November 1966 in Bodleian Library, Mendelssohn papers, F. 10 and Mendelssohn's *In China Now* (London: Hamlyn, 1969).

Beijing during 1963–5, in 1969 described the ceaseless debates and activism of the Cultural Revolution (in terms that he would later renounce) as 'revolutionary democracy on a scale never seen before in China. . . . The very chaos and open-endedness of the situation has shown that ordinary people have learnt to take more control over their own destinies.'[8]

Quite apart from the social and political cost, the Cultural Revolution also seriously damaged China's relations with Britain. There were two principle reasons for this. First, although Chou En-lai (who remained doggedly loyal to Mao) sought to retain control over the machinery of government, there were periods in which extremists were in the ascendant. Secondly, the mixed messages emanating from Beijing encouraged radicals within Hong Kong to challenge British rule. There was no shortage of social and economic grievances amongst the colony's Chinese population—for instance, in April 1966 riots had broken out following a decision to raise fares on the Star Ferries. In the spring of 1967, a strike over poor conditions at an artificial flower factory again resulted in violent confrontations and mass arrests. This time, however, elements within the Chinese leadership in Beijing abandoned the policy of peaceful coexistence with Hong Kong. On 3 June 1967 the *People's Daily* denounced the 'fascist atrocities of British imperialism', and accused Britain of using Hong Kong as a base for US aggression against Vietnam[9]. Between July and December there was a campaign of lethal bombings in the colony, and five Hong Kong policemen were killed when Chinese militia attacked a border post on 8 July. When the authorities closed down three left-wing newspapers in August and rounded up the journalists, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs—which had recently fallen under radical control—issued an ultimatum for their release. On 22 August Red Guards stormed the British Mission in Beijing and burnt down the chancery. Staff members were forced to brave a hostile mob, and the chargé d'affaires, Donald Hopson, described how they were 'half-strangled with [their] ties, kicked and beaten on the head with bamboo poles'. Percy Cradock, then a counsellor in the British mission, was beaten up but bravely refused orders to chant 'Long Live Chairman Mao!'[10]

The attack on the British mission represented a nadir in modern Anglo-Chinese relations. It also marked a further souring in the Labour Party's relations with the PRC. Although it is now commonplace for historians to praise Prime Minister Harold Wilson's skill in keeping Britain out of direct participation in the Vietnam War, it should be noted that this sentiment was not shared by Chinese radicals (or many on the British left) during the Cultural Revolution, who saw him as no

[8] W. J. F. Jenner, 'The new Chinese revolution', *New Left Review*, 1/53 (January–February 1969). In his book, *The tyranny of history: The roots of China's crisis* (London: Penguin, 1992), 189–90, he wrote that: 'Time soon showed even the credulous foreigner that democracy had nothing to do with the struggles that were taking uncounted lives. The Red Guards, Revolutionary Rebels and all the rest of them were being used to create a tyranny that was even worse than the one they fought against.'

[9] Gary Ka-wei Cheung, *Hong Kong's watershed: The 1967 riots* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 221–2. See also Robert Bickers and Ray Yep (eds), *May days in Hong Kong: Riot and emergency in 1967* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

[10] Cheung, *Hong Kong's watershed*, 114.

better than President Lyndon Johnson[11]. Indeed, effigies of Wilson were frequently burnt on the streets of Beijing[12]. Wilson saw China as an obstacle to peace in Vietnam, and in February 1966 petulantly suggested that anti-war protestors should demonstrate outside the Chinese Embassy. There they could call on the Chinese to 'diminish their malevolent pressures' on North Vietnam's 'natural inclination to make peace'[13]. A year and a half later, in response to the attack on the British mission, Wilson and his foreign secretary George Brown imposed restrictions on Chinese diplomats in London, and the Chinese embassy at Portland Place was surrounded by police. There were a number of ugly scenes: for instance, at the end of August a member of the embassy staff was photographed waving an axe at a cowering British policeman[14]. A hostile crowd outside the embassy chanted 'Long live free China' and 'Mao is a pig', while one British supporter of the Chinese diplomats was fined £5 for shouting inflammatory slogans back[15]. However, Chou En-lai—making use of the damage caused to China's foreign relations—eventually reasserted his control over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and brought the confrontation in Hong Kong to an end. The crisis of 1967 did much to cement a new sense of identity amongst the Chinese population of Hong Kong, reflecting their disenchantment with the leftist radicalism associated with the PRC. In the aftermath China quietly signalled its readiness to wait for Hong Kong's peaceful return, while the colonial authorities embarked on a belated programme of social and educational reform.[16]

Anglo-Chinese relations were placed under further strain by the detention without trial of a number of Britons in China. The best-known case was that of the Reuters correspondent in Beijing Anthony Grey, who was seized in July 1967. He was set free in October 1969 following the release of a number of left-wing journalists in Hong Kong. A call by the *Sunday Express* for a boycott of Chinese restaurants may not have hastened his release, but was symptomatic of the ill-feeling that his imprisonment generated in Britain[17]. In a separate case, Eric Gordon, a left-wing British journalist who had been working in China as a 'polisher' of official prose since 1965, was placed under house arrest with his wife and child for two years in November 1967. His offence had been to attempt to smuggle notes, films, and tape recordings through customs—ironically so that he could write a book sympathetic to the Cultural Revolution on his return to Britain. He later accepted

[11] For instance, Rhiannon Vickers praises Wilson's 'political acumen and diplomatic skill' in 'Harold Wilson, the British Labour Party, and the War in Vietnam', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10/2 (Spring 2008), 69. See also Mark Phythian, *The Labour Party, War and International Relations, 1945–2006* (London: Routledge, 2006), ch. 4.

[12] *Morning Star*, 17 May 1967.

[13] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 8 February 1966, col. 258. Wilson was receiving some inflammatory messages from close advisers at this point. For instance, George Wigg (Paymaster General, with a security brief) sent Wilson a memorandum on 17 June 1965 warning of a full-scale Chinese invasion of South Vietnam and Thailand (BLPES, Wigg papers, 4/69).

[14] *Daily Mirror*, 30 August 1967 ('Mao's London hatchet man'). The 'axe man' later appeared as one of Denis Healey's guides during his visit to China in 1972 (Healey, *Time of my life*, 364).

[15] *New Statesman*, 8 September 1967, 280; the *Morning Star*, 31 August 1967.

[16] Cheung, *Hong Kong's watershed*; Steve Tsang, *History of Hong Kong*, 183–96.

[17] See Anthony Grey, *Hostage in Peking* (London: Joseph, 1970); *Tribune*, 17 January 1969.

that his action had been one of 'gross stupidity and total irresponsibility'[18]. Most cases, however, concerned British left-wingers resident in China who had thrown themselves into the treacherous politics of the Cultural Revolution. Until this point foreign sympathizers had not been permitted to participate in Chinese politics, and were restricted to organizing their own discussion groups. This ban was lifted for a year after January 1967. As a consequence many foreigners took part in the factional politics of the Cultural Revolution, and were especially vulnerable when 'their' faction eventually fell from grace[19]. Being 'Holier than Mao' was no protection, and many of the British left-wingers in China, such as Michael Shapiro, David Crook, and Elsie Epstein (née Fairfax-Cholmeley), suffered some form of incarceration[20]. Crook—who had in his words 'plunged into the revolutionary tide with the youngsters and was carried along by it'—was arrested in October 1967 as a suspected spy and held for five years. Despite this injustice, and the immense strain that his detention placed on his family, he remained loyal to Mao and saw his captors as sincere but misguided[21].

The plight of the British prisoners—many of them held uncharged and incommunicado—provided an early test for the new Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU), which had been established in May 1965. Given the current weakness of the British diplomatic presence in China, SACU offered a rare point of contact with the PRC authorities. However, although it made representations on behalf of the detainees, it was unwilling to push its involvement too far. As Joseph Needham explained, anyone 'who throws in his or her lot with a people living through a revolutionary era has to expect some ups and downs', which might well include house arrest 'or worse'. In any case, he argued, the authorities were correct to fear espionage, and this justified 'tedious investigations of some perfectly innocent people'[22]. However, the Labour MP Andrew Faulds, a co-founder of the Great Britain–China parliamentary group in 1968, believed that SACU could have done more, and argued that—while the detentions were legitimate—simple humanitarian considerations had been denied by the Chinese[23].

The Cultural Revolution provoked wildly differing responses on the British left. Communists were appalled at the departure from established methods of 'democratic' decision-taking and the attack on the authority of the party. For many, the cult of Mao's personality and the overthrow of respected party leaders were all too

[18] Eric Gordon, *Freedom is a word* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971). Gordon remained an independent-minded socialist and became the founding editor of the *Camden New Journal* in 1982 ('How a Cultural Revolution came to Camden Town', *Press Gazette*, 26 August 2005: <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=31630>, consulted 1 July 2010). Gordon recently recalled his experiences in China in a letter to *The Guardian* (4 June 2011).

[19] For a helpful account of this period, see Brady, *Making the foreign serve China*, ch. 6.

[20] For Elsie Epstein, see TNA FCO 21/847; see also the case of Gladys Yang (obituary by Delia Davin in *The Guardian*, 24 November 1999).

[21] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 12, pp. 2, 29; TNA FCO 21/497 and FCO 21/848.

[22] CUL, Needham papers, K 199, undated letter. See also the following files on British prisoners, in K 201–4.

[23] SACU papers, 28 February 1969, Faulds to Betty Paterson.

reminiscent of the height of the Stalinist terror in the 1930s[24]. In September 1966 the Executive Committee of the CPGB issued a statement warning against the 'deification' of Mao and the 'stultification' of creative thought. The Red Guards, it claimed, were alien to Communism, and damaged the international Communist movement[25]. Palme Dutt, in a pamphlet issued by the party in 1967, argued that Liu, Deng and the other so-called 'capitalist roaders' were not enemies of socialism but reputable Communist leaders who had opposed Mao's policies since the Great Leap Forward. The sole purpose of the Cultural Revolution was, therefore, to crush resistance within the party to a 'discredited and disastrous policy of economic adventurism, departure from Marxism–Leninism, and hostility to the world socialist camp and international communist unity'[26]. The general perception amongst British Communists—who by now had only very limited means of obtaining news from within China—was that the Cultural Revolution was a power struggle within the party rather than a class struggle or civil war. Their hope was that the resistance of the Chinese workers would eventually bring a halt to this 'reckless' and 'dangerous' course[27].

Communist attitudes towards the Cultural Revolution were, of course, shaped principally by the Sino-Soviet split, as well as by a perception that the PRC was undermining the anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam. Elsewhere on the left, however, it was approached with greater interest and understanding—and in some cases with unalloyed enthusiasm. The *New Statesman* published regular analyses of the political situation in China by the sinologist Roderick MacFarquhar (subsequently a Labour MP), as well as by K. S. Karol, an expert on world communism[28]. In 1968 *Tribune* began to publish a series of sympathetic articles by the journalist John Gittings, who was then based in Hong Kong and was not able to visit the PRC until 1971. Gittings refused to see the Cultural Revolution as sheer 'madness', but rather presented it as an attempt to shape a 'distinctive path of socialist development', avoiding the mistakes of the Soviet Union[29]. *Tribune* also provided a platform for the less measured views of Malcolm Caldwell, a Maoist academic who lectured on South East Asia at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Caldwell was an outspoken supporter of the Cultural Revolution, which he saw as a 'grass roots revolt' against elitism resulting in an 'extraordinary degree of social equality, where none defer and none arrogate'[30]. Events in China had, he argued, struck a first blow against the 'rationalistic-individualistic ("technologico-Benthamite") values' that

[24] A connection that was made explicitly by Monty Johnstone in the *Morning Star*, 30 January 1967.

[25] Published in the *Morning Star*, 13 September 1966.

[26] Dutt, *Whither China?*, esp. pp. 30, 38, and article in the *Morning Star*, 21 January 1967.

[27] See the article by Jack Woddis in the *Morning Star*, 12 September 1967.

[28] See *New Statesman*, 6 May–26 August 1966, and *passim*. MacFarquhar was Labour MP for Belper, 1974–9. He became the leading western expert on the Cultural Revolution, and is currently a professor at Harvard.

[29] *Tribune*, 26 April, 24 May, and 14 June 1968; see also John Gittings, 'Reporting China since the 1960s', <http://www.johngittings.com/id32.html> (consulted 13 June 2006), 1–4.

[30] *Tribune*, 13 June 1969, (a 'debate' article on the Cultural Revolution, with a response by Jack Woddis in 27 June 1969).

had 'dominated and distorted our lives and works' since the Renaissance, Reformation, and Industrial Revolution[31]. Caldwell later supported the disastrous regime of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia with equal gusto, and was murdered—bizarrely, possibly on the orders of the Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot—in Phnom Penh in 1978[32]. Caldwell's belief in the world historic importance of the Cultural Revolution was later shared by Tony Benn, a rising politician on the left of the Labour Party, who visited China in September 1971. Benn found that all of his discussions with Chinese leaders centred on the Cultural Revolution, and concluded that it was a 'real revolution involving a major political conflict of ideas, marked by some violence…'. As a result, China was the only 'real working alternative society to that which in the West, and maybe now Russia, draws its inspiration from the ideas released by the Industrial Revolution…'[33].

The Cultural Revolution clearly offered little to the 'old' left in Britain, whether Moscow-line Communists or trade unionists horrified at the how the Chinese trade unions had been placed in 'cold storage'[34]. At the same time, and in many respects for the same reasons, it was highly appealing to the student radicals of the later 1960s, and to the emerging 'new' left more generally. As David Fernbach, a student at the London School of Economics in 1968, later recalled, the Cultural Revolution 'had a great effect on us morally', even though 'it took us a long time to understand much about it except that it was a great upheaval, that in some ways it was against authority and the entrenching of a new system of privilege and power in post-revolutionary society…'[35]. The Cultural Revolution appealed to the 'new left' for a number of reasons. First, it further undermined the Soviet Union's claim to hegemony over the world revolutionary movement—a process that had started with the Sino-Soviet dispute—and hastened the advent of a multi-polar world. The *May Day Manifesto 1968*, edited by Raymond Williams, presented the Chinese revolution—freed from Soviet manipulation—as a fatal blow to the 'armed stasis' of the Cold War. The Chinese and Cuban revolutions offered 'models of revolution far more attractive to the peasantry and the poor of the former colonial world than… that of Russia'[36]. Secondly, many aspects of the Cultural Revolution, such as its egalitarianism, anti-materialism, and emphasis on grass-roots communal democracy, coincided with the counter-cultural affinities of the 'new left'. As Malcolm Caldwell wrote in 1968, Mao appealed to a generation in the West 'sickened of materialism and the entire official, received western lifestyle'. Mao offered hope not only to the rural poor in the Third World, but the 'despairing

[31] *Tribune*, 8 November 1968.

[32] See the article by Andrew Anthony on Caldwell's death, the *Observer Magazine* (10 January 2010), 17–29; obituary in *China Now* (January/February 1979), 31.

[33] See Benn's article in the *Sunday Times*, 26 September 1971, reproduced in Tony Benn, *Office without power: Diaries, 1968–72* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 372, 376.

[34] 'China—as we saw it' (report of the 1972 AUEW delegation to China), MRC, Mss 36 ISTC c.74, p. 5.

[35] Ronald Fraser et al., *1968: A student generation in revolt* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), 111.

[36] Raymond Williams (ed.), *May Day Manifesto 1968* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 90–7.

apathy of the urbanite' in the First[37]. Finally, the challenge to established authority in education and the workplace appealed to radicalized professionals in Britain who were keen to explore innovative and anti-authoritarian approaches to teaching, health care, and social work[38].

This does not mean, of course, that the 'new left' was fully focused on, or indeed wholly united behind, Mao's revolution. Journals such as *New Left Review* and *Black Dwarf* covered China, but gave greater coverage to other enthusiasms of the time, such as Cuba and—above all—the war in Vietnam. It is also difficult to get a sense of the importance of China from the memoirs of the period. For instance, Tariq Ali's *Autobiography of the sixties* makes little mention of his activities on behalf of China—yet he was a participant in the Oxford branch of SACU, spoke at public meetings, and engaged in press controversy defending China's role in Vietnam[39]. One episode that he did recall was a remarkable summit meeting of new left intellectuals in Bolivia in 1967. Ali and Raymond Blackburn 'defended Mao vigorously' against Perry Anderson and Ralph Schoenman, who had 'dismissed Maoist pretension and the cult around Mao far too brusquely' for Ali's liking. Schoenman compared Mao unfavourably to Lenin, and described him as a 'total confusionist'[40].

The most sustained and immediate defence of the Cultural Revolution was mounted by Joan Robinson, Professor of Economics at Cambridge. She had been involved in promoting trade relations with China since the 1950s, and had close relations with Roland Berger and Jack Perry of the BCPIT, as well as with Sol Adler (a former US Treasury official who had lived in Beijing since the early 1960s). Robinson supported China during the Sino-Soviet split and, alongside Joseph Needham, played a leading role in the founding of SACU. The historian Sheila Rowbotham remembered her as a 'forbidding figure' who praised China's rejection of materialism, and fiercely—and probably hypocritically—'dismissed the need for washing machines'[41]. Robinson toured China in November 1967, taking a particular interest in the impact of the Cultural Revolution on economic management. In a paperback published on her return, Robinson argued that the Cultural Revolution—as an attempt to 'carry socialism into the superstructure and to root out from it all remnants of bourgeois ideas . . .'—represented a wholly Marxist approach to the problems facing modern China. Where western observers saw only 'chaos and disintegration', she saw 'a new kind of class war' which pitted students, workers, and peasants against the 'organization men' in the party. During her visit she toured factories and encountered workers' committees that drew their inspiration

[37] *Black Dwarf*, 13/7 (21 October 1968).

[38] See for instance Horn, '*Away with all pests*', and *Morning Star*, 2 October 1973 and 6 April 1972.

[39] *Hendon Times*, 19 January 1968; Bodleian Library, Coulson papers, F.6.9, Oxford SACU branch papers, 1966; *Tribune*, 2 September and 9 September 1966.

[40] Tariq Ali, *Street fighting years: An autobiography of the sixties* (London: Collins, 1987), 151–2. Ali, Anderson, and Blackburn were all involved with *New Left Review*.

[41] ' "I bet you don't do all your own washing by hand" I thought, silent and resentful', Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a dream: Remembering the sixties* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), 97.

from 'Mao Tse-tung thought' rather than from the material incentives associated with the disgraced 'revisionists'. Chinese socialism, she concluded, was well on the way to achieving industrial modernity 'without the dreary boredom and dehumanization of personal relationships that accompany it everywhere else'. Her account combined this socialist utopianism with political naivety. For instance, she wrote of the 'picturesque' role of the young people, whose enthusiasm brought results in the way that 'decorous, legal procedure' could not; Mao's published thoughts were 'immortal scriptures', inspiring to all but a 'scattered few who refuse to be redeemed'; and the attack on Chinese culture was simply iconoclasm 'in the tradition of the English puritans', essential to the break with a feudal past. 'Devotees of Chinese history and art', she wrote ominously, 'must hibernate for a while'[42].

There was, of course, no greater British devotee of Chinese culture than Robinson's Cambridge colleague Joseph Needham, whose original idea for a single volume history of Chinese science and civilization had, by the 1960s, developed into a widely admired multi-volume project. Needham's views on the Cultural Revolution were—in public at least—similar to Robinson's. The Chinese people were 'building a truly classless society' and might well be the 'harbingers of the more perfectly integrated human society of the future'. The Cultural Revolution was a 'logical extension' of the principles of the Chinese Revolution, and 'literally millions of young people and ordinary people really believe in it'[43]. He rejected the comment of a senior Cambridge academic that the Red Guards were guilty of 'teenage delinquency': Needham preferred to see in them the spirit of the 'reign of the saints' in Commonwealth England[44]. In private, however, Needham was far more circumspect about Chinese revolutionary politics at this time and, as we shall see, differentiated between loyalty to China and to what he termed 'the Maoist vision'[45]. It is also interesting, in this context, to note his comments on student radicalism in Britain, which he encountered as the Master of Caius College, Cambridge, from 1966–76. While he welcomed the revival of student activism, Needham—in two articles published in December 1968—publicly criticized the 'young folks' desire for destruction, and stated that 'all the heritage of ancient and beautiful buildings and things is the people's property, and to wish to harm it is Left deviationism at its craziest'. Students should align themselves with the working-class movement, but above all they should pursue their studies to become 'men of learning for the people'[46]. Although the article was capped with a quotation from

[42] All references are to Joan Robinson, *The Cultural Revolution in China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969/70), 13, 25–6, 28, 29, 39–40. See LHASC CP/CENT/ORG/20 for a report on a meeting of the Camden SACU branch addressed by Robinson on her return from China (24 January 1968).

[43] Joseph Needham, 'Foreword' (dated 31 July 1967) to Knight, *Window*, 5–7.

[44] CUL, Needham papers, K 197, notes for a lecture on the Cultural Revolution, mid 1967.

[45] See below, p. 197.

[46] 'Students in Revolt', *Tribune*, 20 December and 27 December 1968. A few months earlier, however, Needham had welcomed the 'invincible and irresistible spread of [Chinese] ideas', to which he attributed the students' and workers' revolts in France (NRI, SCC2/383/2, 21 May 1968, draft of speech).

Mao, the points made—when translated into a Chinese context—could be seen as profoundly critical of the role of the students in the Cultural Revolution. Even so, Needham made no public criticism of the Cultural Revolution at the time. Indeed, in October 1969 he hailed a new China emerging from the turbulence of the last three years in which the mass of the population had attained 'freedom from want and also freedom from worry about their future'[47]. He only began openly to criticize the Cultural Revolution's harmful effects on Chinese intellectual life after the death of Mao and, even then, did not place the blame on Mao himself[48].

Despite the efforts of Robinson, Needham, and others, however, the impact of the Cultural Revolution on the left in Britain was largely negative, and even its staunchest defenders were aware that many aspects of it appeared ludicrous. The events of 1966–9 revived the disturbing image of a fanatical Chinese Communism that had first come to prominence in the West at the time of the Korean War. One columnist in *Tribune*, for instance, described the Chinese authorities' treatment of the imprisoned Gordon family as 'sub-human'[49]. Paul Johnson, editor of the *New Statesman*, compared the Red Guards to Nazi thugs, and the 'Little Red Book' to a prayer book, to be read out over loudspeakers by 'unsmiling girls'. The Cultural Revolution, he continued, was akin to the 'crazy days' of Stalin's purges. Trained doctors were employed as orderlies while their patients recited Mao's thoughts: 'But you can bet your life old Chairman Mao has a proper doctor'[50]. In February 1976 Denis Healey, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour government of 1974–9, referred to his critics on the left of the Labour Party as being 'out of their tiny Chinese minds'. Healey claimed that he was using a phrase coined by the comedian Tony Hancock, but the quip surely drew its sting from an image—taken from the Cultural Revolution—of Chinese Communists as irrational, dogmatic, and profoundly insular[51].

'THE FRAGRANCE OF FRIENDSHIP': THE EARLY YEARS OF SACU

The Britain–China Friendship Association went into a swift and terminal decline after the hollow victory of the pro-Moscow majority at the May 1964 annual general meeting. By 1966 the secretary Jack Dribbon was openly posing the question: 'Should we or should we not continue?' His only comfort was that the emerging

[47] *Morning Star*, 1 October 1969.

[48] Winchester, *Man who loved China*, 235, citing a 1978 article by Needham. However, Winchester is surely mistaken to imply that Needham criticized Mao in this article ('Science reborn in China', *Nature*, 274 (31 August 1978)): Mao is barely mentioned and Needham places all of the blame on the 'Gang of Four'.

[49] 'Francis Flavius', *Tribune*, 23 May 1969.

[50] *New Statesman*, 25 November 1966, 774; see also 10 March 1967, 322.

[51] *The Guardian*, 26 February 1976. Tam Dalyell has claimed that this insult was aimed at him and his fellow Labour MP Frank Allaun (*Third Way*, February 2002, 22). The link to the Cultural Revolution is made explicit in a cartoon in the *New Statesman*, 16 April 1976, 489, which depicts Healey's trade union critics in Mao jackets and caps, denouncing him as a 'paper tiger' (see Fig. 12).

Fig. 12. 'They're out of their tiny Chinese minds!'
(Garland, *New Statesman*, 16 Apr. 1976)

rival organizations were dominated by academics who lacked basic political skills. '[I]t is true', he commented, 'that at the moment the BCFA does not serve any important purpose . . . [but] if and when something does happen it will be us that will have to do the campaigning'[52]. In fact, the BCFA's final meaningful act was to issue a strong protest against the repressive measures taken by the authorities during the 1967 crisis in Hong Kong, that 'paradise for imperialist traders and bankers'[53]. Thereafter, ever-worsening Sino-Soviet relations—culminating in the armed clashes of 1969—rendered its position untenable. As the chairman put it in 1970, they would like to call an annual meeting—but the main problem was 'what we can tell the members!'[54] The BCFA played no further discernible role in British politics after Dribbon's death in December 1971[55].

The pressing question in the mid 1960s was what would take the place of the BCFA? More specifically, which organization would now receive the backing of the

[52] Hull, DAR (2)/2/51, Dribbon to Olive Page Arnot, 27 April 1966.
[53] See the emergency resolution cited in Hull, DAR (2)/1/26.
[54] Hull, DAR (2)/2/54, 7 January 1970, Harry Francis to Olive Page Arnot. In fact, an AGM *was* held on 17 March (see LHASC CP/IND/DUTT/14/13).
[55] Obituary, the *Morning Star*, 8 December 1971. However, as late as 1973 Needham was warned of a possible revival of the BCFA following the abolition of the Labour Party's list of 'proscribed' organizations, and even encouraged to lobby the Labour NEC against this eventuality (CUL, Needham papers, M 205, Bryan to Needham, Robinson and Mary Adams, 20 April 1973).

Chinese government? During the Sino-Soviet dispute a number of local 'Friends of China' committees had been set up across Britain, which acted as a pole of attraction for disaffected Communists. In addition, Derek and Hung Ying Bryan's 'China Policy Study Group' (CPSG) was established in July 1963, and published the first edition of its journal, *The Broadsheet*, in January 1964. Apart from the Bryans, the principal participants were Peter Townsend, Colin and Virginia Penn (Assistant Secretary of the BCFA), and William and Ranjana Ash. Professor George Thomson, a Marxist Classicist from the University of Birmingham, was a leading academic sponsor. The CPSG was a highly democratic organization, imbued with the Chinese Communist spirit of intense criticism—Hung Ying once noted with regard to editorial meetings that 'nobody likes anyone else's articles'[56]. While these groups all had a role to play, however, none met the requirements of the PRC, which wanted to see the formation of a broadly based movement very different from the BCFA. The Friends of China committees formed a point of contact with the new Maoist groupings but were too politically extreme to attract mainstream support, while the CPSG was the preserve of a small group of intellectuals.

The decisive moment came in the autumn of 1964, when a contingent of 'China stalwarts'—notably Joseph Needham and Joan Robinson—were invited to attend the PRC's 15th anniversary celebrations in Beijing. They held productive talks with the People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and these discussions prepared the ground for the establishment of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding[57]. While no records of the discussions are available, a revealing private letter written by Needham in 1967 shows that they brought together pro-China academics with the left-wing British businessmen who had come to prominence in the China trade during the 1950s. 'I continue to feel', wrote Needham,

> that the business interests who alone made the whole thing financially possible have not really lived up to the promises and expectations adumbrated by Jack Perry when we met with Joan [Robinson] at that historic lunch at Shlomo Adler's home in Peking in 1964[58].

This fragment illuminates the two principal characteristics of the new organization. First, it would be backed by the PRC, but financial support would come indirectly through Perry and his colleagues. There is further evidence of this arrangement in a report from a Communist source inside SACU, who told Jack Woddis (head of the party's International Department) that

> [t]he money for SACU has come from four business men[.] Jack Perry, Roland Berger, and two others whose names he is not sure of. (He added that he understood Jack Perry got 1% commission on all trade with China.)[59]

[56] Herdan, *Liao Hongying*, 123 (citing a note of 21 June 1976).

[57] Ibid. 126–7. The Bryans were invited, but unable to join the delegation. See also SACU papers, undated typescript, 'JR's draft for counterblast' (May/June 1966).

[58] SACU papers, 17 July 1967, Needham to Derek Bryan. At least one meeting appears to have taken place on 17 September 1964 as Joan Robinson noted 'conversation about B.C. Friendship' in her diary of the visit (14 September–18 November 1964). There was also a meeting with Chou En-lai on 2 October, at which 'Jo [Needham] did most of the talking from visitors side' (see KCC, xi/6/1).

[59] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20, report by Woddis of 4 May 1965.

This arrangement allowed Needham to state categorically—with the benefit of 'plausible deniability'—that SACU received no Chinese state funding[60]. Secondly, SACU would seek to build support for China in non-political cultural and academic circles, rather than preaching to the converted on the far left—hence the vital importance of Needham and Robinson. In January 1965 Needham formally resigned as President of the BCFA, blaming the bitter divisions at the 1964 AGM and the BCFA's 'unduly close connection with the British Communist Party'. He announced that 'with other friends' he now intended to set up the 'really broad-based organisation' that the BCFA's political affiliations had not previously permitted[61]. According to the first public statement issued by SACU in April 1965, '[t]he basic aim of the organisation is to spread knowledge, dispel misconceptions, and counter misrepresentations'[62].

SACU started brightly with a crowded launch meeting at Church House, Westminster, on 15 May 1965, attended by some six to seven hundred people. A hundred and eighty prestigious sponsors from many different walks of public life were announced, including eight MPs (four Labour, three Liberal, and one Conservative). The Chinese chargé d'affaires delivered official greetings, and a message was read out from 17 British residents in Beijing. Joan Robinson moved the resolution that set up the new organization, seconded by the left-wing trade unionist Ernie Roberts. In her speech, Robinson emphasized that SACU would not 'make propaganda' or suppress other points of view, but would be dedicated to presenting an 'objective picture' of modern China. The other official speakers included the novelist Han Suyin and Derek Bryan who, as secretary, promised the establishment of country-wide branches, cultural activities, and frequent delegations to China. New members were enrolled on the spot and invited to a reception at the Chinese embassy. The author of a report for the Communist Party noted that 'not a single thing was said which anybody could object to', and that there was hardly any reference to the BCFA[63]. *Tribune* welcomed the formation of SACU and hoped that the presence of the Chinese officials would not encourage Labour's 'petty Stalinists' to proscribe it[64]. The positive response suggested that SACU had tapped into a deep well of interest in Chinese culture and sympathy for China's international isolation that extended far beyond the British left.

Despite this encouraging start, SACU soon stumbled into disarray. This was not only due to the difficulty of holding together such a disparate group, but also the inexorable tug of political events in China and South East Asia: above all the Cultural Revolution and the deepening conflict in Vietnam. Needham privately admitted in 1967 that the 'ideal of a really broadly based SACU was doomed to failure from the very beginning… because of the terrible deterioration of interna-

[60] Sussex University, Leonard Woolf papers, IG 16, 21 June 1966, D. Bryan to Woolf, attaching Needham's letter to sponsors.

[61] LHASC, CP/IND/HANN/11/08, 15 February 1965, BCFA circular to members enclosing (and rebutting) Needham's letter of 26 January 1965.

[62] LHASC, CP/IND/HANN/11/08, circular letter from Derek Bryan, 8 April 1965.

[63] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20, anonymous undated report and SACU press release of 8 May 1965; see also *Daily Worker*, 17 May 1965.

[64] *Tribune*, 21 May 1965.

tional affairs which has taken place during this period'[65]. The radicalization of Chinese politics placed an intolerable strain on SACU and soon drove a wedge between committed supporters of the PRC and those with a more general interest in Chinese culture. For example, the revelation that a Chinese pamphlet depicting US atrocities in Vietnam was being sold at SACU offices caused outrage amongst some moderate members in 1966. After cross-party representations by three otherwise highly supportive MPs, Jeremy Thorpe, Evan Luard, and Dame Joan Vickers, the offending pamphlet was withdrawn. Vickers, a Conservative, stated firmly that SACU was 'not a society for issuing propaganda on behalf of Peking'[66]. Derek Bryan recalled rather resentfully that the early meetings of the Council of Management were held in the 'faded and pompous gloom' of Commons committee rooms, to suit the MPs, and were 'often concerned more with inquiring into the propriety of the work of SACU than with furthering it'[67].

Political naivety—reflecting the absence of a wily campaigner like Dribbon at the helm—was also a factor in SACU's mounting difficulties. Needham's insistence on inviting Sir Gordon Sutherland, Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, to act as Treasurer was a case in point. Sutherland agreed with extreme reluctance, and on condition that he would not be involved in any 'detailed work'. He enjoined SACU to remain 'non-political and out of the Vietnam business', and soon resigned in horror at the first proposed budget.[68] Likewise, it was surely ill-advised to invite the high Tory Oxford historian Hugh Trevor-Roper to join a group of four SACU sponsors that visited China in the autumn of 1965. Trevor-Roper admired Needham's scholarship and had, in 1961, arranged substantial financial support for *Science and Civilisation in China* from a charity[69]. However, he reacted strongly to the reception which the sponsors received in Beijing, and returned convinced that SACU's leaders 'spoke with two voices': one of which must have 'assured the Chinese government that it was a docile agency for the uncritical expression of Chinese official propaganda'[70]. Needham's response was that the 'lower echelons' amongst Chinese officials had not woken up to the fact that SACU was not the BCFA, and had failed to treat Trevor-Roper as a 'distinguished individual scholar desirous of conversing at length with politicians and historians'[71]. On his return Trevor-Roper wrote a hard-hitting article for the *Sunday Times* headlined—against his wishes—'The sick mind of China'. However, while Trevor-Roper's comments caused the greatest impact, other members of the delegation were also critical of aspects of Chinese life.

[65] SACU papers, Needham to Derek Bryan, 17 July 1967.

[66] *Morning Star*, 8 August 1966; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 8 August 1966.

[67] Derek Bryan, 'Background to the formation of SACU', *China Now*, 51 (April 1975), 2.

[68] SACU papers, 1 April 1965, Sutherland to Needham and reply (14 April); 2 June 1965, Sutherland to D. Bryan; 28 June 1965, Sutherland to D. Bryan.

[69] Adam Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: The biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010), 362.

[70] SACU papers, Hugh Trevor-Roper to sponsors, attached to his letter dated 27 May 1966. Trevor-Roper was a late substitute for another Oxford don, the Chinese-born Maurice Bowra, and Bolt was a substitute for the actress Vanessa Redgrave. Later in his career, Trevor-Roper wrote a book about the Sinologist and fantasist Sir Edmund Backhouse (first published as *A hidden life: The enigma of Sir Edmund Backhouse* (London: Macmillan, 1976): see Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper*, 430–5).

[71] Sussex University, Leonard Woolf papers, IG 16, 21 June 1966, D. Bryan to Woolf, attaching Needham's letter to sponsors.

Playwright Robert Bolt concluded that to be a writer under the Communist regime would be 'personally, very depressing', while Mary Adams of the Consumer Association found the 'self-righteousness' of the Chinese, above all their lack of interest in Britain, irritating. Only Ernie Roberts appears to have returned wholly satisfied[72].

While Trevor-Roper became a leading critic of SACU from the right, the fact that he had been given a platform at all exposed Needham to bitter attacks from the left. One lengthy polemic, for instance, accused him of denying the true Marxist–Leninist nature of the Chinese regime with his insistence on the continuing importance of Confucianism and Taoism[73]. Matters came to a head at the first AGM on 21 May 1966, where an observer for the Communist Party noted that the mood was a 'very far cry from the rapture of the first meeting'[74]. Needham proved a 'terribly inefficient chairman' and, while queuing for tea, even asked the informant how the BCFA 'kept the lunatic fringe out of its meetings!' The meeting witnessed a tussle between the SACU leaders and the far left groups, with mixed results. A change in the legal status of SACU and the imposition of a new Constitution without proper debate was denounced by the left as undemocratic. However, a left-wing resolution to appoint a press officer was carried by 73 votes to 25. Given that this officer's role would be to 'make known the official Chinese view' when it was misrepresented in the media, the resolution caused widespread concern amongst SACU members. (In the event, the organization lacked the financial resources to make an appointment.) At the end of the meeting Trevor-Roper, who had sat on the platform but not been called to speak, failed to win re-election to the Council of Management. This setback appeared to bear out a warning—in an article published in the *Sunday Times* a week before the meeting—that a 'coup' would be mounted against 'uncommitted' members of the management committee and that SACU would be run 'wholly as a pro-Communist organisation'[75]. A circular letter sent to sponsors from Needham and Robinson, which unwisely implied that Trevor-Roper was behind the article and warned against 'McCarthyism', triggered the historian's resignation in a 'blaze of charges and counter-charges'[76]. Trevor-Roper's resignation

[72] For articles by the other delegates, see *SACU News*, November 1965 (Bolt), December 1965 (Adams), and January 1966 (Ernie Roberts). See also Ernie Roberts, *Strike back* (Talybont: Owain Hammonds, 1994), 180–4.

[73] LHASC CP/CENT/ORG/20, Pat Murphy (Irish Communist Organization), 'To Friends of China'. Needham had made this point in his address to the inaugural meeting of SACU, published as 'The fragrance of Friendship' in *Within the Four Seas: The dialogue of East and West* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969) 151–9, here pp. 156–7.

[74] LHASC CP/CENT/ORG/20, report by 'B.R.', dated 23 May 1966. This is the source for the following paragraph.

[75] 'Battle to control China society', *Sunday Times*, 15 May 1966.

[76] SACU papers, 21 May 1966, Trevor-Roper to Robinson; *Sunday Times*, 29 May 1966; 27 May 1966, Trevor-Roper to Needham and attached letter to sponsors; Robinson's notes for a reply. Trevor-Roper allegedly made comments similar to those reported in the *Sunday Times* article at a meeting of the Oxford branch of SACU on 25 April. These comments were reported to the SACU officers by two Oxford members, one of whom claimed that Trevor-Roper was determined to destroy SACU. However, at a branch meeting on 18 June 1966 it was agreed that this account was erroneous and that Trevor-Roper had not written the offending article. The source for the article remains unknown (Bodleian library, Oxford, C. A. Coulson papers, F.6.9). Robinson later regretted her 'human' lapse in using the term 'McCarthyism' (SACU papers, letter to A. J. Ayer, 10 June 1966).

was highly damaging and many SACU members and sponsors took their cue to join him—including the philosopher A. J. Ayer, Dame Janet Vaughan, and Leonard Woolf, who quit in protest at 'communistic wranglings'[77].

After Trevor-Roper's acrimonious departure, SACU began to lose high-profile supporters at an alarming rate, accelerated by the anti-western tenor of the Cultural Revolution. The novelist William Plomer, for instance, wrote that the Chinese were 'obviously hostile to the furtherance of Anglo-Chinese understanding', while the playwright N. F. Simpson complained that SACU was not sufficiently objective 'to be much use to someone as non-political as I am . . .'. J. B. Priestley and his wife Jacquetta Hawkes wrote that 'it seems to us quite vain to seek Chinese understanding at the present time'. The pianist Harriet Cohen resigned on the grounds that she could not be associated 'with a people who are so asinine as to talk about Beethoven, Tolstoy and others the way the Chinese have been doing lately'. These sentiments were shared by the artist Fred Uhlman, who protested against 'the destruction of all that artists and writers in Europe hold precious'. Laurens van der Post objected that SACU did not offer 'two-way traffic' in Anglo-Chinese understanding—for instance, British behaviour in Hong Kong could not be understood in isolation from 'the Chinese conquest of Tibet . . . one of the most flagrant manifestations of imperialism in our own day'. When the Oxford classicist E. R. Dodds resigned in 1969, Needham sadly noted: 'Another ripe apple has dropped! . . . I knew him well during the war in China'[78]. Kingsley Martin renewed his subscription in 1966, but against his better judgement. 'If Mao dies and his successors talk about him as Khrushchev did about Stalin', he warned, 'where will you be?'[79] SACU's membership began to recover in the later 1960s, although still hovering at around a thousand. However, the new recruits were often young people on the left with an interest in Chinese Communism and Mao Tse-tung thought. The original vision of a mobilization of British cultural life had clearly failed to materialize.

The onset of the Cultural Revolution, with all of its uncertainties, also affected SACU's standing with the Chinese authorities. Although three members of the Chinese embassy staff attended the second AGM in May 1967, and responded to applause by 'waving the little red book in the air'[80], it was no longer clear that SACU had their wholehearted support. In July 1967 Needham privately noted that the organization's 'stock in China' had been 'falling dangerously low for a long time past'. At the same time, Hung Ying Bryan told him that her husband's role in SACU had 'alienated *us* from [the Chinese Embassy at] Portland Place. Their attitude towards me drastically changed in 1965'. Her recent request for a visa form

[77] Sussex University, Leonard Woolf papers, IG 16, Woolf to D. Bryan, 8 June and 22 June 1966.

[78] SACU papers, 24 August 1967, Plomer to D. Bryan; 21 June 1967, N. F. Simpson to D. Bryan; 26 August 1966, Cohen to D. Bryan; 10 September 1966, Priestly to D. Bryan; 1 September 1966, Uhlman to D. Bryan; 4 December 1967, van der Post to B. Paterson; 11 January 1969, Dodds to Needham, with Needham's note.

[79] Sussex University, Kingsley Martin papers, 14/3, Martin to Mary Adams, 9 August 1966. Martin died in 1969.

[80] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20, undated and anonymous report.

had been denied 'for a very feeble reason'[81]. As a result of these pressures SACU's leaders were perhaps overly eager to please the Chinese authorities, and this contributed to a row that broke out within the society in the summer of 1967. Needham had issued a press release on 18 June 1967 which 'warmly congratulate[d] the Chinese people' on the 'brilliant technical achievement' of testing a hydrogen bomb[82]. The Reverend Paul Oestreicher, Associate Secretary of the International Department of the British Council of Churches and a SACU council member, immediately complained to Needham not only about the poor wording of the statement (the explosion of such a bomb hardly merited congratulation), but also at the fact that the Council of Management had not been consulted in advance. Needham replied that the Chinese success 'in producing this thing—admittedly horrible in itself—is a technological achievement of which they are naturally certain to be extremely proud and which does deserve congratulations'. However, he conceded that the matter should be raised in the Council, and actually welcomed the prospect of a vote of censure leading to his resignation from the 'impossible' role of chairman[83]. Although retrospective approval was granted, the dispute degenerated into farce when it was proposed that the statement should be published in *SACU News* along with a list of those council members who did not wish to be associated with it. This 'quite ridiculous' procedure appalled Oestreicher, who speculated that it might be 'the aim of some to narrow the base of SACU drastically'[84]. Indeed, the eminent Oxford physicist (and former SACU treasurer) Nicholas Kurti resigned over precisely this issue[85].

In fact, Oestreicher's letter precipitated the resignation of Derek Bryan as secretary rather than Needham as chairman. By July 1967 Bryan had become convinced that the original conception of SACU had been flawed, and that the events of the last two years demonstrated that there was an 'increasingly urgent need for a British organisation prepared to champion China's cause openly'[86]. SACU had already begun to move in this direction in recent months. Needham, in his chairman's speech to the second AGM in May 1967, had publicly called for a review of SACU's role and indicated that its 'self denying ordinances' and ' "unbiassed" comment' were no longer viable in a worsening international situation. A Communist who attended the meeting reported that 'the entire meeting was composed of people anxious to push SACU to a more committed position', and a resolution was passed which obliged speakers on SACU platforms only to make comments in line with the society's aims. The report concluded that there would now be a 'sharp

[81] SACU papers, 5 July 1967, Needham to Paul Oestreicher; 19 July 1967, Hung Ying Bryan to Needham.

[82] The press release was actually drafted by Derek Bryan and read out to Needham by telephone (SACU papers, Bryan to Needham, 9 July 1967).

[83] SACU papers, Oestreicher to Needham, 28 June 1967 and reply of 5 July.

[84] SACU papers, Oestreicher to Paterson, 11 October 1967. In the event an equally ridiculous procedure was adopted. It was agreed at the Council of Management on 14 October that SACU members could obtain the text of the press release 'on application to the Secretary'.

[85] SACU papers, 30 September 1967, Kurti to Paterson.

[86] SACU papers, Bryan to Needham, 9 July 1967.

move to the more committed position which presumably the Chinese require'[87]. Even so, Bryan believed that the row over the H-bomb test demonstrated that the majority of the Council of Management was still not in agreement with the views of the members[88].

This continuing tension was encapsulated in the correspondence between Needham and Bryan following his decision to resign. 'It is not possible', Bryan told Needham, 'to express solidarity with reservations': especially at a time when 'China is the main obstacle to US domination of the world'[89]. Needham's response was guarded. 'The inevitable consequence of partisanship', he warned, 'is isolation', and he cautioned Bryan against conflating 'China' with 'the Maoist vision'. As regards a policy of 'no reservations', Needham was

> prepared to approve of [the Cultural Revolution], but not necessarily in detail. . . . Until I have been able to get more adequate information about exactly what has been going on in China . . . indeed until I myself have had the chance of going there again and forming my own opinion, I cannot honestly say that I have no reservations. All I have is an open mind, predisposed to be favourable to what I think they have been trying to do[90].

He shared Bryan's pessimism about the outlook for SACU, and feared that they would continue to lose 'rightists on one side and leftists on the other' until there was nothing left. 'Nevertheless', he concluded, 'Joan [Robinson] and I are going to push on a bit further yet'.

In the autumn SACU regrouped around a new policy statement, drafted by Roland Berger, and formally adopted in November 1967. According to this document, the major issue of the day was the saturation of British life with propaganda 'to condition people's minds to an image of China as Enemy Number One, the bogeyman of this period'. This was intended to neutralize opposition prior to a putative US/British attack on China. Although SACU would remain a home to a range of political views, the statement continued, issues would be frankly discussed 'using the methods of reasoned argument and persuasion which are practiced by the Chinese themselves'. The organization's three aims for the coming period were defined as: opposition to the British government's policy of hostility to China; countering misrepresentations; and making known the progress of the Chinese people since 1949[91].

By the late 1960s the character of SACU had clearly changed. It was now far more forthright in its defence of Chinese interests, and a volunteer 'Press Group' kept a close eye on the media for damaging or hostile images of China. On one

[87] LHASC CP/CENT/ORG/20, undated and anonymous report.

[88] SACU papers, 6 August 1967, Bryan to Needham with draft letter to SACU members; in a private letter to Needham, Hung Ying Bryan also attributed her husband's resignation to his exhaustion due to the politicking within the society and the 'mental conflicts' that he had suffered (SACU papers, 19 July 1967).

[89] SACU papers, Bryan to Needham, 9 July 1967.

[90] SACU papers, Needham to Bryan, 17 July 1967.

[91] *SACU News*, 2/12 (December 1967), 1–3.

occasion, Harlech TV was reprimanded for an episode of 'The Saint' in which a Chinese drug-runner was inspired by the thoughts of Chairman Mao[92]. For much of this period, however, SACU remained on the back foot, especially with regard to the situation of the British subjects detained in China. The question of how best to respond to their plight divided SACU's members, and exposed the organization to abuse and ridicule. Betty Paterson, who had taken over from Derek Bryan as secretary, told Needham that 'I find the whole business distressing, frustrating and very time-wasting'[93]. Meanwhile, the society's membership continued to change, and most of the remaining non-political supporters departed. This was most evident in Oxford, where a well-supported branch had initially attracted many independent-minded academics. In July 1967, however, the city's Labour MP Evan Luard resigned claiming that the branch had been subjected to a 'takeover'. A 'number of individuals, hitherto unknown' had 'packed' the annual meeting and formed a new committee[94]. The remaining moderate members of the Oxford branch were shocked when they were asked to distribute a leaflet which condemned the British treatment of the Chinese diplomats in London while refusing to criticize the more serious attack on the British legation in Beijing[95]. One of the last dons to resign was the mathematician C. A. Coulson, who had seriously contemplated an offer to join the staff of the Christian Yenching University, Beijing, in 1949. In 1968 he cancelled his subscription because he found the articles in *SACU News* 'sheer gobbledygook. . . . I want to know what is really happening in the Cultural Revolution.' A recent article on science in China, he added, 'would be unrecognized by any of us who actually do science'[96]. After a fraught early life, therefore, SACU had gained a clearer sense of mission and purpose, but it was no longer speaking to the uncommitted.

Although the BCFA had organized throughout the United Kingdom, in March 1966 a separate Scotland–China Association (S–CA) was established to complement SACU's work in Scotland[97]. Like SACU it was intended to appeal to a broad audience. Jack Dribbon, attended the founding conference and dismissed it as the preserve of 'innumerable academics who . . . had not heard of the war in Vietnam and the danger of escalation involving a socialist country—China . . .'[98]. The

[92] SACU papers, letter dated 27 November 1968.

[93] CUL, Needham papers, K 199, Paterson to Needham, 21 November 1968.

[94] SACU papers, 10 July 1967, Luard to D. Bryan; in reply (12 July) Bryan indicated his support for the new committee—and '[i]f they can interest Oxford people outside the University, so much the better'. A year earlier Luard had confided to Philip Noel-Baker that the leaders of SACU were 'though not necessarily Communists, so pro-Chinese as to be pretty much the same thing' (Churchill College, Cambridge, NBKR 4/93, letter dated 8 June 1966).

[95] There is a copy of the leaflet in Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms Eng.c.5688, Dorothy Hodgkin papers, G113.

[96] SACU papers, 29 July and 6 October 1968, Coulson to Paterson.

[97] The principal source for this passage is John Chinnery, 'Forty years of the Scotland–China Association', *Sine* (Spring 2006), consulted online at <http://www.scotchina.org> on 5 January 2011. I have not been able to identify any substantive archive for the S-CA. It is not clear why a separate Scottish organization was established—Chinnery says that Scots may have been 'goaded' by the use of the word 'Anglo' in SACU's name.

[98] Hull, DAR (2)/2/51, Dribbon to Olive Page Arnot, 27 April 1966.

founding chairman was the Rev. Ralph Morton of the Iona Community, and he was supported by two academic sinologists, Jack Gray and John Chinnery (a former Communist and BCFA activist who had recently been appointed to head the new Chinese department at Edinburgh University)[99]. Other luminaries included Tom Murray, an arch-Stalinist who had read news of the 1911 Chinese revolution to his blind father, and Colonel John Logan, who had worked in China with British–American Tobacco. The first secretary was Elsie Collier, who then departed to join her husband John, who was teaching at Sun Yat-sen University, Canton, during the Cultural Revolution. One of her successors, the journalist Isabel Hilton, was blacklisted by MI5 in 1977 when applying for a post at the BBC, as the S–CA was deemed a subversive organization[100]. The association survived with a membership of a few hundred, supported by politicians such as Tam Dalyell, the Labour MP for West Lothian who visited China with a trade delegation in 1972[101]. It appears to have largely avoided the crises that often afflicted SACU.

'CANNIBAL TRIBES': MAOIST POLITICS IN BRITAIN

Maoist (or 'Marxist–Leninist') groups first emerged in Britain as a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute, and became a colourful, if peripheral, feature of the politics of the far left during the 1960s and 70s[102]. The number of activists involved was relatively small, and there was a distinct lack of organizational unity—indeed, the Maoists never seemed happier than when fighting each other. One authority claimed that by 1975 there were only 1,500 Maoists in Britain, in eight separate parties, compared with some 28,000 Communists and 14,000 Trotskyists[103]. The Communists, who felt the keenest sense of rivalry, kept a watchful eye on the Maoist groups but struggled to keep pace with their 'process of feuding and splitting', which was greatly accelerated by the Cultural Revolution[104]. An internal party document on 'ultra-leftism' in 1968 described the Maoists as 'continually dividing, like bacteria…'[105]. At times the Communists delighted in the sheer outlandishness

[99] For Chinnery, see his obituary in *The Guardian*, 24 November 2010, and his CPGB personal file (LHASC CP/CENT/PERS/1/04); Gray is best known for his *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000* (1st edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). His 'valedictory' online article entitled 'Mao in perspective' contains some interesting autobiographical reflections: <http://www.freewebs.com/jack-gray>.

[100] *China Now*, 115 (1985–6), 7, and 116 (1986), 8; *The Guardian*, 21 October 1988.

[101] See *Tribune*, 14 January 1972 and *New Statesman*, 25 February 1972, 231–2.

[102] Parker, *Kick inside*, and Peter Shipley, *Revolutionaries in modern Britain* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), were extremely helpful in preparing this section.

[103] Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 16, 222–3.

[104] LHASC CP/CENT/EC/12/08, April 1968, 'Ultra Left groupings and their English language journals' (a list compiled by Betty Reid), 6. Party members were also encouraged to look out for deviant 'Chinese' activity. See the letter to Betty Reid from a woman who had received a Christmas card from a female friend in the party with the following note: 'Have you given much thought to the International controversy—we have'. The woman had subsequently sent her a copy of the CPSG's *The Broadsheet*, which she forwarded to Reid (LHASC CP/CENT/ORG/20/04, letter dated '13 October').

[105] LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/12/08, report to EC, 12 May 1968, 15.

of Maoist politics. For instance, in 1968 they discovered one group that regarded Mao as a counter-revolutionary and supported Liu Shaoqi, the principal victim of the Cultural Revolution[106]. When a Communist observer reported having heard Joan Robinson expounding Mao's theory that political support was like a cucumber with a 'fat mass' in the middle, he added: 'I am not inventing this'[107]. For all the comedy, however, the Maoists had to be taken seriously. They posed genuine questions with regard to the reformist direction taken by the CPGB since the early 1950s, and they held a special appeal for the young as well as for recent immigrants from the Commonwealth. As the Communist Party's 1968 document concluded, a 'general enthusiasm' amongst students and young intellectuals for the apparently 'deeply democratic, spontaneous character of the Chinese revolution' was proving far more influential than any rigid application of Mao's writings.

British Maoists drew direct—at times almost mystical—inspiration from the Chinese revolution. William Ash experienced a moment of revelation on the streets of Beijing in 1970 when he sensed 'hundreds of millions of people feeling and thinking exactly as we did'[108]. Likewise, Michael McCreery—the principal defender of the Chinese cause within the Communist party during 1962–3—was said to imagine himself as the 'spokesman for 700 million'[109]. However, few Maoists had the opportunity to visit China, and their Maoism owed far more to revolutionary ideology than to events in China per se. Above all, the Sino-Soviet split opened 'a window of opportunity' for those who wanted to attack reformism within the British Communist movement[110]. Accordingly, the roots of British Maoism lay primarily in the disaffection of some Communists with *The British Road to Socialism* (1951), as well as with Khrushchev's pursuit of de-Stalinisation and 'peaceful co-existence'. Where most orthodox Communists perceived the Soviet Union of the early 1960s as a successful socialist state that was approaching technological, economic, and strategic parity with the capitalist world, 'anti-revisionists' chose to see only the abandonment of world revolution and compromize with imperialism. While the number of Maoist defectors from the CPGB was small, there was undoubtedly a wider section of opinion within the party that shared at least some of their views. When the Executive Committee issued its pro-Moscow statement on the dispute in the International Communist Movement (as the Sino-Soviet split was politely termed) in the autumn of 1963, the party carefully monitored the subsequent discussions at branch level. The results for the London district show that some 10 per cent of voting members opposed the leadership over this vital question, and almost another 10 per cent abstained[111]. The party was left in no doubt that it had some 'problem branches' in London. In West Hendon, for instance, the resistance was led by Dorothy Birch, the wife of the prominent trade

[106] Ibid.; this was the Marxist–Leninist Organization of Great Britain.
[107] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20, report on SACU's second AGM, 20 May 1967.
[108] William Ash, *A red square: The autobiography of an unconventional revolutionary* (London: Howard Baker, 1978), 181.
[109] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20/07, typescript by 'J.R.M.' c.1963.
[110] Parker, *Kick inside*, 13.
[111] LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/02/09.

unionist Reg Birch, who challenged the Executive Committee's right to criticize Stalin and the Chinese, and described Khrushchev as a 'greedy little peasant'. Alarmingly, a Communist official who attended the meeting noted that 'she needs psychiatric treatment and not political discussion'[112].

The first Maoist breakaway was Michael McCreery's Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity (CDRCU). In November 1963 McCreery issued a public statement along with thirteen fellow Communists (some of many years standing) attacking the leaders of the CPGB for joining the 'anti-China chorus'[113]. All were swiftly expelled from the party. McCreery was a bohemian figure in his mid thirties whose father had been a general in the British army. His privileged upbringing—at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford—made him an implausible champion of political organization at the factory level[114]. One researcher encountered him in a 'dingy top-floor flat' in North London, surrounded by 'piles of dirty clothes, unattended dishes in the sink', and some 2,000 books and pamphlets. When McCreery's committee published a new monthly journal, *Vanguard*, the production quality was so high that many suspected that it was funded either by McCreery's personal wealth or by Chinese subsidy—an allegation which he vigorously denied[115]. One of McCreery's closest colleagues was Arthur (A. H.) Evans, an 'obsessional polemicist' and Welsh coal miner's son who had spent many years in the United States and Australia. Later, he had travelled to New Guinea to observe 'cannibal tribes who still live in primitive Communism'. Evans was a staunch defender of the Chinese view that a nuclear war could be survived—to the horror of an *Izvestia* correspondent who met him at a peace movement conference and concluded that Evans should be placed in a 'straight jacket [*sic*]'[116]. The CDRCU, which only had some 50 members, achieved a modicum of success when its candidate won 899 votes standing against Harold Wilson at Huyton in the 1964 general election. However, it soon succumbed to factionalism: Evans walked out, McCreery was outvoted by his rivals in the London committee, and the organization fragmented after his untimely death from cancer in April 1965[117].

McCreery's meteoric career made little impact on the Communist Party—indeed, many potential allies felt that he had made a foolish mistake in choosing to break away rather than fighting 'revisionism' from within. The party faced a much more formidable adversary, however, in Reg Birch. Unlike McCreery, Birch could claim to be a genuine working-class leader and he was also universally judged to be warm, cultured, and likeable—at ease discussing revolutionary politics with

[112] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20/05, 4 December 1963, John Mahon to Betty Reid; LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20/05, report of the meeting of 14 November 1963 by Bob Harper.

[113] There is a copy in Sheffield University, Townsend papers, Box 2. One signatory, Peggy Pinckheard, had been a party member since 1936.

[114] Michael McCreery, *Organise at the place of work* (London: CDRCU, January 1964).

[115] *Vanguard* (February 1964), citing McCreery's letter to the *Sunday Telegraph*.

[116] For Evans, see George Thayer, *The British political fringe: A profile* (London: Anthony Blond, 1968), 121, David Widgery, *The left in Britain, 1956–1968* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 483, and LHASC CP/CENT/INT/03/05 (ii), report by B. Chekhonin, 31 July 1964.

[117] There is a tribute to McCreery in *Vanguard* (June/July 1965).

a journalist over Meursault and smoked salmon[118]. Birch was a full-time official in the engineering union (AUEW), with a loyal following amongst skilled workers in North London, and a member of the executive committee of the Communist party. He had been the only EC member to vote against the decision to back Moscow against Beijing in September 1963. Birch's relationship with the party deteriorated in the spring of 1965 when his personal assistant at his union office (a party member) passed some of his political correspondence to the Communist Party leadership. This indicated that Birch was continuing to promote China's cause within the international Communist movement. His assistant also provided revealing information on Birch's political contacts, stating that he was 'tremendously active on the new Chinese organisation [presumably SACU]', and in regular contact with pro-China activists such as Jack Perry, Professor George Thomson, Alex Tudor Hart, and Virginia Penn. An angry and indignant Birch was summoned before a subcommittee of seven senior Communist Party members and formally censured in July 1965[119]. Subsequently the party's London District Committee decided not to renominate Birch for the EC due to his backing for 'the Chinese view'. In 1966 Birch joined the editorial board of *The Marxist*, a Marxist–Leninist journal that allegedly received funding from Jack Perry[120]. His party membership was suspended for three months in January 1967 and, in April, Birch and others associated with *The Marxist* were expelled from the CPGB[121]. When Communist party leaders decided to back the 'broad left' Hugh Scanlon, rather than Birch, as their candidate for the presidency of the AUEW, Birch persisted with his candidacy but lost to Scanlon by a humiliating margin in the first round.

Lawrence Parker has argued compellingly that Birch was not a 'consistent, principled opponent' of the party leadership since the 1950s[122]. Instead, his disenchantment with 'revisionist' Communism had first surfaced during the latter stages of the Sino-Soviet dispute and was magnified by the mistreatment that he suffered at the hands of party officials. By January 1967, following his suspension from the CPGB, it was clear that his relations with the party were close to breaking point. He told the journalist Geoffrey Moorhouse that he despised the party's 'opportunism' and its 'camp-following of [peaceful] coexistence'. The Chinese, by contrast, had not abandoned the class struggle and were willing 'to support any war of liberation no matter how it affects them'[123]. In August 1967 Birch visited China, and,

[118] For Birch, see the entry by Geoffrey Goodman in the *Oxford DNB*; profile by Geoffrey Moorhouse, press cutting dated 27 January 1967; *The Observer*, 29 June 1975; obituary in *The Guardian*, 8 June 1994, Will Podmore, *Reg Birch: Engineer, trade unionist, Communist* (London: Bellman Books, 2004) adds little.

[119] The details of the case are in LHASC, CP/IND/GOLL/04/06. Birch attended the inaugural meeting of SACU as a sponsor, but thereafter did not play a visible role.

[120] See Parker, *Kick inside*, p. 40, n. 40. For a chart depicting the various organizations and companies that supported *The Marxist*, see *Hammer or anvil* (the journal of a rival Maoist grouping), 1967, in CP/IND/DUTT/17/09.

[121] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20/05, 28 April 1967, Frank Stanley (London District secretary) to John Gollan.

[122] Parker, *Kick inside*, 28–37; this goes against the view presented in Podmore, *Reg Birch*, 44–9.

[123] Press cutting dated 27 January 1967 (LHASC, CP/IND/DUTT/17/09). In fact, China's support for foreign revolutionary struggles was generally highly circumspect.

while he was away, his wife and allies in the AUEW convened a meeting of 'anti-revisionists' at Conway Hall for his return. The implication was that Birch brought with him the approval of the Chinese Communists in forming a new party, and a provisional committee was established at Birch's house on 14 October[124]. Its first official action was to call a meeting to mark the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, in a hall bedecked with banners bearing the thoughts of Chairman Mao. Birch announced his intention to form a new revolutionary party, and called on those present to applaud the events of 1917 with cries of 'Long live Lenin, long live Stalin'[125]. The principal speakers were Birch's AUEW allies, such as John Hannington and Ted Roycraft, who had supported him throughout his struggle with the Communist party leaders, although Asians (from the Indian subcontinent rather than China) were also well represented both in the audience and on the platform.

In April 1968 Birch formally established the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist–Leninist) (CPB(M–L)) and held the post of chairman until his death in 1994. The new party enjoyed numerous advantages. It was seen as the 'official pro-Chinese party'[126], and Birch was a respected figure of national standing (in 1975 he was even elected to the General Council of the TUC). Moreover—unlike many groups on the far left—it had genuine links to the industrial working class. However, many of the other Marxist–Leninist groups distrusted Birch and his modus operandi—he was seen as an opportunist, still steeped in the manipulative politics of the Communist Party, who had undergone a belated conversion to 'anti-revisionism'. Accordingly, the CPB(M–L), rather than unifying the fragmented world of Marxist–Leninism, merely became the 'largest and most proletarian' of many small political groupings[127]. Even so, no party on the left enjoyed closer links with the People's Republic. Birch and his colleagues visited China many times after 1968 (and its ally, Albania, even more frequently). The interests of his AUEW members were never far from his mind. On one occasion Birch apparently convinced Chou En-lai that China should buy a fleet of British Trident airliners, which remained in service until the mid 1990s. Denis Healey is said to have introduced Birch to Prime Minister James Callaghan as 'the man who sells British aircraft'[128].

In the mid 1960s Maoist ideas also gained support amongst recently arrived immigrants, especially those from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean (although not to a great extent, it should be noted, amongst the burgeoning Chinese population, who came principally from Hong Kong[129]). One of the most visible Asian Maoists was Alberto Manchanda, a Pakistani activist who had arrived in Britain in 1952 and was expelled from the CPGB in 1965. He was deeply involved in sectarian conflicts within the Vietnam solidarity movement, and established a breakaway 'Britain–Vietnam Solidarity Front'[130]. The British Maoist groups also reached out

[124] I am following the chronology of 'T.M.' in 'Revisionism and the British anti-revisionist movement', *Marxist Leninist Quarterly*, 3 (Winter 1972–3), 3–33, here pp. 16–18.
[125] LHASC, CP/CENT/ORG/20/04, undated, anonymous report to Communist party.
[126] Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 154.
[127] Widgery, *Left in Britain*, 482.
[128] Podmore, *Reg Birch*, 68.
[129] For a discussion, see Benton and Gomez, *Chinese in Britain*, 244–54.
[130] Widgery, *Left in Britain*, 492.

to alienated black and Asian immigrant workers, and the writer Peter Shipley described their influence as being strongest in the less prosperous parts of London: 'an arc from Camden in the north going eastwards around to Brixton in the south'[131]. The Maoists' most striking political success was the overthrow of the moderate leadership of the Campaign against Racial Discrimination (CARD) at its 1967 annual general meeting[132]. The coup was organized by Johnny James and Ralph Bennett of the Caribbean Workers' Movement, in association with the London Workers' Committee, a Marxist–Leninist organization led by Paul Noone and Alex Tudor Hart. The rebels' key demands were that CARD should be an openly anti-imperialist body, and run only by immigrants of coloured origin. Anthony Lester QC, a member of the Society of Labour Lawyers and one of the defeated leaders, warned of a 'move for a racialist take-over by people including Trotskyists and Maoists'[133]. However, the victory of James and his allies swiftly turned sour. James was more interested in promoting revolution in the Caribbean than immigrants' rights in Britain, and Asian members raised in the Gandhian tradition were unhappy with the violent 'Black Power' image of some of the Maoist groups. CARD collapsed, and the most lasting outcome was the formation of a new organization, the Working People's Party of England (WPPE), which united some of these elements under the chairmanship of Tudor Hart. As one of its principal goals was the break up of the British state, the WPPE worked closely with the Workers' Party of Scotland whose leader Tom Murray—like Tudor Hart—was an ex-Communist veteran of the Spanish Civil War.

THE LAST YEARS OF CHAIRMAN MAO, 1970–76

In the autumn of 1970 Mao Tse-tung invited Edgar Snow (who had been unable to obtain a Chinese visa since his last visit in 1965) to come to Beijing. On 1 October Snow and his wife joined Mao in Tiananmen square for the celebration of the birth of the People's Republic. At first sight this was a kind gesture to a good 'friend of China' who was approaching the end of his life, but Mao was also using the veteran American journalist to signal a dramatic shift in China's international orientation. Snow's presence indicated that, after the xenophobia and insularity of the Cultural Revolution, Mao was willing to reach out to the United States—now deemed to be a lesser threat than the Soviet Union—and even to consider a diplomatic revolution. The pace quickened in 1971, with the highly public 'ping-pong diplomacy' in April and Henry Kissinger's clandestine visit to Beijing in July. Richard Nixon, a Republican president with a McCarthyite past, made his historic visit to China in February 1972. The immediate benefits for China of Mao's new

[131] Shipley, *Revolutionaries*, 168.

[132] My account draws heavily on Benjamin W. Heinemann, *The politics of the powerless: A study of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). Heinemann carried out his research in 1966–7 and interviewed many of the principal participants. CARD had been established in 1964.

[133] Heinemann, *Politics of the powerless*, 202.

diplomacy were considerable: many states recognized the People's Republic (although the United States did not formally do so until 1979), and Britain finally established full diplomatic relations in March 1972. Meanwhile, the PRC took China's seat at the UN at the expense of Chiang Kai-shek's government on Taiwan—a cause that had united the British left since 1950. More generally, the left welcomed—or at least put a brave face on—China's rapprochement with the United States. Reg Birch foresaw no change in China's Marxist–Leninist principles or its support for national liberation struggles, and argued that the United States had been forced to change policy due to its defeat in Vietnam and domestic political opposition[134]. Even the Communist *Morning Star* welcomed the prospect of Nixon's visit as proof of the growing strength of the world socialist movement, although adding the rider that China must now take the opportunity to restore its relations with the Soviet Union[135]. In fact, China's attacks on the USSR became ever more intense. The most critical note was struck by the Trotskyist *Red Mole*, which saw the sudden warming of Sino-US relations as proof that the Chinese bureaucracy was recovering from the Cultural Revolution, and willing to sell out the world revolution in a quest for stability.[136]

Other aspects of China's foreign policy during Mao's last years were far less palatable for progressive opinion in Britain. For instance, China supported Pakistan's military dictatorship in the 1971 war with India over the secession of East Pakistan, and established links with pariah regimes such as General Pinochet's Chile and apartheid South Africa[137]. In the struggle between rival liberation movements in Angola, it supported the CIA-backed UNITA and FNLA against the MPLA, the Soviet protégé. In March 1976 Jack Woddis, head of the CPGB's international department, denounced China's 'strange "friends" ', and its readiness to associate with the 'most discredited and reactionary' capitalist states. China's 'blind anti-Sovietism', he argued, had led it into keeping 'squalid' company[138]. China was also at odds with much of the British left in strongly supporting NATO and the EEC as bulwarks against the Soviet Union. Conservative advocates of Britain's membership of the 'Common market', such as Edward Heath (who had negotiated Britain's accession in 1973), became honoured guests. As the debate over the EEC intensified within the Labour Party, after its return to power in February 1974, one pro-Market Labour MP was described in *Tribune* as using phrases 'which must have rung round the banqueting halls of Peking. Like Edward Heath, we are all Maoists now!'[139] Trade was also regaining its former importance in Anglo-Chinese relations. Sir Alec Douglas Home, the Conservative Foreign Minister, was delighted

[134] *Tribune*, 30 July 1971.

[135] *Morning Star*, 17 July 1971; Palme Dutt described Nixon's visit as a 'historic defeat' for the USA (*Labour Monthly*, May 1972).

[136] *Red Mole*, August 1971 (article by Tariq Ali), 28 February 1972 (article by Clarissa Howard), 15 May 1972 (editorial and article by Livio Maitan).

[137] When China offered credits to Chile, one reader wrote to *Tribune* that 'I cannot conceive that a country even remotely Socialist would do this' (17 September 1976).

[138] *Morning Star*, 24 March 1976.

[139] *Tribune*, 2 May 1975, Richard Clements describing a speech by John Macintosh MP.

to be played the Eton Boating Song by a PLA band on his arrival in Beijing in 1972, but the *New Statesman* suggested that the lyrics should be rewritten to capture this new commercial dynamic:

> But there's no point in shunning
> A market we hope to screw;
> And so we'll make the running,
> As running dogs always do[140].

Chinese domestic politics also retained the capacity to shock and bewilder. In October 1971 Lin Biao, Mao's heir and Defence Minister, died in a plane crash in Mongolia. He was apparently fleeing with his family after a failed *coup d'état*, but the story was not confirmed for a year and the exact circumstances remain unclear. Lin's death removed a leading radical and facilitated Mao's opening to the United States. Even so, the radicals remained a powerful force, and Mao used them to keep a check on the increasing influence of Premier Chou En-lai. During 1974 a bizarre new campaign mobilized students to 'Criticise Confucius/criticise Lin Biao': it was interpreted as a radical attack on the 'Confucian' Chou as well as the disgraced Lin. The writer William Shawcross, who was visiting China at the time, saw these movements as a sign of the continuing vitality of the Cultural Revolution[141]. The uncertainty of the times was best expressed by the fate of Deng Xiaoping, who had been rehabilitated in 1973 by Chou En-lai after suffering persecution during the Cultural Revolution. When his patron Chou died in January 1976—an event that was greeted with an outpouring of public emotion and a demonstration in Tiananmen square in April—Deng was again stripped of his offices. In place of the 'capitalist roader' Deng, Mao nominated Hua Guofeng, 'an obscure provincial functionary' from Hunan[142], as his successor. David Fernbach, who toured China with SACU in 1976, collected evidence of working-class resistance to Deng's 'Right revisionist wind' and concluded that his pragmatism in economic and educational policy would have been 'disastrous to China's development'[143]. However, one British student in Shanghai observed that the anti-Deng demonstrations lacked conviction and that the Chinese students seemed 'happy to repeat slogans on command'[144]. In any case, Deng's second and more lasting comeback would have to await Mao's death.

The PRC's relatively greater openness after 1970 began to attract more British visitors and fed a revived interest within Britain: indeed, by 1973 Malcolm Caldwell was detecting no end to the 'deluge' of new books on China[145]. In the summer of 1971 Geoffrey Goodman of the *Daily Mirror* became—after a prolonged courtship of officials at the Chinese Legation—the first British journalist invited to visit China after the Cultural Revolution. He was impressed by the overriding emphasis

[140] Roger Woddis, 'Peking Boating Song', *New Statesman*, 3 November 1972, 637.
[141] *New Statesman*, 29 March 1974, 436–7, and 5 April 1974, 472–4.
[142] Dietrich, *People's China*, 212.
[143] SACU papers, 'Outline of proposed contribution by David Fernbach on the 2-line struggle'.
[144] Article by Michael Rank, *New Statesman*, 22 October 1976, 548.
[145] *Tribune*, 4 May 1973.

on equality, and presented Mao as offering an example of 'Christ-like dedication' while living as a 'kind of monk'[146]. (These words echoed Mao's famous comment to Edgar Snow a few months earlier that he was 'only a lone monk walking the world with a leaky umbrella'[147].) In September 1971 Tony Benn, Chairman-elect of the Labour Party, was invited to visit China as the first official Labour representative since the Attlee delegation of 1954. Benn took with him a letter for Chou En-lai from Harold Wilson, although Vic Feather, General Secretary of the TUC, refused to allow him to extend any 'formal greetings' to the Chinese trade unions[148]. Benn returned marvelling at a 'developing country, not symbolized by a starving child but by the immense energy which it has devoted to its own development, almost without any outside help'[149]. During a two-hour discussion with the Vice Minister of Trade, Benn felt that he had 'certainly made an impact' by quoting Mao in support of his argument[150]. Denis Healey, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, followed a few months later and was granted a four-hour meeting with Chou En-lai[151]. Trade union relations were renewed in September 1972 when a delegation from the AUEW visited China, although the National Union of Mineworkers turned down an invitation in 1974 when the Chinese refused to allow Mick McGahey, the Communist leader of the Scottish mineworkers, to lead the delegation[152]. The AUEW delegation was led by the union's president Hugh Scanlon, but it did not include Reg Birch. The delegates were 'stunned' at the abolition of piece work incentives and perplexed by the marginal role played by the Chinese trade unions since the Cultural Revolution, but they were mesmerized by the 'vast potential market' for British capital goods. A film of an operation on a diseased lung using acupuncture, however, proved 'just a little more than [they] could stand'[153].

There was further evidence that the labour movement was taking a renewed interest in China when the Fabian Society convened a 'Labour in Asia' working party in 1972. The section of the report dealing with China was drafted by the journalist Richard Harris, a China-born member of *The Times* staff who had reported on the 1954 Labour Party delegation. The text was revised in the light of comments from Tony Benn, who thought that Harris was too far to the right and too flippant in his treatment of Mao's politics. However, Benn may also have found

[146] *Tribune*, 25 June 1971.

[147] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 238.

[148] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, August 1971, Benn to Feather and reply of 31 August (Feather had made the pencil comment that 'I don't want to be seen to be falling over ourselves for this'. The Confederation of British Industry proved more obliging, see MRC, Mss 200/C/3/DG2/17, John Whitehorn to Benn, 31 August 1971).

[149] *Morning Star*, 18 January 1972, citing Benn's report to the Bureau of the Socialist International.

[150] MRC, Mss 200/C/3/DG2/17, Benn to Campbell Adamson, 29 September 1971.

[151] Healey, *Time of my life*, 361–7.

[152] *Morning Star*, 13 April 1974. McGahey had played a leading role in defeating the pro-China faction within the BCFA in 1964 (see above, p. 177).

[153] 'China—as we saw it' (report of the 1972 AUEW delegation to China), MRC, Mss 36, ISTC c.74; *Morning Star*, 9 April 1973, article by delegate Hubert Howarth.

Harris's message unwelcome, as he argued that Britain's moment as a mediator between China and the United States had long passed, and that the left no longer could assume any natural primacy in Britain's relations with the PRC. Indeed, as Harris put it, the Conservatives' policy towards China had been 'rather better than Labour's. . . . The Chinese prefer the Conservatives because they took us into the EEC and are ready to stand up to the Russians. What policy can we recommend to Labour?'[154] The final version of the report concluded that Labour's image in Asia had been severely damaged by the Wilson government's 'disastrous policy' during the Vietnam war. Labour's horizons had contracted since the days of Kingsley Martin and Stafford Cripps, and the party must now re-engage with Asia[155].

Greater openness also created an opportunity for SACU because, aside from invited guests, the only way to visit China during the early 1970s was by joining a SACU tour. John Gittings' first experience of China (as opposed to Hong Kong) came with the SACU tour in 1971. He travelled as a 'friend of China', rather than as a journalist, and returned with a Mao cap which he wore 'for some time after' his return to England[156]. SACU offered a number of different kinds of delegation. In 1972 twenty academics, curators, and journalists—by no means necessarily on the left—paid £360 each for a 28-day tour. Lady Barbara Wootton, the eminent sociologist, was impressed by China's insistence on periods of manual labour and thought that the system should be adopted in Britain. However, she disapproved of the over concentration on Marxist and Maoist texts: 'Its like reading the Old Testament all the time'. This expedition recalled the association's early efforts to build a greater understanding of modern China in British cultural circles. In fact, however, SACU had moved sharply to the left. In 1974 SACU assembled a delegation wholly composed of political activists, on the grounds that well-informed and sympathetic visitors would not ask embarrassing questions about China's international policy. The delegates were rigorously screened for their knowledge of China and for their political commitment and consciousness, and two of the successful nominees came from Marxist–Leninist parties. In discussion with the Friendship Association in Beijing, the delegates pointed out that—given that there were only 'very few and small' Marxist–Leninist groups in Britain—SACU was regarded by many young people as a 'political force'. Accordingly, they asked 'how much we should be . . . urging British people to take the revolutionary socialist road'[157]. A year later SACU sent a rather fractious 'workers' delegation'. This step was clearly

[154] BLPES, Fabian Society papers, J/75/3/137, Tony Benn to Mick Cornish, 21 April 1972 and J/75/3/236, Harris to Mick Cornish, 9 April 1973.

[155] The report was published in May 1973 as Martin Bernal et al., *Labour in Asia: A new chapter?*, ed. Colin Jackson, Fabian Tract 420 (London: Fabian Society, 1973). A planned seminar to discuss the findings was cancelled due to lack of interest amongst members of the society.

[156] Gittings, 'Reporting China'. He published five articles in *The Guardian* on his return; for reports of the SACU tour, see *Morning Star*, 30 April 1971 and *Tribune*, 7 May 1971.

[157] SACU papers, letter from Dick Hensman to Betty Paterson, 11 February 1974; undated paper entitled 'Talks with the Friendship Association in Peking'; and undated memorandum from the Activities Committee. Hensman suggested that the delegates should 'keep in mind questions for which we are seeking answers (e.g., what relationship the Chinese still maintain with the Socialist Party and the workers in Chile)'.

favoured by the Friendship Association, and a further group of workers was sent in the following year. However, a candid internal SACU document emphasized the problem of identifying, funding, and briefing 'an excellent group of lower paid rank and file workers—made up of men and women, black and immigrant, young and old'[158].

As diplomatic relations became more formal after 1972, SACU's apparent hold over Anglo-Chinese cultural relations swiftly came under threat. The Foreign Office convened a Great Britain–China Committee in March 1972, which brought together senior statesmen, politicians, and businessmen under the chairmanship of Sir Harold Thompson, a scientist with strong connections to the Football Association[159]. One of the committee's first achievements was to help organize the major exhibition of Chinese art at the Royal Academy in 1973–4—the Chinese government's 'most important cultural effort abroad since 1949'[160]. However, a plan for a leading British football club to tour China did not come to fruition, partly because China was still outside of FIFA (International Federation of Association Football), but also because Thompson feared that the British style of play was 'too robust' for the Chinese[161]. The leaders of SACU rightly suspected that the new committee—which became the Great Britain–China Centre (GBCC) in July 1974—represented an attempt to 'cut us out from the right' and seize control over non-official contacts between the two countries[162]. A memorandum from a Foreign Office official in April 1973 made it quite clear that there was concern that SACU was 'gaining ground', and that the new committee must seek to 'act as the umbrella organisation bringing together the various unofficial bodies…'. It would also now receive a direct Foreign Office grant rather than support from the British Council[163]. In January 1975 Thompson openly described the centre as 'coordinating much of the liaison work with the Embassy here, and with Peking, and in drawing together all the different institutions concerned in the United Kingdom'[164]. Yet SACU was pointedly not invited to join the centre's Executive Committee. For all of their experience, Needham, Derek Bryan, and their colleagues were deemed to be 'politically motivated' and kept at arm's length, although the GBCC was not averse to 'pinching SCAU people' for its own staff[165]. However, China had not abandoned

[158] SACU papers, Norman Reynolds to SACU Trade Union and Tours Committees, 12 August 1976.

[159] The committee's President was Malcolm MacDonald, and the other members included the Labour politicians Michael Stewart and Jennie Lee, as well as the Liberal Jeremy Thorpe.

[160] RS, Thompson papers, C121, Anthony Royle (Foreign Office minister of state) to Thompson, 13 October 1972.

[161] RS, Thompson papers, C113, 17 July 1972, Thompson to A. Staples: 'The robust style of play here may differ from that in China, where physical contact may be avoided in favour of artistic ballet style'. In fact, a Chinese football club had played at Highbury in 1936 (*Evening Standard*, 29 August 1936). In 1943 J. Scott-Lee played for Everton and captained the RAF team, while another 'splendid little footballer of Chinese descent', Frank Soo, played for Stoke and England (*Daily Worker*, 4 October and 6 November 1943).

[162] CUL, Needham papers, M 205, Derek Bryan to Needham and others, 20 April 1973; author's interview with Derek Bryan, 14 June 1997.

[163] RS, Thompson papers, C132, 11 April 1973, E. Vines to H. Thompson.

[164] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466, 23 January 1975, Thompson to Len Murray.

[165] TNA, FCO 34/288, FCO minutes, November 1975.

SACU altogether. In January 1975 the director of the GBCC was surprised to learn that an extra performance by a touring 'Wu-shu' team had been scheduled, and that the Chinese Embassy intended to give the proceeds to SACU. When he complained, the Embassy explained that in 1973 the Foreign Office had approved a similar arrangement concerning a troupe of acrobats. Once this was confirmed the matter was swiftly allowed to rest[166].

The sacking of Deng Xiaoping marked Mao's final decisive intervention in Chinese politics. His health deteriorated sharply and he was bedridden for some time before his death on 9 September 1976. Mao's death provided the British left with an important opportunity to reflect on his remarkable career, albeit along predictable lines. Communist commentators struggled to balance Mao's 'greatness' against the 'divisive policies' and 'fantastic personality cult' that had marred his later years. It was left to Arthur Clegg, whose voice had been publicly silent on Chinese issues for some years, to argue that Mao's life showed that British (and Soviet) Communists 'may have something to learn from China in the building of Socialism; something, of course, not everything'[167]. The Maoist Malcolm Caldwell expressed no reservations at all: Mao was 'the greatest revolutionary in history and incomparably the most effective leader the international socialist movement has ever produced'. He had 'discerned the pattern of a new world—a world we will all inherit.'[168] The most interesting responses were on the left of the Labour Party. Tony Benn heard the news of Mao's death in Cabinet, and was disappointed that it had not 'merited a moment of reflection' by cabinet ministers. 'In my opinion,' he wrote in his diary, 'he will undoubtedly be regarded as one of the greatest—if not the greatest—figure of the twentieth century: a school teacher who transformed China, released it from civil war and foreign attack, and constructed a new society there'. He towered above other leaders with regard to his 'philosophical contribution and his military genius'[169]. Chris Mullin, who had visited China in the early 1970s, called for a 'rational' appraisal of Mao, which took into account the ruthlessness, the lack of true democracy, and the 'sheer opportunism' that he had fostered[170]. One of the fullest immediate appreciations came from the writer Mervyn Jones, who emphasized not only the lasting impact of Mao's thought, but also his delight 'in chaos'.

> To the end of his life, he was stirring things up, taking risks, rejecting the comforts of stability. Thus he gave the ultimate proof of his belief in spontaneity, his trust in the untutored masses, his conviction that the revolution must remain revolutionary or lose its soul. That, in the last resort, was what Mao and Maoism meant[171].

[166] RS, Thompson papers, C170, 17 January, 20 January, and 21 January 1975, J. F. Ford to Thompson. In a parallel case, John Chinnery claimed that the Scotland–China Association refused to accept money from the proceeds of an acrobatic performance—fearing the allegation of 'Beijing gold'—and returned the money. Unfortunately, the incident is not dated (Chinnery, 'Forty years').

[167] *Morning Star*, 10 September, 21 September, 1 October, and 12 October 1976. See also *Labour Monthly*, November 1976, 515.

[168] *Tribune*, 24 September 1976.

[169] Tony Benn, *Against the tide: Diaries 1973–76* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), entry for 9 September 1976, 609.

[170] *Tribune*, 8 October 1976.

[171] *New Statesman*, 17 September 1976, 362–4.

That, also, was why he had left so much of the British left behind.

The death of Mao, followed less than a month later by the arrest of his widow and the other members of the so-called 'Gang of Four', marked the end of the chaotic radicalism of the Cultural Revolution and made possible the economic reforms of the 1980s. Even so, in the mid 1970s China still appeared distant and other-worldly to the British left. Even Reg Birch told a journalist in 1975 that the Chinese were 'bleak, pure and celibate'[172], while the 1972 AUEW delegates regretted that 'such a happy and charming people do themselves a disservice by showing such a lack of taste in their clothes'[173]. A nuclear-armed China, which sent its first satellite into space in 1970, aroused admiration—and possibly even fear—rather than affection. In fact, by now none of the reflexes that had sustained the British left's special interest in China across many decades were still functioning. China could look after itself—as Richard Harris rightly told the Fabian working party in 1973: '. . . of course, China no longer needs *defending*!'[174] When China was hit by a devastating earthquake in 1976, shortly before the death of Mao, the *Morning Star* noted that the calm and efficient response proved that China was 'no longer the weak and feeble victim of the imperialist plunderers'[175]. Yet its capricious foreign policy and economic backwardness meant that very few saw Chinese Communism as any kind of model for Britain's future. All that was left was a residual belief in China's sleeping economic potential. This would, at last, be realized after the death of Mao, but China's remarkable economic dynamism would be of far more interest to business and to mainstream politicians than it was to the left.

[172] *The Observer*, 29 June 1975.
[173] 'China—as we saw it' (report of the 1972 AUEW delegation to China), MRC, Mss 36, ISTC c.74.
[174] BLPES, Fabian Society papers, J/75/3/236, Harris to Mick Cornish, 9 April 1973.
[175] *Morning Star*, 31 July 1976.

Epilogue

In May 1986 a 'top level' delegation from the Communist Party of Great Britain arrived in Beijing, the first such official visit since John Gollan and George Matthews' unsuccessful attempt at mediation during the Sino-Soviet dispute[1]. This delegation, which was led by Gordon McLennan, Gollan's successor as party leader, was less ambitious but achieved some tangible results. It not only re-established formal relations between the two Communist parties after a gap of 24 years, but also attempted to breathe new life into the idea of a special relationship between China and the British left: a relationship, in the delegates' words, with 'a long history dating back to the 1920s'[2]. On the delegates' return, the CPGB nurtured interparty contacts. In October 1987, for instance, the Executive Committee sent greetings to the 13th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, encouraging it to continue to overcome the 'errors of the past' and to develop 'democracy and socialism' alongside modernization of the economy[3]. The reconciliation, however, was swiftly overtaken by unforeseen and calamitous events within China. In April 1989 mass student-led demonstrations for democratic reform began in Tiananmen Square. The demonstrators took heart from the visit of the reforming Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to Beijing in mid May. Conservatives within the Chinese leadership—confronted with a profound threat to their authority—rallied behind Deng Xiaoping and, having declared martial law, prepared to crush the protests. In the early morning of 4 June, tanks and soldiers of the PLA moved into Tiananmen Square and began to reclaim the capital by force. Hundreds, possibly thousands (the exact number remains hotly disputed), died in a brutal reckoning which shocked world opinion. In Britain the Communist Party protested at the killings and the Executive Committee voted by 20 to 12 in favour of suspending the newly restored relations[4]. China had still not lost the ability to shock and confound.

* * *

Mao's lacklustre successor Hua Guofeng moved swiftly to strengthen his hold on power in the autumn of 1976 by arresting Mao's widow and her radical accomplices. The so-called 'Gang of Four' were put on trial in 1980 and made ideal

[1] The delegation appears to have been delayed as the TUC was told in March 1983 by the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party that a CPGB delegation was due in July of that year (MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, report dated 9 May 1983).
[2] LHASC, CP/CENT/INT/22/06, press statement, 2 June 1986.
[3] Ibid. undated message.
[4] LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/24/05, EC minutes, 8–9 July 1989.

scapegoats for the disasters of the Cultural Revolution. Their downfall was popular both within China, where many shared Deng's judgement that Jiang Qing was a 'very, very evil woman'[5], and amongst China's foreign friends, who preferred not to question Mao's own culpability. Joseph Needham, who could only bring himself to refer to the gang of four as 'G' or 'the cabal', described it in 1978 as a 'heresy of Maoist ideology' akin to the Gnostic sects or the followers of John Wycliffe. The gang was, in his view, profoundly anti-intellectual and had twisted otherwise sound policies, such as the 'rustication' of intellectuals, into an attack on science and scientists. It had even blocked scientific warnings of the devastating Tangshan earthquake in 1976, whereas Hua had distinguished himself by flying to the scene of the disaster[6]. By 1978, however, Hua's stock was already falling. He was steadily outmanoeuvred by the resurgent Deng Xiaoping and his allies, who argued that China's leaders should seek 'truth from facts' rather than inspiration from Mao Tse-tung thought (as Hua had insisted). As Deng's influence grew, he began to give real substance to Hua's proposed 'four modernizations' in agriculture, industry, science, and defence. The pace of change quickened after Deng and his followers completed their takeover of power in 1981. They swiftly dissolved the People's Communes, favoured the growth of private businesses, and established Special Economic Zones which offered a free-market environment. By the mid 1980s China had taken the 'capitalist road' in all but name.

Political reform, however, languished. In 1978 the popular 'Democracy Wall' movement had exposed the Cultural Revolution to public questioning. One campaigner, Wei Jing-sheng, even called for political freedom to become the 'fifth modernization'. Yet the movement was suppressed in December 1979, and many of the existing Maoist freedoms (allowing criticism of those in authority) were subsequently rescinded. A delegation of British 'Distinguished Persons' (organized by SACU) visited China in October 1979 and was clearly aware of the pro-democracy movement. On their return two members—Iris Murdoch and Michael Young—felt moved to draft a letter to the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee appealing for greater freedom and tolerance. When compared with the 'tyrannical' Soviet system, they wrote, China's role should be to show that 'communism can be tolerant and humane. Acceptance by you that liberty is the fifth modernization would give China an immense influence'[7]. They were gently, but firmly, dissuaded from sending the letter by Derek Bryan[8].

[5] Dietrich, *People's China*, 257. The 'Gang' were given lengthy prison sentences. Jiang Qing apparently committed suicide in 1991.

[6] Joseph Needham, 'Science reborn in China', *Nature*, 274 (31 August 1978), 832–9. The actual efficacy of Hua's role in the relief operation was questionable (see John Gittings' obituary of Hua in *The Guardian*, 21 August 2008).

[7] SACU papers, Young to Janet St John-Austen, 3 December 1979. The letter was principally drafted by Iris Murdoch, but Young had added the reference to the 'fifth modernization'. Wei Jingsheng was subsequently jailed. The other members of the delegation were Brian Aldiss, David Attenborough, Chen Chimutengwende, and Maysie Webb. The trade unionist Mike Cooley from Lucas Aerospace was also selected, but unable to gain leave of absence from his employer.

[8] SACU papers, 3 February 1980, Bryan to Young. Bryan's argument was that the letter would be ineffective and betrayed ignorance of the real changes afoot in China. He also noted that the delegates had already had a forthright exchange of views on these issues during their meeting with Deng.

Economic relations between Britain and China continued to improve during the Labour governments of February 1974—May 1979. Indeed, when the ill-starred Hua Guofeng visited Britain in October 1979, he privately told James Callaghan that the now-former prime minister was regarded as an 'old friend' of China[9]. However, during the twilight of the Labour government, Callaghan's support for China had attracted criticism from the Labour left at a time of worsening Western relations with the Soviet Union. In January 1979, for instance, Tony Benn led minority opposition within Cabinet to the proposed sale of Harrier jump jets to China. Benn described this as a 'watershed decision', in language very different from his earlier enthusiasm for the Chinese Revolution: 'we should not supply arms to dictatorships or to countries which suppressed human rights, and to do so would damage what the Labour Party stood for'. China saw war 'as inevitable' and would doubtless use any weapons that Britain sold it. In Benn's view, the sale of such advanced aircraft to a 'politically volatile' China would 'have a serious affect on Anglo-Soviet relations'[10]. Although Cabinet agreed the sale, the negotiations eventually collapsed. The same fault-line reappeared when Callaghan accepted an invitation to visit Beijing in May 1980, where his role was publicly praised by Deng Xiaoping during a two and a half hour meeting[11]. Callaghan had invited the party general secretary Ron Hayward to join him, and left-wingers on the Labour NEC criticized this not only on the grounds of cost, but also because sending a party official would appear to endorse China's anti-Soviet policies[12].

China's post-Mao leadership demonstrated its gaucheness in international politics by launching an ill-judged attack against Vietnam on 17 February 1979. Like the attack on India in 1962, the target was an Asian state that enjoyed considerable popularity on the British left. Unlike in 1962, however, the Chinese offensive was a military fiasco. The conflict had its origins in China's failure to match the growing Soviet influence in Hanoi during the Vietnam war, and tensions mounted after the reunification of Vietnam in 1975. In November 1978 Vietnam signed a Friendship Treaty with the USSR, and a few days later China agreed to normalize its relations with the United States. Since 1975, meanwhile, China had backed the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia as a regional counterweight to Vietnam. Vietnam invaded Cambodia in December 1978 following border clashes, overthrew the Khmer Rouge, and imposed a pro-Vietnamese regime.

[9] LSE, SHORE/12/71, Peter Shore's 'note for the record', 30 October 1979. In fact, Callaghan was a genuine 'old friend' of China. He had served in the Far East with the navy during the latter stages of the war. As a newly elected MP, he made a number of parliamentary interventions related to China: see, for instance, his speech of 13 December 1945 (*Hansard, Parl. Debs*, vol. 417) and his question about the fate of the East River Column (the wartime resistance in the Hong Kong area) who 'helped our cause so valiantly' (*Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 10 July 1946, vol. 425, col. 365). It was announced that he would give a lecture on 'recent events in China' for the CCC on 7 November 1945 (Hull, DBN/21/1).

[10] TNA, CAB 128/65/4, Cabinet minutes (limited circulation annex), 25 January 1979. For the context, see David Crane, 'The Harrier jump-jet and Sino-British relations', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 8/4 (March–April 1981).

[11] *The Times*, 13 May 1980; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Callaghan: A life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 706.

[12] *The Guardian*, 29 March and 17 April 1980.

In response, China intended to teach Vietnam a sharp lesson: instead, the ill-prepared PLA suffered humiliating defeats and heavy casualties[13].

The response in Britain was overwhelmingly hostile, and even SACU's journal *China Now* merely warned against 'hasty condemnation' of China[14]. The Communist Party condemned the invasion (somewhat belatedly) on 11 March 1979. A briefing paper by the International Secretary Jack Woddis accused China of 'big-nation chauvinism' and described its policies as 'a great danger to the independence of her neighbours, to peace in South East Asia, and to world peace'[15]. Woddis also argued that the party should support the Labour MPs who had been opposing the sale of jump jets to China. One Communist Party branch even called for a 'No arms for China' campaign within the labour movement[16]—a far cry from the slogans of the past. In all, the invasion did considerable damage to China's reputation. Chris Mullin visited Vietnam in 1980 and told Tony Benn that China's actions had been punitive. Schools and factories had been damaged, and industrial equipment looted: it was 'an astonishing story of brutality'[17]. It was only later in the decade that some China loyalists in Britain began to express support for its policy towards Vietnam, and, more alarmingly, for the remnants of the Khmer Rouge which kept up a resistance to the new regime with China's backing[18].

Despite this setback, some efforts were made to revive the Communist Party's links with China. Sam Russell, the foreign editor of the *Morning Star*, was invited to visit the PRC in mid 1979. This was ostensibly to celebrate the 88th birthday of Rose Smith, a foundation member of the Communist Party and former *Daily Worker* journalist who had worked in Beijing for the Xinhua news agency since 1960. In fact, Russell stayed for a month, and his newspaper made clear that his brief was to gain an objective view of China's development, despite its 'colossal mistakes' and 'anti-Sovietism'[19]. His articles depicted a country gingerly finding its way out of the 'monstrous mess' of 1966–76 and beginning to address issues such as economic modernization, population growth, and the need for greater intellectual freedom. However, he concluded that the 'Gang of Four' had been demonized, and that the real problem was the lack of democracy within the Chinese Communist Party[20]. Two years after Russell's visit, Alan Winnington received permission to return to China. He found that his former colleagues at the Xinhua agency had

[13] For a helpful account of this neglected conflict, see Gerald Segal, *Defending China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), ch. 12.

[14] *China Now*, 83 (March–April 1979), 1.

[15] LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/17/01, report by Woddis to CPGB EC, 11 March 1979.

[16] LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/17/01, Don O'Hanrahan, branch secretary of Woodberry branch, London, to McLennan, 2 March 1979.

[17] Tony Benn, *Conflicts of interest: Diaries 1977–80* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), 588, entry for 11 April 1980.

[18] Arthur Clegg, for instance, asked 'how could China do other [than invade Vietnam]', and referred to the 'hysterical and untrue vilification' of the Khmer Rouge. Vietnam had deliberately 'exaggerated' allegations of atrocities by the Khmer Rouge (which had, he claimed, originated with the US-backed Lon Nol regime) to justify its invasion of Cambodia (*China Now*, 113 (1985), 4; 128 (1989), 9).

[19] *Morning Star*, 30 June 1979.

[20] *Morning Star*, 2, 4, 6, 13, 16, 18, 20, and 21 July 1979.

passed through many traumatic experiences since his departure in 1960 (they had 'seen the arbitrary killing and humiliation—been beaten and tortured') and were now meekly toeing the party line. Winnington was disturbed by this 'perfect submissiveness': the repeated reference in his notes to the foul odour from the toilets in the overcrowded Xinhua building was perhaps in part metaphorical[21]. Even so, his old comrades greeted him warmly, and seemed to take his return as a harbinger of greater changes to come. Winnington was delighted to learn that his lecture notes on journalism, which had been buried for safe keeping during the Cultural Revolution, were now again in use[22].

The Chinese also made fitful attempts to maintain links with the labour movement, although they far preferred the statesmanlike and reliable Callaghan to his successor, the former Bevanite Michael Foot. The Chinese ambassador congratulated Foot on his election as leader of the Labour Party in November 1980, and subsequently invited him and other shadow cabinet members for dinner at the embassy. When Foot failed to fix a date, the trade unionist bon viveur, Clive Jenkins, informed him of Chinese suspicions that the Labour leader was 'unwilling' to meet the diplomats in their embassy. Jenkins added that there should, at least, be no culinary obstacle: 'Their Chinese food is Pekinese and excellent'. Perhaps he was mindful that in 1964, Tony and Caroline Benn had been served 'course after course of rather unattractive food' during a dinner with the Chinese chargé d'affaires[23]. The Chinese had more success with the TUC, even though—unlike many individual trade unions—it had had no formal contact with China since 1949. In May 1981 the TUC accepted a Chinese invitation to send a delegation of General Council members to China, and this visit finally went ahead in March 1983[24]. The moment was propitious as the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)—which had been in abeyance since the Cultural Revolution—was beginning to revive, while the TUC was also aware of the potential significance of the Chinese market at a time of high unemployment in Britain. The delegates came away with an extremely positive assessment of China's economic growth and the ability of the unions to develop a genuine role. They concluded that the Chinese unions were 'at a formative stage, and that they were open to influences from the British trade union organisations which would be beneficial to Chinese and British working people'[25]. Indeed, a return visit was arranged a year later, and the

[21] Sheffield University, Winnington papers.

[22] Winnington, *Breakfast*, 199–200.

[23] LHASC, Foot papers, L23/7, 22 November 1982, Jenkins to Foot. Jenkins had recently dined with the Chinese chargé d'affaires and Geoffrey Goodman; Tony Benn, *Out of the wilderness: Diaries, 1963–67* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 111–13.

[24] The delegation, originally scheduled for October 1982, was led by General Secretary Len Murray. After considerable infighting within the General Council, it was agreed that he should be accompanied by Michael Walsh (International Secretary), David Basnett, Frank Chapple, Moss Evans, and Marie Patterson (*The Guardian*, 1 June and 8 June 1982). Frank Chapple recalled this 'left–right manoeuvring', but not the visit to China itself, in his *Sparks fly! A trade union life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1984), 132.

[25] TUC, International Committee minutes, 9 May 1983.

Chinese delegates were particularly impressed with the vocational training centre run by the right-wing electricians' union[26].

The one issue that troubled the TUC delegates was the future of Hong Kong. This question could no longer be avoided as the lease on the New Territories was due to expire in 1997, and Deng Xiaoping had stated in 1982 that China wanted to reclaim the entire colony before that date. The TUC was particularly concerned that the role of the trade unions should be preserved in any political settlement, and the delegates made a two day stopover in the colony to gauge union opinion while travelling to Beijing[27]. They returned from China convinced that—if mishandled—the Hong Kong question could result in a 'complete breakdown in [Anglo-Chinese] relations'. Although the Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister had promised that 'prosperity and stability' would be maintained under Chinese rule, he also warned the delegates that some Labour MPs wrongly believed that the island of Hong Kong could remain a British colony[28]. In the event, compromise prevailed when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government concluded a comprehensive agreement with the PRC in December 1984. The Sino-British Declaration allowed for the retrocession of the entire colony on 1 July 1997, while also guaranteeing Hong Kong's freedoms (including trade union rights) for a period of 50 years. In January 1985 the President of the ACFTU wrote to congratulate Norman Willis on his appointment as TUC General Secretary, and took the opportunity to assure him that the trade unions in Hong Kong would now 'have a good prospect'[29]. Amongst TUC officials, however, relief that Hong Kong was 'out of the way' was tempered by prescient concern that 'another major political upheaval in China' might render the agreement worthless long before the handover in1997[30].

The practical emphasis on training in trade union relations was indicative of the decline in China's ideological concerns during the 1980s. For instance, the ACFTU was eager to send students to the electricians' training facility despite that union's divisive reputation within the wider trade union movement in Britain. Not surprisingly, therefore, those on the British left, who had been drawn to support China due to its Maoist ideology, experienced 'feelings of uncertainty, scepticism, disillusionment and even hostility' after Mao's death[31]. In 1978, on her final visit, Joan Robinson told Sol Adler that 'the romance has gone out of China for me'. It was, she realized, 'deflating [for activists] to be told that the Cultural Revolution is over and that the new aim of policy is modernisation'[32]. SACU was particularly

[26] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, note on visit, 3 August 1984.
[27] *The Times*, 19 March 1983.
[28] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, report dated 9 May 1983.
[29] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, Ni Zhifu to Willis, 18 January 1985.
[30] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, briefing notes by Michael Walsh, 20 February 1985 and 6 June 1985.
[31] Derek Bryan, 'Coping with "the Chinese point of view" ', *China Now*, 114 (1985).
[32] Marjorie S. Turner, *Joan Robinson and the Americans* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 87, 92–3. However, she also thought that the Chinese economic reforms offered an unprecedented combination of 'an ambitious plan for accumulation and growth with open discussion and freedom of thought'. She had no time for the French sinologist Bettelheim who felt that 'China had let him down' by abandoning Maoist politics (*China Now*, 86 (September–October 1979), 25). Robinson died in 1983.

badly affected and there were reports of a 'great clash' in some branches between Maoists and those who supported the new policies[33]. Membership fell sharply after 1976 (although it revived in the mid 1980s), and the organization was, according to Derek Bryan, 'at its most divided and demoralised' between 1980 and 1982[34]. Some SACU activists found themselves increasingly alienated from the new China. A 1980 delegation led by Betty Paterson reported that '[their Chinese hosts'] main interest was in economic construction, ours in political and ideological questions'. During a factory visit delegates found that management was employing large posters to promote English-language concepts such as 'Total Quality Control': a bizarre combination of Maoist form and western content. The visit coincided with the full rehabilitation of Liu Shaoqi, the principal 'rightist' victim of the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Friendship Association sympathized with the difficulties that SACU was encountering in explaining 'a change of this magnitude to our members'. It added, however, that it would take at least five years before a final assessment could be reached on the Cultural Revolution, and in the meantime the Chinese people would 'press on with the task of socialist modernisation'[35].

SACU was increasingly being squeezed between the cultural activities of the Great Britain–China Centre on one hand, and the growth of commercial tourism in China on the other. Some tour operators, such as Neil Tailor who founded Regent Holidays in 1975[36], had strong links with SACU, but larger companies such as Jules Verne were also taking an interest in China. In 1980 some leading SACU members drew attention to the breaking of their 'virtual "monopoly" over anything to do with China', and even posed the question: 'Is SACU still necessary?'[37] When a group of SACU members visited China in April 1982, the precariousness of the organization's relationship with the Chinese authorities soon became apparent. A meeting with Xie Banding of the Friendship Association was dominated by his criticisms of recent articles and letters in SACU's *China Now*. He was particularly annoyed about a two-part eyewitness account of modern Tibet: not only was it highly critical of Chinese policy, but the second part was published *after* a complaint from the Embassy. Xie stated that 'if it happens again (the publication of something which is so hostile) our future cooperation will be impaired . . . it won't happen again, will it?' The delegates denied that their journal had implied that Tibet was not 'legitimately a part of China', but defended its role as a forum for discussion. Turning to the question of tours, Xie said that '[t]he Chinese don't forget old friends and obligations', and promised to do his best to ensure that SACU's tours retained their preferential status vis-à-vis commercial firms (for instance, they paid no deposits or cancellation charges)[38]. While the two issues

[33] KCC, Joan Robinson papers, Sol Adler correspondence, 3 June 1982, Robinson to Adler.

[34] See the articles by Derek Bryan and John Gittings in *China Now*, 114 (1985), which give information on SACU membership.

[35] SACU papers, 'Report from the 1980 SACU delegation'.

[36] See the article by Tailor in *China in Focus*, 1 (Autumn 1996), 16–18.

[37] SACU papers, 'Comments for consideration in relation to SACU's AGM, 1980', by Jenny Clegg and Judith Sweeting, October 1980.

[38] SACU papers, 'Report on meetings held in China in April 1982' (Penny Kane, Anil Kumar, Vida Pearson, and San Choo). The article on Tibet in *China Now*, nos 98 and 99 was written by Susette

were not formally linked, the combination of menace and insecurity in China's stance was inescapable. Even so, during the 1980s SACU's *China Now* did increasingly become a forum for open discussion of the rapid changes within Chinese society, and was ever less frequently graced with Maoist politics. The position of those such as the journalist Jonathan Mirsky, who had argued that articles should not repeat the latest party line as if it were 'dogma from Knock', was broadly vindicated[39].

By the 1980s China was far less likely to arouse left-wing fervour than other causes such as the Nicaraguan revolution or the anti-apartheid struggle. However, support for China was further undermined by changes in the values of the left: in particular the increased importance given to universal human rights and the protection of indigenous cultures. Amnesty International had been expressing concern about the repression of Chinese intellectuals since its foundation in 1961, but had initially found it almost impossible to obtain the reliable information concerning 'prisoners of conscience' on which it depended[40]. By the 1980s, however, access to such information had improved, and Amnesty produced a number of valuable reports dealing with political imprisonment and use of the death penalty[41]. The TUC delegates dutifully presented an Amnesty report to their hosts—although they did not challenge the official response that the prisoners in question had been jailed for crimes against state security[42]. There was also a new sensitivity to the plight of Tibet, and support for Tibet was no longer the preserve of eccentrics and Conservatives. Even on the left Beijing's policy was now less likely to be viewed as the march of socialist modernization than as Han Chinese expansion at the expense of traditional Tibetan culture. David Crook, who had decided to remain in China after his release from prison in 1973, witnessed Han arrogance towards Tibetans and—while not supporting independence for Tibet—argued that they 'deserved respect for their culture'[43]. Despite the new salience of human rights, however, there was still staggering complacency in some circles. The Labour MP Andrew Faulds had been involved with China—through SACU and the Great Britain–China Centre—'before it became popular to be pro-Chinese'[44]. In the 1980s he was chairman of the all-party China group of MPs, which he had helped to found in 1968[45]. In 1984 he was approached by the former Labour Solicitor General

Cooke and Christina Jansen, who had both studied in Beijing and were amongst the first foreign tourists allowed into Tibet. Despite the Embassy's complaint, the SACU Council of Management agreed by 8–1 on 21 November 1981 to continue a policy of encouraging debate. The articles were described as a 'disgrace' by Betty Paterson in *China Now*, no. 100, p. 31.

[39] *China Now*, 88 (January–February 1980), 19–20. When China reduced its purchase of *China Now* from 2000 to 300 copies in 1985, some readers blamed the journal's liberal editorial policy (*China Now*, 114 (1985), 9).

[40] See above, Chapter 5, note 32; IEC minutes, 12/13 March 1966.

[41] See, for instance, *Political imprisonment in the People's Republic of China* (Bristol: Amnesty International Publications, 1978) and reports of 1981, 1984, and 1988/9.

[42] MRC, Mss 292D/Box 2466/file 951, report dated 9 May 1983.

[43] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 16, p. 13.

[44] BLPES, Faulds papers, 3/3/1/2, Faulds to S. P. Pemberton, 17 December 1987.

[45] He later described it as one of the largest such all-party groups, although less because of interest in China than the sumptuous hospitality of successive Chinese Ambassadors (BLPES, Faulds papers, 3/3/1/23, Faulds to Steven Perry, 11 February 1997).

Peter Archer with information concerning alleged human rights abuses in Tibet—information which, in private, Faulds disparagingly dismissed as 'bumf'. When Archer asked for help in making representations to the Chinese government, Faulds asked a colleague, Conservative MP Robert Adley, for help in drafting a reply, because, as he damningly put it, 'I certainly don't want to disturb our friends'[46]. Such toadying could not withstand the horror of Tiananmen Square and, to give him his due, Faulds was one of the first to condemn China's 'geriatric' rulers in Parliament[47].

Even for some of the most loyal supporters of the People's Republic, the Beijing massacres were wholly unacceptable. For Hung Ying Bryan, they 'broke her spirit', and she wept for many days afterwards[48]. Joseph Needham, who strongly supported the students, was 'appalled by the 'June 4th massacre' and saw it as 'the most terrible thing in recent Chinese history'[49]. He even proposed that the first book of Volume VII of *Science and Civilisation in China* should be dedicated in memory of the dead[50]. SACU's editorial committee immediately condemned the 'barbarisms' and 'gross violations of human rights' authorized by the Chinese leaders[51]. David and Isabel Crook brought water and plastic sheets to hunger-striking students in mid May, and appealed to the authorities not to use force to end the protests. Crook later found that his unstinting criticism of the massacre—and those responsible for it—placed him in a position 'which some would call dissidence'[52]. Within British politics, the unanimity of the left's response was striking. Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader, told a Manchester rally that the massacre was a 'crime against humanity', and warned the Chinese leaders that they could not be 'exempt from history'[53]. Labour backed the British government's diplomatic countermeasures, and expressed concern about the fate of Hong Kong. In parliament many Labour MPs, including the Trotskyists Pat Wall and Dave Nellist, saw the massacres as the death throes of Stalinism[54]. Tony Benn agreed to speak at a China solidarity rally in Soho—'the first time I had ever spoken in public against a Communist Government'[55]. The Communist Party, as we have seen, suspended relations with the CCP, and members of the Executive Committee delivered a protest letter in person to the Chinese Embassy.

[46] BLPES, Faulds papers, 3/3/1/2, 26 January 1984, Archer to Faulds, and 5 March 1984, Faulds to Adley. Adley—a railway enthusiast—was the author of *To China for steam* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1984).

[47] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 6 June 1989, col. 37.

[48] Herdan, *Liao Hongying*, 138.

[49] *The Independent*, 27 March 1995; *China Now*, 131 (1989), 39, Needham's message to a memorial meeting organized by the Chinese Students and Scholars Association.

[50] Needham Research Institute, Cambridge, Kenneth Robinson papers, NR13/1/2/51, Needham to 'Editor', Cambridge University Press, 14 August 1990.

[51] *China Now*, 130 (1989), 3, 'Stop press'.

[52] Crook, *Autobiography*, ch. 17, pp. 3, 7. Crook did not accept that he was a dissident—but rather an unwavering believer in socialism.

[53] *The Guardian*, 5 June 1989. For the TUC's 'revulsion at the mass murders perpetrated by the Chinese authorities on unarmed citizens in Beijing', see MRC, Mss 292D/951/3, press release of 5 June 1989.

[54] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 6 June 1989, cols 42, 44, 45.

[55] Tony Benn, *End of an Era: Diaries 1980–90* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), 569, entry for 4 June 1989.

The party also agreed to support a hastily convened 'June 4th China support' group which was administered by SACU and endorsed by Needham and Lord (Asa) Briggs, the association's Emeritus and current Presidents[56].

Only a hard core of 'friends of China' remained unmoved. Jack Shapiro, the brother of Michael, who had visited China in the early 1960s, publicly condemned SACU's leaders as 'acrimonious and partisan critics of everything progressive in China'. He was particularly disturbed to see them join in demonstrations outside the Chinese Embassy with the 'worst elements', including supporters of the Dalai Lama and 'detritus from Taiwan'[57]. A year after the massacres, Arthur Clegg privately told his old friend Sam Chinque that he was glad that China had ended 'the turmoil.... The USA was certainly behind that with Britain as running dogs in their scheme, e.g. the BBC reporting.' He added that the imperialist powers had finally learnt that 'they must leave China alone and not interfere'[58].

The suppression of the pro-democracy protests was particularly shocking for the left in Britain because it occurred at a time of profound change and hope in world politics. On the same weekend as the crackdown in Beijing, voters in Poland were electing the first non-Communist government of a Communist state. Within a few months the Soviet authorities were receiving plaudits from the west for *not* resorting to 'Chinese' methods against the demonstrators on the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, and Prague. China, which had appeared to be moving out from the shadow of Mao and the Cultural Revolution under Deng's leadership, was now experiencing—in the words of Labour's shadow foreign secretary Gerald Kaufman—a 'regression to barbarity'[59]. The British left had wrongly assumed that the trend in China since the death of Mao had been towards greater openness in every sphere of public life, including politics, and that the pro-democracy movement represented a logical next step in China's development. In fact, the horrific events of 4 June 1989 demonstrated conclusively that the values of the Chinese Communist Party were now irreconcilable with those of the overwhelming majority of the British left: China's future lay with a combination of authoritarian politics, nationalism, and capitalist economics. The narrative of a special relationship could not be revived. As Hung Ying's tears indicated—tears which continued to flow whenever she thought about the massacre—this was a stain that could not be simply 'wiped out'[60].

* * *

1989 was a decisive year in the history of the British left. The Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War was ending. Within two and a half years both the Soviet Union and

[56] Press release in LHASC, CP/CENT/EC/24/05. 'China Support' was endorsed by two Labour MPs, Richard Caborn and David Blunkett. Needham also put his name to a Paris-based 'Comité International Contre la Répresion en Chine' (*The Independent*, 27 June 1989). However, in March 1990 he wrote that 'I put my name down as supporting various collections for the Chinese students in the early days but have not done so for some time past because we don't want the [Needham Research] Institute to be blacklisted' (cited in *The Independent*, 27 March 1995).

[57] *China Now*, 132 (1989–90), 6.

[58] LMA, Chinque papers, LMA/4520/02/02/005, Clegg to Chinque, 11 September 1990.

[59] *Hansard, Parl. Debs*, 6 June 1989, col. 32.

[60] Herdan, *Liao Hongying*, 138.

the Communist Party of Great Britain would also be gone: within five Tony Blair had begun to marginalize both the left and the trade unions within 'New Labour'. The People's Republic was now the final viable Communist state; yet, tarnished by Tiananmen Square and pursuing breakneck free-market growth, it did not offer a compelling alternative to the emerging neo-liberal consensus. During the two decades since the Tiananmen Square massacre, and especially since the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, the past has counted for little in the west's relations with China, beyond a tired litany of imperialist misdeeds. China desperately needs to be 'understood' in the modern world, but does the left have a role to play in explaining it? A famous gaffe by Ken Livingstone in 2006 suggests not. The Mayor of London raised eyebrows when he stated that: 'One thing that Chairman Mao did was to end the appalling foot binding of women. That alone justifies the Mao Tse-tung era.'[61] The remark was both injudicious and ill-informed: in fact, foot binding was banned in 1911, long before the advent of Communist rule.

All that remains are some powerful historical echoes: one concerns China's vulnerability, the other its potential power. In 2008 a small Marxist–Leninist party revived the slogan 'Hands off China', citing 'lies about China' in the western press prior to the Beijing Olympics, especially concerning 'its human rights record and its alleged colonisation of Tibet'. Isabel Crook acted as a patron, while Jack Shapiro was Honorary President[62]. Yet, unlike in the 1920s, China is now a world power: nuclear-armed, united (with the exception of Taiwan) within its historic boundaries, and voraciously consuming raw materials from the developing world to feed its surging economic growth. Surely, China can now look after itself.

More compellingly, Martin Jacques, the former editor of *Marxism Today*, has argued that China's remarkable rise not only has profound economic implications for the West, but just as profound political and social implications. China's transformation, he argues, is not a wayward version of western modernity, but an alternative modernity which is rooted in China's ancient culture and civilization[63]. His major work, published in 2009, was a stimulus to a much-needed debate, even if Jacques could not escape the jibe that he was an 'old Marxist swapping culture for class conflict'[64]. Certainly the book's subtitle, which heralded the 'end of the Western world', suggested that China would succeed where the Soviet Union had failed. Yet there was nothing particularly new in Jacques's predictions of the transformative power of a developing China—even though, admittedly, they were now far closer to fulfilment. In fact, although the point is nowhere acknowledged, he joined a lengthy chorus of those on the British left who had made this very point[65].

[61] Cited in *The Observer*, 31 December 2006, 'Quotes of the year'.

[62] 'Report of work to date', 10 February 2009, <http://handsoffchina.org/2009/02/agm-report-of-work-to-date> (consulted 24 February 2009). The campaign is organized by the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist–Leninist)—not to be confused with the heirs of Reg Birch.

[63] Martin Jacques, *When China rules the world: The rise of the middle kingdom and the end of the western world* (London: Allen Lane, 2009). Jacques has also developed these arguments in *The Guardian* (see for instance 15 May 2004, 11 June 2008, 13 February 2009, and 20 April 2009).

[64] Will Hutton, in debate with Martin Jacques in *The Guardian*, 23 June 2009.

[65] There is no mention of Russell, Tawney, and Needham in Jacques, *When China rules the world*, and it is striking that a book that is otherwise so richly historically informed gives no sense of the intellectual tradition within which it stands.

In 1926 Cecil l'Estrange Malone wrote of long delayed social changes in the Far East 'now taking place at a speed which may one day rudely awaken the West. It is time that the old idea that a yellow skin is inferior to a white skin were definitely discarded.'[66] In 1958 Ivor Montagu wrote that: 'Remember, one in about four and a half people is Chinese. The transformation of such an enormous bloc of human beings into educated, active, able, enlightened people of a Socialist society will inevitably have an immeasurable effect upon the rest of the world. The world of our children . . . will be utterly different from the world of our fathers.'[67] And, in the same year, Harold Wilson predicted that China would industrialize more quickly than Britain, or even the Soviet Union. The world, he concluded, 'no longer revolves around white races'[68]. The emergence of China as a powerful modern state and economic superpower, therefore, marks the realization of a decades-old dream of the British left. But the rise of China is now an opportunity—or a problem—not for the left, but for the whole world.

[66] *Socialist Review*, October 1926, 17.
[67] *Labour Monthly*, May 1959, 236.
[68] Bodleian, Ms Wilson c113, 'Visit to China', notes for a speech delivered on the Isles of Scilly, 20 August 1958.

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