THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE POPULAR FRONT MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN IN THE 1930s.

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ROGER EATWELL

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

A.E.U. Amalgamated Engineering Union.

B.L.P. Borough Labour Party.

C.P.G.B. Communist Party of Great Britain.

D.L.P. Divisional Labour Party.

G.M.C. General Management Committee.

I.L.P. Independent Labour Party.

L.P.C.R. Labour Party Conference Report.

L.S.I. Labour and Socialist International.

M.F.G.B. Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

M.P. Member of Parliament.

N.A.C. (I.L.P.) National Administrative Council.

N.A.C. (Labour League of Youth) National Advisory Committee.

N.C.L. National Council of Labour.

N.E.C. National Executive Committee.

N.F.R.B. New Fabian Research Bureau.

N.J.C. National Joint Council.

N.U.D.A.W. National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers.

N.U.G.M.W. National Union of General and Municipal Workers.

N.U.R. National Union of Railwaymen.

N.U.W.M. National Unemployed Workers' Movement.

P.L.P. Parliamentary Labour Party.

P.O.U.M. Partido Obrero de Unifación Marxista.

S.S.I.P. Socialist Society for Inquiry and Propaganda.

S.W.M.F. South Wales Miners' Federation.

T.G.W.U. Transport and General Workers' Union.

T.U.C. Trades Union Congress.

Y.C.L. Young Communist League.

ABSTRACT.

This thesis seeks to recount the history of the British popular front movement in the 1930s, especially its relationship to the Labour Party.

The popular front tactic, involving the unity of all anti-fascists, was first proclaimed to the world by the French communists in 1934. In the following year the tactic was officially sanctioned at the seventh Congress of the Comintern, and from then until the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 communist parties throughout the world sought the formation of popular fronts.

In its British form the popular front has been neglected both by historians of the 1930s and of the Labour Party. The question why the movement should not figure prominently in the former case is easily understood. It came nowhere near to attracting the support of all anti-fascists, yet alone to overthrowing the National Government. Moreover, it was a confusing movement, and it involves analysing problematical questions. Nevertheless, the movement is of interest in the general context of the 1930s for it grew to attract considerable support, not least in the Labour Party. Indeed, the reason for the popular front's neglect in the context of the Labour Party is very difficult to comprehend. The Labour Party was by far the largest opposition party and official Labour hostility

played the major part in dooming the movement as a serious challenger to the government. More importantly, the movement emphasised divisions and problems within the party which can be traced back in its history, especially to the events of 1931, and which by 1939 were posing a serious threat to the party's future.

Thus the concentration in this thesis on the Labour Party and the popular front is a reflection not only of the importance of the party to the movement, but of the movement to the party. And the choice of 1931 as its starting point emphasises the need for a perspective which stretches beyond the confines of the popular front era. Chapter One: the Aftermath of 1931. This chapter examines the impact of the events of 1931 on the Labour Party. It argues that the traditionally held views in which the party is either seen as remaining essentially unchanged, or swinging sharply to the left, are misleading. Changes did take place, especially in the views of individuals, but in terms of party policy the development was more one of clarification and an ordering of priorities. It also argues that although the commonly accepted view that the parliamentary leadership, especially Sir Stafford Cripps, moved to the left is correct, this must be seen in the context of a reassertion of trade union influence within the party - and most of the union leadership, notably its

two most dynamic figures, Ernest Bevin and Walter Citrine, held far from left wing views.

Chapter Two: the Impact of Fascism. This chapter considers the divisions created in the Labour Party by Adolf Hitler's accession to power, and the growing concern with foreign and defence policies as the international situation deteriorated during 1933-1936. The chapter pays particular attention to the change in the Comintern's line in 1933 to accept the united front from above tactic, involving cooperation only between working class parties, and then in 1935 to the popular front tactic, and the impact of these developments on the Labour Party. It concludes with the defeats at the 1936 Labour Conference of the resolutions supporting C.P.G.B. affiliation and the united front, the defeat of an amendment to the united front resolution proposing a popular front, and the approval of the official line on international policy and non intervention in the Spanish civil war - which was seen by many as a microcosm of the growing struggle between fascism and democracy.

Chapter Three: United We Stand. This chapter considers the united front movement during 1936-1937, and its relationship with the growing discontent in the Labour Party over party policy and the role of the unions in making it. The communists and some in the Labour Party initially

held that a necessary precondition to the popular front was a united front - a tactic supported by some in the Labour Party and I.L.P. per se. However, most of the Labour leadership, especially the union leadership, opposed the united front, mainly because of hostility to communism and the belief that the tactic was a manouevre to increase the growing communist penetration of the Labour movement, or to split it. As a result the Socialist League, a left ginger group led by Cripps, was disaffiliated in 1937 for running a unity campaign with the communists and I.L.P. This decision, and opposition to the united front, was overwhelmingly confirmed at the 1937 Labour Conference. Chapter Four: from United to Popular Front. This chapter considers the reasons for the growth of support for the popular front during 1938, especially in the Labour Party, and the change in communist line so that the united front was no longer seen as a necessary precondition. Particular emphasis is placed on the attitude of those on the Labour left, like Cripps, who after the Anschluss and with the situation in the Spanish civil war continuing to deteriorate, came to believe that the threat of fascism had become so great that the immediate task was no longer one of achieving socialism, but of preserving the conditions in which it could be accomplished. This, together with developments in attitudes towards the possibilities of Keynesian economics,

led to a willingness to cooperate with all anti-fascists on a programme of resistance to aggression and moderate domestic economic and social reform.

Chapter Five: Peace Without Honour. This chapter analyses the Labour Party's response to these developments. Labour opposed the popular front at this time for many reasons - in particular, the belief that Labour alone was in a position to win the next election, hostility to communism and the fear that association with communists would lose rather than gather support, the fact that although many individual Liberals supported the movement the Liberal Party itself had not come out in its favour, the belief that a popular front government would prove unstable, and union opposition to the movement. The Liberals in May 1938 came out in favour of the popular front, and Labour's case was in parts far from a convincing one, but over the summer of 1938 there was a dying down of popular front agitation. However, it revived in even stronger form after the Munich conference.

Chapter Six: Oxford and Bridgwater. This chapter considers local electoral agreements, especially in the Oxford and Bridgwater by-elections during October-November 1938. At Bridgwater a candidate representing a united opposition captured what had previously been a safe Tory seat. His

victory confirmed that the relief which had accompanied Munich was rapidly turning into hostility on the part of many. Moreover, it encouraged a growth of interest in the possibilities of electoral agreements. Even among the Labour leadership there developed at this time support for limited arrangements with the Liberals and dissident Conservatives. However, the party, especially the union leadership, remained adamantly opposed to the popular front.

Chapter Seven: Bell, Book and Candle. This chapter analyses Cripps's response to this situation. Cripps believed that the popular front had never been properly discussed outside the N.E.C. because the date of the Labour Conference had been changed in 1937 to Whitsun to avoid following the Trades Union Congress. As a result, there was no Conference in 1938, and the N.E.C. refused to hold an emergency Conference, partly because of the fear that it would discuss the popular front. Cripps therefore decided to circulate a pro-popular front memorandum to all affiliated organisations. He presented it to the N.E.C. first, but, not surprisingly, it was rejected. His decision to circularise it led the N.E.C. to ask him to withdraw, but he refused, arguing that he had a democratic right to raise the issue, and was expelled

from the party for persistent disloyalty.

Chapter Eight: Requiem for the Popular Front. This chapter examines the petition campaign which Cripps launched in 1939. He was so convinced of the existence of widespread support for the popular front that he launched a campaign to gather two million signatures in its favour. He was supported by many of the leading advocates of the popular front, but the campaign failed dismally. There were many factors involved, of which the most important was official Labour hostility. This made the campaign seem futile, it engendered the feeling of loyalty, and it meant that those who did feel strongly enough to defy the party could be expelled - indeed, many were, including Aneurin Bevan, G.R. Strauss and Sir Charles Trevelyan. Therefore the movement was effectively dead when the Labour Conference met and rejected the tactic, and confirmed Cripps's expulsion.

Chapter Nine: Postcript to the Popular Front. This chapter examines the effects of the 1930s, especially the popular front, on the Labour Party. There was considerable disillusion, and individual membership, which had risen steadily during 1931-1937, fell during 1938-1939, some members moving out of politics, a few into other parties, in particular the communist party. Had it not been for the outbreak of war the party would undoubtedly have gone down to a further

general election defeat, and this would have led to pressure to replace Clement Attlee as leader, for his leadership was already under strong criticism. Had he been replaced his successor might have been Bevin. There was no obvious alternative in the P.L.P. Moreover, there was talk among the union leaders of the need for industrial leadership of the party. Such a choice could have had considerable repercussions, for much of the discontent in the party stemmed from the policy and power of the union leadership. As it was, war brought an electoral truce. It also brought the communists out against the war, which together with the Nazi-Soviet Pact and purges did much to discredit the party on the left.

Nevertheless, the Labour Party would almost certainly have survived whatever happened. This would not only have reflected the lack of an obvious alternative political home for many of the dissidents, or the financial importance of the unions. It would also have reflected an ultimate acceptance of the position of the unions in the party, even if not their views at the time. There was also still a strong commitment to the party as the only means of achieving major reform, and that any imperfections in its structure, or views, could be rectified by work within the party or unions. Moreover, the popular front had helped produce a consensus over short

term goals within the party. Together, these factors and developments played an important part in keeping the party together, and in bringing Cripps (whose movement away from the left must be seen in terms of the late 1930s rather than the early part of the second world war), and others, back into the Labour Party during the second world war.

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Reference is made in the bibliography to the primary and secondary sources on which I have drawn in writing this thesis.

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Each of these people has helped improve this thesis. However, the judgements made in it are entirely my own responsibility, as are any mistakes which may exist.

PREFACE.

This thesis seeks to recount the history of the British popular front movement in the 1930s, especially its relationship to the Labour Party.

The strategy of the popular front was first proclaimed to the world by Maurice Thorez, the general secretary of the French Communist Party, in a speech in the Salle Bullier in Paris on 10 October 1934. In July 1934 the internal and external threat of fascism had already led the communists to sign a pact of unity with the French Socialist Party, but in October Thorez called for a widening of this united front to embrace 'un vaste rassemblement populaire, fondé sur l'alliance de la classe ouvrière et des classes moyennes' to combat the growing menace of fascism [1]. Twelve days later the actual term popular front was given to the world when Marcel Cachin, a member of the French party's Central Committee, called for a 'Front populaire contre le fascisme' [2]. During 1935 the communists and socialists

1. Parti Communiste Français, Histoire du Parti Communiste Français, (1964), p. 281.

2. N. Racine and L. Bodin, Le Parti Communiste pendant l'entre Deux Guerres, (1972), p. 298.

extended their agreement to include the Radical Party, and in January 1936 they published the Front Populaire's programme, a programme of resistance to fascism and economic and social reform. In the general elections of April-May 1936 the Front Populaire went on to a notable victory [1].

A similar development took place in Spain, and in the elections of February-March 1936 the Frente Popular also achieved victory [2].

Indeed, throughout the world communist parties at this time were seeking to form popular fronts, for at the seventh Congress of the Comintern, which met in Moscow during July-August 1935, the tactic had been declared the major need of the hour. From the end of the seventh Congress to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939 communist parties devoted their attention to the formation of popular fronts.

Although popular fronts in many countries, notably France and Spain, have attracted considerable interest, the British popular front movement has received scant attention. The reasons for this neglect are clear.

1. For an account of these events see J. Joll, 'The Making of the Popular Front' in J. Joll (ed.), St. Anthony's Papers No. V, (1959).

2. For an account of the events leading up to the formation of the Frente Popular see E. Malefakis, 'The Parties of the Left and the Second Republic' in R. Carr (ed.), The Republic and the Civil War in Spain, (1971).

First, the movement totally failed in its primary aim of overthrowing the National Government. The British communists were far less important than their Spanish, and especially French, counterparts, and the British popular front came nowhere near to attracting the support of the main opposition party of the 1930s - the Labour Party - yet alone to emulating the victory of the Front Populaire and Frente Popular.

Second, the movement is a confusing one. The British communists, and some in the Labour Party, initially held that a necessary precondition was a united front, involving cooperation only between working class parties - a tactic supported by some in the Labour Party and I.L.P. per se. Even more problematical is the fact that the supporters of the popular front spoke in different terms - of the popular front, the people's front, the united peace alliance, a national opposition, and so on [1]. At the same time, some supporters of a united opposition which excluded the communists also used these terms. And some supporters of unity did not make it clear who was to be included.

1. The British communists usually used the term people's front. The term popular front is used throughout this thesis as it is the most familiar term.

Erratum, p. 5.
Insert as paragraph three:

That the popular front movement in Britain was a failure is not in question. That the movement is without considerable interest, however, is very much open to question. It is hoped that this thesis will rescue the movement from bracketing with 'Five-Point Groups, People's Charter Groups, National Petition Groups, and the like, all now forgotten' - and probably deservedly so. It is hoped that this thesis will show that those who have dismissed the popular front in Britain as a chimera have failed to appreciate the importance of the movement. Although the popular front did not overthrow the government, it gathered considerable support. In spite of official hostility, support was especially strong in the Labour Party. Indeed, the movement was the source of considerable controversy in the party, and of major ideological importance to it.

Finally, the movement involves the consideration of several especially problematical questions. Among these are the nature of the Labour left, changes in the membership of parties, grass roots opinion in the parties, the activities and motives of the communists, and public opinion. Clearly these are fields in which definite conclusions tend to be difficult to make.

The British popular front movement has often been dismissed as insignificant. One historian of Britain in the twentieth century has written that 'Official Labour hostility reduced the Popular Front notion to a mere chimera' [1]. Another commentator, who lived through the popular front era and supported the movement, has concluded that 'The political story of Labour and Socialism during those years is of pathetically hopeful but unsuccessful little combinations, Popular Fronts, United Fronts, Five-Point Groups, People's Charter Groups, National Petition Groups, and the like, all now forgotten' [2]. Neither obituarist found it necessary to dwell on the demise of the movement.

Thus the concentration in this thesis on the Labour Party's response to the popular front movement is not only a reflection of the importance of the party to the popular

1. A. Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War, (1968), p. 247.
2. M. Cole, The Story of Fabian Socialism, (1961), p. 217.

front, but also of the popular front to the party. The movement posed fundamental problems for the party - in particular, questions of the possibility of a reformed capitalism, questions of the acceptance and effectiveness of parliamentary action, questions of its attitude to cooperation with other parties, questions of the limits of intra-party democracy and questions of the relationship of the various interests within the party.

In order to fully understand the impact of the popular front on the Labour Party it is necessary to look back to the period before the beginning of the movement, especially to the impact of the events of 1931 on the ideology of the party and the balance of power within it. The events of 1931 set the scene for a series of bitter disputes within the party in the period up to the outbreak of the second world war, of which the popular front came as the last and the most serious. It is therefore on the fateful day of 24 August 1931 that this thesis begins to recount the history of the Labour Party and the popular front movement in Britain in the 1930s.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE AFTERMATH OF 1931.

In the annals of the Labour Party 24 August 1931 is a day of infamy. It was on this day that Ramsay MacDonald announced that he was to form a National Government, supported by the Conservative and Liberal parties and such Labour M.P.s as would follow him, in order to deal with the economic crisis which had been gathering momentum since the Wall Street crash in October 1929. It was less than twenty-four hours after the Cabinet of MacDonald's second Labour government had failed to agree on the question of a cut in the rate of benefit for the ever-rising number of unemployed [1].

Within three months MacDonald, who was expelled from the Labour Party in September, had led the new government, which included two of the other members of Labour's 'Big Five' - Philip Snowden, who had been chancellor of the exchequer in the second Labour government, and J.R. Thomas, who had been, first lord privy seal, and subsequently dominions secretary - into a general election against his former party.

1. Recorded unemployment in Britain rose from 1,141,756 (9.7 per cent) at the time when the King asked MacDonald to form his second administration in June 1929 to 2,737,637 (21.8 per cent) at the time of its fall. Ministry of Labour, Twenty-Second Abstract of Labour Statistics in the United Kingdom (1922-1936), (1937), pp. 54-58.

The result of the October 1931 general election was one of the greatest reversals in British electoral history. The National Government swept the board, gaining 14,532,519 votes (67.2 per cent of the poll) - a result that gave it 554 seats [1]. The Labour Party received 6,649,630 votes (30.8 per cent), compared to 8,370,417 votes (37.1 per cent) in the May 1929 general election. However, mainly as a result of the fall in the number of three or more cornered contests [2], its representation was cut from the 287 M.P.s elected in 1929 to 52 [3].

1. This figure was made up of 469 Conservatives, 35 National Liberals, 33 Liberals, 13 National Labour, and 4 National members. All data concerning elections in this thesis comes either directly, or is calculated from F.W.S. Craig, British Parliamentary Election Statistics, 1918-1968, (1968), and F.W.S. Craig, British Parliamentary Elections: Constituency Results, 1918-1949, (1969).

2. The number of three or more cornered contests in single member constituencies was 473 in 1929 and 113 in 1931.

3. This figure includes six unendorsed candidates. The change between 1929 and 1931 can be seen more clearly if the figure for votes per seat won is considered. In 1929 the figures were (figures in brackets refer to votes per contested seat): Labour 29,165; Conservative 33,293 (33,813); Liberal 89,978. In 1931 the figures were National Government 26,231 (29,597); Labour 127,877 (144,557).

Virtually the entire leadership of the P.L.P. was defeated. Arthur Henderson, the foreign minister in the 1929-1931 government, the secretary of the party, and the man who succeeded MacDonald as leader, lost his seat. So too did two of the most prominent young Labour M.P.s - Herbert Morrison, who had been minister of transport, and Hugh Dalton, the under secretary for foreign affairs. Of the former Labour Cabinet only George Lansbury, the first commissioner of works, retained his seat. Two junior ministers - Clement Attlee, who had been postmaster general at the time of the fall of the second Labour government, and Sir Stafford Cripps, who had been solicitor general - also retained their seats. It was thus on the shoulders of these two and Lansbury, who became chairman of the P.L.P., that the leadership of the parliamentary party fell.

The elevation of these three meant a distinct change in the ideological leanings of the parliamentary leadership. MacDonald, for all his abuse of the Liberals [1], and predictions of the inevitable breakdown of capitalism [2], was basically a millenarian. Attacks on the Liberals and talk of the coming crisis served to hide the fact that he had no clear idea of how the transition to socialism would come, or what the socialist state would be like [3]. MacDonald was a 'master of political

1. For example, see M. Cowling, The Impact of Labour, (1970), passim.

2. For example, see his speech to the 1930 Labour Conference. 1930 L.P.C.R., p. 185.

3. For a detailed account of MacDonald's political thought see B. Barker, Ramsay MacDonald's Political Writings, (1972), passim, especially the introduction. However, N.B. that Barker, like other writers on MacDonald, ignores the fact that to some extent the vagueness in MacDonald's writings reflected an awareness of the functional aspect of vagueness: that is, it helped keep the party together. See J.R. MacDonald, Socialism and Society, (1905), passim, esp. p. 142, and his Socialism and Government, (1909), passim, esp. p. xxx.

obfuscation' and throughout his 'eventful political life, wrote about socialism regularly and with consistent imprecision' [1]. Snowden and Thomas were, if anything, even more vague about the nature of their political beliefs, though both were clearly moderates in the context of the Labour Party.

The economic policies advocated by MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas during 1929-1931 reflected these positions. MacDonald contributed little more than the view that it was the system rather than Labour which was on trial; Snowden and Thomas proved incapable of conceiving any policy other than the palliatives of Treasury or Bank of England orthodoxy [2]. These views were shared by others in the party.

1. J.M. Winter, Socialism and the Challenge of War, (1974), p. 3.

2. For a detailed account of the economic policy of the second Labour government see R. Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump, (1967), passim. R. McKibbin in his article 'The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government, 1929-1931', Past and Present, August 1975, has shown that the government did not 'wilfully' ignore solutions, and that there was no international example for Labour to follow. Although this provides an important corrective to Skidelsky, McKibbin does not pay sufficient attention to the confusion and vagueness in the Labour Party.

Although Clause IV of the 1918 Constitution committed the Labour Party to secure 'for the workers by hand and by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production', this commitment should be seen more as a 'rallying point around which the adherents of different ideologies and the representatives of different interests assembled' than as a commitment to a considered, uniform and socialist faith [1].

This emphasis on the 'different ideologies' which made up the Labour Party is an important one. The Labour Party has always been very much a coalition of diverse views. Some on the left of the party have held very radical, although far from necessarily similar, views, involving a rapid replacement of capitalism by some form of public ownership, often on limited compensation, and a variety of other views [2].

1. R. Harrison, 'The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-1920' in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), Essays in Labour History, Vol. 2, (1971), p. 259.

2. Defining the Labour left is a difficult task. Emphasis is placed here on rapid and extensive nationalisation as it appears to have been the most constant element in what could be defined as left wing thought, whereas on other issues, for example foreign policy, attitudes have been more diverse. The differing attitudes of the left in the 1930s is dealt with in passim in the subsequent pages of this thesis, as is opinion in general within the party.

Others have had varying less speedy, or sweeping, conceptions of the party's mission. The aftermath of 1931 was no exception. Indeed, major differences existed among the P.L.P.'s three new leaders, and especially among the leadership and the party in general, differences which in part stemmed from the record of the second Labour government and the events of 1931.

The two grand old men of the Labour leadership - Henderson, who was sixty-eight, and Lansbury, who was seventy-two - had very different pasts. Both were of working class origin and held strong religious views, views which helped inspire their socialism. However, Henderson's record was one of moderation and loyalty to the party, which he had done so much to build up; Lansbury on the other hand had been a long-standing critic of the leadership [1]. There were especially strong differences over foreign policy. The former was a man greatly interested in foreign affairs and was one of the leading defenders of the League of Nations and collective security in the Labour Party; indeed, in 1932 he was to be appointed chairman of the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, a position which led him to resign the Labour leadership. The latter had little interest in foreign affairs, and was a pacifist.

1. For a detailed account of their careers up to 1931 see M.A. Hamilton, Arthur Henderson, (1938), pp. 1-410, and R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, (1951), pp. 1-272.

Nevertheless, they shared similar reactions to the events of 1931 in that neither's views were significantly altered. The main lesson drawn by both was that Labour should never again accept office without a majority, that, in the words of one of their colleagues in the 1929-1931 Parliament, 'All would be solved when we had "complete Socialism" and power as well as office' [1]. This reaction, which was shared by many in the party, led to a certain complacency about the party programme [2]. Henderson in particular combined loyalty with complacency after 1931 [3].

1. Sir N. Angell, After All: the Autobiography of Sir Norman Angell, (1951), p. 252.

2. Philip Noel-Baker, Henderson's parliamentary private secretary during 1929-1931, put this view in eloquent form when he wrote 'Most of the criticisms of the programme of the late Labour Government are really criticisms.... of the policy of taking office without a majority in the House of Commons'. 'There is no need for a "break with the past", but simply for a development in the light of circumstances, of the policy for which the Party has always stood'. 'The Future of the Labour Party', Political Quarterly, 1/1932, p. 49.

3. For example, see his speech to the 1932 Labour Conference, 1932 L.P.C.R., pp. 163-166.

Lansbury was more critical of the second Labour government's record, and saw the need for some changes, and clarification in the programme, especially a more specific commitment to immediate nationalisation and planning [1]. But these views did not represent a distinct break with the past. Moreover, after 1931 Lansbury was to be plagued with illness, and although he succeeded Henderson as leader, he was to contribute little to the policy discussion in the party before his pacifist views led to his resignation as leader in 1935.

Morrison, who was forty-three, and Dalton, who was a year his senior, were men of very different backgrounds, the former being working class, whereas the latter was upper middle class [2]. There were also differences between them over policy, especially foreign policy. Morrison was a man with very little interest in international affairs, and what views he did have tended to be anti-the Versailles Treaty and sympathetic to German criticisms of it. Dalton, on the other hand, was a man very concerned with foreign affairs, a defender of Versailles, and widely considered 'pro-French'. On domestic issues they shared more similar views, both essentially being Fabian-inspired efficiency-gradualists,

1. G. Lansbury, My England, (1934), passim, esp. pp.58-72.
2. For a detailed account of their careers up to 1931 see B. Donoughue and G.W. Jones, Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician, (1973), pp. 3-179, and H. Dalton, Memoirs, Vol. 1, (1953), passim.

although Morrison had held very radical views in his youth.

They in particular drew similar conclusions from the events of 1931, although there is some evidence that Morrison was for a short time tempted to follow MacDonald [1]. Like Henderson and Lansbury, they were strong critics of the Liberals' role in the government's record [2]. Both also believed that Labour had suffered badly in the 1931 general election as a result of the government campaign, another widely shared belief in the party [3], Morrison believing that the middle class in particular had deserted Labour [4].

1. Donoughue and Jones, op. cit., pp. 155-170.

2. For example, see H. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain,(1935), pp. 20-23.

3. The N.E.C. report to the 1932 Conference stated that 'By exploiting patriotic sentiments, by panic-mongering, and misrepresentation, the so-called "National" Government secured a further lease of power'. 1932 L.P.C.R., p. 3.

4. Donoughue and Jones, op. cit., p. 180.

Morrison and Dalton, however, were far from complacent about Labour's programme, and both sought clarification and change in certain aspects of it. Morrison sought a more definite programme, and detailed commitment to the nationalisation of several basic industries [1]. Dalton, who was one of the leading subscribers to another of the most prevalent beliefs in the party in the aftermath of 1931 - namely that the government had been engineered out of office by a 'bankers' ramp' [2] - stressed the need for the nationalisation of the Bank of England, and controls over investment, including the institution of a National Investment Board [3]. As Morrison and Dalton were to play an important part after 1931 in the reshaping of Labour policy their views are of considerable importance.

1. See below, p. 49.

2. The 1931 T.U.C. election manifesto claimed 'Fellow workers, the first Labour Government was destroyed by a "Red Letter". The second Labour Government has been destroyed by a Banker's Order'.

3. See below, p. 48.

Attlee, at forty-eight, was the oldest of the younger Labour parliamentary leaders. Up to 1931 his career had many similarities to that of Dalton. Both came from prosperous middle class backgrounds, were university educated, and had gone on to be university lecturers in economics. Indeed, on domestic policy they held fairly similar views. However, over foreign policy there were differences. Although both had fought in the first world war, Attlee had gone on to hold a position more similar to Morrison's.

Attlee also differed significantly from Dalton over his reaction, or at least immediate reaction, to the events of 1931. During the 1929-1931 government he had in no way been openly critical of the leadership, although he joined the two research-ginger groups formed in 1930-1931, the New Fabian Research Bureau and the Socialist Society for Inquiry and Propaganda. However, after 1931 he 'made sure that he was among the chorus of assailants on MacDonald's character and judgement' [1], becoming one of the most vociferous supporters of the widely-held belief

1. W. Golant, 'The Early Political Thought of C.R. Attlee II' Political Quarterly, 3/1970, p. 309. This article and its predecessor in the Political Quarterly, 2/1969 provide the best account of Attlee's views before 1931.

that MacDonald had long planned to desert the party [1]. Attlee decided that the party needed to move away from 'the immediate and on to basic socialism' [2], including a definite five year plan of action [3]. He began to press for a programme of immediate nationalisation, including the joint stock banks and land; he advocated the abolition of the House of Lords, with which the second Labour government had clashed on several occasions, and supported emergency legislation so that the next Labour government could act with speed [4]. Speeding up the process of government especially concerned Attlee, and he became the most articulate exponent in the party of the widely-held belief in the need for a reform of the Cabinet, in particular to enable ministers to take a general view, something which had clearly not happened under MacDonald. This proposal fitted in well with the widespread desire in the party after 1931 to restrict the power of any future Labour prime minister [5].

1. The best known statement of this argument was made by Lord Passfield, who had been colonial secretary in the second Labour government, in his article 'What Happened in 1931: a Record', ibid., 1/1932.
2. Golant, op. cit., 11, p. 315.
3. Report on the Easton Lodge conference, April 1932. Cole Papers, box 5, folder 5.
4. C.R. Attlee, Local Government and the Socialist Plan, (Socialist League pamphlet, 1933).
5. For a detailed account of the moves after 1931 to restrict the power of a future Labour prime minister see R. McKenzie, British Political Parties, (1955), pp. 317-323.

The impact of the events of 1931 on Attlee was to play an important part in helping pave the way to the leadership in 1935, for they not only brought him to prominence in the party, but also modified his views in such a way that he became to some extent acceptable to all sections of the party [1].

The events of 1931 were to lead Cripps down a more slippery slope. Although confusion over the National Government's composition initially led Cripps to consider joining it [2], his subsequent reaction was more dramatic than any of the other Labour leaders, making him the most left wing figure in the leadership. This played a major role in bringing him into a series of disputes with the party which eventually culminated in 1939 in his expulsion from the party over his activities in support of the popular front movement. Therefore the impact of the events of 1931 on Cripps is of especial interest.

Cripps entered politics late in life; he was forty when he joined the Labour Party in 1929. Previously he had devoted little attention to politics, concerning himself mainly with building up a lucrative legal practice, and with church affairs. His decision to enter politics owed much

1. See below, pp. 80 and 84.

2. C. Cooke, The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps, (1957), pp. 126-129. Although far from satisfactory, it provides the best account of Cripps's career up to 1931.

to his religious views, for after the first world war, during which he had for a time served in the army, he had worked to promote a world alliance of churches as part of an attempt to further international cooperation and understanding. The internationalism of the Labour Party therefore had a strong appeal for Cripps [1].

It was primarily religious views that inspired the socialism which Cripps came to adopt after 1929, and especially after the fall of the second Labour government. However, two other sources also conditioned his socialism. The first was Fabianism, Cripps being a member of the Fabian Society and a nephew of Beatrice Webb [2]. The second was Marxism, although he claimed that he had never read a line of Marx [3]. Cripps came to believe that capitalism not only caused inequality and class antagonism, elevated profit above social responsibility [4], and was inefficient [5]; during late 1931 he came to believe that the hour had come, that 'We are witnessing the breakdown of capitalism' [6].

1. P. Strauss, Cripps - Advocate and Rebel, (1943), p. 57.
2. M. Cole (ed.), The Diaries of Beatrice Webb, 1924-1932, (1956), p. 259.
3. D.N. Pritt, The Autobiography of D.N. Pritt, Vol. 1, (1965), p. 98.
4. Sir S. Cripps, Why this Socialism?, (1934), esp. pp. 15, 28 and 44.
5. Ibid., p. 94.
6. Letter from Cripps to the Edge Hill D.L.P., 31 December, 1931. Cripps Papers, file 757.

This last belief, together with the belief that the financial crisis which had preceded the second Labour government's fall was a bankers' ramp, led Cripps to adopt a radical view of the transition to socialism. As he told the 1931 Labour Conference

> The recent crisis .... has, I think, brought home to all of us that the time has come when we can no longer try with one hand to patch up the old building of Capitalism and with the other hand to build the new building of Socialism ....
>
> It is not now a question of the inevitability of gradualness, the one thing that is not inevitable now is gradualness[1].

Cripps came to believe that so long as the existing parliamentary institutions 'remain unchanged', it would be 'impossible for Socialism ever to become a reality in this country'[2]. However, he never questioned the parliamentary road. He therefore advocated a series of changes in parliamentary practice, in particular two things. First, the abolition of the House of Lords; and second, the more novel and sweeping proposal to introduce an Emergency Powers Act, which would allow what amounted to rule by decree through Orders in Council, for he believed that to work through the existing institutions would be too slow[3].

1. 1931 L.P.C.R., p. 205.
2. Sir S. Cripps, 'Democracy and Dictatorship', Political Quarterly, 4/1933, p. 467.
3. Sir S. Cripps, Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Means?, (Socialist League pamphlet, 1934).

With these powers a Labour Cabinet would introduce major changes. The exact nature of these changes was not fully described; but they included the nationalisation of the whole banking system [1], and major industries on limited compensation [2]. Cripps believed that such action was democratic because the Labour Party, if it adopted the programme, would make it 'abundantly clear to the voters' what it planned to do' [3]. In making this statement he revealed his belief that a majority of the electorate could quickly be converted to socialism for these plans were not put forward as part of some long term programme, but as proposals on which Labour could win the next general election [4]. In spite of the massive National Government victory in the 1931 general election, he believed that 'a great many people' wanted a change from the existing economic system, but were not sure what they wanted to change to; therefore a strong lead was necessary [5].

These views were shared by many in the Socialist League, a small and largely middle class left Labour ginger group formed in September 1932 [6]. Although Cripps at first was

1. 1932 L.P.C.R., pp. 192-193.
2. 1934 L.P.C.R., pp. 193-195.
3. 'Democracy and Dictatorship', p. 468.
4. Sir S. Cripps, 'The Next Election', Political Quarterly, 1/1932, pp. 39-41.
5. Why this Socialism?, esp. pp. 9-10.
6. For a detailed account of the policies of the Socialist League, and Cripps's relations with it see R.G. Dare, 'The Socialist League, 1932-1937', (University of Oxford D. Phil. thesis, 1972), passim.

somewhat suspicious of the idea of such an organisation, he quickly changed his mind. In June 1933 he became chairman of the Socialist League, and from then until its disaffiliation in 1937 its policies and Cripps's were to all intents and purposes identical.

The Socialist League emerged as a result of a merger of the S.S.I.P. and a group of former members of the I.L.P., who had opposed its decision to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. During the 1920s a group of the I.L.P., led by Jimmy Maxton, its chairman and the M.P. for Bridgeton, had come to believe that the moderation of the Labour leadership was acting as a brake on the achievement of socialism. In spite of the change in the parliamentary leadership in 1931, the I.L.P. at a special Conference in July 1932 voted to disaffiliate from the Labour Party [1]. The result was a rapid drop in I.L.P. membership as the party cut its links with the Labour Party, trade unions and Co-operative movement [2]. Many of the I.L.P.'s members clearly preferred to stay in the Labour Party, mainly through membership of the Socialist League, or through the constituency parties, which were growing rapidly even before the I.L.P.'s decision to disaffiliate [3].

1. R.E. Dowse, Left in the Centre, (1966), pp. 152-182.
2. J. Jupp, 'The Left in Britain, 1931-1941', (University of London M.Sc. thesis, 1956), p. 90. A table of I.L.P. membership may be found in Appendix 1.
3. A table of Labour Party membership may be found in Appendix 1.

The constituency parties had first been formally introduced by the 1918 Constitution. Initially they had been heavily dominated by union members [1]. However, during the 1920s this began to change, especially as middle class members began to enter by this route, particularly former members of the Liberal Party [2]. 1931 saw a significant rise in individual membership, membership in 1932 being 34.1 per cent above the 1930 figure [3].

1. R. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924, (1974), esp. pp. 161-162.

2. C.A. Cline, Recruits to Labour: the British Labour Party 1914-1931, (1963), passim.

3. Party membership figures must be treated with caution. In the case of the Labour Party particular problems are that the number of active members is likely to be far less than the total, and the enthusiasm of the most active will play an important part in the total. Nevertheless, trends are interesting and one as large as during 1930-1932 cannot be ignored. Trends in party membership during 1931-1939, and immediately after, are dealt with in the conclusion.

The impact of the events of 1931 on the constituency parties in terms of ideology is difficult to assess. A study of Conference voting during 1931-1939 indicates that many of the parties present at Conference, if not necessarily all their members, were well to the left of the party line, although this is not to say that there was a uniform left constituency view. This conclusion is borne out by other sources [1]. However, it is not clear to what

1. Grass roots opinion is a very difficult field. In the case of the D.L.P.s and Conference particular problems are that Conference reports do not break up votes, not all constituency parties send delegates to Conference (a table of the number of parties attending during 1931-1939 may be found in Appendix 2), constituency policy may be made by a minority, and there is no guarantee that delegates are mandated, or vote to their mandate. Other sources cannot be relied upon entirely as sources for so elusive and problematical a concept as rank and file opinion, especially for working class opinion as working class people do not tend to write books or leave correspondence. However, the question is an important one and an attempt to assess constituency voting and opinion is made <u>in passim</u> in the pages below.

extent the events of 1931 produced this situation. One local study has argued that 'the debacle of 1931 had little effect on local organisations' [1], although this was probably in part a result of the primarily industrial membership of the party in question [2]. There was no Conference vote immediately before 1931 which gave a clear indication of constituency voting. What evidence there is suggests that even before 1931 the constituency parties held more radical views than the leadership (admittedly a different one) [3]. Nevertheless, left wing sentiments in the constituencies do not seem to have been as strong as they were to become after 1931.

1. S. Pollard, A History of Labour in Sheffield, (1959), p. 265.

2. See below, pp. 46-47.

3. B. Webb Diary, 19 May 1930, information supplied by G.R. Strauss, etc.

It is easier to assess the impact of 1931 on the three men who had come to replace the Webbs as the major Labour theoreticians of the day [1]: G.D.H. Cole, the reader in economics at Oxford University, Harold Laski, the professor of politics at London University, and R.H. Tawney, the professor of economic history at London. The views of these three are interesting not only in their own right, but also because of their influence on others, notably Cripps and the Socialist League [2].

Cole, who was forty-two in 1931, came from a prosperous middle class background [3]. However, in his early political days he had been a leading advocate of guild socialism, notably during world war one, which Cole saw primarily in terms of its threat to the position of the unions [4]. He elevated the trade unions to the major role in the transition to socialism, never really analysing their tendency to be premised on the continued existence of capitalism; and he paid little attention to their tendencies to oligarchy [5].

1. The Webbs produced little after 1923. In the 1930s their main work was Soviet Communism: a New Civilisation?, (1935), reprinted two years later without the question mark.
2. All three were members of the Socialist League, though Tawney was little more than a nominal member. R. Terrill, R.H. Tawney and His Times, (1974), p. 78. And Cole was not active in it after 1933. M. Cole, op. cit., p. 232.
3. For an account of Cole's life and views up to 1931 see L.P. Carpenter, G.D.H. Cole, (1973), pp. 5-179, and M. Cole, The Life of G.D.H. Cole, (1971), pp. 21-197.
4. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 35.
5. J. Hinton, 'G.D.H. Cole in the Stage Army of the Good', Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, Spring 1974, p. 79.

His movement away from guild socialism in the 1920s was not for theoretical reasons so much as the fact that the movement had clearly failed and Cole was a man very concerned with the immediate and the practical, a reflection of his Fabian heritage [1]. During the 1920s he became more sympathetic to the parliamentary road to socialism. The second Labour government's paralysis, and especially its failure to cure unemployment, brought home forcefully to him the need for a careful study of policy and priorities, major reasons for the important role he played in the formation of the S.S.I.P. and N.F.R.B. Cole in particular became interested in government economic planning through a National Investment Board, a policy which fitted in well with his J.A. Hobson-inspired belief that consumption was too low [2], and his old guild socialist slogan concerning the 'coordination of supply and demand' [3].

1. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 126.
2. Ibid., p. 143.
3. Ibid., p. 155.

The immediate impact of the events of 1931 was to revive his socialist rhetoric, and lead him once again seriously to consider the transition to socialism. In an article entitled 'The Old Labour Party and the New', which appeared in the New Statesman on 14 November 1931, he wrote

> I believe this set-back affords a real chance of rebuilding the political Labour Movement on sounder lines .... I think the time has come to stop definitely the attempt to build up the Labour Party on the forsaken inheritance of reformist Liberalism, and to set to work instead to create a real Socialist Party.
>
> In the next few years, we Socialists shall have to build the Labour Party up again, and build it on essentially different foundations.

At a S.S.I.P. conference in the same month he 'doubted whether capitalism could save itself' [1]. However, Cole in fact did not undergo any significant change of view, nor did he advocate a significantly different policy for the Labour Party from the one he had pushed before 1931. And he quickly decided that capitalism was not on the point of imminent collapse.

1. Report of the S.S.I.P. conference on the 'Crisis'. Fabian Society Papers, box N 24.

In 1932 Cole called for a 'decisively socialist' policy, and stressed the need for 'drastic' measures to protect an incoming Labour government from international financiers, including emergency control of banking and the stock exchange, and if necessary the abolition of the House of Lords and a reform of parliamentary legislation [1]. However, such measures had been discussed in the S.S.I.P. before the fall of the second Labour government [2]. Moreover, the socialist policy which Cole advocated after 1931 was essentially the same as before, especially in its stress on planning. Indeed, the basic nature of Cole's socialism can be gauged from the fact that he looked to Ernest Bevin, the general secretary of the T.G.W.U. and the most dynamic of union leaders, to lead Labour out of the crisis [3] - and Bevin was certainly not left wing [4]. It was for similar reasons that he wanted Bevin, who had been chairman of the S.S.I.P., to lead the Socialist League [5], a desire frustrated by the hostility to it of the ex-I.L.P.ers, and Bevin's doubts about the organisation.

1. Report on the Easton Lodge conference, April 1932. Cole Papers, box 5, folder 5.
2. Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 151-152.
3. G.D.H. Cole, obituary on Bevin, New Statesman, 21 April 1951.
4. See below, pp. 42-44.
5. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 184.

Laski was thirty-eight in 1931 and, like Cole, came from a prosperous background [1]. During the first world war, in which he was unfit to fight, he had developed an essentially pluralist view of politics, and, in the British context, had advocated in particular a decentralisation of power on functional lines, although retaining a strong central government [2]. Subsequently he had turned to a more Fabian-inspired view [3], and came to hold that only the state 'has the power to regulate private economic power and to foster social and economic equality' [4]. As major depression began to affect the western world in 1929 Laski moved towards a more Marxist position, especially on the question of the nature of the state [5].

1. For an account of Laski's life and views up to 1931 see H.A. Deane, The Political Ideas of Harold J. Laski, (1955), pp. 13-131, and K. Martin, Harold Laski, 1893-1950, (1953), pp. 9-83.

2. Deane, op. cit., p. 33.

3. Ibid., p. 8.

4. Ibid., p. 125.

5. Ibid., pp. 139-140.

The events of 1931 were to take Laski much further along the Marxist road. In an article entitled 'The Path and the Price', which appeared in the New Clarion on 11 June 1932, Laski, like Cole, foresaw a phoenix rising from the ashes. He wrote

> The last General Election has given the Labour Party a period during which it has a single opportunity for reflection and reconstruction. We ought to be clear what this involves. It means something more than self-commiseration at the treachery of our late leaders. It means something more, also, than the pathetic and continuous insistence that, if we were in office, we were not yet in power. It means something more even than the argument that, before the economic blizzard of 1929, any government would have been helpless....
>
> The Labour Party needs a new attitude to life.

The new attitude to life advocated by Laski was a very different one to the one he had held only shortly before.

Laski fervently believed that Labour had been engineered out of office by a bankers' ramp [1], and he came to adopt a theory of the state in which 'each economic regime' was seen as giving 'birth to a political order which represents the interests of those who dominate the regime'; and in Britain there existed 'capitalist democracy' [2]. He came to believe that the

1. H.J. Laski, The Crisis and the Constitution, (Day to Day pamphlet, 1932), p. 22.

2. H.J. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, (1933), p. 50.

productive relations force 'struggles between economic classes' [1], and that these would intensify for capitalism had entered its final phase [2]. However, in spite of his famous reply to a heckler, 'Yes, my friend, we are both Marxists, you in your way, I in Marx's' [3], Laski never became an extreme or rigorous Marxist. In particular, he was never an ardent class warrior; and he never completely rejected the parliamentary road. Instead, he became, together with Cripps, the leading advocate of the need for an Emergency Powers Act [4], and other constitutional reforms - reforms which tended to occupy his attention to the exclusion of actual policy [5]. His main immediate concern was not so much policy as 'the conversion of the trade unions to Socialism' [6]. For Laski the unions were the brake rather than the driver.

Tawney was the eldest of the trio, being fifty-one in 1931, and like Cole and Laski came from a prosperous background [7]. Unlike Cole and Laski, he fought in the first world war, rejecting a commission and serving in the ranks, for he had a strong faith in the common people

1. H.J. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice, (1935), p. 99.
2. Ibid., p. 111.
3. Martin, op. cit., p. 4.
4. The Crisis and the Constitution, passim.
5. See H.J. Laski, 'What Should Labour's Policy Be?', S.S.I.P. News, August, 1932.
6. The Crisis and the Constitution, pp. 54-55.
7. For an account of Tawney's life and views up to 1931 see Terrill, op. cit., passim, esp. pp. 21-78.

and desire to associate with them. Tawney was a deeply religious man and the central idea running through his work was one of fellowship, a fellowship to be found in both religion and socialism [1]. By 1931 he had also developed important ideas especially on the social responsibility of industry, and equality.

The events of 1931 did not lead to any significant development of these views. In his famous article 'The Choice before the Labour Party', he wrote

> What matters is less the question of the circumstances in which the last Government went out, than what it did, attempted, and neither did nor attempted to do, when it was in. It is possible that....(the verdict) on its death....would be, neither murder nor misadventure, but pernicious anaemia, producing general futility [2].

Tawney went on to find this anaemia in the Labour Party's lack of 'creed'. He argued that existing Labour programmes would 'nationalise land, mines and banking in one sentence, and abolish fox-hunting in the next'; what was needed was a clarification and ordering of priorities [3]. In 1934 Tawney was to contribute to this development when he drafted a new programme for Labour. However, in general Tawney did not play a major role in current controversies after 1931.

1. Ibid., pp. 197-216.
2. Political Quarterly, 3/1932, p. 323.
3. Ibid., pp. 327-329.

Tawney did not believe that capitalism was on the point of collapse [1], and he did not sympathise with the growth of Marxist ideas in the party after 1931. Nevertheless, Tawney wrote little specifically attacking these ideas, concentrating more on historical research and work in the field of adult education [2]. The main attack on these ideas was to come from other sources, including two young admirers of Tawney - Evan Durbin and Hugh Gaitskell, who regularly saw Tawney for discussions at this time [3].

1. Lecture notes, n.d. 1930s. Tawney Papers, 19 (7).

2. Terrill, op. cit., esp. p. 72.

3. Durbin and Gaitskell, both of whom were lecturers in economics, began to emerge in the 1930s as important thinkers in their own right. For example, see their essays 'The Importance of Planning' and 'Financial Policy in the Transition Period' in G.E.G. Catlin (ed.), New Trends in Socialism, (1935). Gaitskell's essay contained a notable attack on the view that a major financial crisis would accompany the election of a socialist government, although he conceded that there would be problems. One point he made was that it would be the prospect of a change of government 'which will first begin to exert an influence', and that 'The election itself, although it results in a Socialist victory, may even be followed by a rebound as tension relaxes'. P. 172.

Henderson, Lansbury, Morrison, Dalton, Attlee and Cripps were all part of the parliamentary wing of the Labour party. Although three were without a seat after the 1931 general election, they were all seeking reelection. Also, none of the six had any close connection with the trade union wing of the party. Nor did Cole, Laski and Tawney, though Cole had made efforts to maintain good relations with the union leadership. Moreover, the Socialist League was primarily middle class, and the constituency parties becoming more so. As the trade unions comprised easily the major of the 'different interests' which made up the Labour Party, it is important to look at the effect of the events of 1931 on them, especially as 1931 saw a significant shift in the balance of power within the party away from the parliamentary and towards the union leadership, notably its two most dynamic figures, Bevin, who had stood unsuccessfully in the 1931 general election at Gateshead, and Walter Citrine, the general secretary of the T.U.C.

The unions had always exerted a strong influence within the Labour Party. Indeed, up until 1924 it was little more than a union parliamentary pressure group. However, from 1924 on the situation began to change. The main factor accounting for this was that MacDonald

during his two periods of office succeeded in keeping the union leaders in the dark about government policy, in spite of frequent representations from the T.U.C. asking to be kept informed. It was the absence of such contact that played the major role in the deterioration of relations between the first Labour government and the T.U.C. in 1924 [1].

Nevertheless, the Labour Party had never been able to overcome its financial dependence on the unions. In 1930 £35,000 of the party's national income of £45,000 came from the unions [2]. The unions also financed many Labour candidates in elections. Of the 52 M.P.s who survived the 1931 election 32 were union sponsored [3]: most of these were ageing officials, an important factor in conditioning the complexion of the P.L.P. during 1931-1935.

1. Lord Citrine, Men and Work: the Autobiography of Lord Citrine, (1964), p. 281.

2. A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. 1, (1960), p. 481.

3. This meant that 61.7 per cent of Labour M.P.s were union sponsored, though only 26.9 per cent of candidates were. In 1929 the figures were 40.1 and 24.4 per cent respectively.

The unions also still dominated Labour Conferences in terms of voting. The 1927 Trades Disputes Act had forced unionists to contract into, rather than out of, the political levy and this, together with a decline in overall union membership, had led to a 62.9 per cent fall in affiliated membership during 1927-1931 [1]. Even so, in 1931 the unions had 80.2 per cent of the Conference votes [2]. Furthermore, twelve out of the twenty-four elected members of the N.E.C. were union representatives, and as the other sections were elected by the votes of the whole Conference, union votes also dominated these sections, though this is not to imply that union votes had always been cast in a uniform pattern.

1. 1932 L.P.C.R., p. 58.

2. A breakdown of Conference voting strengths during 1931-1939 may be found in Appendix 2. In 1919, the year after the formal introduction of the constituency parties, the unions had 91.4 per cent of the votes.
1919 L.P.C.R., p. 110.

Moreover, during the summer of 1931 it was the T.U.C. General Council which, when informed of the bankers' demands for a cut in the rate of unemployment benefit, remained firm whereas the majority of the Cabinet was willing to concede [1]. With the exception of Thomas, the general secretary of the N.U.R., it was from the non-trade union sponsored M.P.s that the fifteen defectors to the National Government came. These factors did nothing to inspire confidence in the reliability of the parliamentary leadership in the eyes of the union leaders, and in spite of the change in parliamentary leadership this suspicion undoubtedly lingered on.

This can be seen in the decision to ensure monthly meetings of the three main executive bodies of the Labour movement, the N.E.C., T.U.C. General Council, and the P.L.P. Executive, by reorganising the N.J.C., the re-organisation coming into effect from January 1932 [2]. Coming as they did on the day before the N.E.C. met, these meetings were well timed to make the non-union members of the N.E.C. aware of the union leaders' views, especially as Bevin and Citrine sat on the council. Moreover, the basis of representation was changed to one

1. Skidelsky, op cit., pp. 405-413.

2. 1932 L.P.C.R., p. 67. It changed its name to N.C.L. after October 1934.

more in the unions' favour. When first formed in 1921 the council had consisted of five members from each executive [1]; the reconstructed N.J.C. included the chairman and six General Council members, the chairman and two N.E.C. members and the chairman and two P.L.P. Executive members.

The policies which Bevin, Citrine and most of the union leadership put forward at N.J.C. meetings, and elsewhere were far from left wing ones.

Bevin, who was fifty in 1931, had never except in his very early political days held left wing ideas [2]. Indeed, up until the late 1920s he devoted little serious attention to politics in the widest sense. Most of Bevin's time before the late 1920s was spent on union work. Bevin had been one of the major figures behind the T.U.C. agreeing in 1920 to set up a General Council; it was Bevin who lay behind the creation of the T.G.W.U. in 1922; during the general strike he played a leading role in the negotiations between the General Council and government; and he was the most forceful union figure in the Mond-Turner talks of 1927-1928, talks which laid the foundation of a new 'industrial co-operation' [3].

1. 1922 L.P.C.R., p. 3

2. For an account of Bevin's life up to 1931 see Bullock, op. cit., pp. 1-503.

3. For an account of these talks see G.W. McDonald and H.F. Gospel, 'The Mond-Turner Talks: a Study in Industrial Co-operation', Historical Journal, 4/1973.

At this time Bevin had no considered views on foreign policy, and few on domestic policy, although he unquestionably sought the replacement of capitalism. However, the 1924 Labour government, the failure of the general strike, and especially the onset of depression in 1929 began to turn Bevin's mind to consider domestic policy more carefully. He was helped in this process by membership of the T.U.C. Economic Committee, which was set up partly at his suggestion in 1929, the Macmillan Committee on finance and industry appointed in 1929, and the Economic Advisory Committee, which MacDonald set up in 1930, and which included several notable economists, including John Maynard Keynes. Moreover, although suspicious of middle class intellectuals, he agreed to become chairman of the S.S.I.P. in 1931.

In terms of policy, the events of 1931 made little impact on Bevin. At the 1931 Trades Union Congress, which met in September, his speech merely reiterated many of the policies which he had advocated before the government's fall, including the need for long term economic planning [1]. The following month at the Labour Conference he laid great emphasis on the need to socialise 'credit', claiming that afterwards 'the rest is comparatively easy' [2].

1. 1931 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 464-465.
2. 1931 L.P.C.R., pp. 191-192.

Although his views were beginning to crystalise into more definite form, he was still essentially vague, refusing to support rapid measures of change and holding that capitalism was far from on the point of collapse [1]. The main lessons that Bevin drew from 1931 was the need for the unions to draw closer to the Labour Party, and the need in future for greater loyalty to the party to avoid further splits [2]. It was his essentially moderate views and emphasis on loyalty that mainly led him to refuse nomination to the National Council of the Socialist League, for although he was initially not opposed to its formation, he was suspicious of the ex-I.L.P.ers [3].

Citrine, who was forty-four in 1931, shared Bevin's position in that he did not see 1931 as a major ideological turning point [4]. Indeed, Citrine's views were essentially similar to those of his elder colleague, for whom he had developed a great admiration. Nevertheless, the events of 1931 led to a reinforcing of two major aspects of this thought which are worth stressing.

1. S.S.I.P. News, June 1932.
2. Bullock, op. cit., pp. 492, 499 and 532-533.
3. Letter from Bevin to E.A. Radice, 16 September, 1932. Fabian Society Papers, box N. 24.
4. For an account of Citrine's life up to 1931 see Citrine, op. cit., pp. 1-292.

The first concerned his attitude to the relationship of the unions and the Labour Party. After his appointment as assistant general secretary to the T.U.C. in 1924, and then general secretary in 1926, he had become worried by the breakdown in communications between the unions and the parliamentary leadership, especially MacDonald, for whom, like Bevin, he had little love. During 1929-1931 he frequently complained that all the union leadership knew of government policy was what they read in the papers, and the joint meeting of the General Council and Cabinet in the closing days of the second Labour government did nothing to allay his criticisms concerning the lack of communication. Indeed, it was Citrine who played the major part in the reorganisation of the N.J.C., though he was backed by Bevin [1].

The second significant effect of the events of 1931 on Citrine was that the result of the election reinforced his belief in the need for a moderate evolutionary programme, in particular to appeal to the middle class [2]. Like Bevin, he came from a working class background, albeit of a more prosperous kind, and he shared Bevin's contempt for the middle class intellectuals who he believed attributed to the union movement a militant attitude 'which most of its members did not possess' [3].

1. Information supplied by Lord Citrine.
2. See his speech to the 1933 Trades Union Congress. 1933 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 318-325.
3. Citrine, op. cit., pp. 300-301.

However, he was more interested than Bevin in the question of attracting the middle class vote, which he believed vital if Labour were to achieve a parliamentary majority. This was to lead him to be extremely sensitive to any kind of policy which he thought likely to lose middle class votes [1].

Not all in the union movement shared Bevin and Citrine's reactions to 1931. Nevertheless, there was a tendency among the union leadership not to react strongly to the events of 1931 in ideological terms, and certainly not swing to the left. Union conferences after 1931 also showed little inclination to the left on the whole, as did union delegations at Labour Conferences. Indeed, at all levels within the union movement in the 1930s, especially in the early 1930s, there was a preoccupation with union, or union-related, issues - such as unemployment benefits - rather than with wider political issues [2].

1. Information supplied by Lord Citrine.

2. It is interesting to note that the events of 1931 were to all intents and purposes ignored at the South Wales Miners' Federation's lodge and Executive Council meetings, and at annual and special conferences, though the Council could find time to debate whether coal owners should be pressed to allow workmen to leave earlier on Saturdays so that they could see rugby games. Executive Council Minutes, 13 October 1931. This pre-occupation with union affairs was confirmed by information supplied by many activists of the time who attended the South Wales Miners' Library seminars, 1974.

However, this is not to say that there was a uniform pattern of union voting at Labour Conferences or that there were not many with left wing views in the unions, or none who related issues such as unemployment benefits to wider political issues [1].

This feeling of many of the leading members of the party outside the P.L.P., especially the union leadership, not to see 1931 as an important ideological turning point did not mean that 'the experience of 1931 did not cause any major transformations' [2]. Many came to believe that the general vagueness of party policy left much to be desired, a feeling reflected in the decision of the N.E.C. in December to appoint a Policy Sub Committee [3]. Out of this committee emerged a series of plans concerning the policy of a future Labour government.

1. Union opinion and voting, at union and Labour Conferences, is dealt with in passim in the following pages of this thesis.

2. R. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, (1961), p. 193.

3. N.E.C. Minutes, 16 December 1931.

'Planning' was now the keyword. The concept of planning was not a new one. It may be found in the 1918 Labour programme, Labour and the New Social Order. And many in the party had become interested in the idea after the inauguration of the first Soviet five year plan in 1928; indeed, the Russian revelation was probably a greater influence on British politics than the Russian revolution. However, it was only after 1931 that planning began to attract widespread attention in the Labour Party.

Nevertheless, there was far from unanimity about what planning meant. The Policy Sub Committee's planning gave little thought to the question of the nature of the socialist ideal, or to how the transition from a capitalist to a socialist society would take place. To the extent that it considered these problems its plans, such as that for the institution of a National Investment Board 'with the object of preventing waste and mis-direction in the use of long-term capital' [1], appeared, in the words of the delegate from the Hemel Hempstead D.L.P. at the 1933 Conference, concerned with making the 'industrial world safe for the capitalist investor instead of making the world safe for labour' [2]. The National

1. 1932 L.P.C.R., p. 182.
2. 1933 L.P.C.R., p. 158.

Investment Board was put forward not so much as part of the mechanism of a socialist economy, as a means of channeling funds into the depressed areas within an essentially capitalist framework.

The criticism of the National Investment Board made by the Hemel Hempstead delegate was far from the only attack which the Policy Sub Committee's plans received. At the 1932 Conference there was a considerable amount of adverse comment. Indeed, the reports on the nationalisation of the electricity and transport industries, introduced by Morrison, were withdrawn because the absence of provisions for trade union nomination to the boards had been attacked, especially by one of the T.G.W.U. delegates [1], clearly with the backing of Bevin, who had no love for Morrison [2]. Moreover, an amendment to the report on banking which committed the party to nationalise the joint stock banks was carried by 1,141,000 votes to 984,000 [3].

However, these results should not be seen as reflecting some form of 'left wing revivalism' [4], or 'socialist fundamentalism' [5], within the party as a whole. In the

1. 1932 L.P.C.R., pp. 214-216.
2. Bullock, op. cit., p. 572.
3. 1932 L.P.C.R., pp. 194 and 201.
4. R. Barker, Education and Politics, (1972), p. 66.
5. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 183.

first instance withdrawal resulted mainly from the demands of one major union, and what was sought was hardly workers' control. And the vote on the joint stock banks reflected the currency of the bankers' ramp interpretation of the events of 1931 as much as any militancy on the part of delegates; indeed, at this time many whose views can only be described as moderate supported the nationalisation of the joint stock banks [1]. Nor should too much be read into the acceptance without a vote of two resolutions, one stating that 'the main objective of the Labour Party is the establishment of Socialism' [2], and the other calling on a future Labour government to 'stand or fall in the House of Commons on the principles in which it has faith' [3]. These were the kind of vague, rhetorical statements which Labour Conferences had regularly tended to indulge in, although the latter clearly reflected a desire for no more minority governments.

1. For example, Arthur Hayday stated that control of the banks was 'the prime lesson of recent events' in his presidential speech to the 1931 Trades Union Congress. 1931 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 66-67.

2. 1932 L.P.C.R., p. 202.

3. Ibid., p. 204.

The decision which the N.E.C. took in May 1933 rejecting suggestions that the party should change its name to 'Socialist', or 'Labour and Socialist', reflects more than just the traditionalism and sense of the past of the Labour Party. It also reflects, on the one hand, the desire of some to commit the party to a more left wing stance, a desire strengthened by the events of 1931, and, on the other hand, the essential continuity after 1931 of the attitudes and ideas of most of the leadership, especially the industrial leadership. Indeed, the regained influence in the party of the union leadership represented a development that in the short run was at least as important as the clarification of policy and ordering of priorities which began in earnest after 1931.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE IMPACT OF FASCISM.

It is against this background of the events of 1931 that the effects on the Labour Party of Adolf Hitler's accession to power in Germany in January 1933 must be seen.

It might be thought that Hitler's appointment as chancellor, and his subsequent destruction of parliamentary democracy and independent labour organisations, would have served to unite the different ideologies and interests in the Labour Party. However, other than an intense hatred of fascism, in both its German and Italian varieties, which extended throughout the party, this was not to be the case. Indeed, increasingly until the British declaration of war on Germany in September 1939 the divisions within the Labour Party were to stem from the differing reactions to, and implications of, the rise of fascism, especially in its German form.

To some extent these divisions stemmed from the various interpretations of the rise of fascism in Germany which were held by members of the Labour Party. Hitler's establishment of a dictatorship during the spring of 1933 prompted widespread discussion of the reasons for the triumph of fascism in the country which had previously boasted the oldest social democratic party in the world. The resulting analyses revealed

important differences of interpretation, differences which tended to reinforce the divisions which already existed in the party.

The main problem was to come from the differences in the official line and that held by many on the left, especially in the Socialist League. The official interpretation recognised a connection between fascism in Germany and Italy and German and Italian capitalists, but there was no firm equation between the two [1]. In this left analysis, however, the relationship was paramount. As J.T. Murphy, a member of the Socialist League National Council, and up until 1932 a leading member of the C.P.G.B., wrote 'Fascism is not an alternative to Capitalism', but 'Capitalism in its most desperate, violent form', the 'product of the crisis of Capitalism' [2]. According to this Marxist-inspired interpretation, fascism and war were synonomous with capitalism in crisis.

Another important difference existed over the reasons for the support which Hitler derived from the middle class. Although the official line and this left analysis shared an essentially economic interpretation in seeing the hyper-inflation of 1922-1923 and the onset of depression as the major factors [3], both added important glosses.

1. For example, see Fascism, (N.C.L. pamphlet, 1934), p. 9.
2. J.T. Murphy, Fascism, (Socialist League pamphlet, 1934), p.1.
3. For example, see the T.U.C. report, prepared by Citrine, 'Dictatorship and the Trade Union Movement', 1933 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 426 and 431.

The official line argued that extremism and criticism of parliamentary institutions had helped pave the way for fascism because it had frightened the middle class and at the same time helped undermine its faith in parliamentary democracy [1]. This left line argued that the Social Democratic Party's pursuit of the 'lesser evil' tactic of accepting non-socialist governments had increased Nazi support as the social democrats had become the bulwark of the system under which the middle class had been ruined; moreover, the social democrats' 'quietism' was seen as contrasting unfavourably with fascism's dynamism [2].

This left attitude to the social democrats played an important part in its interpretation of the reason for the division of the working class movement in Germany in the period immediately before Hitler's accession to power. Both it and the official party

1. Ibid., esp. p. 431.

2. For example, see the 'Socialist League Notes', New Clarion, 23 September 1933.

line accepted that fascism in Germany had achieved success not through some necessary process, so much as through the division between the social democrats and the German Communist Party, which with 200,000 claimed members at the end of 1932 and 16.3 per cent of the poll in the November 1932 general election had been the most important communist party in western Europe [1]. But whereas on this left view the reasons for the division were seen as stemming at least in part from the social democrats' position [2], the official line saw the division as resulting entirely from the line which the communist party took prior to Hitler's accession to power [3].

1. J. Degras, The Communist International, 1919-1943, Vol. 3, (1965), pp. 248 and 388.

2. For example, see J. Brown, 'Fascism's Rising Tide', Monthly Journal, July, 1933.

3. 'Dictatorships and the Trade Union Movement', 1933 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 425-426.

The German communists' policy had certainly been an erratic one. In December 1921 the Executive Committee of the Comintern had adopted a united front from above policy, involving cooperation with social democratic parties, but at the Comintern's fifth Congress, which met in Moscow during June-July 1924, this policy had been dropped in favour of the united front from below, involving cooperation only at the grass roots level. There followed a period in which the Comintern adopted an increasingly isolationist stance, culminating in the sixth Congress, which met in Moscow during July-September 1928. This Congress adopted an ultra-isolationist position, which not only predicted the imminent collapse of capitalism and the growth of fascism, but which, in the words of a statement issued by the Executive Committee in April 1931, also branded social democracy as 'the most active factor and pace-maker in the development of the capitalist state towards fascism'[1]. It was this policy which led to increasing German communist attacks on the social democrats in the years after 1928.

In Britain the Comintern's 'third period' led to attacks not only on the Labour Party and trade union leadership, but also on lower officials. The result

1. Degras, op. cit., p. 159.

was that the C.P.G.B. quickly became totally isolated. Although the events of 1931 led to an influx of new members, electoral support was minimal - the C.P.G.B. candidates in the 1931 general election receiving the grand total of 74,824 votes (0.3 per cent) [1]. As a result, during the winter of 1931-1932 the C.P.G.B adopted a more conciliatory policy at the lower levels [2].

Attacks on the Labour Party and trade union leadership, however, continued. Inan article entitled 'The Seven "Left" Socialist Parties and their Manifesto', which appeared in the Daily Worker on 11 February 1933, Harry Pollitt, the general secretary of the C.P.G.B., stated

> We Communists are for the United Front - a united front with the workers of all views, in the factories, the trade unions, the Labour Party, the I.L.P. and on the streets. But not a united front from the top, with those leaders who have so cruelly deceived the masses.

But the C.P.G.B.'s line was soon to change for on 5 March 1933 the Executive Committee of the Comintern issued a manifesto on working class unity which marked a change of line that within just over two years was to bring the C.P.G.B. to apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. The Comintern manifesto called for working class

1. This was an average of 2,878 votes per seat contested.
2. Noted in J.R. Campbell's speech to the seventh Comintern Congress. 1935 Inprecorr, pp. 1052-1053.

unity on a programme of mass action at the national level. In return, it sanctioned the national parties to 'refrain from attacks on social-democratic organisations' [1].

This Comintern manifesto followed closely on similar appeals from the two socialist organisations. During the weekend of 4-5 February 1933 a conference of seven 'Left' socialist parties, including the I.L.P., was held in Paris. At this meeting it was decided to 'initiate a campaign to secure working class unity on a revolutionary Socialist basis'. A telegram was sent to the Labour and Socialist International, to which the Labour Party was affiliated, and the Comintern calling for a conference to establish a 'plan of action to assist the workers who are now oppressed by Fascism in its various forms and to break the power of the counter-revolution everywhere'. On 18 February the Bureau of the L.S.I. met in Paris and issued its own appeal, but its manifesto, reflecting the more moderate nature of its membership, was a call for unity to defend the concessions which the working class had already won, and for resistance to war, rather than to pave the way for socialism. It was also, like

1. Degras, op. cit., pp. 253-254.

the seven 'Left' socialist parties' appeal, a call for unity at the international rather than national level [1]. The message, however, was the same - unity of all sections of the international working class movement in the face of fascism.

Revealing a capacity for intellectual gymnastics, the leadership of the C.P.G.B. welcomed the Comintern manifesto. Pollitt, a man very much associated with the C.P.G.B.'s acceptance of the 'third period' in the face of criticism from men such as Murphy [2], showed no unwillingness to follow the new line [3]. On 10 March 1933 he wrote, on behalf of the Central Committee, to the Labour Party N.E.C., T.U.C. General Council, the Co-operative Party executive, and the I.L.P. National

1. J. Braunthal, History of the International, 1914-1943, (1967), pp. 391-399.

2. H. Pelling, The British Communist Party: a Historical Profile, (1958), esp. pp. 49-53.

3. It is important to remember that there are no communist party records, or communist leaders' papers, for this period which are available for research. The sincerity of communist statements and opinion within the party is dealt with in passim on subsequent pages.

Administrative Council suggesting a conference to discuss the formation of a united front for 'immediate joint action in support of the German and Austrian working-class fight against Fascism', and 'the fight against the National Government and the employers' offensive in Britain'. The letter concluded by calling for demonstrations in London and every provincial city [1]. Similar approaches were made at the local level [2].

On 5 March the I.L.P. National Administrative Council had decided to issue a virtually identical letter [3], and as a result the I.L.P. accepted the C.P.G.B.'s invitation, the first meeting taking place on 24 March. The response from the Labour organisations, however, was one of blank refusal. The day after the Comintern issued its manifesto the General Affairs Committee of the L.S.I. met and issued a further statement on the united front, advising affiliated parties to refrain from acting until it had had time to consider the appeal. This considered judgement

1. For a more detailed account of the C.P.G.B.'s proposals see 'Documents on the United Front', Labour Monthly, July 1933.

2. For example, on 14 March the London District Committee of the C.P.G.B. wrote to the London Labour Party proposing joint action. London Labour Party Executive Agenda, 6 April 1933.

3. National Advisory Committee Minutes, 4-5 March 1933. Also see Dowse, op.cit., pp. 186-190.

was reached during a meeting held on 18-19 March, when it was decided to advise against national discussions because they could too easily be turned into manouevres by the communists [1].

This decision was in no way unwelcome to the Labour leadership. From the emergence of the C.P.G.B. during June-August 1920, its relations with the Labour Party had been poor. The C.P.G.B.'s revolutionary ideas, and primarily extra-parliamentary interests were not calculated to appeal to the moderate socialism and constitutionalism of the Labour Party. Nor were comments of some of its leading members, such as Tommy Jackson, a member of the Central Committee, who in March 1922 had stated that he would take the Labour Party by the hand 'as a preliminary to taking ....(it)....by the throat' [2]. Nevertheless, up until the 1924 Labour Conference communists were able to become members of the Labour Party, and communists even stood as Labour candidates - one such candidate actually being elected in the 1922 general election.

This experience, however, proved a daunting one, and the differing ideologies, together with the communists' conspiratorial techniques and factious tendencies, led the 1924 Labour Conference to make membership of the

1. Braunthal, op. cit., pp. 391-399.
2. L.J. MacFarlane, The British Communist Party, (1966), p. 98.

C.P.G.B. incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. At the 1925 Conference it was also decided to ban communists from even attending Conference. Although these decisions aroused considerable opposition - the decision to exclude communists from membership only being carried by 1,804,000 votes to 1,540,000 [1] - it was largely silenced by the position which the C.P.G.B. adopted after the summer of 1924, and especially after 1928 [2].

At the meeting of the N.J.C. which took place on 21 March 1933 Bevin and Citrine spoke strongly against any form of cooperation with communists, a line unanimously accepted by the other members of the committee [3]. At the meeting of the N.E.C. which took place the following day it was similarly agreed unanimously to reject the C.P.G.B. and I L P approaches [4].

1. 1924 L.P.C.R., p. 131.

2. For a more detailed account of C.P.G.B. - Labour relations in the 1920s see MacFarlane, op. cit., passim, esp. pp. 94-109.

3. Information supplied by Lord Citrine.

4. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1933.

Two days later the N.J.C. issued a statement on the united front entitled Democracy versus Dictatorship. In this statement the N.J.C. confirmed Labour's faith in 'Democracy and Socialism' and attacked dictatorship on the left as much as that on the right. Democracy versus Dictatorship made it clear that the lesson which the N.J.C. had drawn from the division of the working class movement in Germany was not that drawn by the Comintern's 5 March manifesto. The nature of the N.J.C.'s united front was well described in the editorial of the A.E.U.'s Monthly Journal in September 1934 when it stated that

> The real 'United Front' is that formed by the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party, the Co-operative Movement and the place for sincere advocates of 'unity' is inside these movements.

Hitler's accession to power had in no way lessened the resolve of the Labour leadership to resist any association with the C.P.G.B.

Democracy versus Dictatorship was accompanied by what the 'Editorial Notes' of the Labour Magazine of June 1933 described as a 'clean-up of the Labour Movement'. This 'clean-up' amounted to an attack on communist front organisations, such as the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism. The front tactic, however, was not a new one, indeed, the most important front organisation, the National Unemployed

Workers' Movement, dated from April 1921. The Labour Party's concern about the growth of front organisations was further revealed when in September 1933 it issued a long pamphlet entitled The Communist Solar System [1]. In this pamphlet it was claimed that the goal of these front organisations was to 'create a whole solar system of organisations and smaller committees around the Communist Party .... smaller organisations working actually under the influence' of the communists [2].

There is no doubt that these front organisations were intended to promote communist objectives by attracting support from those who would not have considered joining the C.P.G.B., or cooperating with it. But to treat them as this, and nothing more, was to miss an important function which they fulfilled.

1. This pamphlet was written by William Gillies of the party's International Department. Some idea of its tone can be gauged from the fact that on 19 August 1933 Morrison, one of the firmest anti-communists in the party, wrote to Gillies suggesting that the tone was too hostile! Middleton Papers, box 11 (General).

2. P. 3.

The main reason why Labour Party members were willing to cooperate with groups such as the National Unemployed Workers' Movement was because they fulfilled a need, in this case the organisation of the unemployed, which the Labour Party and trade unions were not fully catering for [1]. As Ellen Wilkinson, one of the most prominent members of the Labour left and, like Murphy, another former communist, noted, The Communist Solar System

> is a magnificent advertisement of the energy and drive of the Communist Party in this country. Why have these organisations flourished like this? Because our own Executive has not acted quickly enough, and has not acted in such a way as to appeal to the imagination [2].

It was not only Labour's attitude to front organisations which aroused criticism within the party. The party's response to the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P.'s united front proposals was another source of discontent. The 'Comments' column in the New Statesman on 1 April 1933 spoke for many in the party when it claimed that

1. The T.U.C. had attempted to promote Unemployed Associations in 1927, but met with only a half-hearted response at best from its members. However, during 1932 the General Council decided to set up Unemployed Associations as a counter to the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. 1932 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 121-123.

2. 1933 L.P.C.R., p. 221.

Democracy versus Dictatorship 'betrayed no realisation that the issue is the destruction of the working-class movement throughout Europe'. Even the N.E.C. was forced to concede that the statement had aroused 'a certain amount of criticism from sections of the party' [1].

Support came in particular from the Socialist League [2], many constituency parties [3], and one major union, N.U.D.A.W., of which Ellen Wilkinson was an active member, voted for the united front at its 1933 Annual Delegate Meeting [4]. However, the Socialist League decided against the united front at its Conference in June [5], far from all constituency parties supported unity [6], and no other major union in 1933 followed N.U.D.A.W. in supporting unity. Thus it is not surprising that at the 1933 Labour Conference a motion in favour of the united front was defeated [7].

1. Ibid., p. 17.
2. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1933.
3. G.D.H. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914, (1948), p. 286.
4. New Dawn, 20 May 1933.
5. Jupp, op. cit., p. 174.
6. See below, pp. 96-97.
7. No card vote was taken, the record simply stating that the proposal was 'lost'. 1933 L.P.C.R., p. 221.

Mainly as a result of the strong sense of loyalty to Conference decisions which exists in the Labour Party, especially in union circles where loyalty to the organisation tends to be stressed [1], there was a dying down of united front agitation after the Conference. However, the sense of loyalty was not the only factor in this. The experience of the united front formed by the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. also played its part. The negotiations between the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. had led to a formal agreement in May 1933, but a most troubled relationship ensued. Many in the I.L.P., not without reason, quickly came to believe that the C.P.G.B. was more interested in taking over the I.L.P.'s membership than in promoting a united front. This led the 1934 I.L.P. Conference to reject the united front, although it accepted the need for unity on specific issues [2].

1. The A.E.U. Monthly Journal in February 1937 was to put this very well when it stated how much successful work depended on 'order, discipline and the observance of rules'.

2. Dowse, op. cit., pp. 186-193.

It was to be 1936 before another united front agreement was to be reached in Britain, but in the meantime there was some unity at the local level on specific issues, although Labour members and organisations engaging in such action faced the danger of being disaffiliated, reorganised or expelled [1]. Much of this activity centred on two areas - London and South Wales.

To some extent this activity in London reflected the fact that the metropolis was a natural terminal point for large demonstrations such as the N.U.W.M.'s hunger marches, especially as the C.P.G.B. saw these marches as a means of promoting unity far beyond the ranks of the unemployed [2]. The main factor, however, was that the C.P.G.B. was particularly strong in London; during the 1930s up to 40 per cent of the C.P.G.B.'s membership lived in London [3]. Moreover, many of the London

1. Among the D.L.P.s threatened with disaffiliation for associating with communists in 1933 were Finchley, Greenwich and Wood Green. London Labour Party Executive Agenda, 4 April 1933, and N.E.C. Minutes, 24 February 1934.

2. For a more detailed account of the C.P.G.B.'s attitude to the hunger marches see Into Action! The Communist Party's Proposals to the National Unity Congress, (C.P.G.B. pamphlet, 1934).

3. This was the figure given for 1939 in the Report of the Central Committee of the C.P.G.B. to the 16th Party Congress, (1939), p. 13.

communists had never been ultra-sectarian, seeking cooperation with non-communist groups even during the Comintern's 'third period'[1].

After 1932 cooperation in London frequently concerned activities against the British Union of Fascists, led by Sir Oswald Mosley, who had been appointed chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster by MacDonald in 1929, but who had broken with the party in the following year when it had refused to accept his plans to cure unemployment[2]. When the British Union of Fascists organised a rally to take place at Olympia in London in June 1934 it was the London District Committee of the C.P.G.B. which organised a mass counter demonstration. When the British Union of Fascists followed this rally by an even larger one in Hyde Park in September 1934, it was the C.P.G.B. which formed a Committee for Anti-Fascist Activities to organise the counter demonstration.

This committee was headed by John Strachey. Strachey had been Mosley's parliamentary private secretary and had at first supported his break with the party.

1. R. Groves, The Balham Group, (1974), p. 21.
2. Sir O. Mosley, My Life, (1968), pp. 229-262, and R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, (1975), pp. 179-245.

However, after 1931 he was attracted to Marxism and by 1934 he enjoyed considerable prestige as a left wing theoretician. His book, The Coming Struggle for Power, published in November 1932, has been claimed to have been the most influential Marxist text published in Britain in the 1930s [1]. This prestige almost certainly played its part in attracting support for the Committee for Anti-Fascist Activities, and although the Labour Party, T.U.C., and Co-operative Party refused to support the demonstration [2], approaching 100,000 people are said to have gathered in Hyde Park on 9 September, a number which dwarfed Mosley's supporters [3].

An even more marked pattern of united action emerged in South Wales, an area with a long tradition of militant action. At first this activity centred around company unionism, the chronic unemployment and the means test, which had been introduced by the National Government in 1931. One especially large series

1. H. Thomas, John Strachey, (1973), pp. 129-135 deals with the impact of this book. It also provides a detailed account of Strachey's life and views.

2. 1934 L.P.C.R., p. 18.

3. For an account of this demonstration, and a general description of what it was like to be a communist activist in London in the 1930s see P. Piratin, Our Flag Stays Red, (1948), passim.

of demonstrations organised by the N.U.W.M., took place in January and February 1935 over a government plan to introduce a change in the means test which would have meant for some a cut in the already pitifully low rate of benefit [1]. 300,000 people marched in South Wales on 3 February alone [2], and faced with this kind of opposition, repeated on a lesser scale elsewhere, the government backed down and announced a two year standstill [3]. However, as the employment situation in South Wales began to ease slightly and the menace of fascism grew ever greater, united activity increasingly became concerned with the struggle against fascism, both at home and abroad [4].

1. On 17 December 1934 there were 2,021,099 registered as unemployed (15.9 per cent), plus 24,887 under sixteen. Of these, 727,175 (35.5 per cent) were receiving some form of means-tested benefit. Ministry of Labour, Report for the Year 1934, (1935), p. 65.

2. Times, 4 February 1935.

3. N. Branson and M. Heinemann, Britain in the Nineteen Thirties, (1971), pp. 32-36.

4. H. Francis, 'Welsh Miners and the Spanish Civil War', Journal of Contemporary History, 3/1970, pp. 177-178.

It might be thought that these demonstrations and especially the way in which the January-February 1935 ones over the Means Test appeared to have influenced the government, would have led to a growth in support for the united front in the Labour Party. In fact, they were to have little effect on attitudes until after the 1935 general election, for in early 1935 many in the Labour Party, which had been achieving massive swings in by-elections [1], believed that the party was in a position to win the next election [2], a belief which naturally tended to undermine the case for a united front.

The government was losing votes. And Labour was gaining votes, especially from supporters of the Liberal Party, which had broken with the government in November 1933 mainly because of the government's adoption of protection, but also because of its lukewarm attitude to the Disarmament Conference [3]. However, the

1. Between October 1934 and March 1935 the average swing to Labour in by-elections in which it came either first or second in both 1931 and 1934-1935 was 22.3 per cent.

2. For example, Sir C. Trevelyan, 'Political Parties and the Next Election: the Outlook of the Socialist League'. Political Quarterly, 2/1935, p. 164.

3. R. Douglas, The History of the Liberal Party, 1895-1970, (1971), pp. 216-229.

support which Labour candidates attracted in Liberal circles because of the party's long standing commitment to disarmament [1] and collective security through the League of Nations, was to be undone during 1935 by the death of disarmament as an immediate issue, by a serious dispute in the party over foreign policy, and especially by developments in the government's own policy [2].

Between 1931 and 1933 the Labour Party showed scant desire to discuss foreign policy at a time when issues such as unemployment appeared more pressing. During 1934 interest grew, especially on the part of Bevin and Citrine. These two had been worried by the destruction of the union movement and parliamentary democracy in Germany. Moreover, untroubled by

1. Foreign policy in general seems to have been important in this context in Labour's famous victory in the October 1933 East Fulham by-election. M. Ceadel, 'Interpreting East Fulham' in C. Cook and J. Ramsden (eds.), By-Elections in British Politics, (1973), esp. p. 132.

2. The study of public opinion in the present, yet alone in the past, is a problematical field. However, it is an important one in the context of this thesis and an attempt will be made to discuss public opinion in subsequent pages. The task becomes somewhat easier in 1938 and 1939 as a result of the activities of Mass Observation and the British Institute of Public Opinion, though this is not to deny that polling and 'observation' pose problems.

strongly held views about Versailles or foreign policy beforehand, they faced the problem posed by the rise of Nazi Germany with a more open mind, and together they were to play a major part in the development of Labour policy in this field [1]. Nevertheless, it was to be 1935 before a large section of the party began to think seriously about foreign policy, especially the implications for the party of its support for collective security through the League of Nations [2].

The Labour Party's commitment to collective security through the League of Nations had evolved slowly. Indeed, the party's initial response to the organisation had been one of great disappointment, and even outright hostility, seeing it very much as part of the widely-disliked Treaty of Versailles [3]. By the end of the 1920s, however, men such as Henderson, and groups such as the League of Nations Union, which included members of all the leading parties, had succeeded in converting the party to acceptance of

1. Bullock, op. cit., pp. 550-551.
2. For an account of Labour's foreign and defence policies at this time see J.F. Naylor, Labour's International Policy, (1969), passim. However, N.B. that although sound on these policies, the book does not pay sufficient attention to the wider framework in which they were made, in particular the attitude of the union leadership. See below, esp. p. 286.
3. H.R. Winkler, 'The Emergence of a Labour Foreign Policy in Great Britain, 1918-1929', Journal of Modern History, 3/1956, p. 248.

the League of Nations as fulfilling, albeit imperfectly, the party's internationalist ideals and as the most effective means of rectifying the grievances which might lead to war. By 1935 this conciliatory conception had broadened to include acceptance of the possibility that British force might be necessary to help the League of Nations in resisting an aggressor.

However, this policy was not accepted by all in the party. A group of pacifists, of whom the most prominent was Lansbury, was opposed to any stand against aggression, believing war to be the greatest of evils. Another notable source of opposition was the Socialist League, which although accepting the importance of the League of Nations in the foreign policy of a Labour government [1], was unwilling to support collective security through it as long as the National Government remained in office. The identification of fascism with capitalism in crisis, meant that, when seen together with the events of 1931, the government was viewed as a crypto-fascist force, which could be relied upon to use collective security

1. For example, see the 1934 Socialist League programme, Forward to Socialism, p. 13. N.B. that the Socialist League was not united over sanctions. See below, pp. 130-131.

only for imperialist and pro-fascist purposes [1].

The extent of this distrust of the government is reflected in Cripps's speech to the 1935 Socialist League Conference. In this speech he called for mass resistance in the event of a declaration of war by the government [2]. The idea of mass resistance had been adopted without opposition at the 1933 Labour Conference [3]; it enjoyed especially strong support on the left, Konni Zilliacus, a member of the League of Nations Secretariat and a man firmly on the left, writing to Gillies on 13 October 1933 noted that 'the one thing the Left Wing people are keen about is the idea of a general strike against war' [4]. However, as the N.E.C. pointed out in its statement War and Peace to the 1934 Conference, it had little relevance to a world in which the working class in Germany and Italy was in no position to strike [5]. Even so, in 1935 the tactic still had many supporters on the left.

1. For example, see Sir S. Cripps, 'National' Fascism in Britain, (Socialist League pamphlet, 1935). Cripps called the government 'Country Gentleman's Fascism'. P.8.
2. Fight Now Against War, (Socialist League pamphlet, 1935), pp. 3-4.
3. 1933 L.P.C.R., p. 188.
4. Cripps Papers, file 515.
5. 1934 L.P.C.R., pp. 242-246.

Cripps's call for mass resistance was occasioned by the deteriorating relations between Abyssinia and Italy which finally led to the outbreak of war between the two in October 1935. The Abyssinian crisis revealed the divisions in the Labour Party over foreign policy, for the N.E.C., P.L.P., and the T.U.C. came out in favour of the League of Nations imposing sanctions on the aggressor. However, some on the left, especially in the Socialist League, opposed sanctions on the ground that they risked what would be a purely imperialist war. And the pacifists opposed sanctions simply because they risked war.

An interesting comment on this division is contained in a letter Kingsley Martin, the editor of the New Statesman and himself a pacifist [1], wrote to Zilliacus during the 1935 Trades Union Congress. He noted that 'Stevenson, the editor of the Daily Herald, sat next to me and passed me a note at the beginning of the speeches to the effect that this issue would split the movement at Brighton, that the proportion would be 85 to 15 per cent, but that the active and energetic people would be in the 15 per cent, which was odd coming from so orthodox and loyal a right-winger'. Martin ominously concluded in terms which were

1. For an account of Martin's views during the 1930s see C.H. Rolph, Kingsley Martin: the Life, Letters and Diaries of Kingsley Martin, (1973), pp. 208-252.

increasingly to be heard as the decade progressed, 'this is the end of the Labour Party as we know it' [1].

However, this drastic conclusion proved wrong, as did the estimate of the minority vote. Possibly it was an accurate expression of feeling in the movement as a whole, but all that is certain is that at the 1935 Labour Conference all the big unions cast their block votes in the same fashion and the majority in favour of sanctions was 95.3 per cent, the opponents of sanctions being defeated by 2,168,000 votes to 102,000 [2].

The 1935 Conference also led to the resignation of Lansbury as leader of the party, an office which he had held since Henderson's commitments at the Disarmament Conference had forced him to resign the leadership in October 1932. Lansbury's pacifism had made his position untenable, a fact brought home at the 1935 Conference in a brutal speech by Bevin, who accused Lansbury of taking his conscience 'round from body to body asking to be told what' he 'ought to do with it' [3].

1. N.d. Martin Papers.
2. 1935 L.P.C.R., p. 193.
3. Ibid., p. 193.

Lansbury's successor was Attlee. There was in effect no other possible choice. Cripps's views clearly made him unacceptable to many in the party, especially as his resignation in September 1935 from the N.E.C., to which he was elected in 1934 [1], highlighted not only his opposition to sanctions but also his essential loyalty to principle rather than organisation. Moreover, Cripps was unwilling to stand as he was preoccupied with his work for the Socialist League and his legal practice. Attlee, although he had moved to the left after 1931, had followed a much more careful path, and, whilst inspiring no one, also had no real enemies. Moreover, Attlee's selection was seen as a temporary affair until the forthcoming general election returned men such as Morrison and Dalton to the House of Commons [2].

1. Cripps came bottom of those elected in the constituency party section with 1,187,000 votes. 1934, L.P.C.R., p. 190.

2. For a more detailed account of Attlee's emergence as leader see W. Golant, 'The Emergence of C.R. Attlee as Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1935', Historical Journal, 2/1970.

The election, in fact, was to take place in November 1935, and the Labour Party's attitude to sanctions played its part in the result [1]. In his letter to Zilliacus, Martin shrewdly predicted the dangers of the drift of Labour policy when he wrote

> the main body of the Party is falling into the trap. It will support the Government and find itself overwhelmed electorally for years to come and discredited too with all the virile part of the movement as soon as the rank and file learn that Abyssinia is to be carved up anyway.

Martin's analysis proved all too true. At a meeting in Paris between the French premier, Pierre Laval, and the British foreign secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, in December 1935, an agreement was reached conceding a large part of Abyssinia to Italy. The leaking of this agreement caused a considerable outcry, and it was quickly repudiated by Stanley Baldwin, who had succeeded MacDonald as prime minister in June 1935, and Hoare was replaced by Anthony Eden. However, its publication proved embarrassing for the government as in the 1935 general election it had portrayed itself, undoubtedly influenced by the popularity of collective security revealed in the Peace Ballot, the results of which were declared in June 1935, as the defender of the League of Nations and the rule of law [2].

1. For an account of the election see J.C. Robertson, 'The British General Election of 1935', Journal of Contemporary History, 1/1974.
2. K. Middlemas & J. Barnes, Baldwin, (1969), pp. 826-869.

The result of this development seems to have been that many Liberals voted for the National Government when no Liberal was standing [1], the government gaining 11,755,654 votes (53.3 per cent), a total which translated itself into 429 seats [2]. The Labour Party captured 8,325,491 votes (38.1 per cent), which yielded 154 seats. And the Liberals, who only twenty years before had held the reins of power, succeeded in polling only 1,443,093 votes (6.8 per cent), a total which produced 21 M.P.s [3] - and even this small group was immediately depleted by the defection of two of its number to the National Liberal group.

There were undoubtedly many in the Labour Party who rejoiced at this 'catastrophe' for the Liberals [4]. However, overall the result was a disappointment for Labour. Only shortly before it had seemed that the similarity between Labour's foreign policy and that of many Liberals would have led to larger gains for Labour. Moreover, it was not only over foreign policy that there were similarities.

1. Liberals contested only 161 constituencies in 1935.
2. This figure was made up of 386 Conservatives, 33 National Liberals, 8 National Labour and 2 National members.
3. This meant that the votes per seat were (votes per contested seat in brackets): National Government 27,402: Labour 54,061 (59,046): Liberals 68,718.
4. H.J. Laski, 'The General Election of 1935', Political Quarterly, 1/1936, p. 5.

There was a growing consensus in moderate Labour, Liberal and progressive Conservative circles in the early 1930s over domestic policy. This can be seen from the programme put forward in 1935 by the Next Five Years Group, a group which included members of all the major parties. The programme included the 'socialisation' of industries such as electricity and transport, and planning to secure a more prosperous life for all [1]. This consensus can also be seen in the reception which John Maynard Keynes's The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money gained after its publication in February 1936 [2]. Certainly Labour's domestic policy in 1935 could have been expected to appeal to such opinion. The Economist, no left wing journal, noted on 2 November 1935 that Labour's election manifesto reaffirmed 'The Labour Party's belief in "public ownership" ', but 'more as a matter of habit than as an election issue'.

1. The Next Five Years Group, The Next Five Years, an Essay in Political Agreement, (1935), passim. For the development of a 'middle' consensus over foreign and domestic policy see A. Marwick, 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political "Agreement" ', English Historical Review, 2/1964.

2. D. Winch, Economics and Policy, (1969), pp. 145-218 and 341-351.

Few young Labour M.P.s were returned in 1935 and the party in Parliament continued to be made up of a large number of ageing trade unionists [1]. However, all the leading figures who had sought election were returned and after the election a new vote for the leadership of the party took place. The three candidates were Attlee, Morrison and Arthur Greenwood, who had been minister of health in the 1929-1931 government. The first ballot took place on 26 November 1935 and Attlee received 58 votes, Morrison 44 and Greenwood 33 - Attlee gaining the support of most of the M.P.s who had been in the 1931-1935 Parliament [2], and many union M.P.s, who may have been turned against Morrison by Bevin. On the second ballot virtually all of Greenwood's votes went to Attlee, and he became leader by 88 votes to 48. Morrison, clearly disappointed, declined the deputy leadership, and it was thus upon Attlee and Greenwood that the task of leading the P.L.P. fell [3].

1. 51.3 per cent of those returned had union backing, although only 23.2 per cent of Labour candidates had been union sponsored.
2. Autobiographical notes. Attlee Papers, 1/14, p. 3.
3. For a more detailed account of the election see Golant, 'The Emergence of C.R. Attlee as Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1935', and Donoughue and Jones, op. cit., pp. 233-243.

On the previous day the C.P.G.B., reflecting a new position which it had adopted during 1934-1935, had applied for affiliation to the Labour Party.

The Comintern's March 1933 manifesto had sanctioned the united front from above tactic. However, in April 1933 the Presidium of the Comintern passed a resolution approving the course of action taken by the German communists, and throughout 1933 the Comintern maintained an equivocal line on cooperation with social democrats [1]. Also, at the diplomatic level, relations between the Soviet Union and Germany at first remained fairly good. But gradually during 1934 a new attitude towards Germany emerged as it became clear that Hitler had succeeded in consolidating his power. In September 1934 the Soviet Union was admitted to the League of Nations, although only shortly before it had been the object of strong attack on the grounds that it was designed to maintain the capitalist status quo. And in May 1935 a treaty of mutual assistance was signed with France. These two events confirmed the drift of Soviet policy towards a rapprochement with the democracies in an attempt to seek an anti-fascist understanding [2].

1. Degras, op. cit., pp. 257-263.

2. A. Ulam, Expansion and Co-Existence, (1968), pp. 209-279.

This change of policy was confirmed at the much-postponed seventh Congress of the Comintern, which met in Moscow during July-August 1935. At this Congress a differentiation was made between capitalist nations. The fascist nations were described as aggressive, whereas the democracies were defensive. In the fascist countries capitalism was held to have reached its greatest crisis and the drive to war was therefore strongest. Support for the democracies against fascism could therefore be portrayed as part of the fight against capitalism in crisis [1].

The most important development at the seventh Congress, however, was the sanctioning of the popular front tactic. Proposing the new line Georgi Dimitrov, the chairman of the Comintern, called for 'the formation of a wide anti-fascist people's front on the basis of the proletarian united front' [2]. Communist parties were to retain their separate identity and long term revolutionary policy, but for the sake of the immediate struggle they were to cooperate loyally with all parties opposed to fascism. A relaxation of Comintern control over parties was also announced, partly to allow the individual parties to decide on the course best suited to their needs, and partly to allay criticisms that communist parties were subservient to Moscow.

1. Degras, op. cit., pp. 359-370.
2. G. Dimitrov, The Working Class against Fascism, (1935), p. 35.

The developments up until the seventh Congress had been mirrored in the C.P.G.B.'s policy and statements, although at the grass roots there seem to have been problems. In an article entitled 'Sectarianism that Must Be Stopped', which appeared in the Daily Worker on 20 April 1933, Pollitt criticised the members of the party who were reluctant to operate the new policy. At the meeting of the Presidium of the Executive Council of the Comintern held in October 1934, Pollitt reported that many British communists had only accepted the change of line embodied in the March 1933 Comintern manifesto reluctantly and had sighed with relief when the Labour Party had rejected the C.P.G.B.'s approach [1]. In his speech to the seventh Congress he similarly noted that 'There is still a lack of conviction amongst our Party members of the burning necessity of the united front' [2].

However, the adoption of the popular front line at the seventh Congress was initially misinterpreted by some of the leading members of the C.P.G.B. Pollitt, for example, even claimed that it represented a 'continuation and extension of our slogan "Class against Class" ' [3].

1. Degras, op. cit., p. 336.
2. H. Pollitt, Unity Against the National Government, (C.P.G.B. pamphlet, 1935), p. 16.
3. Ibid., p. 28.

It seems that Pollitt initially failed to understand the implications of the new tactic. At a special conference of the C.P.G.B. which met in October 1935, Rajani Palme Dutt, the leading C.P.G.B. theoretician and a man of Jesuit-like subtlety and powers of reasoning, attempted to explain the change. The magnitude of the change was revealed in his opening remarks when he argued that

> The important thing is not the question of (Marxist-Leninist) texts. The important thing is, what are the realities of the present world situation and what are we going to do about it ? [1].

The denial of the relevance of Marxist-Leninist texts was virtually heresy, and later Dutt and other C.P.G.B. theoreticians were to show no reluctance to cite Marx or Lenin in justification of the popular front [2]. That Dutt should have done so in October 1935 confirms that the change of line caught the C.P.G.B. somewhat by surprise.

1. Decisive Days Ahead, (C.P.G.B. pamphlet, 1935), p. 6.

2. For example, see J.R. Campbell, Soviet Policy and Its Critics, (1939), p. 323.

The decisions of the seventh Congress represented a particularly important departure for the electoral policy of the C.P.G.B. During late 1934 the Central Committee of the C.P.G.B. had decided that one of the reasons for the failure of the united front to make ground in the Labour Party was that it was not being applied to elections. In accordance with this belief the thirteenth Congress of the C.P.G.B. in February 1935 declared that its policy for the next general election was to secure the return of a 'strong group of Communist candidates' alongside 'the maximum number of Labour members pledged to united action for the elementary demands of the workers' [1].

After the seventh Congress of the Comintern this policy was no longer considered relevant to the needs of the hour. In the Daily Worker on 19 October 1935 it was announced that in the forthcoming general election all but two C.P.G.B. candidates - Pollitt and Willie Gallacher - would be withdrawn [2], and a new

1. H. Pollitt, Harry Pollitt Speaks, (C.P.G.B. pamphlet, 1935), p. 23.

2. Pollitt went on to receive 38.2 per cent of the poll in a straight fight with Labour in Rhondda East, and Gallacher won West Fife with 37.4 per cent against Labour and Conservative opposition, thus becoming the only C.P.G.B. candidate to be elected to Parliament in the 1930s.

approach was made to the Labour Party on the question of a programme of common action against the National Government. This offer was rejected by the N.E.C., however, at its meeting which took place on the afternoon that the offer was announced [1]. Nevertheless, during the election campaign communist leaders and the Daily Worker demonstrated an unprecedented unwillingness to attack the Labour leadership and policy.

On 25 November, that is eleven days after the election, Pollitt, on behalf of the Central Committee of the C.P.G.B., wrote to the N.E.C. applying for affiliation to the Labour Party. However, at the meeting of the N.E.C. in January 1936 this application was unanimously rejected [2]. This information was conveyed to Pollitt on 27 January in a letter from J.S. Middleton [3], who had succeeded Henderson as secretary of the Labour Party in November 1934 after ill health had forced Henderson to resign.

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 19 October 1935.
2. Ibid., 26 January 1936.
3. The correspondence may be found in the 1936 L.P.C.R., pp. 50-51.

Labour's case against affiliation was set out in detail when in July 1936 the N.C.L. issued a pamphlet entitled British Labour and Communism. This pamphlet reiterated Labour's faith in democratic institutions, institutions which it claimed the Comintern was seeking to destroy. The pamphlet claimed that the C.P.G.B. had received large sums of 'Moscow Gold' to further this work, and yet in spite of this and the most bitter attacks on the Labour leadership and policy, the C.P.G.B. had a mere 7,000 members. It was in this failure to attract support that the pamphlet found the reasons for this new tactic. The C.P.G.B. was applying for affiliation not because of a change of heart, or because it genuinely sought to strengthen the democratic forces threatened by fascism, but in an attempt to strengthen the cause of communism by capturing the Labour movement. This statement was approved with 'only a few dissentients' at the 1936 Trades Union Congress [1].

However, not all the members of the Labour Party accepted this continued proscription of cooperation with the communists. There had always remained a groundswell of support for cooperation even after the rejection of the united front at the 1933 Conference. Moreover, after

1. 1936 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 437. Previously in 1934 the T.U.C. had rejected a reference back on a General Council report on the united front by 'an overwhelming majority'. 1934 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 351.

the 1935 general election support for cooperation had grown even among those previously hostile.

One prominent convert was Cripps. Up until the end of 1935 Cripps had opposed association with communists. He had rejected overtures from Fenner Brockway, the secretary of the I.L.P., and Strachey in 1933 and 1934 [1]. And at the 1935 Socialist League Conference he had led the opposition to the united front [2]. However, the defeat of the Labour Party in the 1935 general election, a defeat which he saw as stemming in part from the 'strong undercurrent of reformism and liberalism (which) has been more and more decisively taking control of the movement' [3], led him to reconsider his position. He believed that association with communists would help revitalise the party. Moreover, he believed that the support which the communists gave many Labour candidates in 1935 had also shown that electorally the united front was not a handicap [4]. Nevertheless, although he accepted

1. Letters to Brockway, March 1933, and Strachey, October and November 1934. Cripps Papers, files 570 and 553.

2. Daily Worker, 11 June 1935.

3. Sir S. Cripps, 'Edinburgh and After', Controversy, November 1936.

4. Daily Worker, 14 February 1936, and information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

communist affiliation and the united front, he was not willing to accept the popular front, a line he maintained even after the electoral victories of the French and Spanish popular fronts in 1936. He believed that the popular front was doomed to failure for unity of 'all the progressive forces cannot accomplish the effective economic change that is essential if democracy is to survive' [1]. Cripps continued to hold that only a socialist government could stem the tide of fascism and war.

Two other supporters of cooperation with communists at this time were Aneurin Bevan and G.R. Strauss, the M.P.s for Ebbw Vale and Lambeth North respectively, and shortly to emerge as Cripps's closest political collaborators. However, their positions differed from each other's and from Cripps's.

On many issues Bevan's views were similar to Cripps's, although he had never been an active member of the Socialist League [2]. One issue on which he differed with Cripps was his willingness to cooperate with communists, especially in the N.U.W.M., even before 1933, and after Hitler's accession to power he became even more willing to cooperate [3]. At the 1934 Labour Conference it was

1. Sir S. Cripps, 'The Political Reactions of Rearmament' in B. Russell et. al., Dare We Look Ahead?, (1938), p.120.
2. M. Foot, Aneurin Bevan, Vol. 1, (1962), pp.152-153 & 210.
3. Ibid., pp. 158-159 and 168.

Bevan who moved a reference back on the N.E.C.'s report on 'listed organisations' [1], and by 1936 he had come to support both the united front and communist affiliation. Like Cripps, Bevan saw these tactics very much in terms of revitalising the Labour Party, arguing that they would lead to a 'spiritual awakening of the British Working-class Movement' [2]. However, unlike Cripps, he saw them as preludes to a popular front, although he accepted the popular front mainly because he believed that the leadership of the Labour Party would be more willing to cooperate with others on the left if it could 'balance' this 'by taking in the Liberals on the Right' [3].

Strauss, was another inactive member of the Socialist League with views very close to Cripps's [4]. He also had opposed association with communists before the 1935 general election. However, the demonstrations against the changes in the means test which took place in early 1935 had impressed him greatly. Moreover, during 1935 he came to see the need for a pact with the Soviet Union, and he believed that unity at the international level should be accompanied by unity at the national level. Therefore,

1. 1934 L.P.C.R., p. 138.
2. A. Bevan, 'Should Labour Agree to a Popular Front?', Daily Herald, 5 August 1936.
3. A. Bevan, 'Problems of Labour Policy', Labour Monthly, June, 1936.
4. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

after the 1935 general election he had come out in favour of the united front and communist affiliation, although less confidently about the latter [1]. Like Cripps and Bevan, he saw these tactics partly in terms of revitalising the Labour Party, and like Bevan he saw them as preludes to a popular front. He was particularly impressed by the popular front electoral victories in France and Spain, believing that they showed that unity on the left would not frighten moderate opinion [2].

The C.P.G.B.'s application for affiliation to the Labour Party, and the united front were debated at the 1936 Labour Conference, which met in Edinburgh in October. An amendment to the united front resolution, proposing what amounted to a popular front, was also voted upon, although not discussed.

Two of the big unions, the M.F.G.B. and A.E.U., supported communist affiliation, as did several smaller unions, notably the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the National Union of Clerks and the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association; support also came from the Socialist League, Scottish

1. G.R. Strauss, 'Problems of Labour Policy', Labour Monthly, August 1936.

2. G.R. Strauss, 'My Message for Edinburgh', Daily Worker, 2 October 1936.

Socialist Party and Fabian Society [1]. Nevertheless, affiliation was easily defeated by 1,728,000 votes to 592,000 [2]. Most of the unions were opposed; and even among the D.L.P.s there seems to have been little support, only 16.6 per cent of the vote coming from this source, representing 23.7 per cent of the D.L.P.s' vote [3]. As Cripps commented shortly afterwards, most of the D.L.P.s were suspicious of allowing communists actually into Labour's ranks [4].

1. Ibid., 8 August 1936.

2. 1936 L.P.C.R., p. 211.

3. The breakdown of votes given for C.P.G.B. affiliation and the united front at the 1936 Conference, and for the popular front and Cripps's expulsion at the 1939 Conference, are probably as accurate as can be obtained for the 1930s. Each of these issues caused considerable discussion, and most of the major unions had publicly stated positions. Moreover, the Daily Worker carried considerable detail about how organisations were voting on these issues, detail confirmed in other sources which were used.

4. Sir S. Cripps, 'Edinburgh and After', Controversy, November 1936.

There was more support at Edinburgh among the D.L.P.s for the united front, although this was rejected by the larger majority of 1,805,000 votes to 435,000 [1]. This was mainly because the 400,000 M.F.G.B. votes cast in favour of communist affiliation were cast against the united front. At its Conference in July 1936 the M.F.G.B. had voted in favour of communist affiliation but had made no decision on the united front [2]. Therefore at the 1936 Labour Conference the union delegation made its own decision - and decided, rather strangely, to oppose the united front. N.U.D.A.W. adopted a more comprehensible policy in rejecting communist affiliation, but approving the united front as a purely short term tactic [3]. Many D.L.P.s seem to have thought similarly for 51.2 per cent of the united front vote came from the D.L.P.s, representing 54.1 per cent of the total constituency party vote.

An amendment to the united front resolution proposing that Labour should cooperate with any group opposed to fascism was defeated by 1,993,000 votes to 190,000 [4]. However, as there was no debate and no union had a publicly stated position on the popular front, it is impossible to tell how this vote was made up.

1. 1936 L.P.C.R., p. 257.
2. 1936 M.F.G.B. Conference Report, p. 72.
3. Daily Herald, 10 October 1936.
4. 1936 L.P.C.R., p. 257.

It is also difficult to break up the votes on two other major issues discussed at Edinburgh - the non intervention policy in the Spanish civil war and a N.E.C. report entitled The International Situation - although contemporary reports indicated that in both cases the D.L.P.s formed a very large percentage of the minority [1].

The Spanish civil war had begun on 18 July 1936 when a group of Spanish generals headed by Francisco Franco had initiated a revolt against the Frente Popular government. Under existing international law the republic was entitled to buy arms from other countries, but on 3 August Léon Blum, the French premier and leader of the Socialist Party, put forward a policy of non intervention [2].

At a joint meeting of the N.E.C., T.U.C. General Council and the P.L.P. Executive on 28 August 1936 it was agreed that in view of the dangers presented by the situation the Labour Party would reluctantly support non intervention if agreed to by all countries concerned.

1. See below, p. 104.

2. For an account of the pressures which Blum faced, especially from the Radical Party, see M.O. Gallagher, 'Léon Blum and the Spanish Civil War', Journal of Contemporary History, 3/1971.

This decision was debated at the Trades Union Congress when it met in September. The debate saw a sharp clash between the union leadership, which tended to support non intervention and several left wing delegates, who opposed it. For the left the Spanish civil war was a microcosm of the deepening world struggle between fascism and democracy; as such, anything less than total commitment to the Frente Popular was unthinkable [1]. However, the debate at the 1936 Trades Union Congress was an unequal struggle and the opponents of non intervention were defeated by 3,029,000 votes to 51,000 [2].

By the time that the Labour Conference met evidence of German and Italian intervention was growing. Nevertheless, non intervention was again accepted by the substantial majority of 1,836,000 votes to 519,000 [3]. Two days after the vote, however, two fraternal delegates from Spain were allowed to address the Conference, and their speeches so stirred the Labour conscience that on the last day of the Conference Attlee proposed a motion pressing for an investigation of the breeches of non intervention, and proposing Labour support for arms to

1. For a more detailed account of the impact of the war on the left see D.P.F. Lancien, 'British Left Wing Attitudes to the Spanish Civil War', (University of Oxford B. Litt. thesis, 1965), passim.

2. 1936 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 390.

3. 1936 L.P.C.R., p. 181.

Spain if this investigation were not carried out quickly. This was unanimously accepted [1].

The left's commitment to the right of the Spanish government to purchase arms did not mean that the left accepted rearmament in Britain. This was clearly revealed in the debate on the N.E.C.'s report The International Situation.

Rearmament was a problem that plagued the Labour Party in the 1930s. Before 1936 Labour policy sought disarmament rather than rearmament; in the period before this was achieved national security was to be provided for by collective action through the League of Nations, a policy which, it was believed, would require little arms expenditure, thus making ultimate disarmament all the easier. However, this policy came under increasing attack after the German reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, and especially after the League of Nation's failure to prevent the Italian conquest of Abyssinia in May 1936.

These events added weight to the arguments of men such as Bevin, Citrine and Dalton, who even in 1935 had argued that the National Government could not be denied the arms to give Britain parity with Germany. Nevertheless, in The International Situation Labour's attitude to

1. Ibid., p. 262. Also see Naylor, op. cit., pp. 138-148 and 181-189.

rearmament was made less than clear, a situation not improved by the speakers for the platform, especially Morrison [1]. In particular, no inkling was given as to whether Labour intended to continue to oppose the government's arms estimates in the House of Commons, a policy which the party had traditionally followed as signifying its opposition to the government of the day's foreign and defence policies, but which was coming under increasing criticism as a policy which was open to damaging misinterpretation [2].

Cripps, and many others on the left, drew from the omissions and ambiguities of The International Situation the conclusion that Labour intended to drop its opposition to the government's programme [3]. Those in the party who saw the government as a crypto-fascist force were totally opposed to accepting rearmament under it, even when it was conceded that rearmament would be necessary if a Labour government were in power. Cripps stated this point of view in an article entitled 'Unity - the Power Way', which appeared in Tribune on 1 January 1937.

1. 1936 L.P.C.R., pp. 192-194.

2. For a more detailed account of Labour's attitude to rearmament at this time see Naylor, op. cit., pp. 119-169.

3. See Cripps's speech to the 1936 Conference. 1936 L.P.C.R., pp. 200-201.

He wrote

> For a workers' government all the arms necessary to safeguard its authority for socialism and peace. For a capitalist government, not a man, not a ship, not a plane.

The acceptance of The International Situation by 1,738,000 votes to 657,000 [1] was therefore greeted by dismay, as were the other major decisions of the Edinburgh Conference, by Cripps and many on the left.

1. Ibid., p. 207.

CHAPTER THREE:

UNITED WE STAND.

In an article entitled 'Edinburgh and After', which appeared in Controversy in November 1936, Cripps wrote

> I have become accustomed to voting with a minority upon most matters, but, always before, there has been in the Conference some feeling of vitality and hope, this year that feeling was almost entirely absent. Even the platform, though it was carried to victory in every important debate by the block vote of the big Trade Unions seemed to derive no inspiration from its achievement.

Cripps went on to assert that 'the major issue that has emerged from the Conference is that of the democratisation of the Labour Party itself'. He believed that on the united front, rearmament and non intervention the majority of the D.L.P.s had been united, yet their votes were swamped by the block votes of the major unions.

Cripps was especially angered by the vote over non intervention. It was on this that he believed the constituency parties had been most united. Moreover, Zilliacus had informed Cripps that Bevin and Citrine had hidden from the 1936 Trades Union Congress the fact that the T.U.C. had just received an appeal from its French counterpart asking it to urge the British and French governments to reconsider non intervention [1], a piece of information which made Cripps even more antagonistic to the union leadership [2].

1. Letter from Zilliacus to Cripps, 26 September 1936. Cripps Papers, file 515.
2 Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

Cripps was in no way hostile to the union movement itself. He frequently encouraged workers to join unions and accepted that the unions must necessarily play a large part in the running of the party [1], but he had come to believe that the decision making process of the unions and Labour Party was such that it did not always reflect the views of the rank and file. Cripps believed that a large section of the party had swung to the left in 1931, but that this had not become clear as a result of the nature of intra-party democracy, in particular the block votes of the unions and what he saw as the under-representation of the D.L.P.s at Conference and on the N.E.C. [2].

Cripps was not alone in seeing the reformism of the union leadership as the main bulwark to the conversion of the Labour Party to a more immediate and far-reaching conception of socialism. Bevan and Strauss also held similar views. Bevan's views are especially interesting on this matter because he was a man of working class origins and an M.F.G.B. sponsored M.P. Nevertheless, he was a bitter critic of most of the union leadership and its role in the Labour Party. In an article entitled

1. For example, see his letter in the Bristol Labour Weekly, 15 February 1936.

2. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

'Problems of Labour Policy', which appeared in Labour Monthly in June 1936, he claimed that there would be hardly a member of the N.E.C. left if it were elected by the rank and file, but day-to-day 'Labour Party policy is under the control of this body, a body.... taking its inspiration not from the movement as a whole, but from the head offices of the unions'. To cure this he called for radical constitutional changes, including making the unions affiliate through the D.L.P.s.

These views were shared by many on the Labour left, especially in the D.L.P.s, where the unions' power in the Labour Party had been a source of increasing criticism after 1931, a fact noted by the Labour Organiser in October 1933. Certainly among the D.L.P.s gathered at the 1936 Conference there was considerable discontent over the unions. During the Conference two meetings of the D.L.P.s' representatives took place. Out of the second, which was attended by delegates from nearly 250 out of the 285 parties present [1], a provisional committee to organise a National Association of Labour Parties emerged with Cripps as chairman and Ben Greene as secretary. Greene, a leading member of the Hemel Hempstead D.L.P.,

1. Memorandum, n.d. Cripps Papers, file 505.

had attempted to sponsor a movement to increase the D.L.P.s' say in determining policy after the 1933 Conference, but the effort proved abortive [1]. However, during 1935 Greene had succeeded in establishing a Home Counties Labour Association and before the Edinburgh Conference the association had circularised all D.L.P.s requesting them to write to the N.E.C. to demand a reform of the voting arrangements at Conference. As a result just over 100 did so [2], but a debate did not take place at Edinburgh due to shortage of Conference time.

Cripps's willingness after 1936 to defy Conference decisions on the united and popular fronts can in part be explained by his past. Undoubtedly, Cripps's passionate temperament and his rapid rise to prominence in the party had played a part in his clashes with the Labour leadership over issues such as the Emergency Powers Act and sanctions. These features were to continue to play an important part in the course of action which he took after 1936. However, this course must also be seen in terms of his belief that Conference decisions were not always a representation of true feeling in the Labour movement. This belief played an important part in the

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 26 April 1937.
2. Ibid.

decision which Cripps took shortly after the Edinburgh Conference to approach the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. with a view to organising a national campaign with the Socialist League to promote working class unity.

Fenner Brockway, the general secretary of the I.L.P., had written to Cripps on 23 September 1936 suggesting the possibility of the Socialist League entering a united front, but two days later Cripps had replied stating that he was unwilling to act until after the deliberations of the Edinburgh Conference [1]. In the aftermath of Edinburgh Cripps was no longer willing to wait, and negotiations between the Socialist League, the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. began almost immediately. In these negotiations Cripps and William Mellor, a former member of the C.P.G.B., and the eminence grise of the Socialist League, represented this body, Pollitt and Dutt represented the C.P.G.B., and Maxton and Brockway represented the I.L.P. On several occasions the negotiations almost broke down for major differences existed between the three groups [2].

1. Cripps Papers, file 591.
2. A.F. Brockway, Inside the Left, (1942), p. 266.

The leadership of the C.P.G.B. saw the negotiations as part of their campaign to promote a popular front in Britain. The popular front which the C.P.G.B. was working for in 1936 was not one involving a formal alliance with the Liberal Party. As Pollitt wrote in an article entitled 'Forward from Edinburgh and Sheffield', which appeared in Discussion in November 1936, 'When we communists talk about the People's Front, we have in mind no Lloyd George or Ramsay Muir, but rather the millions of middle-class and professional workers who have been profoundly impressed by the effect upon the working class of capitalism in its decline and who desperately want to do something in the general fight for peace'.

This refusal to seek the support of the Liberal Party, or leading Liberals, came at a time when a large number of prominent Liberals were coming out in favour of the popular front. The weakness of the party's electoral position, the similarity of its views on foreign policy with those of the Labour and communist parties, and the growing threat of fascism, pushed many Liberals towards the popular front. Moreover, hostility to communism was, if anything, less deep rooted among many of the Liberal leaders than among the Labour leadership, possibly a reflection of the fact that most Liberals had no experience of working with communists and did not fear communist infiltration [1].

1. Information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

Among the prominent Liberals in 1936 who came out in favour of the movement were Sir Richard Acland, the M.P. for North Devon [1], A.J. Cummings, the political editor of the News Chronicle [2], Sir Walter Layton, the head of the group which controlled the News Chronicle [3], Geoffrey Le Mander, the M.P. for Wolverhampton East [4], and Wilfrid Roberts, the M.P. for North Cumberland [5]. The News Chronicle itself gave sympathetic coverage to the victories of the popular fronts, and also a long article to Pollitt [6]. The Manchester Guardian was also sympathetic to the popular front, and its editorial on 6 June 1936 stated that 'on the dominating question of foreign policy' the C.P.G.B. was 'infinitely more orthodox than a large section of the Labour Party', and argued that if Labour put the menace of fascism first it would be difficult to refuse affiliation to the communists.

1. See below, p. 156.
2. See below, p. 176-178.
3. See his letter in New Outlook, August 1936.
4. Ibid.
5. W. Roberts, 'A Progressive Alliance', New Outlook, April 1937.
6. News Chronicle, 16 July 1936.

The editorial of the Daily Worker on 13 May 1936 noted that some Liberals spoke of the popular front, although they specifically excluded cooperation with communists. This was certainly true of Dingle Foot, the M.P. for Dundee [1]. He supported a Lib-Lab alliance, a tactic explicitly pushed by other Liberals, notably Ramsay Muir, a vice president of the Liberal Organisation [2]. And some Liberals spoke of the popular front, but did not make it clear whether this included the communists. The most prominent example of this was Lloyd George [3], who in 1935 had set up a Council of Action to push his views on parliamentary candidates [4]. The London evening Star also advocated a popular front, but did not make it clear whether this included the communists [5]. However, these tendencies cannot explain

1. D. Foot, 'The Popular Front: a Liberal View', New Outlook, October 1936.
2. A Marwick, Clifford Allen, the Open Conspirator, (1964), p. 135.
3. D. Lloyd George, 'Britain's Popular Front', Reynolds News, 4 October 1936. Also see below, pp. 341-343.
4. In the 1935 general election 67 candidates endorsed by the Council of Action on the basis of their replies to its manifesto were returned. Of the 67, 33 were members of the Labour Party, 21 members of the Liberal Party, 11 members of the Conservative Party, 1 was a National Liberal, and 1 was an Independent. Letter from C.J. Humphrey to A.J. Sylvester, 29 November 1935. Lloyd George Papers, box G/142.
5. For example, see its editorials, 5 and 14 May 1936.

the C.P.G.B.'s unwillingness to seek the support of the Liberal Party or leading Liberals. Some prominent Liberals supported a popular front; indeed, the adherence of the Liberal Party to a popular front in 1936 appeared more likely than that of the Labour Party.

One explanation of the C.P.G.B.'s attitude is that it had no real interest in the popular front, and was simply using it to break down Labour's resistance to cooperation with communists. Certainly the popular front line seems to have been greeted by amazement on the part of some of the C.P.G.B.'s leaders. Moreover, one communist activist of this time has written that the new tactic 'was to soft-pedal in public whilst sticking to everything as before' [1]. It is difficult to believe that the communists did not see the popular front as an excellent way of ending Labour's proscription on cooperation with communists. And it is clear that some communists never really supported the popular front. However, this is not inconsistent with the communist leadership genuinely accepting the popular front. Moreover, the line in 1936 can be explained in other terms, and subsequent events were to show that the C.P.G.B. was not to be dogmatic in refusing the cooperation of the Liberal Party and leading Liberals [2].

1. D. Hyde, I Believed, (1951), p. 56.

2. The development of the C.P.G.B.'s line is dealt with in passim in the subsequent pages of this thesis.

The popular fronts in France and Spain had been built on the united front, and Dimitrov's call for popular fronts at the 1935 Comintern Congress had stated that this was to be the pattern. The C.P.G.B. in Britain in 1936 was attempting to pursue this line. Pollitt went on to state in his article in Discussion in November 1936 that 'Our fundamental thesis on this whole question is that there can be no successful People's Front until the Unity of the working-class is first established'. The C.P.G.B. held that unless a popular front were based on prior working class unity, it would serve only to increase the reformist tendencies of the Labour leadership.

The C.P.G.B.'s lack of interest in the Liberal Party at this time also reflected the fact that the popular front which it was advocating was not one in which electoral agreements figured prominently. The C.P.G.B.'s ideology was essentially a non-parliamentary one. Moreover, in France in particular the communists were an important party, with a claimed 71,000 members in 1935 and 8.4 per cent of the vote in the May 1932 election - a fact ignored by many of the Labour supporters of unity. The popular front allowed the French communists to build on this, and in 1936 they won 15.3 per cent of the vote and increased their number of deputies from 10 to 72 [1].

1. Degras, op. cit., pp. 330 and 386.

Its popular front was therefore more a tactic to rally public opinion against the government than to win by-elections, or a general election which need not have taken place until November 1940. Strachey stressed the 'mass movement' side of the popular front in an article entitled 'A People's Front for Britain', which appeared in Left Book News in August 1936, arguing that 'the running of candidates at Parliamentary elections would be only one, and in the long run not the most important, of the activities of a People's Front in Britain'.

The I.L.P. was opposed to any form of popular front. The I.L.P.'s response to the victory of the Frente Popular had been somewhat equivocal. It welcomed the concessions which the electoral victory had brought, but it believed that 'Parliamentary victories will prove a delusion if it causes the workers to build false hopes or if their representatives tie themselves to support the Liberal Government in such a way that they are led to damp down the necessary working class revolt which must occur if the political revolution is to be succeeded by the social revolution' [1]. The I.L.P. was confirmed in its belief that the victory of a popular front would lead to a dampening of working class ardour by the history of France and Spain after the victories of the popular fronts, particularly by the failure of the mass sit-in strike movement in France,

1. A.F. Brockway, 'The World this Week', New Leader, 6 March 1936.

which began in May 1936, to develop into a revolutionary situation [1]. Thus by the summer of 1936 the I.L.P.'s initial suspicion had turned into outright hostility.

Moreover, whereas the C.P.G.B. wanted agreement over a broad field to give the maximum impression of unity, the I.L.P. wanted agreement only on those issues where definite agreement existed. The C.P.G.B.'s insistence on a broad programme almost led to a breakdown over foreign policy. Whilst both the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. shared the Socialist League's opposition to rearmament under the National Government, important differences existed over their attitudes to war in general and to Britain's security.

The C.P.G.B.'s foreign policy in 1936 was not dissimilar to the official Labour and Liberal policies. The main difference was one of emphasis. Although the C.P.G.B. supported collective security through the League of Nations, its hopes for resistance to aggression were pinned more on an extension of the Franco-Soviet Pact, on an international 'popular front'. The official

1. For the I.L.P.'s case in favour of the existence of a revolutionary situation see A.F. Brockway, Workers' Front, (1938), pp. 155-156, C.L.R. James, World Revolution, 1917-1936, (1937), pp. 392-400, and C. Vincent, The Popular Front in France, (1939), passim. Some in the I.L.P. were undoubtedly influenced by Leon Trotsky's line on the united and popular fronts. Information supplied by Lord Brockway.

I.L.P. line supported cooperation only between 'working class' governments, a rather impractical policy as only the Soviet Union was seen as working class; it also opposed collective security through the League of Nations if it entailed cooperation with capitalist governments. Although these policies were not supported by anywhere near all in the I.L.P. [1], they clearly differentiated it from the C.P.G.B. As long as the National Government remained in power, the I.L.P.'s policy was effectively pacifist.

There were also problems over the form which the organisational unity should take. The C.P.G.B. wanted the I.L.P. to attempt to reaffiliate to the Labour Party, a course which the I.L.P. was not willing to consider unless there was a democratisation of the Labour Party.

However, the impasse was resolved, when Cripps suggested that the I.L.P. should issue a letter at the same time as the joint programme, stating its reservations on the popular front, foreign policy and affiliation. The unity campaign had been born [2].

The unity campaign manifesto showed every sign of being a hybrid document. It began by calling for

> UNITY OF ALL SECTIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT. Unity in the struggle against Fascism, Reaction and War, and against the National Government [3].

1. Dowse, op. cit., p. 195.
2. Brockway, Inside the Left, pp. 266-267.
3. Capitals in the original.

The tone of the preamble was distinctly militant. It was argued that 'To-day is no time for defeatism or for breakaways; to-day is no time for retreat or for the abandonment of working-class unity in favour of class collaboration; to-day is the time for a united challenge and attack'. Yet the details of the programme were not. The demand for a pact between Britain, France and the Soviet Union to 'save the peoples of the world from the growing menace of fascist aggression' was one which was being increasingly heard in Labour and Liberal circles. And the demands for the abolition of the means test, the introduction of a forty hour week, the nationalisation of the mining industry, 'Effective control of the Banks', and the rest of the domestic programme were hardly extremist. It is clear that the programme was basically a communist popular front one on to which the Socialist League and I.L.P. had grafted the militant rhetoric.

By 1936 rhetoric was virtually all the I.L.P. had to give. Although the I.L.P. had four M.P.s to the C.P.G.B.'s one, they all represented Glasgow constituencies. Outside this historic centre of the I.L.P., and a handful of other areas such as Bradford, the I.L.P. had no equivalent of the C.P.G.B.'s position in the Fife coalfield, in east London and in south Wales. Moreover, whilst the C.P.G.B.'s membership in October 1936 was only 11,500, it was at

least expanding. I.L.P. membership had dwindled to less than 4,000 - a quarter of its total only four years before. The C.P.G.B.'s strength also cannot be measured simply in terms of parliamentary seats, or card carrying members. Its membership was small, but it was highly active; it was a party of the dedicated unemployed and, increasingly, of the middle class [1], of the 'long haired men and short haired women', of the 'corduroys and the plus fours' [2]. The I.L.P.'s membership was also active, but the I.L.P. had no equivalent of the people like Strachey who, although to all intents and purposes a dedicated communist, never actually joined the party [3]. It did not have the high membership turnover the communists had, a turnover which

1. In 1931 60 per cent of the party was unemployed, but especially after 1935 the number of middle class members rose rapidly. K. Newton, The Sociology of British Communism, (1969), pp. 21 and 42-53.

2. C.H. Darke, The Communist Technique in Britain, (1953), pp. 36-37.

3. Strachey applied for membership of the C.P.G.B., but was turned down. It seems that Dutt thought that he was likely to be unreliable. Thomas, op. cit., pp. 122-123. It is also possible that the communists thought that Strachey would be more useful to them as a non-member; for example, it would be easier for him to cooperate in front organisations with Labour Party members than if he were a member of the C.P.G.B.

meant that there were many outside the party who only shortly before had felt strongly enough to be members [1]. It had no equivalent of the thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of people, especially intellectuals, who whilst not accepting the communist line on all issues were fellow-travellers on many issues, in particular over the need for resistance to fascism [2]. The I.L.P. also had no 'closed' category of membership - that is members who for a variety of reasons did not reveal their membership [3].

1. Report of the 14th Congress of the C.P.G.B., (1937), p. 41. It is not clear what the attitude of those who left the party was. However, it would be wrong to believe that all left through disillusionment. Many other factors could explain the turnover, not least the rigorous demands on time made on communist members. See Darke, op. cit., passim.

2. For a more detailed account of this phenomenon see D. Caute, The Fellow Travellers, (1973), Part One, and N. Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, (1959), passim. Caute's central thesis, in which fellow-travelling is seen as a 'postcript to the Enlightenment', means that he underplays the importance of the economic crisis in the west and, in particular, support for the Soviet Union's foreign policy after she had joined the League of Nations and proclaimed the popular front tactic.

3. See Hyde, op. cit., passim, and below, esp. pp. 120-126 and 384.

One major reason why communists did not reveal their membership was to enable them to work under cover in the Labour Party (and in the early 1930s in the I.L.P.'s Revolutionary Policy Committee) [1]. A communist activist of the 1930s has written of using the 'familiar communist infiltration methods' to gain control of a constituency party: first he joined as an individual member, then began to recruit supporters at ward meetings, and was quickly elected to the G.M.C. and Executive Committee where he continued his activities [2]. However, during the Comintern's 'third period' there seems to have been few communists operating in the Labour Party [3], although this may reflect the small size of the C.P.G.B. at this time as much as a policy decision [4]. Infiltration seems to have grown from late 1931 on [5], and especially after the N.E.C.'s rejection of affiliation in 1936. In November 1936 the Labour Organiser noted this development and claimed that 'Communists have

1. J. Paton, Left Turn!, (1936), pp. 391-392.
2. Hyde, op. cit., pp. 64-65. Communists soon after effectively ran the party.
3. Information supplied by Reg Groves.
4. Assessing communist infiltration is an especially problematical task as the evidence is very thin concerning the 1930s. However, an attempt is made to consider the question in the subsequent pages of this thesis.
5. It is interesting to note that the Revolutionary Policy Committee first came to prominence in the I.L.P. in 1932. Dowse, op. cit., p. 180.

eaten far deeper into local Labour Parties than is realised'. Nevertheless, it is important not to overstate the size of this infiltration and its importance at this time. The number of communists working under cover in the Labour Party in the 1930s does not appear to have been that great [1]. Moreover, communists operating under cover were in a difficult position, especially as far as advocating cooperation with communists was concerned. The N.E.C. and district organisers were very sensitive to such proposals, and individuals and parties cooperating with communists were likely to be expelled or reorganised [2].

The I.L.P. also did not have the influence in the trade unions which the communists had. After late 1931 the communists had again become active in many unions. In 1934 the T.U.C. General Council had attempted to stem the rise of open communist influence by issuing its 'Black' Circular 16 and Circular 17. Circular 16 threatened to withdraw recognition from trades councils accepting communists or fascists as delegates. Circular 17 was sent to the unions and asked them to amend their rules, if necessary, to reject the nominations of members of 'disruptive organisations' for official posts [3].

1. See below, esp. p. 384.
2. See below, esp. p. 138.
3. 1935 T.U.C. Annual Report, pp. 110-112.

By the 1935 Trades Union Congress 283 trades councils had accepted Circular 16, 80 had given no reply and 18 had rejected it [1]. After further pressure from the T.U.C. all but two accepted the circular, and the two dissident councils were therefore removed from the approved register [2]. By the 1935 Trade Union Congress 41 unions had stated that they accepted Circular 17, and another 8 had stated that they already had such a rule [3]. In these unions, and the trade councils, therefore communists seeking office were forced under cover. Again, it is extremely difficult to gauge to what extent this went on, but it is interesting to note that the unions with proscriptions tended to experience very little united and popular front agitation [4].

By the 1935 Trades Union Congress 25 unions had rejected Circular 17 [5]. To some extent these rejections reflected a desire to keep politics out of union business and a dislike of what was seen as T.U.C. dictation [6].

1. Ibid., p. 111.
2. 1936 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 113.
3. 1935 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 111.
4. For example, see below, p. 287. Hyde has described how he used infiltration tactics for both a D.L.P. and a trades council, though he claims that he only managed to get a 'foothold' in the latter. Hyde, op.cit., p.65.
5. 1935 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 111.
6. S. Davis, 'The British Labour Party and British Foreign Policy, 1933-1939', (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1950), pp. 245-246.

However, it should also be noted that among the unions rejecting Circular 17 were those in which the communists were strongest. Four of the unions which rejected it were the A.E.U., M.F.G.B., N.U.D.A.W. and N.U.R. Although the N.U.R., unlike the other three, had neither voted for C.P.G.B. affiliation or the united front at the 1936 Labour Conference, it had a very strong minority in favour of cooperation with communists [1]. Among the other unions rejecting Circular 17 were the Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the National Union of Clerks, and the National Furnishing Trades Association - all of which had voted for C.P.G.B. affiliation and the united front at the 1936 Conference.

The unions in which the communists were especially active tended to be the ones in which unemployment was greatest [2]. In terms of actual power within the unions, the method of selection of officials and the structure was important. Attempts to capture the presidency of the A.E.U. in the 1930s., foundered on the unions' second ballot procedure [3]. The T.G.W.U. helped keep down

1. P.S. Bagwell, The Railwaymen, (1963), p. 568.
2. R. Martin, Communism and the British Trade Unions, (1969), p. 183 and Newton, op.cit., pp. 42-53.
3. V.L. Allen, Power in Trade Unions, (1954), p. 297.

down communist influence by appointing some officials [1]. Nevertheless, the communists had considerable influence at the local level in both unions. The busmen's London Rank and File Committee of the T.G.W.U., for example, was dominated by communists - and it was from this source that the unsuccessful motion in favour of a united front came at the 1935 T.G.W.U. Conference [2]. The M.F.G.B. had been built up by amalgamations and had a weak central organisation, unlike say the N.U.R. This meant that communists could gain considerable control at the regional level even if they did not have control nationally. The best example of this was the S.W.M.F., where by the beginning of 1935 352 communists held responsible posts [3], where in May 1936 a communist was appointed president of the federation, and where the federation regularly engaged in joint work with communists [4]. Indeed, at the 1936 M.F.G.B. Conference the vast majority of the

1. J. Goldstein, The Government of British Trade Unions, (1952), p. 215.
2. Bullock, op.cit., p. 559 and Daily Herald 6 July 1935. At the 1937 T.G.W.U. Conference membership of the rank and file movement was made incompatible with membership of the union. Bullock, op.cit., p. 612.
3. Daily Worker, 22 April 1935.
4. Francis, 'Welsh Miners and the Spanish Civil War', Journal of Contemporary History, 3/1970.

votes cast in favour of C.P.G.B. affiliation came from two areas - South Wales and Durham [1]. And Durham was another area in which the communists were very active within the union movement; indeed Durham had been the centre of the minority movement's strength in the mining industry [2].

Nevertheless, it should not be thought that support for cooperation with communists from within the unions stemmed solely from communists. Certainly before 1937 they do not appear to have been that important, although the decision of the C.P.G.B. Congress in that year to step up activity within the unions seems to have led to an increase in influence [3], as efforts were made to capture offices by hard work, apathy among the members, and ballot rigging [4]. Some non-communists were unquestionably impressed by the massive growth in union membership in France after the communists and socialists formed a united front [5], ignoring the fact that previously

1. 1936 M.F.G.B. Annual Conference Report, p. 72.
2. W.R. Garside, The Durham Miners, 1919-1960, (1971), p. 239.
3. Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress, (1938), p. 21.
4. For an account of communist techniques within unions see Goldstein, op.cit., passim, esp. pp. 215-218.
5. J.C. Little, the president of the A.E.U., stressed this point in his speech moving the united front resolution at the 1936 Labour Conference. 1936 L.P.C.R., p. 250.

union membership had been low, and divided in particular between the socialist federation with 800,000 members and the communist federation with 300,000 [1]. And others supported cooperation for reasons similar to those which led people like Cripps, Bevan and Strauss to support unity [2].

The Socialist League was in hardly any stronger a position than the I.L.P. Its membership numbered only 3,000. Moreover, by 1936 its relations with many of the Labour leaders were poor in the extreme. The situation had become especially bad in 1934 when the Socialist League had decided to take a more active role in opposing the party's policy. At the 1934 Conference it had proposed 75 amendments to the official programme, For Socialism and Peace. Many of these amendments were never debated, but those that were went down to heavy defeat. For example, one proposing that the next Labour government should make 'a decisive advance within five years to a Socialist Britain' was rejected by 2,146,000 votes to 206,000 [3]. Another proposing nationalisation on limited compensation was defeated by 2,118,000 votes to 149,000 [4].

1. Degras, op.cit., p. 384.
2. For example, see F. Lewis, 'The United Front', Railway Review, 12 February 1937.
3. 1934 L.P.C.R., p. 165.
4. Ibid., p. 191.

Many in the Socialist League believed that the minority consisted primarily of constituency party votes and that the result was a victory for the 'union machine' rather than a reflection of opinion in the party [1]. Certainly all the major unions voted against these proposals, but it is impossible to tell how the small unions voted. In the, unlikely, event that the minority consisted simply of the Socialist League and constituency party votes, then these figures represented 47.2 and 33.9 per cent respectively of the D.L.P.s' votes, although it should not necessarily be assumed that the other constituency parties' votes were cast against the amendments. In spite of the fact that it could have had at best the support of less than half the constituency parties on its central amendment, the Socialist League decided to engage in even more open opposition. As the Socialist Leaguer's editorial on 15 December 1934 noted, 'We have passed out of the realm of the programme-making' and 'into the realm of action'.

The Socialist League's emphasis on opposition rather than propaganda after 1934 marked the beginning of serious

1. Dare, op. cit., pp. 218-228, and information supplied by Reg Groves and Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

trouble within the organisation itself. There were some, like Cole, who had always feared that it would develop like the I.L.P. and begin to act as a party within the party; as their fears became realised these people tended to drop out of the Socialist League, or become inactive members [1]. Moreover, in spite of its small size, the Socialist League was far from a homogeneous body in terms of the ideology of its membership. This was especially true of those who had been members only in its early days, or inactive members. There was little similarity, for example, between the views of Tawney and the official line. Indeed, it was Tawney who drafted For Socialism and Peace [2].

However, even among the Socialist League's leadership there were strong differences, the leadership mainly being united in a desire to commit the Labour Party to a more immediate and far-ranging conception of socialism. One member of the Socialist League's National Council - Reg Groves - was an archetypal example of a left winger in the Labour Party in spite of the fact that he had little in common with the party's essentially parliamentary ideology. He

1. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914, p. 284. Bevan and Strauss were worried about the Socialist League for this reason. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

2. Terrill, op. cit., p. 78.

had been expelled from the C.P.G.B. in 1932, mainly for Trotskyite deviations, he placed great emphasis on the role of the unions in the transition to socialism, and was working hard in 1936-7 to increase the working class membership of the Socialist League. Groves was a man whose militant and revolutionary line reflected more than just rhetoric [1]. Mellor was another Marxist, and a man who had some Trotskyite sympathies, especially over the popular front [2]. Murphy, a third member of its National Council who was a former communist, had been opposed to the Comintern's 'third period', but was no Trotskyite; although he also placed great emphasis on work in the unions, he had no sympathy with Trotsky's line on the popular front [3]. Cripps and most of the Socialist League leaders had some Marxist learnings, but cannot really be described as Marxists. Certainly it would be difficult to describe Sir Charles Trevelyan, one of the former Liberals in the Labour Party, as a Marxist.

In 1931 Trevelyan had resigned as president of the board of education, primarily because of the feebleness

1. See R. Groves, Trades Councils in the Fight for Socialism, (Socialist League pamphlet, 1935). This section is also based on information supplied by Reg Groves.
2. See below, pp. 190 and 234.
3. See below, pp. 155-156.

of the second Labour government, and at the 1932 Labour Conference he had proposed the resolution committing the next Labour government to stand or fall on 'the principles in which it has faith'. However, he was a man with no clear ideas on domestic policy, other than that a more aggressive approach was needed. He was more interested in foreign policy and at the 1933 Labour Conference had proposed the mass resistance resolution. However, his growing appreciation of the menace of fascism, together with the fact that he did not see the government as a crypto-fascist force, led him to reject the Socialist League's line on sanctions. As he wrote to Cripps on 15 September 1935, 'I am quite definitely in favour of the League of Nations using sanctions if Mussolini goes to war' [1].

Another Socialist League opponent of its line on sanctions was Murphy, who during 1934-1935 had developed a line on foreign policy similar to that of the C.P.G.B. Indeed, in 1936 he resigned from it primarily over its policy on sanctions [2]. Bevan also was unhappy about its position over sanctions, although he initially supported it [3], and there were others in the Socialist League who were similarly equivocal or opposed [4]. However,

1. Cripps Papers, file 590.
2. J.T. Murphy, New Horizons, (1941), p. 318.
3. Foot, op.cit., p. 210.
4. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

the divisions within the Socialist League produced by the sanctions issue were nothing compared to those produced by Cripps's decision to enter into negotiations with the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P., and the resulting unity campaign manifesto.

The negotiations were initiated by Cripps without consulting the Socialist League's National Council. The first details it was given of the negotiations was on 7 November. At this meeting several members, notably Groves, raised doubts not merely about the contents of the manifesto, but also about the very idea of entering a joint campaign with the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. Groves was opposed to cooperation with communists in particular because he believed that the communists were using the united front as a way of destroying the organised Labour left [1]. As a result of his, and other, opposition a special delegate conference was called to meet in London on 16-17 January 1937.

At this conference Cripps stressed that the unity campaign was not a united front, but a campaign to promote unity. As he wrote in a letter to Ruth Dodds,

1. Information supplied by Reg Groves.

a member of the National Council, on 23 January 1937, 'This is not a United Front at all, but a Unity Campaign, which is a very different thing' [1]. A large minority remained unconvinced by Cripps's sophistry, however, for by 1,820,000 votes to 89,000 the 1934 Labour Conference had accepted the N.E.C.'s request for 'full disciplinary powers' to deal with those even associating with communists or communist organisations [2]. It therefore made no difference whether the unity campaign was a united front or not. It still contravened Conference decisions. The oposition to the unity campaign in the Socialist League can be judged from the fact that when the vote came to be taken on 17 January it was only approved by 56 votes to 38 with 23 abstentions [3].

The unity campaign manifesto was published on the following day. A day later Mellor and Margaret McCarthy, the secretary of the Socialist League, issued a circular to all the group's branches asking them to get in touch with the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. branches in their area to organise the campaign [4]. The unity campaign itself was launched on 24 January at a giant rally,

1. Cripps Papers, file 514.
2. 1934 L.P.C.R., p. 142.
3. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 26.
4. Labour Party Papers, Socialist League box.

addressed by Cripps, Pollitt and Maxton, which filled both the large and small Free Trade halls and the Theatre Royal in Manchester - the largest political gathering that Manchester had seen for years.

The enthusiasm for the unity campaign manifested at the Manchester and subsequent rallies [1] was not shared by the N.E.C. At a special meeting of the N.E.C. on 8 January 1937 it had been decided, with only four dissenting votes [2], to issue a statement, which appeared on 12 January under the title of Party Loyalty. This statement noted that 'By overwhelming majorities, proposals in favour of Communist Party affiliation and the promotion of a "United Front" policy' had been defeated, and appealed to all sections of the party to remain loyal to Conference decisions. The publication of the unity campaign manifesto and the Manchester rally were discussed when the N.E.C. met on 27 January. The outcome of this meeting was that the Socialist League was disaffiliated for disloyalty to Conference decisions, a motion to defer decision for a week being defeated by 14 votes to 9 [3].

Disloyalty to Conference decisions, however, was not the only issue involved. There had always existed

1. For reports of these rallies see Tribune, January-June 1937.
2. There is no record of how many supported the decision in the N.E.C. Minutes, 8 January 1937.
3. Ibid., 27 January 1937.

in the Labour Party, especially in the unions, a certain hostility to socialist bodies such as the Socialist League. John Marchbank, the general secretary of the N.U.R., expressed this feeling in his column of Railway Review on 1 January 1937 when he wrote 'No real reason exists, in my view, for the maintenance of these bodies with a separate identity inside the Labour Movement'. The socialist bodies' political views and their tendency to develop as parties within the party were not features which appealed to the trade union leadership. Bevin in particular had quickly developed a strong dislike of the Socialist League, a fact he made clear to Lansbury in a letter on 9 March 1933 [1].

The 'intellectual' nature of some of the Socialist League's members was another factor. Before the first world war the term 'intellectual' had frequently been one of abuse in the party, and although this had begun to change by 1918 [2], there remained a distinct suspicion of educated people. Citrine certainly had little time for the 'intellectuals' [3]. Whereas many educated members of the party, for example Cripps, tended to think of the trade unions as a reformist force whose block votes were dominating Labour Conferences and

1. Lansbury Papers, file 28 (195).
2. Winter, op. cit., p. 272.
3. Citrine, op. cit., pp. 300-301.

destroying party democracy, many trade unionists thought that the 'intellectuals' were leading the party away from its working class-trade union base. Rhys Davies, the N.U.D.A.W. sponsored M.P. for Westhoughton, expressed this feeling in the leader of New Dawn on 14 November 1936 when he wrote

> The so-called intelligentsia in our party are now complaining that the block vote of the trade unions is stifling their enthusiasm for the cause. As one who has been in the party from the very commencement I may be allowed to say, quite frankly that the boot is often in the other leg; the organised trade movement is a little apprehensive of being led up the garden by that type, however well intentioned it may be.

There was also some hostility on this score from the non trade union section of the party. Morrison, for example, was suspicious of the 'intelligenstsia': as he wrote in an article entitled 'Should Labour Agree to a Popular Front?', which appeared in the Daily Herald on 5 August 1936, he was interested in the ordinary local Labour party workers rather than the 'clever-clever people', a description which clearly betrays his sentiment.

However, the disaffiliation of the Socialist League did not mean the end of the unity campaign. The Manchester rally was followed by a series of demonstrations up and down the country, demonstrations which

evoked considerable enthusiasm among activists. A large number of the 36,000 people who signed cards pledging themselves to work for the campaign held office in the Labour movement [1].

Support was strong in the D.L.P.s. In a letter to a Mrs. Barker on 12 April 1937, Cripps claimed that at least half of the D.L.P.s. supported the campaign [2]. Cripps was being optimistic if he was referring to parties which openly supported the campaign, but the number was certainly high and included Attlee's own Limehouse party [2]. A N.E.C. Organisation Sub Committee report on the campaign noted that 'in many cases, the Constituency Parties lending support to Mr. Green's activities are the same as those giving support to the "Unity Campaign"' [4].

Support was especially strong among the Labour League of Youth [5]. This group had been in continual trouble with the N.E.C. since 1935 over its demand for the right to vote upon policy. This request was refused, although the moderate Women's Section of the Labour Party was permitted to vote on policy at its

1. 'A Paramount Task' (manifesto issued by the Unity Campaign Committee), Tribune, 11 June 1937.
2. Cripps Papers, file 555.
3. Daily Worker, 1 February 1937.
4. N.E.C. Minutes, 24 February 1937.
5. The League was open to all members of the Labour Party between the age of 16 and 25, but the vast majority of its membership, which was approximately 20,000 fell in the 21-25 age group. 1936 L.P.C.R., pp 71-75

Conference. During 1936 relations between the Labour League of Youth and the N.E.C. worsened, and the N.E.C. therefore decided to disband the N.A.C., to terminate publication of the organisation's journal, and not to hold a youth Conference in 1937. It was also decided to lower the upper age limit in the hope that this would remove the most active elements [1]. However, the N.A.C. reformed unofficially during December 1936 as the National Activity Committee, and during 1937 the committee, especially its chairman, Ted Willis, and many in the Labour League of Youth supported the unity campaign [2].

In spite of the continuation of the unity campaign, when the N.E.C. met on 24 February no further decision was taken on the campaign, the matter being referred to the Organisation Sub Committee, which was to produce a report in time for the N.E.C. meeting scheduled for 24 March [3]. The report produced by the committee made it clear that as far as it was concerned, the only issue involved was association with communists. The report noted

1. Ibid., pp. 71-75.
2. W. Mothersdale, 'Youth and the Unity Campaign', Advance, March 1937.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 24 February 1937.

> Up to the commencement of the present Unity Campaign, decisions of the Annual Party Conference respecting the Communist Party, etc., have been closely administered....
> Many constituency and Local Labour Parties have been expelled....
> To leave the 'Unity Campaign' to proceed without further notice will mean the scrapping of all Resolutions passed relating to the Communist Party, and will render further disciplinary action thereunder impossible [1].

Attlee, however, although strongly opposed to the united front [2], was well aware of the dangers of a large scale expulsion of the left. In a letter to Laski on 22 February 1937 he stated

> Stafford and Co. have played into the hands of every right wing influence in the party besides offending a vast mass of members who are not right wing but who will not stand for the flouting of Conference decisions....
> I fight all the time against heresy hunting, but the heretics seem to seek martyrdom [3].

Nevertheless, at the N.E.C. meeting held on 24 March Attlee, always a shrewd judge of the impossible, did not oppose a motion proposing that after 1 June 1937 membership of the Socialist League be made incompatible

1. Ibid., 24 March 1937.
2. See C.R. Attlee, 'Ours is the Popular Front', Daily Herald, 15 June 1936.
3. Letter in the possession of Mrs. Laski.

with membership of the Labour Party. Instead, Attlee attempted to mollify the effects of this decision by proposing a motion which would have had the effect of postponing any expulsions until after the Labour Conference had met - and hopefully after tempers had cooled. This motion, however, was defeated by 14 votes to 6 [1]. Feeling against the unity campaign was running very high in the N.E.C. Moreover, there were those in the party who would have been none too sorry to see the back of a section of the left - and especially Cripps.

Bevin and Citrine had little time for Cripps, the latter being 'perplexed to understand how a man of such legal eminence could utter such irresponsible drivel' [2]. Dalton even believed that Cripps's 'gaffes' such as his 'Buckingham Palace' speech made in February 1934 in which he had implied that a future Labour government would have to face opposition from the crown [3], had been the main reason why Labour had lost the 1935 general election [4]. The most recent of Cripps's 'gaffes' had been made at Preston in 14 November 1936 in a speech in which he had argued that the position of

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 24 March 1937.
2. Citrine, op.cit., p. 293.
3. For a more detailed account of the content of this speech and its impact see Cooke, op.cit., p 159.
4. Information supplied by John Parker.

the British working class would not have been significantly altered if 'Imperialist Britain were conquered by Germany'. The Daily Herald on 19 November referred to this comment as 'pre-eminent over all Sir Stafford's magnificent gifts to Conservative propagandists'.

There was also a certain amount of hostility to Cripps on account of his tendency at times to be rather condescending, or impatient, with colleagues [1]. For example, these traits seem to have got the better of him at the N.E.C. meeting in January 1935, for at the end of this meeting he announced that it had cost him £120 in lost legal fees to attend, and he might just as well have sent his secretary [2].

Some in the Labour Party, especially in the trade unions, seem also to have been suspicious of the wealth which Cripps's legal practice gave him. There was a feeling that this wealth was being used to obtain a freedom of manoeuvre not open to others. There was undoubtedly some truth in this. Cripps was certainly subsidising Tribune, a left wing weekly, edited by Mellor, which Cripps had helped launch in January 1937 and

1. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.
2. Dalton Diary, 23 January 1935.

which backed the unity campaign. And, in spite of denials, he seems to have been a major contributor to the expenses of the unity campaign [1]. The resentment towards Cripps's wealth can be seen clearly in the bitter speech which an M.F.G.B. delegate made at the 1937 Labour Conference [2].

Cripps realised that feelings against him were running strong and he decided to attempt to take the heat out of the situation by dissolving the Socialist League. At a special conference which was held in Leicester on 16 May it was agreed to wind up the Socialist League. However, it was resolved by 56 votes to 0 to continue with the unity campaign [3]. This did not satisfy the N.E.C. and at its meeting on 25-26 May it was decided to issue a statement making it clear that this was impermissible [4]. This ruling was

1. E. Estorick, Stafford Cripps, (1949), p. 117. In a letter in the News Chronicle on 10 April 1937 Cripps claimed that he only made small donations at meetings.
2. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 159.
3. Ibid., p. 27.
4. N.E.C. Minutes, 25-26 May 1937.

accompanied by a warning to Strauss, one of the most active supporters of the unity campaign, that if he took part in the campaign rally arranged to take place in Hull on 6 June he would be expelled.

Strauss, supported by Cripps and Mellor, was willing to defy this edict on the grounds that it was a dangerous attempt to suppress free speech within the party, but Laski and several other leading members of the Labour left advised against this course. Defiance was also opposed by Pollitt and Dutt for since the adoption of the popular front line the C.P.C.B.'s leadership had been keen to avoid any suspicion that it was attempting to split the Labour Party [1]. The leading Labour supporters of the unity campaign therefore withdrew from the campaign and formed a Labour Unity Committee. It was under the auspices of this committee that the Hull rally took place, no member of the C.P.G.B. or I.L.P. appearing on a platform headed by Cripps and Strauss.

In his speech to this rally Cripps commented on the 'determination of the National Executive of the Party to start upon a large scale heresy hunt throughout the country' [2]. As Cripps noted in his speech, in

1. Letter from Cripps to Lionel Elvin 9 June 1937. Cripps Papers, file 514.
2. Ibid., file 430.

some areas this campaign had already begun. This was especially the case in Scotland where Arthur Woodburn, the secretary of the Scottish Labour Party and an ardent anti-communist, had issued a circular instructing all affiliated organisations to refuse to accept supporters of the unity campaign as delegates [1]. Similar discrimination against supporters of the unity campaign also took place in London. Among those to suffer was Strauss, who after the Labour victory in the London County Council elections in March 1937 was not recommended by Morrison as a chairman or vice-chairman of any committee, although he had been a successful chairman of the Highways Committee and a vice-chairman of the Finance Committee since the Labour victory in March 1934 [2].

Cripps hoped that the withdrawal from the unity campaign would put an end to the campaign against the supporters of the united front. However, this was not to be the case. At its meeting on 28 July the N.E.C. decided that nothing in the way of a public campaign for a united front could be tolerated [3], a clear warning

1. Daily Worker, 29 May 1937.
2. London Labour Party Executive Agenda, 1 April 1937.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 28 July 1937.

to the supporters of the Labour Unity Committee that they were liable to expulsion. The N.E.C. was also continuing to refuse to endorse parliamentary candidates who had been associated with the unity campaign. One of the most prominent supporters of the unity campaign to suffer in this way was Mellor. Another form of discrimination can be seen in the case of Robert Young, who fought North Islington three times, capturing it in the 1929 general election.

In the early 1930s he had been bitterly opposed to any association with communists, but during 1936 his position had changed. As he wrote to Strachey on 8 August 1936 in connection with C.P.G.B. affiliation

> Hitherto I have been opposed to Communist affiliation. Now, in view of events abroad, I am not so sure. All my instincts are for affiliation; my reason hesitates [1].

The Edinburgh Conference, however, convinced Young of the necessity for joint action with the C.P.G.B. and he became one of the leading supporters of the unity campaign. In a letter to Cripps on 4 September 1937 Young claimed that when his name came up in the nominations for the by-election which was pending in North

1. Strachey Papers, 1936-1939 file.

Islington in 1937, the secretary of the D.L.P. had informed him that his name was not on the official list, as it had been removed because of his support of the unity campaign. After signing a declaration that in future he would not appear on the same platform as communists, Young was put back on the list, but by this time, Young claimed, Transport House and the London Labour Party had ensured a majority for another candidate [1] - Dr. Charles Haden Guest, who for a time in the 1920s had broken with the Labour Party and actually stood as Conservative candidate for North Salford in the 1929 general election.

In his letter to Cripps Young commented 'Is it not a grim commentary on T.H. at present that, as between two wandering sheep, one going left and the other right .... T.H. should support the latter' [2].

Cripps shared Young's disgust and on 9 September he wrote to Middleton withdrawing from the 'Socialist Crusade Week', which was to be held between 19-26 September with a view to attracting 100,000 new members

1. It appears that the London Labour Party quite frequently intervened to ensure the selection of 'sound' candidates. Donoughue and Jones, op.cit., p. 216.
2. Cripps Papers, file 514, The by-election took place in October 1937, and Guest captured the seat achieving a 7 per cent swing from the National Government. This was achieved, however on a 40.4 per cent poll, 19.3 per cent less than in the 1935 general election.

for the Labour Party before the 1937 Conference met, as a protest against the N.E.C.'s treatment of the supporters of the unity campaign, especially the refusal to endorse Mellor's parliamentary candidature [1]. Laski and Strauss also cancelled their speaking engagements for the same reason [2].

The united front and the N.E.C.'s treatment of the Socialist League were debated when the 1937 Labour Conference met in Bournemouth in October. The N.E.C. refused to permit a full debate under the three year rule, but debate took place on a reference back of the N.E.C.'s report The Socialist League and Party Loyalty [3]. In the debate, however, little was said about the pros and cons of the united front as such. Cripps's speech moving the reference back set the tone. Although he proclaimed his continued support for the cause of unity, the majority of the speech was more concerned with the issue of intra-party democracy. Cripps argued that

1. Ibid.
2. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.
3. The report may be found in the 1937 L.P.C.R., pp. 25-28.

Lord Cecil, Mr. Winston Churchill and the Archbishop of Canterbury are three as bitter opponents of the working class as one could find in Great Britain, and yet eminent members of the Labour Party in high and influential positions have shared and are sharing platforms with them today' [1].

Laski and Strauss made virtually the same point in their speeches, noting that the party's heresy hunt against those associating with communists was not extended to those who associated with people such as Churchill [2]. However, when the vote came to be taken on the reference back, the united front was defeated by 2,116,000 votes to 331,000 and the part concerning the Socialist League by 1,730,000 votes to 373,000 [3].

1. Ibid., p. 157. Cripps was almost certainly referring to the activities of the League of Nations Union and the Focus group, formed in 1936 to push the need for rearmament and including members of all parties. Among those associated with this group was Citrine, who had even chaired a meeting in the Albert Hall in December 1936 at which Churchill and other non-Labour members spoke. N. Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers, (1971), pp.130-131. Churchill was disliked on the left on account of his past, especially his conduct during the general strike and in sending aid to the anti-Bolshevik forces after 1917. See 'We Ask', Tribune, 1 January 1937.
2. 1937 L.P.C.R., pp. 158 and 160-161.
3. Ibid., p. 164. A united front resolution was defeated by a 'large majority' at the 1937 Trades Union Congress. 1937 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 384.

The 1937 Labour Conference also saw a major debate on the N.C.L.'s statement International Policy and Defence, which had been issued in July, the month in which the P.L.P. had decided to change its policy of voting against the government's arms estimates to one of abstention. This change, and the N.C.L. statement, owed much to the efforts of Bevin and Dalton, who as chairmen of the T.U.C. General Council and N.E.C. respectively during 1936-1937, had worked hard to educate the party to the need for rearmament even under the National Government [1].

Although International Policy and Defence simply noted that the League of Nations had been rendered temporarily ineffective and that this required increased national armaments without committing the Labour Party to acceptance of the National Government's programme, many on the left, not unreasonably, considered the statement as tantamount to this. As Bevan argued in the debate on the statement 'The fact of the matter is that a re-statement of the Party's foreign policy is being made the guise under which the Movement is being committed to a real support of the rearmament programme of the Government' [2]. However, the reference

1. Naylor, op.cit., pp. 189-196.

2. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 208.

back of International Policy and Defence was defeated by 2,169,000 to 262,000 [1].

Another major debate at Bournemouth concerned the position of the D.L.P.s in the party. The main demands of the constituency party movement were an increase in D.L.P.representation on the N.E.C., provision for the D.L.P.s to elect their own representatives rather than electing them by a vote of the whole Conference [2], and proxy voting, for many of the poorer parties could not attend Conference. The last of these had virtually no support outside the D.L.P.s and was 'overwhelmingly defeated'. However, the other two proposals enjoyed the support of N.U.D.A.W. and the M.F.G.B., although the N.U.G.M.W., N.U.R. and A.E.U. were opposed. The attitude of the T.G.W.U. was thus very important. Bevin was not keen on the reforms, but there was some support for them in the T.G.W.U. delegation. Dalton knew this and came to deal with Bevin by which the T.G.W.U. votes would be cast in

1. Ibid., p. 212.

2. This had previously been discussed at the 1920, 1921 and 1922 Conferences, being defeated each time, although in 1920 it had been carried by a 'fair majority' on a show of hands before being defeated by 1,597,000 votes to 1,211,000 on a card vote. 1920 L.P.C.R., p. 170.

favour of the reforms, but their implementation would be delayed for a year. As a result the increase in D.L.P. representation from five to seven was carried by 1,408,000 votes to 1,134,000, and direct election by 1,814,000 to 658,000 [1]. Angered by the T.G.W.U. decision, Marchbank and Charles Dukes, the general secretary of the N.U.G.M.W., decided to get 'their own back' on Bevin, and voted for immediate implementation [2]; this being carried by 1,886,000 votes to 466,000 [3].

In the first elections under these new rules Cripps, Laski and D.N. Pritt, the M.P. for North Hammersmith, a leading fellow-traveller and an especially vociferous defender of the Moscow purge trials [4], were elected [5]. However, little more was heard of the united front from the Labour left. The unity campaign had

1. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 154.
2. Dalton, Memoirs, Vol 2, p. 143. This provides the basis of this paragraph.
3. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 155.
4. For example, see D.N. Pritt, The Zinoviev Trial, (1936), passim.
5. Of the members of the previous D.L.P section one member did not stand and another was defeated. The other members were all reelected. The votes were Morrison, 348,000, Dalton 306,000, Laski 276,000, Noel-Baker 267,000, Cripps 260,000, Dallas 187,000 and Pritt 155,000. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 181.

shown that under no circumstances would the N.E.C. permit any sort of public campaign to secure unity on the left. Moreover, by the summer of 1937 relations between the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. had moved from bad to worse.

Communist support of the popular front led to growing I.L.P. attacks during 1937, and the Moscow trials were being viewed with increasing suspicion by the I.L.P. - suspicion which after 1936 rapidly turned to disbelief [1]. The main friction, however, stemmed from events in Spain, especially the communists' suppression of rivals on the left during May 1937. Thus by the summer of 1937 relations between the two parties could hardly have been worse. I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. speakers may have appeared on the same platforms in the closing stages of the unity campaign, but at the door the two parties sold pamphlets denouncing each other [2].

The split between the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. pushed the latter even further into the political wilderness. By 1937 there were many in the Labour Party who were suspicious or critical of communist activities in Spain,

1. For example, see A.F. Brockway, 'Must We Pass through Dictatorship?', New Leader, 14 January 1938.

2. Brockway, Inside the Left, p. 267.

and the validity of all the charges being brought in the Moscow trials. However, some, especially on the left, did not voice these doubts in public. There was a feeling that the Soviet Union, or Spanish communists were in such a position that they could not afford to take risks. Victor Gollancz, the left wing publisher who had founded the Left Book Club in 1936 [1], put this argument in the Soviet context when he wrote to H.N. Brailsford, a well known journalist, on 8 December 1937 that 'I feel that the Soviet Union is in a war situation; that in that situation it is not only justified but compelled to take every possible measure that can prevent the faintest chance of disloyalty or disruption' [2]. More commonly, others believed in the need to suppress their fears in the cause of the fight against fascism. Kingsley Martin had as early as 1936 become suspicious about the trials and in 1937 was worried about the Spanish situation, but when George Orwell sent the New Statesman an eye-witness account of the suppression of the P.O.U.M. Martin declined to print it, fearing that it would weaken the anti-fascist cause [3]. Moreover, in 1937 the I.L.P. and many on the Labour left were

1. See below, pp. 161-162.
2. Strachey Papers, 1936-1939 file.
3. E. Hyams, The New Statesman, (1963), pp. 197-199.

united in their support of the united front. In 1938, although the I.L.P. continued to pursue the united front line, a growing number in the Labour Party were to turn to the popular front, regardless of whether or not it was founded on prior working class unity.

CHAPTER FOUR:

the beginning of 1938 there were few prominent members of the Labour Party who supported a popular front not founded on working class unity. One prominent exception was Murphy. His decision to leave the Socialist League in 1936 reflected not only his opposition to its line on sanctions, but also the fact that the majority of its leading members supported the united front [1]. Murphy believed that the united front was a distraction from what had become the main task, namely the defence of democracy against fascism. Murphy still held that fascism was 'inherent in capitalism', but in 1936 he did not see British capitalism as being in its final crisis. He came to believe that the issue was no longer 'Socialism or Capitalism' today', but of whether it was possible to 'preserve the means whereby society can change and progress through the expressed will of the people' [2]. Murphy believed that the best way of defending democracy was to rally all

1. Murphy, New Horizons, pp. 319-320.
2. J.T. Murphy, 'A Socialist Replies to Mr. Attlee', New Outlook, October 1936.

anti-fascists. To propagate this idea, he and several others formed the People's Front Propaganda Committee in the spring of 1936. During 1936-1937 this committee organised a series of meetings around London, including one much-publicised one at the Friends' Meeting House in London on 14 December 1936 which was addressed by Richard Acland, the only Liberal to write a book devoted entirely to the popular front [1], G.D.H. Cole, Strachey and Robert Boothby, the Conservative M.P. for Aberdeen and Eastern Kincardineshire [2].

Cole was the only member of the Labour Party to write a book devoted entirely to the popular front [3]. His views are therefore worth considering in some detail.

Cole had only briefly in 1931 believed that capitalism was on the point of collapse. The identity between capitalism in crisis and fascism had therefore never played as prominent a part in his thought as it had in Murphy's; Cole's analysis of fascism concentrated more on the role of the 'petite bourgeosie' and the appeal of nationalism [4]. Thus he did not make the equation between the National Government and fascism

1. R. Acland, Only One Battle, (1937).
2. Murphy, New Horizons, pp. 319-326.
3. G.D.H. Cole, The People's Front, (1937).
4. G.D.H. Cole, What Marx Really Meant, (1934), pp. 132-133.

made by many on the left. For Cole the fascist danger lay in the logic of the fascist arms economy rather than in the logic of a decaying, at least according to some, capitalism [1].

Hitler's consolidation of power in Germany in 1933 had led Cole for the first time to consider seriously foreign policy, and by mid 1935 he had come to support a policy of 'thorough-going collective security under the auspices of the League of Nations', based on 'the extension of the existing Franco-Soviet Pact into a system of collective security open to all peace loving countries' [2]. He believed that the National Government would never drop its basically 'imperialist' concerns and adopt such a policy, and that in the absence of such a policy western civilisation might suffer total eclipse - and with it 'our chance of building Socialism' [3]. This belief played a major part in converting Cole in the spring of 1936 to the need for a popular front [4], based upon an international programme of resistance to aggression, and a domestic programme of moderate economic and social reform, including

1. G.D.H. Cole, Practical Economics, (1937), pp. 68-102.
2. G.D.H. Cole, 'A People's Front', New Outlook, July 1936.
3. G.D.H. Cole, 'Can Capitalism Survive?' in G.D.H. Cole (ed.), What Is ahead of Us?, (1937), pp. 42 and 44-45.
4. Letter from Cole to Stephen Spender, published in Left News, February 1937.

national and regional planning, a scheme of public works, increased benefits for the unemployed, a reform of the banking system and control over trusts [1].

Cole's acceptance of the popular front, however, reflects not only his fear of fascism, but also his appreciation of the possibility of securing reforms under capitalism. This was partly a result of his non-apocalyptic vision of 1931 and his long-standing tendency to compromise, but it also stemmed from his realisation of the importance of Keynes's General Theory. Cole had been greatly influenced by the writings of J.A. Hobson, especially his view that the mal-distribution of income and resulting over-saving led to insufficient consumption, and he believed that Keynes, with whom he had worked during 1930-1931 on the Economic Advisory Committee, had simply 'sugar-coated .....(the Hobsonian doctrine) .... for the new generation' [2]. Nevertheless he saw that the General Theory overall was an advance on Hobson, especially in the implications of R.F. Kahn's multiplier idea, and he welcomed it as the most important work on economics since David Ricardo's On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation and Karl

1. For a more detailed account of Cole's programme see The People's Front, pp. 154-252.
2. G.D.H. Cole, The Means to Full Employment, (1943), pp. 47-49.

Marx's Das Kapital [1].

Nevertheless, Cole would not have been willing to accept the popular front if Labour alone had been in a position to challenge the National Government. But the 1935 general election had left the government with an unassailable majority, and although in 1936 Labour captured four seats in parliamentary by-elections and the government suffered a mean swing of 3.4 per cent in the seven by-elections in which accurate comparison with the 1935 election can be made, in the nine elections in which turnout can meaningfully be compared there was an ominous 10.4 per cent average fall in the poll.

The weakness of Labour's electoral position, however, did not mean that Cole saw the popular front as a primarily electoral device. His conception of the movement was in essence similar to that developed by the C.P.G.B. during 1936. Both Cole and the C.P.G.B. shared an interest in extra-parliamentary movements [2], although it is true that in the late 1920s Cole had become more sympathetic to parliamentary action [3].

1. G.D.H. Cole, 'Mr. Keynes Beats the Band', New Statesman, 15 February 1936.
2. In the letter to Spender published in Left News in February 1937 Cole wrote 'I have spent most of my life combating the idiots who .... look at politics from the superficial standpoint of mere parliamentary manoeuvring'.
3. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 180.

It is therefore not surprising that they agreed on the importance of the popular front serving as a rallying point for public opinion against the National Government rather than as a means of winning by-elections or a general election. And although Cole was far from sympathetic to the C.P.G.B. [1], he at first shared its belief in the importance of basing the popular front on working class unity.

Cole's extra-parliamentary tendencies and support for working class unity, however, did not lead him to support the unity campaign. The campaign manifesto's policy on rearmament was far from Cole's liking, for during 1936 he had come to accept, albeit equivocally, the need for some rearmament even under the National Government. Also he, unlike many of the supporters of the unity campaign, did not underestimate the difficulties involved in converting the Labour Party to accept common cause with communists. Moreover, the decisions of the Edinburgh Conference on C.P.G.B. affiliation,

1. In many ways Cole had suffered at its hands. It had played a major part in the collapse of guild socialism, and C.P.G.B. infiltration had damned another of Cole's projects, the Labour Research Department. In the early 1930s Cole was one of those most singled out for attack as a 'Social Fascist' by C.P.G.B. leaders. His support of cooperation with communists is thus all the more remarkable. For Cole's attitude to the C.P.G.B. see *ibid.*, passim, esp. pp. 95-98.

which he supported, and the united front confirmed Cole in his belief that a public campaign could only provoke the N.E.C. and expose the leaders to collective attack. And he had no desire to risk expulsion for a campaign which he believed was doomed to failure [1].

The decisions taken on C.P.G.B. affiliation and the united front at Edinburgh also led Cole to see working class unity more as a simultaneous aim of the popular front rather than as a precondition. Thus after 1936 he argued that the only way in which working class unity could be achieved was by confronting the 'official Labour Party with the movement in the country too powerful and spirited for them to resist', and that this could best be achieved by a movement based on a programme which would appeal to all progressives rather than 'by a narrow campaign for the United Front'. Cole believed that this movement had to be developed not by public campaigns, but carefully from below, by work through the D.L.P.s, trade unions, Co-operative movement, and through bodies such as the Left Book Club and Spanish aid committees [2].

The Left Book Club was one of the most interesting developments on the left in the 1930s. It grew out of

1. The People's Front, pp. 336-337.
2. G.D.H. Cole, 'The United Front - and the People's Front', Labour Monthly, January 1937.

a series of discussions which Gollancz had with Strachey in early 1936 [1]. The idea behind the club was to supply books, chosen by a panel consisting of Gollancz, Strachey and Laski, to as large a readership as possible. The first monthly choice, which appeared in May 1936, was Thorez's France To-Day and the People's Front, an apt choice not only because of its topicality, but also as a symbol of the club's immediate purpose, namely the promotion of a popular front in Britain. Subsequent titles included Cole's The People's Front and Acland's Only One Battle. Although Gollancz frequently asserted that the club's role was purely educative and that it was up to others to make the political moves which would lead to a popular front, the club undoubtedly played an important part in promoting the movement. When it issued its first book it had 5,000 members; at its peak in April 1939 the club had 57,000, primarily middle class [2], members, and 1,500 discussion groups. And the national rallies which the club held in 1937, 1938 and 1939 saw the gathering of impressive miniature popular fronts on their platforms.

1. For an account of the history of the club see J. Lewis, The Left Book Club, (1970), passim.
2. S. Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', Journal of Contemporary History, 2/1966, p.75.

At the local level popular fronts formed not only in club discussion groups but also in Spanish aid committees. The outbreak of the Spanish civil war had been accompanied by the rapid growth throughout Britain of groups seeking to organise aid for the republic. In many instances the initiative in forming these groups came from communists. It was the communists who mainly organised recruiting for the International Brigade. It was a group of communists who called the meeting which led to the formation of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, which sent the first British medical staff to Spain in August 1936. It was also communists who promoted the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, which rapidly attracted the support of members of all parties, including the duchess of Atholl, the Conservative M.P. for Kinross and West Perth, Wilfrid Roberts, and Strauss. At the local level the Medical Aid Committee and similar groups also attracted all party support, especially from those in the Labour Party who were disatisfied with Labour's response to the war [1].

Even after Labour's repudiation of the non intervention shortly after the Edinburgh Conference its policy remained cautious. At the meeting of the

1. N. Green, 'The Communist Party and the War in Spain', Marxism Today, October 1970.

N.E.C. held on 8 January 1937 a motion proposing that Labour request that the government, which was to remain faithful to non intervention until the fall of the republic, should agree to the supply of arms to the republic was defeated by 9 votes to 4 [1], although by this time there was overwhelming evidence that the rebels were receiving vast quantities of supplies from Germany and especially Italy. Labour's less than resolute stand over the rights of the republic aroused widespread criticism in the party. In particular, it led the Executive of the Home Counties Labour Association to call a meeting of 'labour supporters of the Spanish Republic' in London's Conway Hall for 13 March 1937 because 'the Executive of the Association felt that Transport House had not only failed to express the will of the movement, but was pursuing a policy which helped and encouraged the National Government in its vicious attitude towards the Spanish struggle' [2].

Out of this meeting emerged the Labour Spain Committee. During 1938 the committee formed the main focus of criticism of Labour policy on Spain, and was a major source of pro-popular front agitation, for support for the republic was to become very much bound up with the

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 8 January 1937.

2. Report on the conference. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/2 (1).

popular front movement [1]. Its chairman was H.N. Brailsford, a former member of the Socialist League National Council and another who had turned to the popular front in 1936. Brailsford's views had many similarities to those of Cole, notably his intellectual debt to Hobson, and, despite an emotional sympathy with the radical elements of the party, a tendency to be interested in short-term goals and the immediately practical. However, he differed from Cole in many ways, in particular the fact that, like many middle class people of Liberal origins, he had always had a somewhat patronising attitude to the unions, a tendency which had aroused Bevin's anger, and had always been very interested in foreign policy [2]. Also, he came to support the popular front only after the outbreak of the Spanish civil war [3], having earlier in 1936 been a supporter of the united front [4].

However, during 1937 the Labour Spain Committee's activities were somewhat muted for in June the N.E.C., T.U.C. General Council and P.L.P. Executive, meeting in

1. See below, pp. 243-245.
2. F.M. Leventhal, 'H.N. Brailsford and the New Leader', Journal of Contemporary History, 1/1974.
3. Letter from Brailsford to Cripps 31 July 1936. Cripps Papers, file 591.
4. See his column in Reynolds News, 28 June 1936.

joint session, decided to support the supply of arms to the republic. Shortly afterwards the N.E.C. also decided to institute a Spain Campaign Committee, the formation of which was announced at the Bournemouth Conference. During the winter of 1937 this committee held a series of meetings up and down the country, culminating in a giant rally at the Albert Hall, which attracted the most enthusiastic audiences [1].

The sense of commitment which the Spanish civil war aroused in the Labour Party was not confined to a small number of activists. Mass Observation, the pioneer public opinion organisation founded in early 1937 by Tom Harrisson, an anthropologist, and Charles Madge, a poet and Daily Mirror journalist [2], found in its study of Bolton ('Worktown') that large sections of Bolton's population passionately supported the cause of the republic [3]. In areas of even the highest unemployment working class people were almost invariably willing to give money or food for the republic. The

1. 1939 L.P.C.R., pp. 33-35.
2. Mass Observation's object was to study British society and public opinion mainly by observing, and from 1937 until the end of the second world ar it had up to four hundred full time 'observers' and a thousand voluntary observers. T. Harrisson, 'The Mass Observation Archive at Sussex University', Aslib Proceedings, August 1971.
3. Information supplied by Tom Harrisson.

C.P.G.B. organiser for south Wales at this time has written 'We could go to the door of any unemployed family in the Rhondda and need only say that we were collecting for Spain and without question or exception we would be handed a tin of milk or a pound of sugar or whatever they had to give, and this week after week from the same houses' [1]. The sacrifices which people such as those of the Rhondda valley made for the republic testify to the intensity of feeling which the war evoked. So too do the sacrifices of Labour parties, and union branches - such as the Cambrian Lodge of the S.W.M.F. which, although desperately short of funds, could in 1938 'once again' send assistance for 'the dependents of the International Brigade who is given their (lives) in Spain for (the) freedom of the world' [2].

The enthusiasm aroused within the Labour Party by the Spanish civil war stood in marked contrast to the response engendered by Labour's candidates in parliamentary by-elections in 1937. Labour's performance

1. W. Paynter, My Generation, (1972), p. 63.
2. Letter from James Morris, the secretary of the Lodge, to Charlotte Haldane, 20 August 1938. Cambrian Lodge Letter Book, 1938. Charlotte Haldane was a leading Spanish aid organiser and secretly a member of the communist party, as was her husband, Professor J.B.S. Haldane. Charlotte Haldane broke with the party in 1942 and her husband revealed his membership in the same year. C. Haldane, Truth Will Out, (1949), p. 266.

in by-elections during 1937 was no more inspiring than it had been in 1936. As in 1936, the problem was more one of the failure to arouse the electorate than to win seats. In 1937 Labour captured two seats and the National Government suffered a mean swing of 4.0 per cent in the 17 by-elections in which comparison can be accurately made with the 1935 general election, but in the twenty-two elections in which turnout can be meaningfully compared there was a 12.6 per cent average fall in the poll. During the Ilford by-election, which took place in June 1937, a Mass Observation 'observer' wrote to Madge 'The general attitude I have found so far is absolute apathy to politics' [1]. The only consolation for Labour was that if its candidates were failing to inspire voters, the National Government's candidates were having even less success. Coming after two years during which real earnings had actually fallen [2], and during which the National Government had reversed the foreign policy which had helped carry it to success in the 1935 general election, however, this was rather small consolation for Labour.

1. N.d. Mass Observation Papers, box 308. The poll at Ilford - 37.3 per cent - was the lowest in 1937 and was 26.7 per cent less than the poll in the 1935 general election.
2. Average annual real earnings (on the cost of living index) fell from 109.2 in 1935 to 105.2 in 1937. Branson and Heinemann, op.cit., p. 347.

The drift of the government's foreign policy, and especially the tendency of Neville Chamberlain, who had succeeded Baldwin as prime minister in May 1937, to pursue his own foreign policy although he had virtually no knowledge of the field [1], led Eden to resign as foreign secretary in February 1938 [2]. Mass Observation's work revealed that the resignation 'reached through to sections of the population not usually touched by political happenings'. A poll conducted on 23 February revealed that 82 per cent were following news of the affair. Although the same survey showed that two thirds were unable to answer the question 'What does Eden's resignation mean?', there was undoubtedly a widespread belief that it meant the reversal of the foreign policy on which the government had been elected in 1935 [3]. The Council of Action conducted a test ballot in four constituencies with government parliamentary majorities of 5-7,000. The ballot asked the, admittedly somewhat vague, question 'Do you approve of Mr. Anthony Eden's stand for good faith in international affairs and will you support his demand for the re-establishment of peace

1. For an account of Chamberlain's foreign policy see K. Middlemas, The Diplomacy of Illusion,(1972), passim.
2. For a more detailed account of Eden's resignation see Thompson, op.cit., pp. 139-155.
3. C. Madge and T. Harrison, Britain,(1939),pp. 42-44.

and security through the League of Nations'. 48,220 people voted, representing a 24.9 per cent turnout, and 94.3 per cent answered 'yes' [1].

Eden's resignation led to a growth of interest in politics, and especially foreign affairs among the British people. A Mass Observation study of 15,000 conversations in Bolton revealed that shortly before the resignation only 0.3 per cent of conversations were devoted to politics. On 21 February the figure was 4 per cent. Three weeks later on 13 March it was 6 per cent [2]. Even allowing for statistical error and Mass Observation's methodology, these figures cannot be ignored, especially as they are borne out by the memory of people like Murphy, who has claimed that in his factory on the day Eden resigned everyone talked politics - and Chamberlain had no supporter [3].

However, by 13 March another event had replaced Eden's resignation as the main source of political conversation, for on 12 March German forces had occupied Austria. On the following day Hitler entered Vienna in triumph. Mass Observation's work revealed that this time detailed knowledge was shown by those interviewed.

1. Lloyd George Papers, box G/142.
2. Madge and Harrison, op.cit., p. 42.
3. Murphy, New Horizons, p. 328.

The conclusions drawn were predominantly pessimistic; 69 per cent thought the Anschluss 'bad', whereas only 4 per cent thought it 'good', and 27 per cent were 'unsure' [1].

In the debate in the House of Commons which took place on the Anschluss, Attlee argued that it was yet another example of the failure to achieve collective security, a failure for which the government bore prime responsibility. He asserted that 'Each successive instance of bad faith, each breach of a treaty, each successful act of aggression leads to another', and called for a return to the League of Nations and a stand against 'a further descent into lawlessness' [2], a call echoed by the Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair [3].

Attlee's speech contained many good points, but it failed to demonstrate the fighting spirit which many in the Labour Party believed the situation demanded. His performances in the House of Commons and rallies up and down the country were methodical rather than inspiring; his weak voice and lack of physical presence meant that he was never able to move an audience. H.F.

1. Madge and Harrisson, op.cit., p. 43.
2. House of Commons Debates, Series V, Volume 333, columns 53-56.
3. Ibid., columns 56-62.

Coggon in a letter to Cripps on 1 January 1938 decided that Attlee 'must have some personal virtue undetected in public' [1]. This was to be a sentiment increasingly heard during 1938.

Attlee's leadership played its part in the growing sense of frustration which overcame a large section of the Labour Party in the spring of 1938. The renewed Japanese aggression in China which had begun in July 1937, the continuing fascist intervention on the side of the rebels in the Spanish civil war and the German occupation of Austria were seen as confirming a pattern of fascist aggression, a pattern which the Labour Party was proving powerless to resist. It was this sense of impotence in the face of impending doom that led many in the Labour Party in the early months of 1938 to turn to some form of inter-party cooperation, especially the popular front.

Immediately after Eden's resignation, and especially after the Anschluss, there were strong rumours that a new coalition government might be formed. Churchill was said to have been willing to be prime minister, and Eden his foreign secretary. The Liberal parliamentary leaders were sympathetic. Among the Labour leadership

1. Cripps Papers, file 592.

Attlee and Greenwood were interested. And Morrison, who was rumoured to have been willing to lead a Lib-Lab alliance in 1937 [1], was said to be especially interested. However, the idea quickly died when it became clear that the number of dissident Tories was far smaller than had originally been thought, and that Eden had no intention of challenging Chamberlain [2].

Had such a government been formed it could not strictly have been called a popular front one, though the sole communist M.P. would probably have supported it [3]. It would have been based on no formal agreement. Moreover, the Conservative dissidents, with the exception of the duchess of Atholl, and many in the Labour and Liberal parties were either opposed to, or suspicious about, any form of agreement with communists. This support for some form of inter-party agreement which excluded the communists, or which was equivocal about it, can be seen clearly in the attitude of some of those who advocated the idea of some form of national opposition after it had become clear that there was to be no new coalition.

1. News Review, 22 July 1937. The report stated that the idea was likely to run into trouble with the unions, especially as its sponsors wanted to whittle down the power of the unions in the Labour Party.
2. Dalton Diary, 8 April 1938.
3. For the development of the communist line on the popular front at this time see below, pp. 178-181.

Some sought a basically Lib-Lab coalition, strengthened by any Conservatives willing to break with their party. The most persistent public advocate of such a tactic in the Labour Party was A.L. Rowse, a fellow of All Souls who had fought Penryn and Falmouth in the 1935 general election. He argued even before Eden's resignation that the Labour Party did not look so much like 'a national party as the Conservatives do', and claimed that the only way for the party to broaden its base was to come to an understanding with the Liberals, specifically excluding the communists who he believed to be unimportant and likely to frighten the middle class [1]. In letters which appeared in the Manchester Guardian on 25 February and 25 March 1938 Rowse suggested broadening this Lib-Lab base to include Conservative dissidents.

Others spoke in similar terms, but may have been willing to accept cooperation with communists. A notable example of this in the Labour Party was Tawney. In a letter which appeared in the Manchester Guardian on 23 March 1938 he wrote

1. A.L. Rowse, 'The Immediate Future of the Labour Party', Political Quarterly, 1/1938, esp. p. 28.

> If the Government can be compelled to change its policy by action in the House of Commons well and good. If not, would not the Labour Party do better - together with such Liberals and Conservatives as may on these matters agree with it - to withdraw temporarily from Parliament and devote its whole energy to arousing in the country a movement of which the Cabinet must take notice?

The letter appeared to exclude a willingness to admit the sole communist M.P. in this scheme. Certainly Tawney had little time for the C.P.G.B. and communism [1]. However, in a letter which appeared in the Daily Worker on 22 April 1933, Tawney, and others including Cole, had supported the united front. His omission of Gallacher in 1938 may therefore have been inadvertent, although it probably reflected an equivocal position, similar to that held by Kingsley Martin.

Martin had played a major role in the attempts to promote a new coalition during February-March 1938 [2]. His position over the united opposition at this time is an interesting one. During the summer of 1936 he had opened the columns of the New Statesman to several supporters of the popular front, notably Cole, and he had himself supported the movement. However, he was suspicious of the Moscow trials from the outset, and at

1. Terrill, op.cit., esp. p.274.
2. Dalton Diary, 8 April 1938.

the same time he developed an appreciation of Churchill - as did Tawney [1]. This led him to a somewhat ambivalent position. He was not willing to attack cooperation with communists, but nor was he any longer willing openly to advocate it. After his attempts to organise a new coalition had failed he therefore began to use columns of the New Statesman to press the idea of a national opposition, an idea which he had pushed intermittently in the New Statesman since November 1936 [2]. It was not made clear whether this national opposition was to include the communists [3].

It should not be thought that omission of reference to the communists necessarily implied an ambivalence or hostility to cooperation with communists. This can be seen from a statement made by A.J. Cummings in the spring of 1938. Cummings was the man described by Dalton as the 'arch-priest of the popular front' [4]. He had consistently pushed the idea through his column in the News Chronicle,

1. Terrill, op.cit., pp. 72-73.
2. See 'Critic', 'London Diary', New Statesman, 21 November 1936.
3. See K. Martin, 'What Ought We to Do?', ibid., 26 March 1938.
4. H. Dalton, 'The Popular Front', Political Quarterly, 4/1936, p. 489.

and elsewhere [1]; he had frequently mocked the Labour leadership's refusal to cooperate with communists [2]; and he was a prominent defender of the Moscow trials [3]. He was also a man with close contacts with the Soviet ambassador and Pollitt [4]. However, in an article entitled 'Storm over Eden', which appeared in the News Chronicle on 1 March 1938, he wrote that 'It is of vital importance if victory is to be assured, that the Liberal and Labour Parties should fight on an agreed front and in order to attract that great silent section of central opinion which is neither Tory nor Socialist'. It is just possible that this seeming-call for a Lib-Lab alliance represented a change of heart on Cummings's part; certainly he conceded that the Moscow trials were having a damaging effect on the cause of unity [5]. Never-

1. For example, see his column in the News Chronicle, 19 May 1936 and Discussion, September 1936.
2. Writing in his column in the News Chronicle on 2 February 1937 he ridiculed Attlee for refusing to appear with Pollitt in a Spanish aid rally, and suggested that Pollitt should disguise himself as Churchill.
3. See his column in ibid., 20 May 1937.
4. F.R. Gannon, The British Press and Germany 1936-1939, (1971), p. 40.
5. A.J. Cummings, 'Arabian Nights in Moscow', News Chronicle, 15 March 1938.

theless, he continued to defend them [1]; he remained willing to appear at meetings with communists [2]; and there were even some who suspected that his relationship with the C.P.G.B. was more than one of sympathy over the popular front [3].

The C.P.G.B.'s attitude to developments in early 1938 was a surprising one in view of its attitude only shortly before, and may help explain Cummings's position. In late 1937 the party had made a major change in its line on the popular front. As the Central Committee's report to the 1938 party Congress noted, 'Since our last Party Congress great changes have taken place in the character of the fight for unity', adding that 'at our last Party Congress we were only able to deal with the People's Front issue in a general way' [4]. At the 1937 Congress it had been conceded that there could be no 'mechanical' application of the process by which the popular front had been formed in France and elsewhere [5]; during late 1937 and 1938 the C.P.G.B. moved towards a

1. Ibid.
2. For example, he appeared at the National Emergency Conference on Spain on 23 April 1938. See below, p. 227.
3. Confidential information.
4. Report of the Central Committee to the 15th Party Congress, (1938), p. 6.
5. Report of the 14th Congress of the C.P.G.B., (1937), p. 63.

popular front more suited to the British political context.

On 8 January 1938 the C.P.G.B. launched its 'Crusade for the People'. This called for the unity of the Labour movement and all other supporters of democracy and peace on a programme involving an international 'popular front' against fascism, and a domestic programme of economic and social reform, including moderate demands such as the introduction of a 40 hour week and holidays with pay [1]. The failure of the unity campaign and the hostility between the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. meant that working class unity was no longer seen as a precondition to the achievement of a popular front; it was now seen more as a simultaneous aim.

Together with this movement away from seeing the united front as a necessary precondition came a more electoral and parliamentary conception of the popular front. Although it had quickly become clear during February-March 1938 that there was to be no major Conservative breakaway the possibility remained much greater than it had been when the C.P.G.B. had first formulated its popular front line during 1935-1936; moreover an election was due by November 1940 at the latest, and might come much quicker as a result of divisions

1. Daily Worker, 17 January 1938

within the government. In the Daily Worker's editorial on 25 February 1938 it was noted that the Labour Party was demanding a general election, but had given no indication of how one could be forced on the government; it claimed that the popular front could do this by rallying in the country such a force of opinion that the government's position would be undermined. On the previous day the Daily Worker's editorial had criticised the P.L.P. for not putting forward an amendment in the Eden resignation debate which the dissident Tories could have supported.

An electoral or parliamentary popular front necessarily meant basically a Lib-Lab one, for the C.P.G.B.'s electoral position and single M.P. meant that it had little to offer in this context. The C.P.G.B. continued to oppose a Lib-Lab pact pure and simple. As the Central Committee noted in its statement The People's Front, which appeared in May 1938,

> No one proposes a Liberal-Labour alliance on the old basis of electoral alliances before 1914. What we propose is a United Peace Alliance with a united Labour Movement as the basic leadership and guarantee that its aims will be realised.

The C.P.G.B. clearly still hoped that the popular front would prove the vehicle by which it could end the Labour Party's proscription on cooperation with communists.

Moreover, the fact that the C.P.G.B. had little to gain from the electoral and parliamentary side of the popular front, together with broader ideological reasons, meant that the party still stressed the extra-parliamentary aspect of the movement. However, formal agreement with the Liberal Party was no longer opposed, and after the Anschluss the Central Committee simply called on the Labour Party to summon an emergency conference of all organisations 'opposed to war and ready to act decisively to preserve peace and formulate a programme which a People's Front Government could carry out' [1].

The use of the term 'United Peace Alliance' in the May 1938 Central Committee statement reflects a growing tendency during 1938 on the part of communists to refer to the popular front, or people's front as they had previously tended to call it, by other terms, presumably in an attempt to play down the communist origins of the movement [2]. The term 'United Peace Alliance' was one coined in the spring of 1938 by the Co-operative Sunday newspaper, Reynolds News, which since

1. Save London From the Fate of Barcelona!, (Central Committee of the C.P.G.B. statement, 19 March 1938).
2. Marchbank stressed this new communist approach to unity in his general secretary's report to the 1938 N.U.R. conference, 1938 N.U.R. Annual General Meeting Report, p. 123.

1936 had shown popular front sympathies.

In the editorial of Reynolds News on 20 March 1938 the paper's editor, Sidney Elliot, had called upon the Labour Party to lead 'men and women of all Parties who care for Peace and Democracy' in a campaign against the National Government. Elliot argued that

> The domestic policy of this Peace Alliance emerges in clear and simple outline.
> There would be vigorous measures to prevent profiteering and full recognition of Trade Union rights and standards in the prosecution of the rearmament programme.
> Slums, a danger to health and no protection against gas attack, would be swept away. Roads and water services would be expanded. Derelict land would be brought into cultivation.
> The storage, production and distribution of food supplies would be tackled boldly. A complete scheme of Air Raid Precautions would be operated.
> There would be an intense, planned attack on malnutrition.

As Elliot made clear, however, it was the foreign policy of his 'United Peace Alliance' that was most important. Elliot believed that only a return to League of Nations principles with an effective policy of collective security could avert the war which was looming ever nearer. Elliot claimed that it was essential that Britain should reverse this trend 'by calling a halt to the Fascist rape of Spain' and by, together with France

and the Soviet Union, guaranteeing the independence of Czechoslovakia - 'by force of arms if necessary'. Elliot argued that an alliance of all opposition parties on such a programme would guarantee a comfortable majority in the next general election.

When the Co-operative Party conference opened at Brighton on 15 April its chairman, Alfred Barnes, the M.P. for East Ham South, announced that he was in favour of the peace alliance. This led to the tabling of an emergency resolution and on 17 April the conference discussed the peace alliance. Barnes was supported by G.S. Woods, the M.P. for Finsbury, and the alliance enjoyed considerable rank and file support. This support was probably accentuated at the conference by the fact that the peace alliance was supported by the communists [1], for in 1937 the C.P.G.B. had decided to take a more active role in the Co-operative movement, and had quickly succeeded in having members elected to official positions in several areas [2]. Although the peace alliance was opposed by the seven other Co-operative M.P.s and the London Co-operative Society,

1. Daily Worker, 23 March 1938.
2. Report of the 14th Congress of the C.P.G.B., (1937), p. 257.

the largest in the country, Barnes carried the day by 2,343,000 votes to 1,947,000 [1].

During May the peace alliance gained a further success in the Co-operative movement when the London Co-operative Society changed its position and came out in favour of it [2]. At the Co-operative Congress in Scarborough in June, however, the alliance was defeated by 4,492,000 votes to 2,382,000 [3]. Since the gathering of the Co-operative Party conference the N.E.C. had issued a pamphlet setting out in detail its case against the popular front, and this had undoubtedly had its effect on many of the supporters of the popular front [4]. Moreover, in the debate A.V. Alexander, the M.P. for Hillsborough, had claimed that the week before Sinclair had told him that the Liberals would have nothing to do with any other party [5]. Although Sinclair

1. Daily Herald, 18 April 1938. The debate was taken in secret session and therefore does not appear in the 1938 Co-operative Party Congress Report.
2. Daily Worker, 28 May 1938.
3. 1938 Co-operative Union Congress Report, p. 594.
4. See below, pp. 201-219.
5. 1938 Co-operative Union Congress Report, p. 590. Alexander also stressed the communist origins of the peace alliance, although he did not make any reference to communist activity within the Co-operative movement.

immediately issued a statement to the press categorically denying that he had made any such comment [1], it came too late to undo the harm done by Alexander's claim. A third factor which counted against the peace alliance was that there was a strong element in the Co-operative movement of opposition to any form of political activity [2].

Defeat in these circumstances hardly justified the jubilant obituary which appeared in the editorial of the Daily Herald on 9 June

> Dead, dead, dead is the Popular Front.
> Let's bury it quickly.

1. Manchester Guardian, 9 June 1938.

2. Only 61 per cent of Co-operative membership was affiliated to the Co-operative Party. J.J. McShane, 'Co-operators in Congress', Labour Monthly, July 1938. Some idea of the problems involved in obtaining Co-operative support even for joint action with the Labour Party can be gauged from the prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for Maldon's fervent plea on 25 March 1939 for the local Co-operative society to reconsider its attitude to the joint Labour-Co-operative campaign agreed on by the two parties in November 1938. He noted 'I can quite well appreciate the point made by your Committee that collective political action creates some dissensions'. Maldon D.L.P. Papers, 1939.

The Times's editorial on the same day showed a shrewder appreciation of the vote when it noted 'Not the rejection of the "united front" [1] by the Co-operative Congress but the size of the minority deserves the more attention'.

1. More recent commentators have similarly confused the movements. For example, see Carpenter, op.cit., p. 186, M. Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, (1975), p. 215, Thomas, op.cit., p. 174 etc. Other writers have spoken of the popular front when they are in fact referring to other forms of coalition, or they have failed to distinguish between the popular front and other types of movement. For example, see the chapter entitled 'A Popular Front?' in Thompson, op. cit.

The strong hostility which the Daily Herald exhibited towards the popular front was hardly surprising in view of the nature of the paper. In its early days it had been a left wing journal, but union hostility, and especially its need for financial assistance, had brought it effectively under the control of the T.U.C. in 1925 [1]. In 1929 the T.U.C. sold a majority share in the paper to Odhams Press, but retained ultimate control over editorial policy through the T.U.C. directors, who included Bevin and Citrine [2]. Naturally, this policy was very different from that advocated earlier, and throughout the 1930s the Daily Herald's line was a source of frequent criticism in the party [3]. Its editor in 1938, Francis Williams, has claimed that the editorial

1. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924, pp. 221-234.

2. Bullock, op. cit., p. 421.

3. For example, in 1937 the S.W.M.F. sent a resolution to the M.F.G.B. Executive criticising the Daily Herald for its 'reactionary' policy, and asking the Executive to press for a policy more 'in keeping with the views of Socialism'. The Executive agreed with the resolution and decided to watch carefully the paper's policy 'with a view to representations being made to....(it) in the future'. M.F.G.B. Executive Minutes, 19 July 1937.

policy was entirely his own [1]. However, it is interesting to note that Bevin liked to call the Daily Herald 'my paper' [2], and Dalton has claimed that Bevin influenced the paper's line during the 1931 crisis [3]. Probably the truth of the matter is that Bevin and the other union directors' views were similar to those of Williams and they rarely, if ever, needed to intervene. Certainly over the popular front Williams's views coincided very much with the Daily Herald's union directors.

The hostility of the Daily Herald, whose circulation was over 2,000,000 and second in size only to the Daily Express [4], was a serious blow in terms of popularising the idea of the popular front. Nevertheless, it did not mean that the movement's only media support came from Reynolds News, which had a circulation of 500,000, the Daily Worker, with a circulation of 100,000 [5], and small weekly and monthly communist and fellow travelling journals like Labour Monthly and Left Review. The popular front was also supported by the

1. Lord Francis Williams, Nothing So Strange,(1970), p. 134.
2. Bullock, op.cit.,p 589.
3. Dalton,Memoirs, Vol. 1,p. 274.
4. Political and Economic Planning, Report on the British Press, (1938),p. 84.
5. Ibid.

Manchester Guardian, which although it had a circulation of only about 50,000 sold very much to elite opinion groups, and the News Chronicle, which had a circulation of 1,324,000, making it the fifth largest national daily [1].

The two Liberal national dailies had given sympathetic coverage to the popular front victories in 1936 and their implications for Britain. After Eden's resignation both turned first to the idea of a new coalition and then to a united opposition, although both were clearly unsure about the value of the communists, and suspicious of the Moscow trials [2]. Nevertheless, neither opposed cooperation with communists. The Manchester Guardian's editorial on 18 April argued that 'there is growing up in the country a movement against the Government and its foreign policy that is far more powerful than anything the Labour Party has been able to rouse', and added that 'United action may be forced on all progressives however much they may cherish their previous affiliations'. The editorial of the News Chronicle on 26 March claimed that 'United action by all those who seek a positive peace policy is the most urgent need of the day', and argued that 'The old

1. Ibid.
2. Editorials, News Chronicle, 11 June 1937, and Manchester Guardian, 14 March 1938.

party divisions lose their meaning when the existence of civilisation is at stake'. On 21 April it produced its own electoral calculations and concluded, like Elliot in Reynolds News, that a united opposition could win a majority at the next election [1].

The popular front also received support from the columns of Tribune, although its editor, Mellor, remained hostile to any agreement with non-socialists [2], as did another of the former leaders of the Socialist League, Reg Groves [3]. Among those who used the pages of Tribune in spring of 1938 to push the cause of the popular front was Cripps. Although Cripps had previously been a

1. The editorial of the News Chronicle on 21 March 1938 welcomed the united peace alliance.
2. See below, p. 234.
3. Information supplied by Reg Groves. Trotskyite opposition from within the Labour Party also came from the Youth Militant Group of the Labour League of Youth. The position of this group was very similar to Groves's and provides another example of left wingers in the Labour Party who did not accept its basically parliamentary line. The July 1937 editorial of its journal, Militant, for example, called for a 'revolutionary' Labour line. This group had supported the united front, although critical of the C.P.G.B.'s 'moderation' and 'class collaboration', and the Moscow trials. For example see Militant's editorial August 1937. However, as Militant's May 1938 issue made clear, it was opposed to the popular front, which it saw in similar terms to the I.L.P.

fervent opponent of the popular front, he now embraced the cause with the enthusiasm which he had devoted to his earlier campaigns against party policy. He announced his change of heart in an article entitled 'Peace Fronts', which appeared in Tribune on 14 April 1938. He wrote

> I myself was bitterly opposed to any such political alignment a year ago.... But events move rapidly today and it is necessary to reconsider one's opinions and decisions in the light of changing events. The gravity of the situation of the working class of this country and of the world is undoubtedly far greater today than it was a year or even three months ago.

The growing threat of fascism, and developments in his own thought which had led to a modification of his attitude to the possibility of achieving worthwhile reforms under capitalism [1], meant that Cripps was now willing to campaign on a short-term policy involving less than a rapid and far-ranging movement towards ending capitalism.

Some of the reasons for Cripps's conversion to the popular front were put in a memorandum which he, Laski, Pritt and Ellen Wilkinson sent to the N.E.C. for consideration at its 5 May meeting. This memorandum

1. See below, pp. 407-409.

serves as an excellent insight into the reasons why four of the leading members of the Labour left turned to the popular front in the spring of 1938.

The memorandum argued that a crisis of unparalleled danger existed for democracy in the world, a crisis which the government's 'pro-Fascist' foreign policy had played a major part in creating [1]. The memorandum also showed that some on the left had lost none of their old suspicions about the 'domestic side'. It claimed that

> If the National Government should win the next election, and thus secure another five years of life, we must, if we believe in our own propaganda, hold that within those five years we should drift into another imperialist war or into a definite alliance for concerted action with the Fascist Powers. Either would greatly intensify the restriction of political and industrial freedom, and the more such restriction grows the greater will be the tendency of the National Government - always under its assumed 'mandate' of National Unity' - to borrow the methods of suppression now in vogue in totalitarian countries. The area of democracy will shrink still further, and our ability to maintain it here will be proportionately jeopardised.

The memorandum therefore argued that the overthrow of the government had become the most urgent need of the hour. It agreed that in normal times it would be right for the Labour Party to wait its chances at the

1. Copy of the memorandum in the N.E.C. Minutes, 5 May 1938.

forthcoming general election, but claimed that the situation was such that to do so would risk losing, 'perhaps for ever', the 'chance of establishing the only conditions under which we can hope effectively to start the process of socialisation'. The popular front was thus seen not as a betrayal of socialism, but as essential to its long term achievement.

The memorandum went on to argue that whilst Labour was making little progress in the country electorally and appeared unlikely to win the next general election, there was a large body of opinion which was anti-Chamberlain, but lacking a strong lead. It claimed that this body of opinion could be rallied to the support of Labour's foreign policy, but not its full domestic policy. The memorandum therefore advocated that Labour should adopt a new domestic programme and launch a campaign to 'rally the unattached and politically unconscious voters of all shades of opinion and of all classes by the demand for the formation of a new and more real National Unity' [1]. The memorandum concluded that such a campaign

> would force an issue and create a challenge that the National Government could not ignore. We are convinced that the one effective chance of that immediate victory which is essential for the salvation of democracy and peace lies along this road.

1. Emphasis in the original.

However, when the N.E.C. met on 5 May the proposals put in the memorandum were defeated by 16 votes to 4 [1], and it was decided that Dalton, Greenwood, Laski and Morrison should prepare a statement on the issue and issue it to the movement. At the N.E.C. meeting on 12 April 1938 it had been decided to issue a circular to all affiliated organisations pointing out that the united front and 'similar proposals' had been rejected by Conference on several occasions and calling on members to refrain from associating with other 'political bodies that do not share the Party's policy or its determination to achieve democratic objectives' [2]. However, this circular appears to have had little effect for the Co-operative Party was not the only organisation to come out in favour of the popular front at this time.

One of the major trade unions, N.U.D.A.W., voted 43,612-35,525 in favour of the movement at its Annual Delegate Meeting on 2 May [3]. Considerable support came from the constituency parties, especially among the smaller and more rural ones where the electoral situation seemed most hopeless - areas like the south west where the Bristol East, Exeter, Honiton,

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 5 May 1938.
2. Ibid., 12 April 1938.
3. Daily Worker, 3 May 1938.

North Cornwall, Penryn and Falmouth, Swindon and Taunton D.L.P.s had set up a committee to call a conference to promote a peace alliance [1]. And support was especially strong in the Labour League of Youth.

The support for the unofficial National Activity Committee which existed had forced the N.E.C. to concede defeat and it was decided to reform the N.A.C., to recognise the unofficial League journal Advance and to accept the Labour League of Youth's right to advocate any policy it wished, as long as its members refrained from cooperation with communists [2]. A conference of League branches was therefore held in London in March to accomplish the reorganisation, and Willis was formally elected chairman. However, the N.E.C. must have quickly regretted the decision for after the Anschluss the Labour League of Youth, the Universities Labour Federation, the Young Communist League, the Young Liberal Association and the League of Nations Youth Group formed a youth popular front. On 12 June a meeting was held at Earls Court which decided to initiate a campaign to promote an international 'Peace Block'

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 5 May 1938 and Labour Organiser, March 1939.

2. Lord Willis, Whatever Happened to Tom Mix?, (1970), pp. 161-166.

and domestic economic and social reform [1].

It was in an attempt to stem this rising tide of support for the popular front that the N.E.C. on 5 May appointed Dalton, Greenwood, Laski and Morrison to prepare a statement answering the case for the popular front.

Laski's decision to help prepare the N.E.C.'s statement against the popular front reflects one of the most serious problems which the supporters of the popular front faced, namely the sense of disloyalty involved in advocating a movement opposed by the N.E.C or Conference. Many in the Labour Party shared Laski's strong sense of loyalty, a sense which was undoubtedly heightened by his election to the N.E.C. [2].

Nevertheless, Laski's decision cannot be explained solely in terms of his sense of loyalty and discipline. It must also be seen in terms of the nature of his commitment to the popular front.

Laski's more Marxist position after 1931 did not immediately lead him to drop his hostility to cooperation with communists. It was only after Hitler's

1. T. Willis, 'Youth Has Learned the Value of Unity', Tribune, 20 January 1939.
2. Martin, Harold Laski, 1893-1950, p. 112.

accession to power and the commencement of the persecution of the Jews, for whom Laski felt an intense sense of identification, and the change of Comintern line in March 1933 that Laski's attitude changed [1]. During the spring of 1933 Laski emerged as a leading supporter of the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, a communist front organisation, and it was Laski who moved the reference back on the N.E.C.'s report on this organisation (renamed the Relief Committee for the Victims of German and Austrian Fascism after the suppression of the Austrian socialists) at the 1934 Labour Conference [2].

However, Laski, like many on the left, did not come to support the united front until after the 1935 general election. In an article entitled 'Harold Laski Conducts an Autopsy', which appeared in the December

1. Whilst Laski was opposed to cooperation with communists before 1933 his attitude was never the virulent anti-communism of many of the Labour leadership. As Laski wrote in 1927 'The answer to the new faith is not the persecution of those who worship in its sanctuary, but the proof that those who do not share in its convictions can scan a horizon not less splendid in the prospect it envisions nor less compelling in the allegiance it invokes'. H.J. Laski, Communism,(1927),p.251.
2. 1934 L.P.C.R.,p. 136.

1935 issue of Labour, he announced his support of the united front. Laski's reasoning was similar to Cripps's. In particular he was becoming increasingly alarmed at the reformism of the Labour party, especially the union leadership.

Laski's position on the popular front at this time was a complex one. In an article entitled 'Unity and the People's Front', which appeared in Labour Monthly in March 1937, he wrote

> I can support it upon two fundamental conditions only. First, it must be built upon the United Front; without that, it can have no meaning. Secondly, whatever immediate measures of amelioration a Popular Front may propose, it must move directly against the citadel of capitalist power.... It cannot be just one more effort to patch up the decaying fabric of capitalist society.

The insistence that a popular front must be founded on the united front was shared by many of the supporters of the popular front at this time. Laski's attitude towards the basic task of the popular front, however, was a unique one, for by insisting upon its acceptance of 'increasingly Socialist purposes' Laski effectively made the achievement of a popular front impossible.

Laski believed that the logic of a decaying capitalism made the popular front unworkable if based on a Liberal-reformist policy, Laski having little sympathy with Keynes, seeing him as a spokesman for the

'national bourgeoisie'. Whilst Laski's attitude changed somewhat during the spring of 1938, he never fully accepted the possibility of a reformed capitalism, nor did he feel the overwhelming sense of impending doom which so affected Cripps. He was never completely able to overcome his feeling that the most important problem was the Labour Party's tendency to compromise and quietism, tendencies which the popular front could only strengthen. As Laski wrote in a review of Cole's The People's Front, which appeared in Left News in July 1937, 'Frankly, the danger which confronts the Labour Party is still MacDonaldism'.

In view of this, it is easy to see why Laski accepted the invitation to prepare the statement against the popular front.

CHAPTER FIVE:

PEACE WITHOUT HONOUR.

The result of Dalton, Greenwood, Laski and Morrison's work appeared on 12 May under the title Labour and the Popular Front. This six page pamphlet was to serve as the main N.E.C. statement on the popular front until the collapse of the movement.

Labour and the Popular Front opened

> We live in very critical times. Everywhere there is profound apprehension about international relationships....
>
> An acute sense of these dangers is uppermost in many minds. It has led a number of people, including some of our friends, to consider the possibility of a new political combination....What is known as the 'Popular Front' or 'Democratic Peace Alliance' is, say its advocates, the high road to immediate victory.

Seeing the popular front in purely parliamentary terms, however, the pamphlet went on to argue that only a breakaway of dissident Conservatives could offer the popular front any hope of success. And, not unreasonably, this possibility was considered unlikely.

Labour and the Popular Front was also not willing to accept that the popular front was necessary to improve Labour's prospects in the next general election. The pamphlet argued that 'Such a view underestimates the growing strength of Labour in the country as indicated by

recent by-elections' [1]. The evidence of growing Labour strength presented by the four by-elections which had taken place since the beginning of the year, however, was far less clear cut than Labour and the Popular Front implied. Although Labour succeeded in capturing two seats - Ipswich on 16 February and West Fulham on 6 April - on both occasions victory was achieved by candidates who fought campaigns which were specifically designed to attract Liberal voters by concentrating on foreign policy.

The Labour candidate at Ipswich, R.R. Stokes, made a particular effort to attract Liberal support. After his selection in January 1938 he wrote to Layton asking for News Chronicle support as he intended campaigning on foreign policy and issues which Liberals could accept [2]. He also saw Victor Finney, the secretary of the Council of Action, and the council's local representative [3]. Although there had been no Liberal candidate in the 1931 and 1935 general elections, in 1929 a Liberal had polled 22.6 per cent, and undoubtedly a large number of Liberals had not voted Labour in 1935. Lloyd George's election adviser noted after Stokes's victory that 'socialism was

1. Pp. 4-5.
2. R.R. Stokes Papers, file 29.
3. R.R. Stokes Diary, 24 January 1938.

the one thing that was not mentioned at this election' [1]. A Liberal Organisation memorandum, written in February 1938, claimed that 'Stokes has won a spectacular victory on a policy which is entirely Liberal' [2]. On no issue was Stokes's campaign more in tune with Liberal policy than over foreign affairs, and support of League of Nations principles and collective security figured prominently in the campaign.

Foreign policy figured as prominently in the campaign of Dr. Edith Summerskill at West Fulham, the first by-election to take place after Eden's resignation and the Anschluss. Of Summerskill's opening speech in the campaign, fifty-two minutes were devoted to foreign affairs, five to personal matters and none at all to domestic affairs [3]. Domestic policy played a more important role in the campaign as a whole, but criticism of the government's foreign policy was a constant theme in Labour speeches and leaflets. Speaking at the declaration of the poll Summerskill showed she had no doubts as to the reason for her victory when she commented 'I won because the people of Fulham....have no

1. A.H. Henderson Livesey, The Meaning of Recent By-Elections, (Privately published pamphlet, 1938), p. 10.
2. Thurso Papers, box 63.
3. Mass Observation Papers, box 346.

faith in the foreign policy of the National Government' [1]. Almost certainly this campaign made a strong appeal to Liberals, who had polled 3.3 per cent in 1935 but who had no candidate in 1938; it was undoubtedly intended to [2].

There can be no denying that the gains made by Labour at Ipswich and West Fulham were impressive. At Ipswich the swing to Labour was 10.3 per cent and the poll - 82.8 per cent - was 0.7 per cent higher than in 1935. At West Fulham the swing against the government was 7.3 per cent on a 65.5 per cent poll, 4.4 per cent lower than in 1935 [3]. However, Stokes and Summerskill were strong candidates, especially the former who was a well known local employer. Moreover, as later by-elections were to show, Labour's success in these contests was attributable more to the nature of the campaigns, especially the concentration on foreign policy, than to any upsurge in support for the Labour Party pure and simple.

These results seem to contradict Labour and the Popular Front's claim that in 'many constituencies the absence of a

1. Manchester Guardian, 7 April 1938.

2. Information supplied by Baroness Summerskill. It is interesting to note that the Daily Herald's editorial on 22 April 1938 claimed that both candidates had fought on the full Labour programme.

3. The poll at Ipswich was the second highest in 1938, and the poll at West Fulham was the highest achieved in the ten by-elections which took place in London between the 1935 general election and the outbreak of war.

Liberal assists the Conservative rather than the Labour candidate' [1]. This was an analysis which ignored developments in the nature of the Liberal Party and its support. Nevertheless, it was an understandable claim. As Labour and the Popular Front noted, in the past Liberals and Conservatives had often formed 'United Fronts' in constituencies against Labour [2]. Moreover, the past also made it difficult to forget that Labour had been helped from obscurity before 1914 by a pact with the Liberals; and once Labour had replaced the Liberals as the main parliamentary opposition to the Conservatives its electoral and rhetorical strategy was 'aimed less at upsetting the Conservative predominance than at forestalling a Liberal revival' [3].

Although in the late 1930s Labour leaders tended to remain silent on the possibility of a Liberal revival, it is difficult to believe that the fear that a popular front might help sustain the Liberal Party did not play its part in the opposition to the movement. Certainly in the late 1930s the Liberals appeared on the point of extinction. A Liberal Organisation memorandum written in May 1938 recognised the bankruptcy of the party's traditional appeal on

1. P. 5.
2. Ibid.
3. McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924, p. 120.

issues such as free trade, and to groups such as the non-conformists [1]. The Liberals' vote in the 1935 general election was their lowest ever. And the state of the party in the constituencies was poor: in 1936 the party had only 189 constituency associations, with less than one third of these engaged in 'substantial propagandist work' [2].

Labour and the Popular Front was on stronger ground in arguing that there was no evidence that the Liberal Party would accept the popular front. Sinclair was known to support a popular front, as were three of the most active members of the parliamentary party, Richard Acland, Le Mander and Roberts. Many other Liberals and the two major daily Liberal newspapers also supported the popular front. Nevertheless, some Liberal associations, especially in northern England, were afraid that a popular front would lead to their eclipse by the Labour Party [3], and a large number of Liberals, including many who supported a Lib-Lab alliance, were opposed to any form of cooperation with communists [4]. Thus at the 1937 Liberal Assembly a

1. Thurso Papers, box 62.
2. Liberal Publications Department memorandum, January 1936. Ibid., box 56.
3. Liberal Organisation memorandum, May 1938. Ibid., box 61.
4. Information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

popular front motion proposed by the Chertsey party, which in 1936 had unsuccessfully attempted to form a local electoral popular front [1], was rejected [2].

However, eight days after the publication of Labour and the Popular Front the 1938 Liberal Assembly passed by a 'large majority' a resolution, proposed by Richard Acland, which stated that 'this assembly of the Liberal Party is prepared to receive assistance from any individual, any group, or any organisation which is prepared to receive assistance from, and give assistance to the Liberal Party, in order to put into operation the foreign policy adopted by this assembly, and in order to achieve, in the immediate future, a programme of domestic reform which is not inconsistent with the policy of the Liberal Party' [3]. There should have been no cause for confusion about the meaning

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 27 May 1937. In July 1937 the Liberals unsuccessfully fought this seat in a straight fight with the Conservatives (there was no agreement with Labour over a single candidate). The Liberal candidate fought on the Chertsey 'Charter', which appealed for all party support on a rather vague version of the Next Five Years Group's programme. Letter from Mrs. E.M. Alexander, New Outlook, March 1937. This decision was clearly opposed by some in the party, as for a time it appeared that an 'Independent Liberal anti-Communist' candidate would stand. Times, 10 and 18 June 1937. However, the Liberal candidate received the support of many leading Liberals, including Acland, Layton, and Lloyd George and his Council of Action. News Chronicle, 1 July 1937.

2. Ibid., 31 May 1937.

3. Ibid., 21 May 1938.

of this resolution, for Acland was a well known advocate of the popular front and he made it clear in his speech that he was proposing agreement stretching from the 'extremist left' to dissident Conservatives [1]. The Labour critics of the popular front could no longer claim that the Liberals had not indicated their willingness to combine with other parties.

Labour and the Popular Front laid special stress on the fact that agreement with the C.P.G.B. would frighten moderate opinion [2], and this argument was in no way silenced by the decisions taken at the 1938 Liberal conference to support the popular front. Indeed, it was to remain one of the main arguments against the popular front until the collapse of the movement.

This is an especially difficult argument to assess. It is best considered as two questions: first, whether a national agreement with the communists would have frightened moderate opinion; and second, whether communist support for local electoral agreements and non communist candidates frightened moderate opinion. The first is more problematic as it did not actually happen. Probably such an agreement

1. Ibid.
2. P. 5.

would have been harmful for it would have advertised communist support, and offered fertile ground for National Government propaganda. However, it is not clear that the second type of support was harmful, though possibly this may have been because many electors were unaware of such support.

Since the introduction of the popular front line the C.P.G.B. had frequently given support to Labour candidates standing in parliamentary or municipal elections. In many cases the Labour candidates receiving such aid did well. In the 1937 London County Council elections the C.P.G.B. had, without the consent of the London Labour Party [1], organised a large number of meetings on behalf of Labour candidates and distributed thousands of leaflets. Although Conservative newspapers, especially Lord Beaverbrook's Evening Standard [2], and many Conservative candidates had run

1. On 8 January 1937 Morrison issued a circular to all Labour candidates ordering them to decline cooperation with communists. London Labour Party Papers, 1937. D.L.P.s quite frequently refused communist offers of help. For example, the Rhondda party refused in 1937 to even meet a delegation from the Rhondda communists which wanted to discuss ways in which they could help in the borough elections. Letter from J. Morris to the secretary of the Rhondda B.L.P., 17 March 1937. Cambrian Lodge Letters, 1937. And this in spite of the fact that the C.P.G.B. had polled 37.4 per cent in Rhondda West in the previous general election.

2. For example, see the Evening Standard, 13 February 1937.

communist bogey campaigns, the Labour Party consolidated its 1934 victory [1]. Similarly, in by-elections such as that at West Fulham, communist participation seems mainly to have excited the fears of Labour Party officials [2].

Where Labour did badly, however, communist intervention provided a ready made excuse. When Labour failed to capture the North St. Pancras seat in a parliamentary by-election in February 1937 it was the communists who were blamed by many in the party [3]. When the Labour Party did badly in the November 1938 municipal elections in Cheshire and Lancashire, the Organisation Sub Committee reported 'In every case where the Communists intervened it was to the detriment of the Party' [4]. In St. Pancras, however, Labour achieved a 5.2 per cent swing, 1.2 per cent above the average swing against the government in 1937. And in the 1938 municipal elections in Cheshire and Lancashire Labour's failure was greatest in areas where there was a strong

1. In 1934 Labour won 50.5 per cent of the poll and had a majority of 16 seats. In 1937 it won 50.6 per cent and had a majority of 30. Turnout in 1937 at 43.4 per cent was 9.9 per cent higher than in 1934. Donoughue and Jones, op. cit., p.654.

2. Report, n.d. Mass Observation Papers, box 313.

3. For example, see Marchbank's leader in Railway Review, 12 February 1937.

4. Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 16 November 1938.

catholic community. In these areas Labour had always faced problems, mainly over the catholic schools issue, problems compounded in the latter half of the 1930s by Labour's support for the republic in the Spanish civil war. Moreover, throughout Lancashire the Labour organisation was in a state of advanced decay [1]. The party was attracting few new members, and in Liverpool in particular Labour members spent more time arguing among themselves over issues of religion and personality than in promoting Labour's cause among the electorate [2].

Labour and the Popular Front went on to claim that even if a popular front were to succeed in achieving office, divisions within its ranks would soon emerge. A large number in the party still believed that it was Labour's need for Liberal support in 1924, and especially during 1929-1931, that had led to disaster. As the pamphlet noted 'the experiences of 1924 and 1929-1931 teach us that, whatever the intentions of many of the Liberal rank and file, the official

1. See the report on the Preston by-election. By-Election Sub Committee Minutes, 8 February 1937.

2. On 24 February 1938 the national agent wrote to Cripps 'In some Divisions (of Liverpool) the introduction of new blood appears almost impossible'. Cripps Papers, file 502. For a more detailed account of the state of the Liverpool Labour Party see R. Baxter,'The Liverpool Labour Party 1918-1963', (University of Oxford D. Phil thesis,1969), esp. pp. 45-75.

Parliamentary Liberal Party is uncertain and unreliable' [1]. Moreover, although the fate of the Front Populaire was not specifically mentioned, it undoubtedly played its part in the belief that a popular front government would be plagued by internal division. The split in the Front Populaire over the supply of arms to the Spanish republic had been quickly followed by division over economic and financial policy. Although when Blum's government collapsed in June 1937 it was as a result of an adverse vote in the Senate rather than the break-up of the coalition, the growing breach in the ranks of the Front Populaire had already ensured that the ministry could not have survived much longer.

The collapse of the Front Populaire posed a problem for the British supporters of the popular front. Some tried to defend its record. Elliot, for example, argued in the editorial of Reynolds News on 11 May 1938 that

> Despite its weaknesses, the French Popular Front put through a great social programme which, in a dark hour, inspired French democrats with new hope, new enthusiasm and new effort. It saved France from Fascism in 1934. It smashed the Cagoulards financed and armed by foreign dictators in 1938 [2]. It may even yet play a decisive part in saving Europe from disaster. The French Popular Front Government fell under the same evil blows that broke the British Labour Government of 1931 - the blows of Big Money. I beg Labour spokesmen,

1. P. 7.
2. Blum formed a second ministry in March 1938 which fell a month later.

> victims of a banker's ramp in 1931, that they should not deride their French comrades now bleeding from the wounds of treason.

The C.P.G.B. in particular attempted to defend the Front Populaire, especially Blum's (and the French communists') attitude to the sit-in strike movement [1]. Many British supporters of the popular front after 1937, however, increasingly turned their attention to the coalition governments of Scandinavia, Sweden in particular attracting attention [2]. Although these were Lib-Lab type alliances rather than popular front ones, they unquestionably had more in common with what a popular front would have meant in Britain than the Spanish and French coalitions.

The question of the stability of a popular front government was an important one, but it was not a damning one. There were major differences of attitude to defence and foreign policy under the National Government between the communists, Labour and Liberals, whose policy on these issues in 1938 was similar to Labour's. However, these differences would probably have disappeared if a popular front government had existed, for they stemmed mainly from attitudes to the government. The central question is, therefore, whether differences over domestic policy would have led to

1. For example, see Campbell, op. cit., pp. 336-345.
2. For example, see J. Parker, 'Labour Rule in Sweden', N.F.R.B. Quarterly, Autumn 1936.

the fall of a popular front government?

The C.P.G.B. appeared to present no problems in this context. By 1938 it was willing to support virtually any policy of resistance to aggression and domestic reform that would have secured unity - although whether it would have stuck to it is another, and unanswerable, question. Moreover even after a popular front general election the communists would only have had one seat in Parliament. The question thus becomes one of whether the Labour and Liberal parties could have reached agreement on a short term programme.

In an attempt to attract maximum Liberal and Conservative support the programmes put forward by G.D.H. Cole, and to an even greater extent by Elliot, were distinctly moderate. Neither included any major piece of nationalisation, nor did they press for the nationalisation of the arms industry, which was contained in the programme of the Next Five Years Group, and supported by many leading Liberals. Clearly if the Labour Party had put forward such a programme there would have been little possibility of division - at least with the Liberals. However, many of the Labour left supporters of the popular front would never have accepted such a programme at this time. For example, the Cripps-Laski-Pritt-Wilkinson memorandum had stated that there was to be

'some considerable measures of socialisation'. The question therefore becomes, what were the chances of the Liberals accepting such a programme?

The answer must be that many Liberals would have accepted such a programme. This was not just a case of concern over the drift of foreign affairs leading them to accept domestic policies which they did not really support. It also reflected the developments which had taken place in Liberal thought, especially since 1931. In March 1937 the Labour Party had published its long-awaited Immediate Programme, which was designed as a programme for one term in parliament. This programme omitted the controversial nationalisation of the joint stock banks, but included the nationalisation of the Bank of England, coal, power and transport; the institution of a National Investment Board; and national 'control' of land use. It was greeted with widespread Liberal approval. As the News Chronicle's editorial on 8 March 1937 stated 'There is very little in these proposals which an ardent Liberal could not advocate with perfect consistence'.

If the supporters of the popular front had agreed to the Immediate Programme as the basis for any popular front's policy, stressing that first priority would be given to the fields of agreement in foreign policy and social reform, they would have avoided one of the main arguments of the

Labour opponents of the movement. This was that only socialism could cure the economic ills of the nation and avert international disaster. The concluding paragraph of Labour and the Popular Front used this argument when it appealed

> Do not let us compromise our Socialist convictions. Let us, rather, work with renewed energy for the triumph of the ideals we have inherited. Never has it been so clear as now that their achievement is the condition of democracy and peace.

The popular front movement, however, was never to achieve the cohesiveness necessary to produce a single document, and although during 1938 an increasing number of supporters of the movement were to realise that the Immediate Programme was moderate enough to serve as the basis for a popular front, there was always to be sufficient division of opinion, or lack of clarity, over the programme to allow Labour opponents to claim that the popular front involved a betrayal of socialism, whereas the Labour programme did not.

Opposition to the popular front also stemmed from reasons not stated in Labour and the Popular Front.

One was touched upon in the statement when it said of the Liberals 'at least they do not attempt to manipulate Labour Party policy from within' [1]. The reference was clearly to the communist party and the belief that in part the agitation in the Labour Party for a popular front stemmed

1. P. 7.

from cover communists. Moreover, there was unquestionably a strong belief among the Labour leadership, especially on the part of Bevin and Citrine, that the popular front, like the united front, was simply an attempt by the communists to lessen Labour's defences against cooperation with communists, or to split the movement [1].

Another reason was in no way touched upon in Labour and the Popular Front. This was that some trade union leaders opposed the movement not only for the foregoing reasons, but also because, not without reason, they saw that in part the popular front movement was connected with hostility to the unions' position in the Labour Party and believed that the movement threatened this. As Marchbank wrote in his column in Railway Review on 6 May 1938 'Some of us are coming to the conclusion that a deliberate attempt is being made to bring into existence a new kind of political party in which it is hoped to swallow up the constituency organisation of the Labour Party and to eliminate the organised trade union membership'.

Labour and the Popular Front was thus open to many criticisms, but with its publication the agitation in the Labour Party for a popular front died down. The reasons for this were several.

Firstly, many supporters of the popular front accepted

1. Information supplied by Lord Citrine.

the plea for a closing of ranks embodied in Labour and the Popular Front's comment 'The success of a political party, especially in a critical time, depends upon the loyalty, the courage, the grit, and the staying-power of its members' [1]. The strong sense of unity and loyalty in the Labour movement was a factor which counted heavily against the popular front throughout the movement's existence. It is impossible to tell how many in the party supported the movement, but remained publicly silent; there were undoubtedly some [2].

Secondly, to some extent support for the popular front derived from a feeling of disgust with Labour's leadership and policy as much as from a commitment to what was implied by the popular front, especially cooperation with communists. In this the popular front was only picking up where the united front had left off. G.D.H. Cole had noted this connection in his article 'Unity and the People's Front' which appeared in Labour Monthly in March 1937 when he wrote 'One of the main reasons for wanting working-class unity, for wanting the People's Front, lies not in any particular love for organisations of that sort, but in a sense

1. P.8.

2. For example, the parliamentary candidate in the 1937 Farnham by-election wrote to the N.E.C. stating that he supported the popular front, but did not intend broadcasting the fact. N.E.C. Minutes, 24 February 1937.

of the deep and utter rottenness of the present Labour leadership'. Those who supported the popular front for this reason were always likely to be less than resolute, and as the immediate impact of the Anschluss receded so too did the commitment of many of those attracted to the popular front in the spring of 1938.

Thirdly, the unity campaign had demonstrated the futility of running a campaign against official policy on an issue on which the N.E.C. could use its powers of expulsion and reorganisation against dissident individuals and D.L.P.s. The N.E.C. in the spring of 1938 had already used these powers to reorganise several D.L.P.s. for popular front activities [1]. Few members of the party in May 1938 were willing to consider expulsion from, or breaking with, the party.

Certainly Cripps, who only months later was to accept such a course, was not. On 16 May 1938 Lady Murray, the wife of Sir Gilbert Murray, the professor of Greek at Oxford University and a prominent member of the League of Nations Union, wrote to Cripps to inform him that she felt so strongly about the popular front that she intended to leave the Labour Party. Two days later he replied 'As you

1. The Willesden D.L.P., for example, was reorganised. Ibid., 25 May 1938.

know I am keen about the Popular Front, but in spite of the fact that it has been turned down at the present stage, I feel that it is essential for everybody to stick to the Labour Party at the moment since it is obviously the strongest nucleus and does contain all organised Labour and must be the central point of any Popular Front in the future' [1]. Events in May 1938 had not reached such a pass that he was willing to go to the limits on this issue. Moreover, Cripps at this time was a sick man and from late July to early October he was in Jamaica, partly for reasons of health [2].

The dying down of the popular front agitation in the early summer of 1938 was in no way diminished by the results of the two by-elections which took place in May 1938 - by-elections which did nothing to strengthen the N.E.C.'s case against the popular front. On the very day that the N.E.C. considered the Cripps-Laski-Pritt-Wilkinson memorandum voters went to the polls at Lichfield and the Labour candidate, C.C. Poole, captured the seat from the National Liberals with a swing at 4.7 per cent on a 57.8 per cent poll, 6.4 per cent less than in 1935. Unfortunately for the opponents of the popular front Poole concentrated in his campaign on foreign policy and attributed his success

1. Cripps Papers, file 572.
2. Cooke, op. cit., p. 198.

to opposition to the government's foreign policy, and especially the support which he received from traditionally non-Labour voters [1]. Subsequently he was to become one of the leading advocates of a popular front.

Fourteen days later at Aylesbury, which the Cripps-Laski-Pritt-Wilkinson memorandum had singled out as a likely victory in the event of the Labour Party accepting a popular front, the Labour Party achieved what the Daily Herald's editorial on 21 May 1938 described as 'one of the most brilliant Labour achievements for a long while'. This brilliant achievement, however, did not result in Labour winning the seat. In fact, the Labour candidate, Reg Groves, came third in a three-cornered contest. But Groves had succeeded in increasing Labour's percentage of the poll from 11.0 per cent on a 70.2 per cent turnout in the 1935 general election to 19.1 per cent on a 63.1 per cent turnout in 1938.

The main interest in this, however, lies not so much in the increase in the Labour vote as in the events which took place in the constituency before the poll. At the beginning of April the Liberal candidate, T. Atholl Robertson, had come out in favour of a popular front candidate contesting the seat. Behind the scenes several local and national Labour figures, including Brailsford and

1. Daily Worker, 7 May 1938.

Christopher Addison, another former Liberal and the man who had been minister of agriculture at the time of MacDonald's defection, had made similar suggestions [1]. In 1935 the Conservatives had comfortably won the seat with 57.4 per cent of the poll in a three-cornered contest, but in the 1929 general election a Liberal had polled 41.3 and Labour candidate 10.6 per cent against a Conservative opponent. This, together with the drop in the government vote in by-elections since 1935, encouraged the belief that a single opposition candidate could defeat the Conservatives. The proposal found some support in the Ayelsbury D.L.P., which contained three cover communists [2], but at a meeting of the G.M.C. on 23 April it was decided by 21 votes to 8 to confirm Groves's candidature [3].

This decision, however, came only after the N.E.C., through the national agent and district organiser, had gone to great lengths to replace Groves by a less left wing candidate [4]. The machinations of Transport House

1. Information supplied by Reg Groves.
2. Ibid.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 27 April 1938. According to the Manchester Guardian's 'Private Wire' column on 9 May 1938 the president and the treasurer of the D.L.P. resigned as a result in order to work for the Liberal.
4. Information supplied by Reg Groves.

were not the only problem which Groves faced. Groves experienced considerable difficulty in attracting Labour speakers [1]. Moreover, although on the extreme left of the party, Groves was in no way sympathetic to the C.P.G.B., and during the campaign the small Aylesbury communist branch and the Daily Worker supported Atholl Robertson [2], although it was normal C.P.G.B. policy to support Labour candidates in three-cornered contests, even if the Labour candidate opposed the popular front and the Liberal supported it [3].

In view of these circumstances and the primarily agricultural nature of the constituency, Groves did well to increase the Labour vote by as much as he did. However, it is not clear that this justified the Daily Herald's editorial on 21 May 1938 in asserting 'if we were "Popular Fronters", we would take one look at the Aylesbury result and then crawl off home'. If anything, the result confirmed the popular fronters' argument that in most rural areas only an accommodation with the Liberals could offer any hope of capturing seats in the foreseeable future for, in spite of Groves's 'success', the Conservatives were left with a comfortable majority of 54.1 per cent of the poll.

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 25 May 1938.
2. For example, see the Daily Worker, 13 May 1938.
3. For example, this happened in the Holderness by-election in February 1939. Ibid., 15 February 1939.

The supporters of the popular front's claim that Labour alone could not win the next general election was given further weight by the result of the by-election which took place in Stafford on 9 June 1938. In the 1935 general election the Labour candidate had polled 43.6 per cent in a straight fight with a Conservative and in 1938 Labour made a great effort to win the seat. The Labour candidate, F.G. Lloyd, who had fought the seat in 1935, however, was a conscientious objector [1] and he campaigned almost entirely on domestic policy [2]. Even the Spanish civil war hardly received a mention, and Lloyd specifically refused to have Josiah Wedgwood, the independent Labour M.P. for Newcastle under Lyme, and one of the leading supporters of the republic, speak on his behalf [3]. The result was the only by-election during 1938 in which the Conservatives improved their position, achieving a 1.2 per cent swing on a 77.1 per cent poll, 1.9 per cent less than in 1935. This was hardly evidence of an upsurge in support for the Labour Party and excuses such as that used in the Daily Herald on 11 June which claimed that the Tory candidate had benefited because he was on honey-moon when the campaign started, must have left some un-

1. Letter from H. Swaffer to Lloyd George, 10 June 1938. Lloyd George Papers, box G/159.
2. News Chronicle, 6 June 1938.
3. Letter from Wedgwood, Manchester Guardian, 13 June 1938.

convinced[1].

Many Labour supporters of the popular front, however, were far from inactive during the summer of 1938. After the publication of Labour and the Popular Front they tended to shift their attention to agitation for the convening of a special Labour Conference. The main reason for wanting such a Conference stemmed from the desire to discuss the deteriorating situation of the Spanish republic, but supporters of the popular front saw the Conference also as a means of raising the issue of the popular front.

At the 1937 Labour Conference it was announced that it had been decided to move the date of the Conference from October to Whitsun to avoid following the Trades Union Congress gathering in September. As this would have meant that another Conference would be due in seven months, it was decided by the N.E.C. that the next Labour Conference would be held at Whitsun 1939. Dalton, on behalf of the N.E.C., however, confirmed that it was within the discretionary powers of the N.E.C. to call a Conference before that

1. At Transport House blame was placed, just as ludicrously, on the Council of Action, which had supported Lloyd, and an investigation of the activities of the council was ordered. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 June 1938. Since the 1935 general election the Council of Action had supported a large number of Labour candidates without apparent adverse effect. In many by-elections the Council of Action's pamphlets were even distributed by the D.L.P. This happened in West Fulham, for example. Report, n.d. Mass Observation Papers, box 313.

date if it was felt that there was a need [1].

Following the Anschluss and the deterioration of the situation in Spain in the spring of 1938, a large number in the Labour Party decided that such a Conference had become necessary [2]. At the 5 May meeting of the N.E.C., however, a motion, proposed by Cripps, asking the executive to convene such a Conference was defeated after the executive had split 9-9 and the chairman, Dallas, had exercised his casting vote against the proposal [3].

Nevertheless, pressure for an emergency Conference was mounting and at the N.E.C. meeting held on 25 May it was announced that up to the previous day 126 B.L.P.s and D.L.P.s, four federations of Labour parties and four trade unions, including the M.F.G.B. and N.U.D.A.W., had informed the executive of their support for a Conference [4]. A further motion calling for a Conference, however, was withdrawn after it had become clear that opposition had grown since the last meeting, mainly because of the realisation that it would be difficult to prevent a Conference convened to discuss the Spanish situation from turning its attention

1. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 154.
2. The Daily Worker began calling for such a Conference as early as 15 February 1938.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 5 May 1938.
4. Ibid., 25 May 1938.

to other issues, in particular the popular front [1].

This is what had happened at the National Emergency Conference on Spain, held in the Queen's Hall London on 23 April 1938. The conference had been organised immediately after the Anschluss by a group of Labour and Liberal backbenchers [2]. Its platform included Cummings and a host of leading supporters of the popular front. Among those who spoke were the duchess of Atholl, Brailsford, Cripps, Le Mander, Pollitt, Pritt, Roberts, Trevelyan and Ellen Wilkinson - a collection described by the Manchester Guardian on 25 April as 'the first meeting of the Popular Front in England'. The conference was attended by 1806 delegates, including 176 B.L.P.s, D.L.P. and trade councils [3]. These delegates unanimously agreed to a programme of action to rouse 'The whole force of democracy' in Britain on behalf of the republic [4]. Trevelyan, making

1. Morrison, for example, appears to have opposed a special Conference for this reason. Letter from Sybil Wingate to J. Pole, the secretary of the Labour Spain Committee, 27 May 1938. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/5 (14).

2. Daily Worker, 25 April 1938.

3. Report on the National Emergency Conference on Spain, 23 April 1938, p. 29.

4. Ibid., pp. 27-29.

one of the most moving speeches of the day, spelled out clearly what he saw this as meaning when he concluded 'What we need, in this country, is a Popular Front'. The delegates drowned the end of his speech in cheers [1].

Laski again raised the question of an emergency Conference when the N.E.C. met on 27 July. Although by this time at least 171 B.L.P.s and D.L.P.s supported such a Conference [2], Dalton succeeded in having the matter postponed until the executive met in September. This decision led the Labour Spain Committee to decide that if when the N.E.C. met in September it did not come out in favour of an emergency Conference, then it would organise its own, a bold decision for the Home Counties Labour Association had given up such a plan after Middleton had threatened that anyone attempting to organise a conference without the N.E.C.'s consent would be expelled [3]. In a memorandum prepared by the Labour Spain Committee in August it was argued

> Two reasons justify our action. A party which values its democratic institutions ought not to be deprived for twenty months of a general assembly. But the much graver

1. Ibid., p. 7.

2. This was the figure given to Middleton in a letter from Pole on 20 June 1938. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/5 (27).

3. Letter from Middleton to Greene, 2 June 1938. Ibid., 1/5 (14).

> reason for the meeting is drawn from the Spanish War. Though the Parliamentary Party has used its opportunities of question and debate to the full there is much more that the movement outside the House might do to aid our Spanish comrades [1].

The memorandum went on to suggest that the Labour Party should refuse to cooperate over rearmament until the government agreed to supply arms to the Spanish republic, and that in the meantime the Labour Party should itself export arms. Brailsford had canvassed Cripps on the latter idea in April, arguing that 'volunteers should be openly recruited and munitions sent to Spain', and noting that the Edinburgh and Glasgow trades councils had already decided to start smuggling arms [2].

The argument that cooperation with the government's rearmament programme should only be given in return for the government promising to carry out an acceptable foreign policy was one which had increasingly been voiced by some in the Labour Party since it had become clear in 1937 that the union leadership in general was not opposed to rearmament under the government. The argument came especially from those not completely committed to the parliamentary road. G.D.H. Cole, for example, had put forward this line

1. Ibid., 1/5 (54).
2. Letter from Brailsford to Cripps, 11 April 1938. Cripps Papers, file 521.

in an article entitled 'Dilution?', which appeared in Tribune on 1 April 1938. However, at the 1938 Trades Union Congress a reference back of the General Council's report on rearmament made on this ground was defeated by an 'overwhelming majority' [1], and little more was heard of the idea.

The 1938 Trades Union Congress met as a crisis was beginning to develop over the Czechoslovak Sudetenland, which contained three million German speaking people. Although the Sudeten Germans had never been part of Germany, the Sudeten frontier had been one of the aspects of Versailles most heavily criticised within the Labour Party in the years immediately after the war. By 1938, however, the Labour Party, impressed by the development of democracy in Czechoslovakia and revolted by the Nazi regime, had adopted a radically different position. Revealing an insight so sadly lacking in the government's assessment of the situation, the Labour pamphlet Hitler's Threat to Czech Democracy, which was issued in June 1938, refused to accept the case for cession to Germany or autonomy, claiming that 'It cannot be too often emphasised that the Nazi campaign against Czechoslovakia has nothing to do with the rights or wrongs of the Sudeten Germans but is part of the drive of Nazi Germany for hegemony not merely in Europe but in

1. 1938 T.U.C. Annual Report, p. 313.

the world' [1].

As the German divisions gathered on the Czech frontier at the beginning of September the N.E.C., T.U.C. General Council and P.L.P. Executive met in joint session and issued a statement entitled Labour and the International Situation, which called on the government to 'leave no doubt in the mind of the German Government that it will unite with the French and Soviet Governments to resist any attack upon Czechoslovakia'. The statement, which was published on 8 September, claimed that 'No State has treated its nationalities more generously' and argued that the acceptance of the latest Czech offer to the Sudeten Germans 'would remove any legitimate grievances that are now under consideration'. The statement concluded

> Whatever the risks involved, Great Britain must make its stand against aggression. There is no room for doubt or hesitation.

Labour had stated its belief that there was no cause for further concession; that it would fight if Hitler sought redress by force.

Meetings were held with Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, who had succeeded Eden as foreign secretary, to press on the government Labour's determination to stand firm. Demonstrations were organised. However, Labour made no serious

1. P.11.

effort to rally public opinion, and the demonstrations died down in the last week of the crisis. The Czech government's decision on 21 September to accept the cession of those parts of the Sudetenland in which there was a German minority introduced an element of confusion into the minds of many in the Labour Party, which lacked the steadying hand of Bevin who was in Australia from July to October [1]. The pressure which the British and French governments had put upon the Czechs to make this offer was denounced. But the Czech acceptance of cession helped undermine some of Labour's resolve to stand firm and risk the war which Hitler threatened if the Czechs did not begin withdrawal from the whole of the Sudetenland by 26 September, and strengthened the pacifism of some, and the commitment to peaceful treaty revision of many in the party.

These equivocations can be seen very clearly in the attitude of the Daily Herald during the crisis. In its editorial on 9 September 1938 the Daily Herald had stated that 'No more should in honour be asked of the Czechs', and argued that the latest Czech offer would make the 'Sudetens the freest minority in Europe at the grave expense of the capacity of an isolated Czechoslovakia to defend itself'. To some extent the Daily Herald maintained this attitude;

1. F. Williams, Ernest Bevin, (1952), p. 220.

for example, in its editorial on 26 September it criticised the pressure which the British and French governments were putting on the Czechs for more concessions. However, as the crisis developed an ambiguous note set in. In its editorial on 29 September it stated that the fundamental issue was 'whether in the adjustment of differences between nations, large or small, the rule of reason and mediation shall govern or whether force shall set aside all equity in international affairs'; the exclusion of Czech representatives from the conference gathering at Munich was simply described as 'unfortunate'. More importantly, it seems that in the last week of September Williams was offered a memorandum on the German opposition to Hitler which indicated that if Britain stood firm there would be a coup against Hitler. Although this memorandum came from a special envoy sent to Germany by the government's chief diplomatic adviser, Williams refused to publish it [1].

A commitment to peaceful treaty revision, at least as a means of preventing war, had never been a strong feature of the thought of those on the Labour left. However, this did not mean that the left adopted a uniform policy of resistance to Hitler during the crisis, although individual

1. B.B.C. television's Yesterday's Witness programme, 'Who Was Carl Goerdeler?', 1 June 1972. In this programme Lord Ritchie Calder, a reporter for the Daily Herald, claimed that had Williams published the memorandum Munich would never have happened for it would have strengthened public opposition to concessions.

members of the left tended to maintain a more consistent position throughout the crisis than the party leadership in general. Lansbury and some pacifists supported Chamberlain throughout, opposing war in any circumstances [1]. Groves and those on the left who held the National Government to be crypto-fascist refused to support the government in any war that might result from a stand against Hitler [2]. Zilliacus and others on the left who had come to see the threat of Hitler as greater than any dangers posed by the government were willing to back the government, but on conditions. Zilliacus stated this position in some detail in an article entitled 'What Labour Must Do', which appeared in Tribune on 16 September 1938 [3]. He argued that Labour should urge 'the Government immediately to join with France and the Soviet Union in declaring that these

1. Postgate, op. cit., p. 317.

2. R. Groves, 'To Support War Is to Weaken Socialism', New Leader, 30 September 1938. See also Militant, October 1938, and below, pp. 238-239.

3. This was the first issue edited by H.J. Hartshorn. Mellor had been replaced as editor because of his unwillingness to support the popular front line of the rest of the editorial board. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss. It seems that by this time Mellor was also doubtful about cooperation with communists. Foot, op. cit., p. 280. Foot also claims that pressure to replace Mellor came from the Left Book Club, which starting with the 16 September issue had the centre pages of Tribune for its own news. These pages were used in particular by Strachey. His first article appeared on 16 September 1938 and was entitled 'What Must Socialists Do if War Comes?'. His answer reflects the difficulties faced by those who saw the government as crypto-fascist, but wanted to fight fascism. It was an equivocal call for support for the government, but at the same time agitation to overthrow it.

countries will assist Czechoslovakia with all their forces in case of aggression, and in concerting joint military action with these powers in the case of war'. Zilliacus went on to state that if war resulted, Labour should co-operate with the government only on condition that Chamberlain and other leading appeasers resigned, that the trade unions be given control over all labour questions, and that, finally, the government conclude a treaty with its allies laying the foundation of a future 'World Peace Union'. Others, like Bevan, were unsure of their position [1].

The equivocations of many in the party were epitomised by Attlee's performance in the parliamentary debate which took place on the Munich conference during 3-6 October. In his speech he singled out resistance to aggression as the missing element in the government's foreign policy, but missed the point that no aggression had taken place. On the conference itself, Attlee's criticisms were far from incisive. On the crucial question of what, if any, concessions should have been made beyond the Czech government's offer of 21 September he was silent. His criticisms appear to have been based on the belief that some solution could have been found which would have been both more favourable to the Czechs and acceptable to Hitler. Such a solution,

1. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss. It is interesting to note that Foot has nothing to say about Bevan's attitude during the Czech crisis.

however, was almost certainly impossible in the circumstances. And Attlee's hope that Hitler would now feel able to return to the League of Nations reveals the extent to which the belief that once the grievances resulting from Versailles had been settled peace would return to Europe was still important in the party [1].

Attlee's confused reaction, however, reflected the attitude of the majority of the British people. There were few who opposed Chamberlain's flight to Munich. Mass Observation estimated that only 10 per cent of those interviewed were opposed to Chamberlain's policy at the time of Munich, although only a week before the figure had been 40 per cent [2]. The distribution of gas masks in the days before the Munich conference had brought home all too forcefully the horrors of war. The crisis had developed too quickly for many to comprehend the issues involved. The press gave the crisis wide coverage, but, as so often before in the 1930s, its coverage can only have added to the confusion. Of the national press only the Daily Worker and Reynolds News constantly stressed that the issue was not one of self determination for the Sudeten Germans, but

1. House of Commons Debates, Series V, Volume 339, columns 50-66.

2. Mass Observation estimated that had Chamberlain given in to Hitler at this time 'there might well have been serious riots in London and elsewhere'. Madge and Harrisson, op. cit., p.110. Although difficult to accept, this is a conclusion which cannot be ignored.

resistance to fascist aggression [1]. Although the Left Book Club issued over two million leaflets on the crisis [2] and a Penguin special - Europe and the Czechs by S. Grant Duff - sold 50,000 copies within twenty-four hours of its publication on 1 September [2], most people in Britain shared Chamberlain's ignorance of a 'far away country' [3].

Rumour had it that the vote on the government's motion on Munich in the House of Commons would be treated as a test of loyalty for Conservative M.P.s. It was this news which Harold Macmillan, the Conservative M.P. for Stockton on Tees and a man who had been working for a new Conservative-Liberal-Labour coalition since 1935 [4], conveyed to Dalton on the first night of the debate. The following day Dalton met Eden, Churchill and several other Conservative opponents of Munich. This group was seeking to organise the maximum Conservative abstention, both on the government's motion and the Labour amendment, and was therefore anxious that the latter should not be too openly a vote of censure. The

1. For an account of the press's reaction to Munich see Gannon, op. cit., pp. 136-228.

2. Lewis, op. cit., p. 98.

3. Madge and Harrisson, op. cit., p. 86.

4. Memorandum from Macmillan to Lloyd George, 22 November 1935. Lloyd George Papers, box G/141.

possibility of an election in which twenty or thirty Conservatives would be victimised was again mentioned and Dalton was asked whether there was any possibility of electoral agreements in the constituencies [1].

These proposals were of considerable interest to the supporters of the popular front for Labour and the Popular Front had specifically stated that a Conservative breakaway might lead Labour to reconsider the popular front [2]. It seems clear that this statement was misleading in that most of the Labour leadership had no intention of cooperating with communists under any circumstances, even if some were willing to reconsider their attitude to an agreement with dissident Conservatives and Liberals. And the Conservative dissidents held similar views on the communists. However, some in the Labour Party, including Cripps, did not see this [3]. On 6 October, therefore, Cripps, who had only returned from Jamaica four days before, visited Dalton and urged that Labour should make common cause with the dissident Tories.

Cripps's reaction to the Czech crisis had been at first a somewhat confused one. This was partly because he had not been completely in touch with events in Europe. The most important factor, however, had been the danger of war,

1. Dalton, Memoirs, Vol. 2, p. 199.
2. P. 4.
3. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

for it brought with it the problem which had plagued the left in the 1930s - namely would it support the National Government in a war against fascism? Cripps answered this question by deciding that he could not support the National Government [1]. The Munich conference meant that he avoided having to take so momentous a decision, but the realisation that he might have been forced to take it increased his commitment to the popular front [2].

At his meeting with Dalton on 6 October Cripps suggested that Dalton, Attlee and Morrison should meet three or four of the dissident Conservatives, and possibly Sinclair, to discuss the possibilities of a parliamentary and electoral alliance. Dalton was doubtful if the Conservatives would still be interested in agreement once the crisis was over. Moreover, he realised that 'It would be impossible to go against the general opinion of the Trade Union leaders'. Nevertheless, he agreed to approach Attlee and Morrison. Attlee was not averse, and Morrison was certainly interested [3]. However, on the last day of the Munich debate Chamberlain had announced that there was to be no snap election, and with this went the major reason for the Tory flirtation

1. Cooke, op. cit., pp. 225-227.
2. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.
3. Dalton Diary, 6 October 1938, and Donoughue and Jones, op. cit., p. 248.

with Labour. At what proved to be the final meeting between Dalton and Macmillan on 12 October Macmillan expressed his doubts about the value of further conversations for the majority of Conservatives would move no faster than Eden. And Eden was still far from anxious to create a breach between himself and the Conservative leadership. Indeed, he even considered voting with the government in the Munich debate until dissuaded by some of the other dissidents [1].

Even had Eden shown a greater taste for opposition, however, it is doubtful if he could have carried all the Conservative dissidents in Parliament, yet alone in the country, with him. The sense of loyalty to party and the strong sense of respect in which the leadership is held in the Conservative Party would have worked against such an eventuality.

In the Labour Party, respect for leadership has never been one of the most marked features of party thought, but the sense of loyalty to party has always been far stronger than in the Conservative Party. And yet, such was the impact of Munich on some in the Labour Party that four prominent members, and many lesser figures, were shortly to take a course of action which was to lead them into direct conflict with official policy. Ultimately, this conflict was to lead

1. Twenty-two Conservatives abstained on the government motion and Labour amendment. Thompson, op. cit., p. 189.

them to accept expulsion rather than concede their case.

In early September Cummings had written in his column that there was strong rank and file discontent in the unions, notably over Citrine and his 'finding too many reasons for passive acquiesence in the Government's foreign policy' [1]. There was a similar rank and file feeling among the constituency parties, as can be seen from the response of many parties to Labour's reaction to the Sudeten crisis.

In a letter which the Westminster Abbey D.L.P. sent to Middleton on 6 October 1938 it congratulated the P.L.P. for its stand against the 'Pro-Fascist policy of Mr. Chamberlain and his followers in the early stages of the crisis', but deeply regretted the dropping of 'active and open opposition' during the later stages, 'especially in the house on Wed. Sept. the 28th.' [2].

A more far-reaching criticism of Labour policy was contained in a memorandum which the Holborn D.L.P. sent to the N.E.C. on 2 October 1938. For the authors of this memorandum the most important aspect of the crisis was the way it demonstrated the failure of the Labour leadership. The memorandum asserted

> In our opinion, the betrayal of the Czech people must be laid at the door of the

1. News Chronicle, 6 September 1938.

2. Cripps Papers, file 514.

> Labour leaders who throughout these critical days have seemed incapable of realising their responsibilities to the working class of this country and the world....
>
> The only consistent lead given to the democratic forces as a whole has come not from the Labour Party, but from outside bodies such as the League of Nations Union, the International Peace Campaign, the Communist Party and the Left Book Club.
>
> Months ago we were told that should a crisis arise, the question of combined action with other parties and organisations prepared to work with us on a common programme would be considered.
>
> Our Party has still an opportunity to draw together and lead all those in opposition to Chamberlain and those who, although still wavering, would follow a definite lead from the Labour movement [1].

The Holborn D.L.P.'s plea for a popular front was to be repeated by a growing number of supporters of the Labour Party in the weeks afters Munich. In the wake of what was seen as the most serious of the National Government's surrenders to fascism, the claims of party loyalty were weakened. In a letter which appeared in the Daily Herald on 28 October 1938 Poole noted that the

> supreme need of the moment is the rallying of all lovers of democracy and freedom, irrespective of party to present an alternative to the present Government, to arrest its disastrous Foreign Policy and to save civilisation from total wreck.
>
> If this be not done, of what use will it be for me to comfort myself in the years that lie ahead that I have kept a pure Socialist faith?

1. Ibid., file 572.

> **Of what service to my day and generation shall I have been if, with liberty and freedom gone, and living under a Nazi regime, I can tell myself (for I shall not dare tell anyone else) that I never associated with any other party?**

The call for a rallying of all lovers of democracy and freedom was one which figured prominently at the Labour Spain Committee's conference when it met in London on 23 October 1938. At its meeting on 6-7 September the N.E.C. had again considered the question of an emergency Conference and resolved 'That power be given to the Chairman and Officers to call a special meeting of the National Executive Committee to consider the summoning of a Special Conference in the event of the international situation becoming critical'[1]. This did not satisfy the Labour Spain Committee, which, not without cause, believed that with the situation in Spain rapidly deteriorating and a crisis in the offing over the Sudetenland, it was ridiculous to imply that the international situation was not already critical. The committee therefore went ahead with its plans to convene a conference.

Delegates from 118 Labour organisations, including

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 6-7 September 1938.

99 D.L.P.s and 9 B.L.P.s were represented [1]. The chairman was Brailsford; Trevelyan was among the speakers; and G.D.H. Cole, Strauss and Tawney were among those who sent messages of support [2]. Although the conference had grown out of the demand for a full Labour Conference to discuss Spain, following so soon after Munich it could hardly avert its gaze from wider issues. On Czechoslovakia it passed a resolution which claimed by a timely and open military understanding with France and the Soviet Union, Great Britain would have averted war without the surrender of Czechoslovak integrity and independence [3]. However, it was on the popular front that the conference passed its most important resolution. In a letter which appeared in

1. The vast majority of these organisations came from southern England, 30 coming from London alone. Only two came from Wales and 2 from Scotland, although support for the republic was especially strong among the coalfields in these countries. It should be remembered, however, that travelling costs may have deterred many of the more distant organisations from attending. Of the 99 D.L.P.s represented, 80 had a candidate in the 1935 general election sponsored by itself, 8 had a union sponsored candidate, 5 a Co-operative candidate, 1 a candidate sponsored by the Scottish Socialist Party, and 5 had no Labour candidate. Of the 99 D.L.P.s, 18 had a Labour M.P. at the time of the conference. Of these 18, 6 had majorities of 3,000 or less, 3 had majorities of 3,001-6,000 and 9 had majorities of more than 6,001. Of the other 81 constituencies, 1 had seen an unopposed government return, 52 had a majority of over 6,001, 10 majorities of 3,001-6,000, 15 majorities of 1-3,000, and 3 had seen candidates elected on a minority vote. Calculated from a list of parties attending given in Labour Spain Committee, Labour and Spain,(1938), p. 4.
2. Ibid., p. 5.
3. Ibid., p. 9.

the New Statesman on 26 November Brailsford wrote

> The organisers of the Conference had asked for collaboration among all sections of the Opposition only on the single issue of Spain. But out of the resolutions and amendments sent in by a large number of parties there emerged the much bolder motion which the Conference ultimately adopted. It called for a People's Government led by the Labour Party, based on a broad union of all progressive forces in the country.

The Labour Spain Committee's conference's call for a popular front came at a time when the prospects for the movement had never appeared better. Indeed, as the conference deliberated a candidate representing a 'broad union of all progressives forces' was campaigning in the first by-election to take place after Munich - that at Oxford [1].

1. The conference agreeed by 'an overwhelming majority' to send the candidate a telegram of support. Ibid., p. 15.

CHAPTER SIX:

OXFORD AND BRIDGWATER.

Before October 1938 no parliamentary election had been fought in the popular front era in which there had been an agreement to put forward a single opposition candidate. The British electoral system, with its single ballot, made agreement a much more difficult business than in Spain and France, with their two ballot systems- a point frequently made by the opponents of the popular front [1]. However, agreements were certainly not impossible, as can be seen from the fact that agreement was reached in at least two constituencies during 1936-1937.

One of the first attempts to reach a local agreement took place in the Banbury constituency during the summer of 1936 [2]. Although in the 1935 general election the National Government candidate had won 65.7 per cent of the poll in a straight fight with Labour, in the 1929 general election there had been a three cornered contest in which the Liberal candidate had polled 38.2 per cent and the Labour candidate 16.3 per cent. The 1929 result and the hopelessness of Labour's cause led many in the Banbury D.L.P., and especially

1. For example, Dalton, 'The Popular Front', Political Quarterly, 4/1936, pp. 483-484.

2. N.E.C. Minutes, 1 October 1936.

J.W. Robertson Scott, the editor of The Countryman and the longest standing member of the Banbury Labour Party General Management Committee [1], to turn to the idea of a local popular front.

As a result several meetings were held with the Banbury Liberal Association during late 1936. Out of these meetings came an agreement, which was welcomed by the small Banbury communist party, to support Patrick Early, a member of the Fabian Society and a well known local businessman, in the next parliamentary election. This decision was approved at a meeting of the Banbury D.L.P.'s G.M.C. by almost three quarters of those present [2]. Several meetings were duly held on a popular front platform [3]. The decision to support Early, however, had been opposed by the Labour district organiser and at the N.E.C. Organisation Sub Committee meeting which took place on 16 June 1937 it was decided to reorganise the Banbury D.L.P. [4]. A meeting was duly held in Oxford and

1. In 1935 Robertson Scott had offered a financial guarantee to the Labour candidate when others doubted the wisdom of contesting the seat. Letter from Robertson Scott in the New Statesman, 14 May 1938.

2. Letter from Robertson Scott to Cripps, 27 September 1937. Cripps Papers, file 503.

3. G.D.H. Cole supported Early's candidature and spoke on his behalf at one of these meetings. Letter from Cole to Pritt, 30 October 1937. Ibid.

4. Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 16 June 1937.

as a result Robertson Scott and several others were expelled [1].

The experience of the Banbury popular front served as a deterrent to other constituency parties interested in local agreements; it certainly led the Stroud D.L.P. to withdraw from a similar agreement [2]. Little more was therefore heard of local agreements until the deterioration of the international situation in the spring of 1938 led to a renewal of interest.

Supporters of a national popular front often saw local electoral agreements as a way of demonstrating the potential of a full popular front. In the Cripps-Laski-Pritt-Wilkinson memorandum to the N.E.C. it had been argued that an agreement with the Liberals in Aylesbury would have given a 'good chance of registering another Government defeat'. However, some supporters of a full popular front put less faith in isolated electoral agreements, believing that only a national campaign, based on formal unity between all the government's opponents, could achieve any worthwhile success. Brailsford was to put this argument in a letter which appeared in the New Statesman on 26 November 1936 when he stressed the great 'psychological effects that would follow agreement on policy' between the opposition parties.

1. Letter from Middleton to Robertson Scott, 26 October 1937. Cripps Papers, file 503.

2. N.E.C. Minutes, 24 November 1937.

Local agreements were also supported by some who opposed a full popular front. Richard Crossman, a fellow of New College Oxford and assistant editor of the New Statesman, wrote in a letter which appeared in the New Statesman on 25 June 1938 that 'I am one of the great majority who are faithful to the Party leadership and are willing to accept its decisions on the Popular Front as a national policy', but would it not 'be possible for the National Executive.... to give a good deal more latitude to local parties' [1]. Crossman's position is a very interesting one. He was a man at this time strongly attracted to communism. He could even write to Strachey on 18 March 1938 that 'I find it difficult to see where a right-winger and a communist differ', adding that 'most of us long for its (the C.P.G.B.'s) discipline and demands and its Marxism' [2]. However, Crossman was worried that the C.P.G.B.'s true loyalty was to Moscow, and he was troubled by the Moscow trials [3]. He opposed a formal alliance with the communists as he was suspicious about their motives in seeking cooperation with the Labour Party, and believed that to advertise communist support would risk losing electoral support. Nevertheless, he was willing to accept

1. Italics in the original.
2. Strachey Papers, 1936-1939 file.
3. Ibid., and information supplied by Richard Crossman.

communist support on an informal basis, including in elections. Electoral pacts did not need the agreement of the communists - a fact which offered the added benefit that pacts could rally both the supporters of the popular front and Lib-Lab alliances [1]. Crossman's willingness to accept local agreements can be seen clearly in the Oxford election in October 1938.

The Oxford D.L.P. was a long-standing supporter of co-operation with communists. It had been one of the first to turn to the united front in 1933, and at the 1934 Labour Conference it was a delegate from the Oxford D.L.P. who moved the reference back on the N.E.C.'s report on the united front [2]. In January 1936 it had voted by 51 to 5 in favour of C.P.G.B. affiliation, and during 1937 it had supported the unity campaign [3], as had its candidate in the 1935 general election, Patrick Gordon Walker [4]. In the spring of 1938 the Oxford D.L.P. had turned to the popular front and within twenty-four hours of the invasion of Austria it had met in emergency session and set up the Oxford Co-ordinating Committee for Peace and Democracy, which contained Labour, Liberal and

1. Ibid.
2. 1934 L.P.C.R., p. 135.
3. Tribune, 2 April 1937.
4. Letter from Gordon Walker to Cole, ? 1937. Cole Papers, box 5, folder 4.

communist members. In the first fortnight this body distributed 45,000 leaflets and held over fifty open air meetings [1]. However, the Oxford D.L.P. was quickly forced to withdraw from the committee after the national agent, G.R. Shepherd, had warned that failure to do so would lead to disaffiliation [2], and over the summer of 1938 most of the supporters of the popular front in the Oxford D.L.P. remained faithful to the proscription of popular front activity [3].

The death of the M.P. for Oxford, R.C. Bourne, in August 1938, however, soon led to a renewal of popular front activity in Oxford. In 1935 Bourne had gained 62.8 per cent of the poll in a straight fight with Gordon Walker, and it was clear that a three-cornered contest in 1938 could only make the Conservative task the easier. Nevertheless, on 1 September the Oxford Liberal Association decided to recommend as its prospective candidate Ivor Davies, a young graduate from Edinburgh University. When the Liberals had last contested Oxford in 1929 they had gained 30.7 per cent of the poll to Labour's 16.8 in a three-cornered fight, but this did not seem sufficient reason for putting forward a candidate in 1938 to

1. Letter from H. Prickett, the secretary of the Oxford D.L.P., to Pole, 12 April 1938. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/4 (43).

2. Oxford Labour Party Minutes, 1938.

3. Information supplied by Lord Longford.

many in the Oxford D.L.P., which had already selected Gordon Walker as its prospective candidate, and a period of inter-party bickering ensued.

However, pressures were already mounting for a candidate representing a combined opposition. There were certainly many within the Liberal association who favoured a pact, including Alan Wood, the president of the Oxford Union and prospective Liberal parliamentary candidate for Southend [1]. Many in the Oxford D.L.P. also supported an agreement, especially the university members for it was within the confines of Oxford's colleges that some of the most ardent supporters of a pact were to be found. The most prominent members of this group were G.D.H. Cole [2], and city councillors Frank Pakenham and Richard Crossman. They were supported by a large non-university Labour group which contained a small communist cell - indeed, at least one of the

1. At the 1938 Liberal University Associations' Conference, held in Oxford in April 1938, Wood had proposed and Davies opposed a motion in favour of the popular front. The motion was lost, although another supporting local popular fronts was carried. Manchester Guardian, 8 April 1938.

2. Cole, however, played no part in the moves which led to the emergence of the candidate. Letter from Cole in the New Statesman, 12 November 1938.

officers of the party at this time was a communist [1].

This support for a pact led Davies on 12 September to offer to stand down in favour of a single candidate without strict party allegiance [2]. However, nothing came of this offer until a series of rapid moves in the first two weeks of October led to the emergence of a candidate representing a united opposition - Alexander Dunlop Lindsay, master of Balliol College and a long-standing member of the Labour Party.

There is little doubt that had it not been for Munich, agreement on a single candidate would not have been possible. Certainly but for Munich Lindsay would not have come forward as a candidate. Lindsay held no parliamentary ambitions, but he was a man with an intense preoccupation with the importance of participation in political affairs and an opponent of Chamberlain's foreign policy [3]. There is some mystery surrounding

1. Information supplied by Lord Longford and Lord Gordon Walker. Lord Gordon Walker claims that both the chairman and secretary were communists; Lord Longford claims that only the secretary was. Richard Crossman has specifically denied that either were. Information supplied by Richard Crossman. However, it seems highly likely that the secretary was for in the summer of 1939 the C.P.G.B. called out some of its cover members as a protest against Labour policy. See below, p.384.And the Oxford secretary resigned and joined the C.P.G.B. Daily Worker, 13 July 1939.
2. Information supplied by Ivor Davies.
3. Lindsay also had an enthusiastic wife. Harold Nicolson noted in his diary on 25 November '(Lindsay) asks my advice whether he should stand again as an independent....I say that his usefulness in the House would be less than his usefulness in Balliol....I can see that he agrees, but his bloody wife tells him that it is his duty to "sacrifice everything for his country"'. Nicholson Diary, 25 November 1938.

the origins of Lindsay's candidature. Lindsay's daughter has claimed that her father 'was approached unofficially by several members of the Oxford City Labour Party, among whom were Richard Crossman and Frank Pakenham' [1]. Both however, deny that this was the case [2]. What is certain is that by 8 October Lindsay had decided to stand and that he had succeeded in gaining the approval of Dalton [3].

However, this was far from official Labour support. When on 10 October Lindsay visited Shepherd and proposed that he should stand as an 'Independent Progressive' candidate 'Dr. Lindsay was informed of the difficulties which would arise, especially as Oxford had been the centre of Popular Front agitation, but he was told that his suggestion would be considered by the Election Sub Committee which had been convened for Wednesday 12th. inst.' [4]. At this meeting, however, Gordon Walker was expressly forbidden to stand down, partly because Gordon Walker, who had been invited to attend the meeting, informed the committee that the mass of the party

1. Lady D. Scott, A.D. Lindsay: a Biography, (1971), p.242.
2. Information supplied by Richard Crossman and Lord Longford.
3. Memorandum, n.d. Cripps Papers, file 504. For an account of Dalton's position on the popular front after Munich see below, p. 288.
4. Report on the Oxford by-election. N.E.C. Minutes, 26 October 1938.

membership stood behind him - a curious claim for every one of the officers of the party and 17 out of 21 members of the Executive Committee had requested that he should withdraw [1].

Thus on the evening of 12 October Gordon Walker's agent, Ray Roberts, tried to persuade those members of the party who advocated alliance to accept the N.E.C.'s line. In this he was unsuccessful [2] and on the following day a deputation went to London to see Dallas, Middleton and Shepherd. After a two hour discussion the deputation returned, together with the assistant national agent, R.T. Windle. Windle had been asked to attend a meeting of 'key workers' which was to take place that evening. The meeting was opened by Windle describing the process of adoption and endorsement of Gordon Walker and proposing that Roberts should give his election plans. At this point A. Holt, a ward chairman formerly distinguished for his efforts to have supporters of the unity campaign expelled from office and party, proposed that they should discuss what was uppermost in all their minds - namely the withdrawal of Gordon Walker. This motion was immediately carried and

1. Memorandum n.d. Cripps Papers, file 504. The following two paragrpahs are based primarily on information contained in this memorandum.

2. Roberts may not have tried too hard. Roberts was the permanent agent for North Lambeth, Strauss's seat, and was later described as having been an enthusiastic Worker for Lindsay. Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 14 December 1938.

after a discussion lasting almost three hours it was decided by 109 votes to 34 that the best interests of the party, both nationally and locally, would be served by Gordon Walker's withdrawal.

The following day Shepherd telephoned Gordon Walker to inform him that in the N.E.C.'s opinion the decision should be left to the G.M.C. Gordon Walker, however, insisted that there were still some in Oxford who were willing to make a fight of it and that Transport House was shamefully running away. At this point Roberts and several others arrived on the scene and insisted on taking Gordon Walker to London to have it out [1]. The Oxford delegation was received by Middleton, Shepherd, George Dallas, the chairman of the N.E.C. and three members of the N.E.C., Stanley Hirst, Barbara Ayrton Gould and George Lathan, who, after a short discussion, decided to leave the matter in local hands. It had become clear

> that the by-election with Mr. Gordon Walker as candidate had been rendered extremely difficult, if not impossible. It was felt, however, that the onus of withdrawing his candidature should not be accepted by the Executive Committee Representatives [2].

When the news of this decision reached Oxford Roy Harrod, a Liberal Christ Church economics fellow and an ardent advocate of electoral pacts, contacted Davies to arrange a withdrawal,

1. Memorandum, n.d. Cripps Papers, file 504.
2. Report on the Oxford by-election. N.E.C. Minutes, 26 October 1938.

but on the morning of 15 October this approach was rebuffed [1]. The Oxford Liberal Association announced that unless Lindsay renounced his membership of the Labour Party there was no chance of gaining full Liberal support for him. Undeterred, the Labour party's G.M.C. met that evening and voted by 48 to 12 that in view of 'the continued gravity of the international crisis and the disastrous policy of surrendering to aggression pursued by the Government' Gordon Walker should withdraw [2]. At this point Harcourt Johnstone, the chairman of the Liberal Organisation intervened and suggested Davies should stand down [3]. As a result a meeting took place in Lindsay's lodgings on 17 October. On condition that Lindsay accepted no party whip if elected, that a coordinating committee be set up beyond the duration of the campaign to organise a Liberal candidature in the next election and that the Liberals were reimbursed their expenses. Davies agreed to withdraw [4].

While the debate over the question of a single candidate was raging in Labour and Liberal circles, the Oxford Conserva-

1. Information supplied by Sir Roy Harrod.
2. Memorandum n.d. Cripps Papers, file 504.
3. Information supplied by Sir Roy Harrod.
4. The expenses, which amounted to £350, were guaranteed by Pakenham. Information supplied by Lord Longford.

tive Association had gone ahead and confirmed Quintin Hogg, a young fellow of All Souls, as their candidate. It was Hogg's first election and he fought on a call of unity behind Chamberlain. On the rare occasions Hogg dwelled on domestic policy he said nothing to contradict the judgement made by his colleague Rowse, who supported Lindsay and who in a letter to Murray on 8 September 1938 described Hogg as 'a real reactionary and likely to be a dangerous one' [1].

Both Hogg and Lindsay were supported during their campaigns by a host of speakers. Among those who spoke on behalf of Lindsay were Richard Acland, Randolph Churchill, Megan Lloyd George, Macmillan and Poole [2]. A feature of the campaign was the number of students, especially members of the university Labour club, who were active on Lindsay's behalf [3]. Among those who canvassed for Lindsay was the Balliol organ scholar, E.R.G. Heath, who on 13 October had opened the debate in a

1. Murray Papers, box 59.

2. For a complete list see the Oxford Mail, October 1938. The Elections Sub Committee on 19 October imposed a ban on members of the N.E.C. speaking at Oxford. This led Cripps to decide not to speak. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

3. Oxford University Labour Party at this time had 1,500 members, its numbers having risen drastically as a result of the depression, the rise of Hitler and the Spanish civil war. Only just over ten years before it had had 150 members. J. Parker, 'Oxford Politics in the Late Twenties', Political Quarterly, 2/1974, p. 223. Hogg seems to have had few student helpers.

packed Union, proposing that 'This house deplores the Government's policy of peace without honour'. The student magazine Isis commented on 19 October 'As a Conservative, Mr. Heath must have astonished his confreres by his bitter attack' [1].

Lindsay also had the support of a large number of communists sent in to Oxford to campaign by the South Midlands organiser of the C.P.G.B., Abe Lazarus [2]. So great was this communist support that the Conservatives started a rumour that Lindsay had received a message of encouragement from Stalin. Lindsay fiercely denied this, stating 'it was a damned lie, and I repeat it now, it is a lie and nothing but a lie' [3]. Nevertheless, although Lindsay's deeply held religious views made him hostile to communism he was willing to accept communist support [4], and even appeared on a joint platform with Richard Acland and Lazarus during the campaign [5].

1. The motion was carried by 320 votes to 266. On 17 November the Union debated the motion 'That this house has no confidence in the National Government as at present constituted', the motion being carried by 203 votes to 163. Heath again attacked Chamberlain, describing the Prime Minister's policy as 'if at first you don't concede, fly, fly, fly, again' and claiming that in the next crisis Chamberlain would turn all four cheeks at once (Heath almost certainly borrowed these jokes from Claud Cockburn's The Week).

2. Information supplied by Richard Crossman and Lord Longford.

3. Oxford Mail, 27 October 1938.

4. Information supplied by Lord Longford.

5. Oxford Mail, 22 October 1938.

Lindsay's supporters countered the Stalin rumour with slogans such as 'A Vote for Hogg is a Vote for Hitler' [1] and 'Hitler Says Don't Dare Vote for Lindsay'. Hogg, like Lindsay, seems to have been ruffled by this tactic and challenged Lindsay 'to state where and to whom Hitler made' the latter statement [2].

Oxford on the day of the poll - 27 October - was the scene of a vast organisational effort. The Conservatives possessed an efficient constituency machine and were determined that the election would prove the extent of the support which existed for Chamberlain's foreign policy. Lindsay had the help not only of his own agent. W.S. Belcher [3], but also of the three Liberal agents who were to have helped Davies [4]. The 'Notes and News' column of the Oxford Mail on 3 November 1938 estimated that over 450 cars were employed by Lindsay and Hogg, 270 of which were at the disposal of the former [5].

1. A slogan coined by the Magdalen College philosopher, J.L. Austin, and 'the only proposition of his I ever understood'. Information supplied by A.J.P. Taylor.
2. Daily Worker, 26 October 1938.
3. Belcher was one of Lloyd George's agents.
4. Information supplied by Ivor Davies.
5. Lindsay was lucky. Most Labour candidates in the 1930s had only a handful of cars to carry their supporters to the polls. The secretary of the Shrewsbury D.L.P. wrote to Cripps shortly after the 1935 general election that 'We did well....considering the weather, and the 550 Tory cars against (our) own 3'. N.d. 1935. Cripps Papers, file 602.

Lindsay believed that he had generated such enthusiasm that he had to win; on the morning of the poll he told Pakenham that he did not see how anyone could vote against him [1]. But although 76.3 per cent went to the polls, 9 per cent more than in 1935, when at 11.15 p.m. that evening the lord mayor announced the result it was a jubilant Hogg who came forward to pronounce his verdict in the words

It is not my victory. It is Mr. Chamberlain's [2].

Although Lindsay had secured 43.9 per cent of the poll, this still left Hogg a comfortable winner. Nevertheless, there could be little comfort for Chamberlain. Far from a wave of popular gratitude that would sweep the National Government to a massive victory in a general election, Hogg had suffered a 6.7 per cent swing - and this against a candidate handicapped by division, and by his own weakness as a parliamentary candidate.

Lindsay had the support of many of Oxford's trade union leaders, including the president and secretary of the trades council [3], 12 out of 14 of the Labour city councillors, and a

1. Information supplied by Lord Longford.
2. Oxford Mail, 28 October 1938.
3. The Oxford trades council had been one of the 18 which originally rejected the T.U.C. General Council's Circular 16, although it later retracted. In 1938 it undoubtedly included some cover communists. Information supplied by Richard Crossman and Lord Longford.

'large percentage of the members of the Oxford City Labour Party' also supported Lindsay [1]. However, there were some within the party who remained opposed to the pact. Especially important was the attitude of Gordon Walker who, whilst advising Labour supporters to vote for Lindsay, had written to the Daily Herald and Reynolds News denouncing Lindsay's candidature [2]. Gordon Walker made his position clear in a long letter which appeared in the New Statesman on 5 November. He wrote

> If the present state of mind of nearly all the 'Left Intellectuals' of Oxford is at all indicative of their attitude in general in the country, I do not expect much of a welcome for the views I am about to express....
>
> The Lindsay campaign was very largely initiated in middle-class University or near University circles, fairly early on drawing in Communist support....
>
> Examine Mr. Lindsay's actual policy. It was almost entirely an attack upon some parts of Mr. Chamberlain's foreign policy. But by no means upon the whole of his foreign policy....
>
> The most infuriating thing of all is that a glorious chance has been missed to lead a real popular front, with organised Labour in the lead (instead of this inverted 'democratic front' led by the intellectuals) [3].

1. Daily Herald, 21 October 1938, 'Critic', 'A London Diary' New Statesman, 5 November 1938, and Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 14 December 1938.

2. Daily Herald, 21 October 1938 and Reynolds News, 23 November 1938.

3. Gordon Walker subsequently chaired a Home Counties Labour Association committee which in December came out in favour of a popular front. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/8 (137).

Gordon Walker's letter struck a raw nerve. Although Lindsay's campaign had fired the middle class and academics of Oxford, it had almost by-passed the working class. In an article entitled 'Crisis By-Election', which appeared in Picture Post on 5 November 1938, Tom Harrisson, who had conducted a study of Lindsay's campaign for Mass Observation, wrote

> Because he (Lindsay) was a great University figure, his donnish advisers took it for granted that everyone in the town knew him as well as they did. They were wrong. Over half of the Oxford electorate didn't know him from Adam.

Another opinion poll conducted at the same time reflected this ignorance. Its organiser commented

> According to those interviewed, meetings of either candidate held very little interest. The proportion who had attended meetings was almost negligible [1].

This failure to reach the mass of the Oxford electorate is explained partly by the fact that Lindsay had but ten days in which to conduct his campaign. Lady Violet Bonham Carter, a prominent Liberal supporter of the popular front, wrote to Lindsay 'One more week's work and you would have been in'; Macmillan judged that 'the only misfortune was that the election was too soon and too short' [2]. The most serious problem,

1. S.F. Rae, 'The Oxford Bye-Election; a Study in the Straw Vote Method', Political Quarterly, 2/1939, p. 279.

2. Scott, op. cit., p. 255.

however, lay more in the candidate than in the short duration of the campaign.

Dr. N. Micklem, the president of the Oxford Liberal Association in 1938, has described Lindsay as 'Magnificent but inaudible' [1]. It is easy to be less charitable. Lindsay lacked the personality, the clear exposition of case, the broad based appeal that another 'Independent Progressive' candidate was shortly to reveal so tellingly at Bridgwater. Moreover, as Gordon Walker noted in his letter to the New Statesman, Lindsay's campaign was far from clear cut opposition to the government's foreign policy. In particular, Lindsay's deeply held religious beliefs led him to an equivocal position over the Spanish civil war. Lindsay's campaign was a strange blend of woolly idealism and political honesty. He was deeply shocked when his supporters produced the slogan 'A Vote for Hogg is a Vote for Hitler', because he believed that his opponent sought peace as sincerely as he did [2]. However, morally commendable Lindsay's position was, it undoubtedly differentiated him from many of Chamberlain's opponents.

Munich had hardly proved the issue which would sweep the National Government to a great electoral victory. If anything it was beginning to look more the millstone around its neck.

1. Information supplied by Dr. N. Micklem.
2. Information supplied by Lord Longford.

This was confirmed by Mass Observation's work during October, for its research found that 'Every day since Munich the relief felt has been declining, the revulsion growing' [1]. Appeasement must have suffered a further blow when on 7 November a third secretary to the German Embassy in Paris was shot and fatally wounded by a Polish Jew; the secretary's death led to a wave of murder, pillage, arson and the inevitable suicides of countless tormented Jews in Germany. Only the most blind supporters of Hitler could have averted their gaze from this latest demonstration of the nature of Nazi rule. Certainly the government's performance in by-elections during November gave it no cause for complacency, Labour achieving a 4.3 per cent average swing. However, Labour's performance in November was completely overshadowed by that of another 'Independent Progressive' at Bridgwater, for this sleepy Somerset constituency saw what was, debatably, the most fascinating by-election of the 1930s.

The contest at Bridgwater was caused by the appointment of the sitting member, R.P. Croom Johnson, to the High Court on 10 October. In normal times Bridgwater would have been a safe seat. In the 1935 general election Croom Johnson had polled 56.8 per cent of the vote, his Liberal and Labour opponents polling 23.4 and 19.8 per cent respectively. But these

1. Madge and Harrisson, op. cit., p. 242.

were not normal times.

The Munich agreement acted as the final spur to action for certain people in the constituency who were opposed to the government's foreign policy. For over a year Richard Acland, who lived in the constituency, and Cresswell Webb, the 'red' vicar of Oare, had worked to promote an electoral agreement in Bridgwater [1]. Local Left Book Club discussion group meetings were frequently used for this purpose, the group including most of the Labour and Liberal activists [2]. By October 1938 Acland and Webb had succeeded in converting to the cause the Labour and Liberal candidates in the 1935 general election [3], the chairman of the Bridgwater D.L.P., a majority of the G.M.C., which included at least one cover communist [4], and a large number of rank and file Labour and Liberal supporters.

1. Acland had heard a rumour in 1937 that Croom Johnson was to be appointed to the High Court. Information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

2. The Left Book Club played no part in the emergence of Lindsay. For reasons which are not entirely clear the club enjoyed poor support in Oxford. Samuels, 'The Left Book Club', Journal of Contemporary History, 2/1966, p. 73.

3. The Labour candidate, A.W. Loveys, had, like Cresswell Webb, been warned by Transport House for supporting the unity campaign. N.E.C. Minutes, 26 October 1938. At the time of Munich Loveys was prospective candidate.

4. Information supplied by Reuben Bray, an individual member of the D.L.P. at this time.

However, two major problems still confronted the supporters of an electoral agreement in Bridgwater. The first was the choice of candidate. This was solved by Webb who, with the agreement of Acland, approached Vernon Bartlett, a well known Liberal journalist and a fellow officer with Webb in the Dorsetshire Regiment in the first world war. In his capacity as foreign correspondent for the News Chronicle Bartlett had covered Chamberlain's three visits to Hitler in September 1938 and 'was absolutely convinced that Chamberlain's policy was disastrous and frustrated that there was nothing I could do' [1]. Bartlett therefore received Webb's proposal with interest and agreed to visit the constituency to discuss the matter with local party leaders. A meeting was duly arranged by the Liberal agent, Harold Scholfield, and on 25 October Bartlett's candidature was approved unanimously by the eighty Liberals present at this meeting. Bartlett, however, stated that he would stand only on the condition that he received both Liberal and Labour support [2].

It was this attempt to gain the Bridgwater D.L.P.'s support which presented the supporters of an electoral agreement with their second major problem. The Liberal association had presented few difficulties. Bartlett enjoyed the support

1. Information supplied by Vernon Bartlett.
2. Information supplied by Harold Scholfield.

of all the leading local Liberals and national figures such as Sinclair and Layton. Moreover, although in the past the Liberals had been a force in Bridgwater politics, in 1938 the party had but two regular contributors in the constituency [1]. The Bridgwater D.L.P., however, presented much greater problems. Although the majority of the party were willing to support Bartlett, an important minority, including W.J. Farthing, the secretary and a T.G.W.U. member of the T.U.C. General Council, were bitterly opposed to any suggestion of an electoral pact. When at a meeting of the G.M.C. on 15 October Cresswell Webb suggested that they should agree to support an unnamed man 'of national and international reputation who would stand on a full League of Nations Policy' and promised that full financial support would be available to such a candidate [2], a heated debate ensued. All the G.M.C. could agree upon was to meet again on 29 October [3].

In the meantime Webb decided to write to Cripps to ascertain whether the Bridgwater D.L.P. was in fact able to nominate Bartlett. On 20 October Cripps's secretary, Gwendoline Hill, replied that Cripps had stated that

1. Ibid.

2. Acland guaranteed the finances. Information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

3. Report on the Bridgwater election. N.E.C. Minutes, 23 November 1938.

> It would be impossible for the Labour Party to put up Vernon Bartlett as an official candidate, as under the constitution a candidate must be a member of the Party....On the other hand it would be quite in order for a group of people....to nominate and adopt an independent candidate. This would of course not be officially a meeting of the Labour Party.... When this had been done the local Labour Party could have its official meeting and could pass a resolution that it would urge the Party's supporters to work and vote for the Progressive candidate. There could be no objection constitutionally to this and would really fulfil the purpose we have in mind [1].

Cripps was following events in Oxford and Bridgwater with great interest, but he was none too keen to become directly involved in the Bridgwater negotiations. Hill therefore warned Webb 'At the moment things are a little difficult and it would be much better if we were not brought into the picture at all'.

On 5 November the Bridgwater Labour Party's G.M.C. belatedly met to make its decision. On 27 October the Bridgwater and Minehead local parties had passed a resolution in favour of Bartlett [2], but there was still some doubt as to what line the G.M.C. would take. The meeting was opened by Loveys who, when pressed, admitted that he did not intend to stand and stated that he supported Bartlett. Following a

1. Cripps Papers, file 504.

2. The Minehead party had only been in existence since 11 October when it was founded after a meeting called by the Left Book Club group. Report on the Bridgwater by-election. N.E.C. Minutes, 23 November 1938. This and the following paragraph are based largely on this report.

short discussion, it was resolved 'that we do not contest this by-election'. There was little opposition to this as the N.E.C. Elections Sub Committee had on 12 October resolved 'not to encourage a contest and to inform the constituency party that no grant would be made out of the By-Election Insurance fund because of the non-payment of premiums thereto by the Party' [1].

A long debate ensued, however, over whether the meeting should recommend Bartlett to Labour voters. Farthing in particular was strongly opposed to this course and he was supported by several others, including some who, whilst not unsympathetic to an electoral agreement, feared lest such action should lead to the reorganisation of the D.L.P. [2]. It was common knowledge that Bartlett had visited Middleton on 18 October to discuss the possibility of his standing as an 'Independent Progressive' candidate and that, in Bartlett's own words, he was 'angry about Oxford and unhelpful (to put it mildly) about Bridgwater' [3]. After heated exchanges between the various factions and offers of resignation from both the chairman and Farthing, the meeting

1. Election Sub Committee Minutes, 12 October 1938.

2. The Bridgwater D.L.P. was in fact later reorganised. N.E.C. Minutes, 26 April 1939.

3. Letter from Bartlett to Lloyd George, 19 October 1938. Lloyd George Papers, G/42/2.

broke up, without resignations and, more importantly, without recommending Bartlett to Labour voters.

As the majority of the G.M.C. supported him, Bartlett, who had already begun compaigning, decided to proceed with his candidature and run, like Lindsay, as an 'Independent Progressive'. Both Bartlett and the Conservative candidate, Patrick Heathcoat Amory, held a large number of meetings throughout the length and breadth of the constituency. Bartlett and Scholfield had decided to take the campaign to the electors by a series of over 150 meetings. A cavalcade of loudspeaker vans toured the constituency announcing details of Bartlett's meetings and Bartlett spoke in even the smallest hamlets [1].

Bartlett based his campaign primarily on foreign affairs. Like Lindsay, however, he fought on a policy which was different to that held by many of the opponents of the government's policy. In particular, he was still influenced by the idea of economic appeasement and the suggestion that Germany should share in some international administration of the colonies figured prominently in his campaign. Unlike Lindsay, however, Bartlett was a firm supporter of the Spanish republic.

Many of those who had fought at Oxford made the pilgrimage to Bridgwater - Lindsay, Megan Lloyd George, Poole- the list

1. For an account of the campaign see the Bridgwater Mercury, 5-12-19-26 November 1938.

is long. The C.P.G.B. sent a representative from London to help the small number of local communists. The arrival of this proletarian proselytiser was awaited with some trepidation. He arrived waring plus fours and possessing a distinctly non-proletarian accent, and was promptly sent off to help in Highbridge, a middle class holiday resort. Belcher travelled to Bridgwater to help Scholfield and Victor Finney, the secretary of the Council of Action, was also present to oversee the council's activities on behalf of Bartlett, which as in Oxford for Lindsay, were considerable [1]. Messages of goodwill poured in, including a letter of support, organised by Strauss, which was signed by 39 Labour M.P.s, a quarter of the P.L.P. [2].

The day of the poll brought forth a record local turnout - 82.3 per cent, an increase of 9.6 per cent on the 1935 general election [3]. The following day a crowd of 6,000 gathered to

1. Information supplied by Harold Scholfield.
2. The 39 were D. Adams, F. Bellenger, A Bevan, J. Brown, W. Burke, H.C. Charleton, W. Dobbie, E. Dunn, J.C. Ede, Lt. Commander R. Fletcher, R. Gibson, W.T. Kelly, B. Kirby, W. Leach, N. Maclean, M. Macmillan, L. MacNeil Wear, F. Marshall, G. Mathers, W. Paling, J. Parker, J.A. Parkinson, A. Pearson, M. Philips-Price, C.C. Poole, R. Richards, B. Riley, J. Ritson, T.M. Sexton, F.S. Silverman, B. Smith, E. Smith, G.R. Strauss, E. Summerskill, S.P. Viant, J. Westwood, E. Williams, G. Woods. Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 14 December 1938. This list is not a complete record of Labour M.P.s who supported Bartlett. Cripps, Pritt and Ellen Wilkinson also numbered among his supporters, as did S.O. Davies.
3. The by-election record is 89.1 per cent at Ashton under Lyne on 29 October 1928.

hear the result, which was declared at 2.20 p.m. The announcement that Bartlett had polled 53.2 per cent - a swing of 10 per cent to the united opposition - was greeted by 'Scenes of enthusiasm such as Bridgwater has not known since "peace" night twenty years ago' [1]. Bartlett, having been carried shoulder high through the streets of Bridgwater, commented

> I left the electors in no doubt as to where I stood. I fought the election on foreign affairs, and I accepted the offer to contest Bridgwater because it was an agricultural constituency and therefore presumably difficult for an Independent Progressive to win....
>
> Even in the tiniest hamlets the people listened to my speeches on foreign affairs with intense interest, and their questions showed that they are following the international situation with intelligence as well as with alarm....
>
> Everywhere I went I found people who have always voted Conservative coming over on this foreign issue [2].

Such a victory could not pass unnoticed.

Bartlett had succeeded in capturing a seat which only weeks before had appeared beyond the reach of the opposition. Undoubtedly his personality was a contributory factor in his victory. Mass Observation found that of the candidates in the seven by-elections which took place in the two months after Munich, he was 'the only one for whom none of the hundreds

1. Manchester Guardian, 19 November 1938.
2. News Chronicle, 19 November 1938.

interviewed expressed dislike or contempt' [1]. Bartlett's personality alone, however, cannot explain the interest and enthusiasm which the campaign generated.

By standing as a candidate of a united opposition Bartlett had succeeded in convincing the people of Bridgwater that there was a chance of overthrowing the government candidate. On the day before the poll Mass Observation found that there was a widespread belief in the constituency that Bartlett would win [2]. By fighting his campaign largely on foreign policy Bartlett had confirmed that a successful campaign could be fought on the issue of foreign policy - the issue which constituted the main concern and field of agreement between the opponents of the government.

Previously many had argued that a successful campaign could not be fought if it were based mainly on foreign policy. Harrisson, for example, argued in a memorandum specially prepared for the London Labour Party district organiser, Hinley Atkinson, during the early stages of the West Fulham by-election that foreign policy should not be the only main issue in the election. Indeed, Harrisson believed that the seat 'can be won entirely on HOME AFFAIRS, including in that category air raid precautions, attitude to conscription, national defence,

1. 'Critic', 'A London Diary', New Statesman, 26 November 1938.
2. Information supplied by Tom Harrisson.

profiteering, as foreign affairs brought home to Fulham, plus the HOME ISSUES OF FULHAM direct' [1]. Harrisson claimed

> People cannot grasp the world situation.
> People are refusing to think out the implications of foreign-policy chaos, though (more than ever before) are seeing its dangers, and fearing the world debacle. But they won't face straight up to it - and very naturally; if they did, would life be worth living?....
> Because unwilling or unable to face facts, many are still satisfied with our foreign policy.
> Many others say that Labour would do no better.
> Because MOST think that 'world affairs' are a part of some unknown chain of events set in motion in some uncontrollable way, and that no man can hold them, no party (can either). World affairs are as remote, mystical, predestined, unreal, as the football pool prize or astrology.
> And thus, though many think war is now certain, others rationalise the situation out of existence and say NO, but never with any positive long-term emphasis. War is 'natural' they think [2].

As a result, Atkinson, who only shortly before had decided to concentrate on foreign policy, issued instructions that domestic policy and local affairs were not to be ignored in the campaign [3].

Harrisson and several 'observers' were also present at the Bridgwater election. Harrisson acted as unofficial

1. N.d. Mass Observation Papers, box 346. Capitals in the original.
2. Ibid.
3. Report, n.d. Ibid., box 313.

adviser to Bartlett and because of his work at West Fulham and other by-elections he advised Bartlett to introduce more references to domestic policy and local affairs in his speeches [1]. This was undoubtedly good advice as Bartlett's early speeches had virtually ignored these issues. Nevertheless, foreign policy remained the central issue on which Bartlett campaigned.

The result was a campaign which echoed the inner fears of the Bridgwater electorate. John Parker, the Labour M.P. for Romford and a leading supporter of the popular front [2], has commented that at meetings which he addressed questions of domestic policy and local affairs, especially unemployment which was 16.9 per cent in Bridgwater itself in November 1938 [3], predominated, but the discussion always eventually came round to foreign affairs [4].

1. Information supplied by Tom Harrisson.
2. The Romford D.L.P. also supported the popular front, and had been prominent in the united front agitation. Dalton referred to it in a minute written on 11 November 1936 as 'one of the most militant and disatisfied D.L.P.s in the country'. Dalton Papers, Bournemouth conference file.
3. Information supplied by the Department of Health and Social Security, Bridgwater.
4. Information supplied by John Parker. Sir George Schuster, the National Liberal candidate in the November 1938 Walsall by-election, had made a similar observation. Information supplied by Sir George Schuster.

Bartlett's victory was achieved not because of the Bridgwater electorate's interest in domestic policy or local affairs, but because of its sense of unease, its underlying and often unarticulated feeling that all was not well with the government's foreign policy. Mass Observation was right to argue that, in general, 'People cannot grasp the world situation'; right to point to a certain fatalism which afflicted a large section of the British people; but it was a confusion and passivity which to a large extent reflected the approach of the opposition parties. In an article entitled 'The Non Voter' which appeared in the New Statesman on 10 December 1938, Mass Observation in effect conceded this point when it wrote that 'there are indications that candidates who approach ordinary people in an ordinary way can stir up the many who usually abstain, but whose complacency has been shattered by the Miracle of Munich'. Bartlett had approached ordinary people in an ordinary way and the result had been dramatic.

The lead which Bartlett had given to the Bridgwater electorate was to have its effects far beyond the boundaries of this sleepy Somerset constituency.

Some hoped that the victories would encourage further local agreements. Others hoped for a national Lib-Lab pact, including dissident Conservative support if it could be

achieved. Others hoped that the victory had demonstrated the potential of a popular front campaign over the whole country. However, the growing enthusiasm for various forms of inter-party cooperation was of little use without official Liberal and Labour agreement. Although Lindsay and Bartlett had emerged as 'Independent Progressive' without the consent of Transport House, it was unlikely that any significant number of local agreements could be reached in the face of official hostility. And there was certainly no hope of running any kind of successful national campaign in the face of official Liberal, and especially Labour, opposition.

In the weeks which followed Munich the official agreement of the Liberal Party to some form of alliance was by no means out of the question. The Liberal Party had accepted the need for united action at its conference in May 1938. Moreover, Munich had made a deep impression on many of the Liberal leaders, notably Sinclair, who passionately felt the betrayal of Czechoslovakia [1]. On 18 October the Liberal Party Executive met and agreed to issue a manifesto restating Liberal policy in the light of Munich. This manifesto stated that it was essential to work for the establishment of a government 'capable of regaining the confidence of our own

1. Sir P. Harris, Forty Years in and out of Parliament, (1947), p. 137.

people', a government capable of working for peace 'by recovering unity of purpose and action among the peace-loving nations', a government capable of making a 'united effort for self defence', with 'no more inefficiency, no more profiteering, and no more one-sided sacrifice'. The manifesto concluded

> For these ends the Liberal Party declares that, because of the present emergency, it is ready to subordinate mere Party considerations and to co-operate whole-heartedly with men and women of all Parties who realise the gravity of the time. It, therefore, appeals to all citizens to join it in working for the establishment of peace, the preservation of freedom, and the defence of Liberal civilisation [1].

Nevertheless, the Liberals were not united over the form of unity sought. Sinclair still hoped for a popular front, though he believed that the Liberals could not press too openly for cooperation as it would 'expose us to rebuff' from the Labour Party 'which would be humiliating to our own people' [2]. Richard Acland, Le Mander and Roberts also still hoped for a popular front, but, like Sinclair, were beginning to doubt seriously whether it could be achieved. They were also experiencing growing doubts about the Moscow trials and cooperation with communists in general, as was Sinclair, who

1. Manchester Guardian, 19 October 1938.

2. Letter from Sinclair to the secretary of the St. Albans Liberal Association, 9 December 1938. Thurso Papers, box 62.

had always been more dubious about the communists. These doubts had not fully crystallised, especially on the part of Roberts who was still very active in the Spanish aid movement, and all four failed to realise fully the extent of anti-communism within the Labour Party. Therefore none of the four in late 1938 had decided against cooperation with communists. Many others in the party felt similarly. However, there were some, like Layton, who had modified their position and become supporters of a Lib-Lab agreement, thus adding their voice to those like Ramsay Muir, who had supported such a line since 1936. And some in the party remained opposed to any form of cooperation. The main consensus was over local electoral agreements, which enjoyed widespread support in the party. As Sir Andrew McFadyean, the treasurer of the Liberal Party Organisation, noted in a speech he made at Bedford, 'What we did at Oxford and Bridgwater we shall do again wherever opportunity presents itself' [1].

Oxford and Bridgwater also had their effects on the Labour Party and at the N.E.C. meeting which took place on 26 October it was decided to ask the Policy Sub Committee to look into the implications of these elections. As the

1. Manchester Guardian, 22 November 1938. This paragraph is based on information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

memorandum on which the committee was to base its discussion noted, 'The discussion on the Oxford and Bridgwater by-elections covered so wide a field, even touching on the subsequent business - the restatement of Labour policy after Munich - that on the suggestion of the Leader of the Parliamentary Party, the Policy Sub Committee was instructed to draw up a document which could be the basis for a discussion on the political situation in general, and the future relationship of the Labour Party to other political groups in particular' [1].

This ten foolscap page document was prepared by William Nield, the assistant secretary of the Policy Sub Committee. The memorandum conceded that a great deal of discussion over the practicability and desirability of some form of 'unification of the opposition' was taking place. The memorandum noted that

> This discussion is taking place among a large number of people in all parties, and the idea of some form of unification of opposition finds support in such quarters that it is impossible to dismiss the whole matter as a product of Communist manouevres or the result merely of agitations by irresponsibly edited newspapers.... The Communist Party undoubtedly is the

1. Policy Sub Committee, General Policy Statement No. 3. This memorandum does not appear to have been kept in the N.E.C. papers and the following section is based on a copy in the Dalton Papers, file 14.

> source of a great deal of the open agitation for, and some, though much less, of the private discussion of the unification of the Opposition to the Government. But though the Communist agitation comes first in time, it does not necessarily come first in importance.

For Nield, the most important aspect of the situation was the possibility of a Tory breakaway. Nield realised that the dissident Conservative group in Parliament was small and far from on the point of breaking with Chamberlain, but he believed that dissent could be fostered and breakaway encouraged if Labour would openly accept cooperation with Conservatives and Liberals [1], but not with communists. Nield believed that such cooperation would have to be for specific purposes only and for a limited time, that each party would have to retain its own identity, and that there would have to be an agreed programme and an accomodation on candidatures in the constituencies. The memorandum concluded

> The crux of the matter is this. Is the Labour Party to continue its present policy of working for an exclusively Labour Government which will carry out a full Socialist policy, even if it is felt that such a Government cannot be secured at the next General Election; or is the Party to encourage the dissensions which Mr.

1. There is evidence in a letter which Macmillan sent to Lloyd George on 16 January 1937 that such a policy might have worked. Macmillan commented 'To create an alternative force means cooperation between Liberals and Labour. If that were achieved, the support of progressive elements in the Conservative Party could be obtained'. Lloyd George Papers, box G/141.

> Chamberlain's policy has brought about, and if necessary, to consider giving the people a choice at the next General Election, not between Chamberlain and a hundred per cent Socialism, but between Chamberlain and a policy which will remove the menace of Fascism and perhaps even get us some way along the road towards Socialism.

Nield's memorandum provoked the most violent reactions when the Policy Sub Committee met to discuss the document. The discussion is of considerable interest for it covered the whole field of inter-party unity, and in particular the popular front [1].

The attack on any form of cooperation was led by Dallas. Dallas launched into a far-ranging argument. He claimed that the document was outside the terms of reference and that it amounted to an attack on Attlee's leadership [2]. Dallas believed that the agitation within the party for a united opposition came mainly from middle class, academic and communist circles - terms of equal abuse for a man like Dallas, who was intensely aware of his working class origins, the limitations of his intellect, and was bitterly anti-

1. The committee composed of Dalton, who was chairman, Jennie Adamson, Attlee, J.R. Clynes, Dallas, Barbara Ayrton Gould, Greenwood, J. Henderson, Laski, Morrison and Pritt. Laski was not present as he was in America.

2. Nield seems to have supported Morrison for leader. Dalton Diary, 15 June 1938.

communist. He ominously concluded that the reception which various forms of coalition were receiving in 'responsible quarters' was making some of the trade union leaders rethink their relationship with the Labour Party [1].

Dallas was in no way exaggerating the intensity of feeling among the union leadership over the question, especially over the popular front. Bevin's attitude was typical of many when he wrote in an article 'Labour Stands Firm', which appeared in the T.G.W.U. Record in December 1938, that the 'Trade Unions have confidence in their own political party, not in other parties; and if by any chance this situation be changed, many trade unions would revert to freedom of action and would not acknowledge any obligations to any "Popular" party that might be formed'. Shortly after Bevin wrote to the N.E.C. protesting about the letter which 39 Labour M.P.s had sent to Bartlett and warning that 'the liberty taken by a section of the Party to depart from Party Policy makes it impossible for the National Executive Committee to ask the Trade Unions to remain loyal' [2].

The reasons for this hostility to various forms of

1. Memorandum, n.d. Dalton Papers, file 14, and confidential information. The discussion of this meeting is based on these sources.

2. Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 14 December 1938.

unity were to some extent those set out in Labour and the Popular Front - especially hostility to communism in the case of the popular front. Many of the union leaders were also worried by the fear expressed by Marchbank at the time of the publication of Labour and the Popular Front, that cooperation with other parties might weaken the position of the unions in, to use Bevin's phrase, 'their own political party' [1]. There was also a growing dislike of the emphasis of the supporters of unity on foreign policy, and a belief that Labour, at both the national and local level [2], was already spending too much time on foreign affairs and not enough on matters of immediate concern to trade unionists [3].

Nevertheless, of the three union members of the N.E.C. who sat on the committee only Dobbs opposed Nield's memorandum, though Dobbs, a member of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, which was one of the unions with

1. Information supplied by Lord Citrine.

2. The report of the London Labour Party for 1937-1938 revealingly comments 'Despite the local character of our work....the year under review has been so dangerous and disturbing that it was inevitable that the political mind of the nation and of the party should be largely occupied with questions of foreign policy'. London Labour Party Papers, 1938.

3. Bevin wrote to this effect to Attlee. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1939. And Bevin was the union leader most concerned with foreign policy!

a proscription on communist office holding [1], spoke mainly against cooperation with communists [2]. Clynes was a member of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, another union with a proscription on communists [3]. He also opposed cooperation with communists, but, together with Henderson, a member of the N.U.R., supported the policy put forward by Nield. However, Clynes and Henderson had little influence in the union movement. Clynes had led the Labour Party before MacDonald and been one of the 'Big Five' during 1929-1931; but on the issue of cooperation he was to some extent compromised by his association with the Liberals in the first world war. And Henderson's union's general secretary was Marchbank! Even Clynes concluded that the majority of the union leaders were opposed to any form of cooperation.

Of the other members of the committee only Pritt supported Nield. Pritt's position is interesting because of the fact that his views were close to those of the C.P.G.B. The memorandum specifically rejected cooperation with communists, but Pritt seems to have supported it in the belief that the policy would encourage a Tory breakaway,

1. A. Flanders, Trade Unions, (1968), p. 160.

2. It is interesting to note that this union at its Conference in 1939 voted against the popular front by 155-0. Daily Herald, 12 April 1939.

3. H.A. Clegg, General Union, (1954), pp. 119-121.

and this would lead, as promised in Labour and the Popular Front, to a reconsideration of the popular front.

However, both Dalton and Morrison were not completely hostile to the memorandum, for they were becoming increasingly interested in relaxing Labour's 'exclusive' attitude in some by-elections [1]. Dalton in particular was interested in local arrangements. As party spokesman on foreign affairs he was well aware of the dangers of the international situation, and by late 1938 he had decided that Labour alone was unlikely to win the next election. However, Dalton could not bring himself to support the popular front. Like Morrison, he was a bitter anti-communist. Also his contacts with the rank and file had never been great, and this led him to underestimate the extent of the support which existed for the popular front. Moreover, with criticism of Attlee's leadership growing ever stronger, he could not afford to ignore the fact that he was a possible contender for the leadership, and support for the popular front, or any formal kind of united opposition, would have damned him in the eyes of the union leadership. This latter factor influenced Morrison as well.

Attlee's part in the Policy Sub Committee's discussion is a fascinating one. Most of what he said concerned the

1. Memorandum, 23 January 1939. Dalton Papers, file 14.

popular front. In an article entitled 'Ours Is the Popular Front', which appeared in the Daily Herald on 15 July 1936, he wrote that it would 'be a mistake to ignore the public opinion which is attracted by the idea of unity of the left'. In his book The Labour Party in Perspective, which was the Left Book Club choice for August 1937, he commented on the popular front that 'I would not myself rule out such a thing as an impossibility in the event of the imminence of a world crisis' and concluded that 'It must be admitted that there is considerable strength of opinion in support' of the popular front [1]. In fact, Attlee had no intention of supporting the popular front in any foreseeable circumstance. As he went on to make clear in The Labour Party in Perspective, he had a hatred of the C.P.G.B. as strong as that of even Bevin and Morrison [2]. Moreover, behind the self-effacing facade, he was using the popular front agitation to help maintain his own leadership. The left wing position which he had adopted immediately after 1931, his occasional sympathetic references to the popular front and his unquestionably sincere opposition to a heresy hunt against the left, meant that although opposition to

1. C.R. Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective, (1937), pp. 124 and 129.

2. Ibid., pp. 134-135.

his leadership, in particular his inability to inspire the electorate, was strong on the left, it remained in general an equivocal one. And his emphasis on the need for loyalty to Conference decisions and the importance of maintaining party unity [1] tended to help bring those worried by the divisions caused by the supporters of the popular front behind Attlee's leadership.

At the Policy Sub Committee's meeting on 16 November 1938 Attlee demonstrated this repertoire to the full. Unlike most of the members of the committee, he claimed that a Tory breakaway was by no means impossible and that the issue had to be faced. But he pointed to Conference decisions on cooperation with communists and the popular front, and to the dangers of adopting a course of action which could only split the movement. Although Dalton was chairman, Attlee effectively performed the chairman's task of summing up and, after due deliberating, came down in favour of the existing party policy on cooperation with other parties. Loyalty to Conference decisions, and internal unity had to be maintained. Most of the members of the Policy Sub Committee agreed, and it was resolved to confirm the policy set out

1. For example, see Attlee's statement under the heading 'They Both Say - Get Rid of this Government!', Advance, March 1939.

in Labour and the Popular Front [1].

When the Policy Sub Committee's report came up for discussion at the November 1938 N.E.C. meeting it was decided, 'following considerable discussion', to accept its conclusions [2]. Although it was agreed to accept a Co-operative Party proposal to launch a joint campaign against the National Government, and especially its foreign policy [3], the executive had rejected any form of agreement with other parties. However, this time the reaction of certain of the leading supporters of the popular front, especially Cripps, was to be radically different from their response to the N.E.C.'s previous statements and decisions.

1. It is not clear whether there was a vote.

2. There is no indication in the N.E.C. Minutes for 23 November 1938 as to whether there was a vote.

3. This proposal came from the 20 October 1938 Co-operative Party National Committee meeting. At this meeting a proposal had been put forward to hold an emergency Co-operative conference on the peace alliance in November or December, but an amendment, proposed by Alexander and Woods, and carried by 16 votes to 9, had amended this to proposing a joint campaign with the Labour Party. Co-operative Party National Committee Minutes, 20 October 1938.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE.

Cripps found himself unable to accept the Policy Sub Committee and N.E.C.'s decisions on the popular front as final ones. With the passing of each day since Munich he had become ever more convinced of the need for unity. The problem was how to convert the party to his cause. There appeared little hope of the N.E.C. ever accepting the popular front. The matter could have been brought up at the next party Conference, but this was not due to meet until June 1939. Although by November 1938 the number of D.L.P.s which had specifically requested an emergency Conference had risen to 239 [1], a proposal for such a Conference to be held in January had been rejected at the N.E.C. meeting in November [2]. With the official Conference over six months away and little prospect of an emergency Conference, Cripps therefore decided to take his campaign to the country by issuing a pro-popular front memorandum.

1. This was the figure given to Middleton by Pole in a letter of 25 November 1938. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/8 (29).

2. N.E.C. Minutes, 23 November 1938. There is no indication in the minutes as to whether there was a vote. This was the last time on which the question was discussed, although support continued to grow. For example, the N.U.R. Executive, which at its May-June quarterly meeting had decided unanimously to oppose a Conference, decided by 14 votes to 6 in favour of such a Conference at its December meeting. N.U.R. Executive Minutes, 1938.

Cripps was finally convinced of the necessity for so drastic a course of action by Bevan. Bevan during the 1930s had increasingly come to admire Cripps, who he saw as a 'cleaner and more wholesome influence in the Labour leadership than any of his competitors who had so readily accepted MacDonaldism and still connived at its survival' [1]. At the same time Cripps had come to develop a great admiration for his younger colleague, seeing him as his proletarian oracle. Bevan's decision that a final attempt had to be made to convert the Labour Party to the popular front therefore fortified Cripps in his resolve to continue the campaign [2]. Strauss also supported the idea [3].

Cripps approached other members of the Labour Party whom he thought likely to be sympathetic to the popular front, including Barnes and Emmanuel Shinwell, the M.P. for Seaham. Shinwell had been deeply affected by Munich and it had undermined his previously strong resolve to refuse cooperation with other parties. As he wrote

1. Foot, op. cit., p.155.
2. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
3. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

in a letter which appeared in Reynolds News on 9 October

> The Labour movement cannot afford to await events and to rely on the existing organisations of the Movement and the decisions of past conferences. We may require to take steps to strengthen the forces of Democracy either by a drive towards improved organisation, or it may be by a new alignment of forces.

However, Shinwell, who at the 1933 Labour Conference had launched a damning attack on communist front organisations [1], had lost none of his hostility to communism and he was unwilling to support a popular front. Barnes, who was friendly with Shinwell, was influenced by the latter's position, for he had always been suspicious of cooperation with communists, and they both tried to persuade Cripps to drop his support for the popular front and advocate instead alliance without the communists [2]. As a result of this pressure Cripps decided not to specifically mention the communists in the memorandum he was preparing; but he remained committed to communist participation [3].

As a result of pressure from Barnes and Shinwell, he also agreed that the memorandum would be presented to the N.E.C. first, but he held no illusions about its chances

1. 1933 L.P.C.R., pp. 144-145.
2. E. Shinwell, Conflict Without Malice, (1955), pp. 134-135.
3. See below, esp. p. 334.

of success. Before the meeting of the executive on 23 November he had unofficially shown to several colleagues a popular front memorandum which he thought the executive might issue. The copy of this memorandum which survives in the Cripps Papers has the word 'rejected' pencilled in Cripps's hand at the top [1]. A further memorandum could only face a similar fate.

It might be thought that in view of the attitude of the majority of the N.E.C. and trade union leadership to to the popular front Cripps would have done better to accept Barnes and Shinwell's proposal, or to have worked for some limited agreement and attempted to exploit the sympathies of men such as Morrison and Dalton. However, he could not do this for primarily four reasons. First, he was still to some extent influenced by the belief that cooperation with communists would help revitalise the Labour Party; his movement away from the left was far from complete in 1938. Second, he did not see the communists as a handicap electorally; and as far as extra-parliamentary agitation was concerned he saw them as a useful asset. Third, like many others, he did not fully

1. Cripps Papers, file 572. See below, pp. 313-314.

appreciate the hostility to communism which existed among the Labour leadership. And finally, he believed that only a full national agreement could generate the enthusiasm necessary to defeat the National Government; local agreements were useful to demonstrate the potential of a popular front, but they could never alone be sufficient to overthrow the government [1].

Moreover, it was not in Cripps's character to submit to opposition, no matter how strong, when convinced of the rightness of his cause. His ultimate loyalty was not to his party, but to his conscience. And he had come to believe in the need for a popular front with an almost messianic fervour. In an article entitled 'Stafford Cripps on the Labour Party', which appeared in the Socialist Leaguer of June-July 1934, he had foreseen that a time might come when he would find himself fundamentally at odds with party policy. He had written

> There may come a time, though I sincerely hope not, when our convictions allow us to compromise no further; when we feel that the whole future of our Party would be sacrificed if we were to give way. We must then in loyalty to our own beliefs stand fast by them, whatever may be the result.

In November 1938 Cripps decided to make his stand on the popular front.

1. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss forms the basis of this paragraph.

Cripps fired the opening shot of his campaign when in an article entitled 'Make Labour Strong', which appeared on the front page of Tribune on 2 December, he wrote

> What....are the tasks that lie before those who realise the extreme urgency of the present situation and the vital necessity for an early defeat of Chamberlain at the polls if our democracy and freedom are to be preserved?
>
> FIRST, WE MUST DO OUR UTMOST TO REINFORCE AND STRENGTHEN THE PARTY, AND WE MUST JOIN WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH IN THE NEW JOINT CAMPAIGN WITH THE CO-OPERATIVE PARTY.
>
> SECOND, WE MUST CONTINUE WITHIN THE PARTY OUR DEMOCRATIC ADVOCACY OF THOSE TACTICS THAT WE BELIEVE ESSENTIAL FOR THE WINNING OF THE NEXT ELECTION.
>
> THIRD, WE MUST DO OUR UTMOST TO ENCOURAGE EVERY CHANGE IN OUR OWN ORGANISATION THAT WILL STOP THE WASTE OF ENERGY UPON HERESY HUNTING AND SUBSTITUTE FOR IT A REAL AND DETERMINED DRIVE FOR POWER. A GREAT DRIVING FORCE IS REQUIRED. A FORCE THAT IS PREPARED TO GO TO THE LIMIT IN ITS CHALLENGE OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT UPON ITS FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY ALIKE [1].

However, when the N.E.C. met on 16 December Cripps failed to present any memorandum. Although it is highly unlikely that this was a crucial factor in the popular front movement's failure, there can be no denying that by the time Cripps came to present his plans in January 1939 a certain amount of the enthusiasm for the popular front had evaporated.

1. Capitals in the original. This article did not mention the words popular front.

While Cripps was preparing his memorandum a dinner took place at Gatti's restaurant in London on 5 December which saw the gathering of many of the leading supporters of some form of united opposition. The dinner was organised by Richard Acland and Victor Finney and was held in honour of Bartlett and Lindsay. Among the popular front supporters present were Cripps, Ellen Wilkinson and Gollancz [1]. Layton, L.J. Cadbury, who owned the company which controlled the News Chronicle, and Lord Cecil, the independent Conservative president of the League of Nations Union, and an ardent supporter of local electoral pacts [2], were also among those present. However, the dinner ended in disaster. There was far from agreement among those present over the kind of unity sought. Moreover, Acland made a proposal to set up a bureau and raise funds for independent progressives which posed the kind of direct threat to the existing party organisations that worried many present. Cripps in particular was, in view of his plans, not at all keen to be associated with anything which might be considered a challenge to the Labour Party organisation, or in any way likely to promote a centre party [3].

1. Nicolson Diary, 12 December 1938.
2. Letter from Cecil to Dalton, 28 November 1938. Dalton Papers, file 14.
3. Information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

In fact Acland, as he had made clear in a letter which he had circulated a few days before the dinner, had not the least intention of promoting independent progressives on a large scale. As he noted

> Just because one seat has been won through the common action of a local Liberal and a local Labour organisation, strongly supported by innumberable individuals who have never taken any part in politics before, as well as by others who had always voted Conservative, there is no reason to suppose that a new party consisting of two or three hundred candidates is going to spring up overnight....
> In the overwhelming number of constituencies the Chamberlainite candidate must be fought by the recognised candidate of one of the existing parties [1].

G.D.H. Cole, in an article entitled 'Independent Progressive', which appeared in the New Statesman on 19 November 1938, had made just this point when he argued that 'It must....be clear that as our parliamentary democracy is unworkable except through the party system, in most cases local pacts must take the form of giving a Labour or Liberal candidate a clear run rather than putting forward a candidate without party allegiance'.

1. Manchester Guardian, 3 December 1938.

Acland, however, believed that there was a small number of constituencies in which an independent progressive candidate might come forward, or be a help in bringing the parties together, and to facilitate this he had formed his bureau for independent progressives. Nevertheless, the bureau was to meet with little success as many supporters of some form of united opposition were suspicious of such candidates [1].

The last by-election to take place in 1938, however, saw another independent candidate face the government representative. The election took place in the Kinross and West Perth constituency and was brought about by the resignation of the duchess of Atholl on account of her opposition to the government's foreign policy. The duchess's main grievance was over the government's support of non intervention, but it was the Munich agreement which prompted her to apply for the Chiltern Hundreds - which was granted on 20 November - in order to fight her seat as an independent [2].

In the 1935 general election the duchess had gained 60.2 per cent of the poll in a straight fight with a Liberal and at first it appeared that a Liberal would stand in 1938. After

1. Trevelyan, for example, refused to contribute to Bartlett's campaign fund because he was not standing as a party candidate. Letter from Trevelyan to Richard Acland, November 1938. Trevelyan Papers, 1930s box 3.
2. Duchess of Atholl, Working Partnership, (1958), pp.219-228.

an appeal from Sinclair and pressure from Roberts, who was sent to the constituency as official Liberal adviser to the duchess [1], however, the prospective Liberal candidate, Mrs. Coll MacDonald, decided not to contest the seat [2]. The Liberals had given yet another indication of their willingness to come to an accommodation in by-elections. This time there could be no problems with the Labour Party for no Labour organisation existed in the constituency, and there was no question of Labour contesting the seat. The duchess therefore had a clear field against her Conservative opponent, W.M. Snadden.

Support poured in for the duchess from members of all parties. Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Churchill, Keynes, Lindsay, Murray and 21 Labour M.P.s were among those who sent the duchess messages of support [3]. The Daily Worker gave the duchess official communist blessing [4]. Bartlett, Cecil and Wedgwood were among those who travelled north to speak for the duchess [5].

1. Interview between Roberts and a Mass Observation observer, n.d. Mass Observation Papers, box 316.
2. This decision was widely supported in the Liberal Party. W.R. Davies, the secretary of Liberal Party Organisation, wrote to Sinclair on 3 December 1938 'I have not yet heard a single expression of support for a Liberal candidate in this By-Election'. Thurso Papers, box 61.
3. News Chronicle, 21 December 1938.
4. Daily Worker, 26 November 1938. It is not clear whether the communists provided organisational aid.
5. Report, n.d. Mass Observation Papers, box 316.

Both the duchess and Snadden concentrated on foreign policy in their campaigns. 'Critic' in his 'London Diary' in the New Statesman on 24 December 1938 commented that Snadden 'and the Duchess both plug foreign affairs to the virtual exclusion of all other subjects', but Snadden dropped the term appeasement and referred instead to 'peace by understanding'. Already appeasement was fast acquiring a pejorative sense.

Polling took place on 21 December. When the result was declared the next day it was found that, although the Conservatives had suffered a 7.3 per cent swing, Snadden had been elected with 52.9 per cent of the poll on a 66.6 per cent turnout, 7.3 per cent less than in the 1935 general election. The reasons for the duchess's defeat were several. The duchess was undoubtedly handicapped by a lack of cars to carry her voters to the polls in this vast constituency - a shortage made worse by the fact that heavy snow fell on the day of the poll. A more important factor was the lack of unity among the progressive forces. On 6 December Roberts wrote to Lloyd George that 'The split in the organisation has bewildered the duchess' [1].

1. Lloyd George Papers, G/43/2.

The duchess herself wrote to Lloyd George on 26 December:

> We were up against the whole force of the Scottish Unionist Association (and) the whole of the local press, with one exception, was turned against us.....(moreover) there were Liberals who were upset at Mrs. MacDonald being pressed to stand down [1].

The main problem, however, was not so much that Mrs. MacDonald had been pressed to stand down as the fact that the duchess's domestic record could hardly be described as progressive. Speaking in the House of Commons on 26 May 1936 the duchess had argued against raising the school leaving age on the grounds that the export industries needed 'small hands' to work the machines in order to maintain Britain's export position [2]. Unfortunately for the duchess, comments such as this were only too frequent in her past record. The Daily Herald on 5 December commented succinctly that 'Red Duchess she may be on foreign policy, but she is hardly a pale-pink Duchess on home affairs'. Surprisingly, the duchess made little effort to allay suspicions about her domestic record during the campaign.

1. Ibid.
2. House of Commons Debates, Series V, Volume 312, column 1885.

It was an omission which almost certainly cost the duchess many votes.

The result gave great cheer to the opponents of the popular front. The Daily Herald's editorial on 23 December gleefully concluded

> There will be widespread sympathy for the Duchess of Atholl among all those who are ready to pay tribute to political courage....
> (But) the result does little to support the case of those who would have the Labour Party desert its socialist principles on the grounds that there are enormous numbers of Conservatives who, while they would not vote for Labour, would welcome any opportunity of voting against the Government if 'Popular Front' candidates were put before them.

As usual, the Daily Herald was being less than fair to the popular front. The duchess's domestic record made her a far from ideal candidate. Moreover, most of the supporters of the popular front believed that the main electoral benefits would come in the English constituencies. Many constituencies in Wales and Scotland tended to be either strongly pro-Labour, or pro-Conservative or Liberal, and therefore offered little hope for gains for the popular front. The constituency of Kinross and West Perth was very much in this category. Arthur Woodburn, the secretary of the Scottish Labour Party, described it at the time as 'one of the most reactionary in the whole of Scotland....one where liberty itself is hardly known in the political sense'[1].

1. Daily Herald, 23 December 1938.

Thus the year 1938 ended in low key for the supporters of the popular front. Although the duchess's defeat was understandable in the circumstances, it undoubtedly undermined some of the enthusiasm for the popular front which had been inspired by Bartlett's victory. The omens for Cripps's memorandum were not good.

On 9 January 1939 Cripps sent his memorandum to Middleton to present to the N.E.C. for 'its most urgent consideration'. In a letter which accompanied the memorandum Cripps explained that the urgency was brought about by the danger that the combined youth movement might be captured by 'anti-Labour elements' together 'with the announced participation of Mr. Herbert Morrison with Sir John Anderson and Mr. Ernest Brown in the launching of the National Register Campaign'.

The introduction of the national register had been announced in the House of Commons in December 1938. The idea behind the register was to list all those of military age in order to facilitate the introduction of conscription in the event of war. The announcement that Morrison would appear on a platform with two ministers therefore angered Cripps not only because the left was not allowed a similar freedom to appear on platforms with communists, but also because he saw Morrison's participation in the campaign as yet another example of the Labour Party's tendency to co-operate with, rather than challenge, the government over foreign policy.

Cripps's concern over Labour's inability to inspire youth reflected a strand which had long been important in his thought. During 1937-1938 he had been especially worried by the fact that the Labour meetings he addressed were made up primarily of the old. The specific event which prompted his concern at the beginning of 1939, however, was a meeting which took place in the Caxton Hall, London, on 5 January at which Duncan Sandys, the Conservative M.P. for Norwood and Churchill's son-in-law, had announced the formation of a 'One Hundred Thousand' movement. Cripps noted that this attempt to 'capture the youth for reactionary imperialism' had failed, but feared that another 'group will make an attempt to take command of this very considerable force of young opinion and fashion it into the nucleus for a rapidly expanding centre party or democratic front' [1]. To avoid this, Cripps advocated that the Labour Party should take up the leadership of the youth movement.

As Cripps went on to note in the letter which accompanied the memorandum, however, he regarded the threat to the youth of Britain 'as only one, though momentarily the most important, example of the growing urgency of the situation as regards the whole question of a combined opposition to the National Government'. Cripps conceded that the issue

1. In Oxford Lindsay had gained 80 per cent of the male, and 76 per cent of the female, under 26 vote. Rae, 'The Oxford Bye-Election: a Study in the Straw Vote Method', Political Quarterly, 2/1939, p. 275. In his reports on meetings he addressed during 1937-1938, Cripps had frequently pointed out that the audience consisted mainly of the old, and that Labour should make a greater effort to attract young people. For example, see his report to Shepherd, ? 1938. Cripps Papers, file 502.

'has been dealt with by the Executive on a number of previous occasions since the joint memorandum was submitted to them in May last by myself, Ellen Wilkinson, Laski and Pritt', but Cripps argued that the issue had 'become so increasingly pressing that I desire to submit this memorandum for their consideration before it becomes too late to take action prior to the next General Election'.

Although Cripps had been working on the memorandum since November, it was a rather rambling document. It began by noting that during the previous twelve months the political situation, both nationally and internationally, had progressively deteriorated and that opposition to the government had grown. Cripps argued that the Labour Party had failed to capitalise upon this opposition, a failure which he believed was largely the result of 'The rigidity of Party discipline' which had led to a weakening of the opposition forces and 'to discouragement among party members in many areas'. Cripps argued that the only hope of altering this situation and saving the British people from 'the dangers of fascism and war' lay in a popular front, for 'The growth of the Labour Party is not such as to warrant the belief that the party can defeat the National Government

single-handed at a General Election within the next 18 months'. He continued

> I certainly should not desire to encourage the Party to any combination with other non-socialist elements in normal political times. I have in the past always strenuously opposed such an idea. But the present times are not normal, indeed they are absolutely unprecedented in their seriousness for democratic and working class institutions of every kind. In such times it is impossible to overlook the fact that a too rigid adherence to Party discipline and to traditional Party tactics may amount to losing the substance of working class freedom and democracy for the shadow of maintaining a particular type of organisation, which is, as a mere machine, in itself of no value.

For these reasons Cripps advocated the issuing of a manifesto appealing for the support of all progressives and offering to enter into mutual agreements in the constituencies on the basis of an agreed programme.

In the memorandum which Cripps, Laski, Pritt and Ellen Wilkinson had presented to the N.E.C. in May 1938 the popular front had been portrayed in part as an extra-parliamentary movement, but in Cripps's memorandum the popular front was presented mainly as a means for winning the next general election. G.D.H. Cole believed that this played into the executive's hands by arguing 'on the ground which it had chosen, as if the popular front were mainly a device for winning the next General Election when it came, rather than for mobilising public opinion at once against the Government's foreign policy' [1]. As a general election

1. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914, p. 358.

was widely expected later in 1939, however, it would have been impossible for Cripps to ignore the electoral side of the popular front. What did play into the N.E.C.'s hands was not Cripps's concentration on the popular front as an electoral tactic, but the weakness of Cripps's presentation of the electoral argument.

On 1 January 1939 the Labour Party held 164 seats in the House of Commons, 144 short of an absolute majority. In order to win a majority Labour would have needed to capture all the seats which the National Government had won in the 1935 general election with majorities of 6,000 votes or less. Cripps estimated that Labour would only capture seats with majorities of less than 3,000 - a contestable, but not unreasonable figure [1]. On this basis Cripps calculated that Labour would win 228 seats in the next general election and that other opposition parties and independents would number 38. To reach his total for a popular front he added to the opposition total of 266 seats, the seats which the National Government had won on a minority vote in 1935, the seats in which it had a majority of less than 1,000 over two or more opponents, and 25 other seats which he believed that the popular front

1. The picture can be seen more clearly if swing is considered rather than votes. The average swing to Labour during 1938 in by-elections in which it came either first or second in both the 1935 general election and 1938 was 4.5 per cent. In the 1935 general election Labour had polled 38.1 per cent, so the swing in 1938 was well below that necessary to ensure a majority

could win. Together these totalled 330 seats, but, as a result of the way in which Cripps presented the figures, the total appeared as 331.

These sums left much to be desired. Although Cripps was correct, on his assumptions, in giving the figure of 266 seats for the opposition parties fighting the next general election independently, the correct total for Labour's share was 223, not 228. Also, the number of seats held by the government on a minority vote was 32, not 31 as claimed by Cripps. Both of these were minor errors as was the claim that Labour had polled almost 8 million votes in 1935, whereas the correct figure was 8,325,491. A far more serious error was Cripps's failure to see that some of the seats which the National Government had won on a minority vote in 1935 would have been won in the next general election by the opposition fighting alone, for it added 15 seats to the popular front total. This would still have left his popular front with a total of 316 seats, but the 316 would have included 5 I.L.P. and independent members who would have been far from sympathetic to the popular front and two Liberals, who although not elected as National Liberals, in fact supported the government. Thus on closer inspection, Cripps's comfortable working majority of 331 seats to 284 changes into a minority of 307 to 308.

Cripps could easily have shored up his electoral calculations by making greater allowance for the enthusiasm which it was argued would follow from the conclusion of a popular front agreement. This is in effect what the News Chronicle and Reynolds News had done in their electoral sums and what the Cripps - Laski - Pritt - Wilkinson memorandum had done in the discussion of the Aylesbury by-election. The case for the popular front, both as a means of rallying public opinion and as an electoral tactic, rested ultimately on its ability to generate enthusiasm - the enthusiasm which the Front Populaire had initially aroused; the enthusiasm engendered by the cause of the Spanish republic; the enthusiasm which was so clearly lacking in the majority of the Labour Party's demonstrations. If a popular front in Britain could have succeeded in generating such enthusiasm, then there was every reason to believe that it would have won a general election. Certainly on the evidence of Bridgwater there were good grounds for hoping that an electoral popular front would win far in excess of the 307 seats which Cripps's figures yielded.

The manner in which Cripps presented the electoral argument was not the only weakness in the memorandum. The programme which Cripps put forward as a basis for the popular front was also open to criticism. The programme

was basically a shortened version of the Immediate Programme, but with two important differences. First, whereas the Immediate Programme made it clear that Labour intended to nationalise the transport, coal and power industries, the memorandum spoke only of 'national control and co-ordination' and 'National and controlled planning'. It is clear from the memorandum which Cripps presented to several of his colleagues before the November N.E.C. meeting the he intended these terms to imply nationalisation, but their vagueness was to allow opponents, and even some supporters of the popular front, to attack Cripps for being willing to forego even a minimum programme of socialism [1]. Second, whereas the Immediate Programme clearly stated that 'A Labour Government will unhesitatingly maintain such armed forces as are necessary to defend our country and to fulfil our obligations as members of the British Commonwealth and of the League of Nations', the memorandum spoke elliptically of 'The effective protection of the democratic rights, liberties and freedon of the British people from internal and external attack'. It is again clear from Cripps's November 1938 memorandum that he accepted the need for large scale rearmament, although he was still not willing to support the National Government's plans, but the omission of any

1. For example, see Morgan Philips-Price's letter, Manchester Guardian, 20 January 1939.

specific reference to rearmament in the memorandum must have limited its appeal outside of the left, for by this time rearmament enjoyed widespread public support [1].

Cripps's failure to make his position clear over rearmament was typical of many on the Labour left [2]. The weakness of the electoral presentation and the looseness of phraseology in the references to nationalisation, however, were more characteristic of Cripps's approach rather than that of the Labour left. The carelessness which lay behind this approach was typical of much of Cripps's writings. Although a man of high intellectual ability, he possessed little of the intellectual's concern for the meticulously prepared argument - at least outside the courts. Cripps was an orator, a debater, rather than a writer, a man who convinced by the force of his passion rather than by the power of his reason. And passion does not lend itself easily to paper.

1. A British Institute of Public Opinion survey conducted in October 1938 showed that 72 per cent answered yes to the question 'In the present situation do you favour increased expenditure on armaments?', that 18 per cent were opposed and 10 per cent had no opinion. Lancien, op. cit., p.217.

2. Strauss noted this in an article entitled 'A Positive Policy for Peace', which appeared in Tribune on 14 October 1938. He added 'We must announce in the plainest language that while we are not prepared to co-operate in the armaments programme of a Government which uses its power to destroy European democracy we would be far more energetic than this Government in the production of whatever arms may be necessary, however large, for the defence of the British people'.

The weaknesses in the memorandum figured prominently in the discussion at the N.E.C. meeting which was specially convened to consider it on 13 January. It would be wrong, however, to think that these weaknesses in any way influenced the executive's decision. It is highly unlikely that even the most carefully worded document could have changed a single vote; the lines of division on the popular front were drawn long before. Although Munich had unquestionably made several members of the N.E.C. sympathetic to local pacts, no one had been converted to a full popular front. Moreover, it seems that not every member of the executive was opposed to Munich; James Walker, the M.P. for Motherwell and a member of the Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Federation, even stated that Chamberlain had done a good job at Munich, and that Cripps was in his political childhood [1]. It unquestionably came as no surprise to Cripps when after a two hour meeting his memorandum was rejected by 17 votes to 3, Cripps, Pritt and Ellen Wilkinson making up the minority [2].

Indeed, anticipating defeat, Cripps had spent £25 on printing a large number of copies of his memorandum.

1. Estorick, op. cit., p. 163

2. N.E.C. Minutes, 13 January 1939. Laski was still in America; it is not clear how he would have voted had he been present.

Immediately after the executive had voted he left the meeting and telephoned his secretary, instructing her to circularise the memorandum to all Labour M.P.s, prospective parliamentary candidates, and all affiliated organisations [1].

Cripps's decision was to cause doubts even among those not unsympathetic to the popular front. In particular, many felt that Cripps should have resigned from the N.E.C. before circularising the memorandum. Morgan Philips-Price, the Labour M.P. for the Forest of Dean, wrote to Trevelyan, his uncle, on 13 April 1939

> Cripps had a case which ought to have been discussed. His memorandum was a poor affair, badly drafted and full of loose thinking, but it merited discussion.
>
> Cripps should have resigned from the Executive when his memorandum was turned down and gone round the country addressing local Labour Parties on his point of view. They could not have touched him. It was to my mind, incredibly bad tactics to remain on the Executive and to appeal to the rank and file against the decision of a body to which he belonged [2].

Laski made the same point in a letter to Martin on 12 April. He wrote

> Stafford, I think was a grievous blunderer in the manner of his action. You can't stay on the E.C. and run a campaign against it at the same time [3].

1. Cripps deleted certain passages which he believed 'might embarrass the Party'. Memorandum, February 1939. Cripps Papers, file 506.
2. Trevelyan Papers, 1930s box 3.
3. Woodman Papers, Harold Laski file.

Cripps's unwillingness to resign, however, did not reflect a lack of appreciation of the possibility. In a memorandum which he wrote in February 1939 he claimed that

> It must be remembered that I was an elected member of the Constituency Parties, and it was for me to estimate whether, in the circumstances, it would be in accordance with the wishes of my constituents that I should resign....I decided that it would not be in accordance with those wishes [1].

In fact his unwillingness to resign lay not so much in his appreciation of the views of his supporters as in his concem to assert his right not merely to circularise his views, but also to do so while remaining a member of the N.E.C. Cripps's motive was revealed later in the same memorandum when he noted

> The issue seems quite a simple one of 'Democracy within the Party', It is not suggested that on every occasion of difference it would be convenient or practicable to circularise the views of both sides to the difference, but where the minority considers the issue to be one of vital importance it is its right and duty in my viewto acquaint its constituents of its views.

Nevertheless, the decision to circularise the memorandum was an unprecedented one. No member of the executive had ever before adopted such a course, although it was not uncommon for B.L.P.s and D.L.P.s to issue circulars on matters of policy [2]. Cripps, however, had warned the executive of

1. Cripps Papers, file 506.
2. Only the month before the Manchester B.L.P. had issued a pro-popular front circular to over 400 B.L.P.s and D.L.P.s. Manchester Guardian, 17 January 1939.

his intention to circularise in the letter which had accompanied the memorandum and he had been questioned on his intentions at the beginning of the meeting on 13 January. Although one or two members of the executive had protested, the matter had been quickly passed over without any indication that this would be considered a cause for expulsion [1].

On 14 January, however, Dallas issued a statement on behalf of the N.E.C. pointing out that Cripps's proposals had been heavily defeated and claiming that the continuation of the popular front agitation could only 'plunge the Movement into another useless and disturbing controversy' at a time 'when it is more than ever essential that it should be united in its efforts to bring about the defeat of the National Government and secure power for a Labour Government' [2]. Dallas therefore requested Labour Party members to take no action before a statement could be issued answering Cripps's case.

In order to consider Cripps's action a second special meeting of the N.E.C. was arranged for 18 January. The

1. Memorandum, February 1939. Cripps Papers, file 506.
2. Daily Herald, 16 January 1939.

meeting was arranged to take place at 4.15 p.m. so that Cripps could attend after the courts had risen, but he failed to attend, claiming that he had an important legal consultation - a claim which led to charges of high-handedness and evasion [1]. Cripps's absence made it difficult for the executive to act and it was agreed, on Morrison's suggestion, to refer Cripps's action to the Organisation Sub Committee which would produce a report in time for the N.E.C. meeting scheduled for 25 January [2].

After the 18 January meeting of the executive Dalton visited Windle to discuss the likely effect of the memorandum on the movement. Windle stressed the importance of an immediate expulsion to avoid trouble, particularly from the trade unions' leadership which was becoming increasingly annoyed at what it saw as the Labour Party's tolerance of popular front agitation [3]. There is little doubt that most trade union leaders were angry that Cripps had raised 'an issue on which the trade union section of the movement has made up its mind' [4]. Bevin appears to have been especially

1. It appears, however, that Middleton, who had no love for Cripps, made no effort to check that he could attend the meeting at this time.
   Memorandum, 23 January 1939. Dalton Papers, file 14.
2. N.E.C. Minutes, 18 January 1939. It was agreed that Cripps should be allowed to see the report before the meeting.
3. Memorandum 23 January 1939. Dalton Papers, file 14.
4. J. Marchbank column, Railway Review, 20 January 1939.

angered and he worked hard for the expulsion of Cripps [1].

It was against this background that the N.E.C. met on 25 January. The Organisation Sub Committee's report asked that Cripps should withdraw his memorandum and reaffirm his allegiance to the Labour Party within the meaning of 'the Constitution, Programme, Principles and Policy of the Party'. Had Cripps accepted, the situation could have proved difficult for several trade unions leaders were out for blood, but he refused both demands, claiming that he had a democratic right to pursue the course of action which he had taken and that his work for the party in years past made his loyalty beyond doubt. Cripps offered to compromise if the executive would lead a popular front campaign in the country and permit electoral agreements in the two hundred or so most hopeless constituencies [2], but the executive was in no mood for such a compromise and by 18 votes to 1 it was decided to expel Cripps [3], Ellen Wilkinson being the only dissenter [4].

1. Williams, Ernest Bevin, p. 211.
2. Memorandum, February 1939. Cripps Papers, file 506. As an electoral popular front would not have been necessary in any where near all the constituencies, this represented only a minor concession. Shepherd at the November 1938, Policy Sub Committee meeting estimated that Labour would need to stand down for the Liberals in 48 constituencies, and the Liberals for Labour in 83. Memorandum on the meeting Dalton Papers, file 14.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 25 January 1939.
4. Pritt was ill. In a letter which appeared in the Manchester Guardian on 6 February 1939 he stated that he would have voted against the expulsion.

On the evening of his expulsion Cripps addressed what was to be the last of the great Spain rallies. Although this meeting in the Queen's Hall, London, had been arranged only six days before, it attracted the usual capacity crowd - indeed, Kingsway Hall had to be taken for the overflow - to hear speakers who included Bevan, Isobel Brown, a ubiquitous communist fund raiser, Lindsay, Roberts and Ellen Wilkinson. The most interesting aspect of this meeting, however, was not the size of the audience or the miniature popular front which gathered on the platform, but the reception which Cripps received when he stepped on to the podium for virtually the entire audience rose in acclamation [1].

In the weeks which followed there were to be many similar demonstrations of support for Cripps. In spite of the memorandum's failings, it met with widespread approval among the supporters of the popular front, although some supporters of a Lib-Lab agreement, or local agreements believed that the memorandum had disturbed the hornet's nest and dished their chances. For example, Dalton believed that the possibility of quietly arranging constituency agreements had been ruined by Cripps and concluded 'The man has the political judgement of a flea' [2]. And Rowse, in an article entitled 'Liberals and

1. Ibid., 26 January 1939.
2. Memorandum, 23 January 1939. Dalton Papers, file 14.

Labour' which appeared in the Manchester Guardian on 13 February 1939, commented sadly 'In all the discussion about the Cripps memorandum and the Popular Front people are apt to overlook the case for an electoral understanding with the Liberals or even to assume that they are the same thing'.

The Central Committee of the C.P.G.B. supported the memorandum [1]. On 21 January the Daily Worker declared its support, claiming that 'The Cripps policy, if adopted, will do two vitally urgent things: strengthen the Labour movement, (and) lead to the defeat of Chamberlain'. However, the support of the Central Committee and Daily Worker was hardly surprising in view of the party's support for the popular front, especially as on 14 January the C.P.G.B. had launched a 'Crusade for the Defence of the British People' in a final attempt to achieve a popular front [2]. Cripps's efforts to convert the Labour Party therefore came at an opportune moment from the communist point of view.

1. See its statement The Cripps Memorandum, issued in February 1939.

2. The Crusade led to the production of Ivor Montagu's pioneer British sound political propaganda film For Peace and Plenty.

More important was the support which the memorandum attracted in the non-communist press. The Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle, New Statesman, Reynolds News, the Star and Time and Tide all commented favourably on the memorandum. The Manchester Guardian's editorial on 17 January noted

> The two main contentions of Sir Stafford Cripps's memorandum are unchallengeable. The first is that there is a widespread desire for common association in action....The second is that in the next general election that is imminent Labour, on its present line of tactics, will not have a majority either by itself or with the help of other anti-Government parties. Sir Stafford Cripps's movement offers us what is probably the last chance we shall have of staving off this calamity.

Time and Tide's editorial on 21 January 1939 commented 'The General Election is looming near; the issues at stake are so desperately critical, we can but hope that Labour will not throw away this great opportunity - it may even be of averting war - for the sake of a narrow interpretation of its great mission in this country', Tribune, naturally, gave the memorandum the widest coverage, printing it in full in its 20 January issue [1].

Many leading individual supporters of the popular front, including Acland, Bartlett, Brailsford, G.D.H. Cole, Le Mander, Lindsay, Murphy, Roberts and Trevelyan also declared their

1. This issue of Tribune also printed an abbreviated, although not emasculated, version of Labour and the Popular Front.

broad sympathies with the memorandum [1]. Some idea of the extent of Liberal support for the memorandum may be gauged from a letter which Sinclair, who supported the memorandum, wrote to Harcourt Johnstone, the chairman of the Liberal Organisation, on 30 January 1939. Sinclair commented 'I have received a good may expressions of approval .... and none of criticism' [2].

The support for the memorandum which existed in the Labour Party can be gauged from the fact that in the two months following its publication 58 D.L.P.s, including Cripps's own party, wrote to the N.E.C. to convey their support for the memorandum - a considerable number in view of the risks of expulsion which this ran [3]. Predictably most of the 58 D.L.P.s came from non-industrial constituencies where the popular front had most to offer the Labour Party, and dislike of the trade unions' domination of the party was strongest. The correlation between hostility to the trade unions and support

1. For a more detailed list see the Daily Herald, Daily Worker, Manchester Guardian, News Chronicle and Tribune, January 1939.
2. Thurso Papers, box 65.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1939. Several parties which supported the popular front were reorganised. See below, pp. 353-354.

for the memorandum was commented on in the New Statesman on 18 March when it noted

> The true foundation of the Cripps revolt is neither the desire for an electoral alliance nor the desire for a different programme, but the deep and uneasy sense that the Labour Party does not at present look to the country like an effective alternative government....It manages to give the impression that it is being too much run by the Trade Unions, whose part in it must necessarily be great, but whose domination, whether apparent or real, is a fatal electoral handicap.

Opposition to the expulsion in the D.L.P.s, however, was spread much more evenly over the country. As opposition to the expulsion did not court reorganisation or disaffiliation, the number of parties was much larger. Moreover, it was possible to oppose the memorandum and yet believe that Cripps did not deserve to be expelled. In the two months after the expulsion 134 D.L.P.s wrote to the N.E.C. to protest [1]. Opposition to the expulsion was especially strong in the Labour League of Youth, and on 30 January a letter signed by every member of the N.A.C. was issued protesting against the expulsion and, with one dissenting member, supporting the memorandum - an act which led to a new disbandment of the N.A.C. [2]. During March the Durham miners revealed that Cripps had his supporters on the trade union side of the movement when Cripps came top

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1939.
2. 1939 L.P.C.R., pp. 80-81. The Youth Militant Group, whilst not supporting the memorandum, was worried about the implications of the expulsion as far as intra-party democracy was concerned. Militant, February-March 1939.

of the poll, in which 120,000 voted, for speakers at the Durham Miners' Gala [1] - an invitation considered by some as 'the prize of the Labour movement' [2].

Support for the N.E.C.'s action was in no way increased by the publication in February of two pamphlets, Socialism or Surrender? and Unity True or Sham?, setting out the case for expulsion. Sydney Silverman, the Labour M.P. for Nelson and Colne and a lawyer, commented succinctly in a letter which appeared in the Manchester Guardian on 21 February 1939

> I have read the Executive's memorandum [3] again and again. I still do not understand why Sir Stafford Cripps was expelled.

Silverman was using the English language carelessly to state that he could not understand why Cripps was expelled. The two pamphlets show clearly why the N.E.C. believed that it was justified in expelling Cripps. What they do not present is a valid case for expulsion.

Although Unity True or Sham? went to great lengths to criticise Cripps's memorandum, the executive sought to make it clear that he had not been expelled for his support of

1. Unity News, 5 May 1939. Bevan came second in the poll.
2. Sir G.E.G. Catlin, For God's Sake Go!, (1972), p.83.
3. Presumably Silverman was referring to Unity True or Sham?, which was the main statement.

the popular front as such. Socialism or Surrender? stated that 'Sir Stafford Cripps has been expelled for disloyalty to the Labour Party - and not because he chooses, for the moment, to believe in a "Popular Front"' [1]. Unity True or Sham? concluded 'In the opinion of the National Executive Committee, Sir Stafford Cripps' actions display an indifference to the welfare of the Labour Party and a demand for a degree of liberty incompatible with loyal membership' [2], an accusation which it was made clear referred not only to Cripps's actions in 1939 [3].

These statements clearly raise two points. First, were Cripps's actions 'gravely harmful' to the Labour Party as Socialism or Surrender? claimed? [4]. And second, was he guilty of disloyalty, did he demand 'a degree of liberty incompatible with loyal membership'?

There is no doubt that Cripps's statements on the Emergency Powers Act and his 'gaffes' provided fertile copy for Tory newspapers, and many government speakers.

1. P. 1.
2. P. 11.
3. Indeed, Unity True or Sham? contained a catalogue of Cripps's alleged past misdeeds and changes of position.
4. P. 1.

Dalton even believed that Cripps had cost Labour the 1935 general election [1]. However, it should not be forgotten that in 1935 Labour gained a higher percentage of the vote than it had ever done before. Moreover, there is no way of knowing - at least to the extent that it is ever possible to know - just what effect Cripps had on Labour's electoral performance as there were no opinion polls in the modern sense before October 1938 when the British Institute of Public Opinion began to publish its results. It is interesting to note that what appears to be the only poll taken specifically on Cripps before the outbreak of war - one on his popular front plan - showed considerable support for his proposal [2].

Nor is there any evidence that Cripps's campaigns weakened party organisation. There were undoubtedly those who were bitterly opposed to his views, but there were others who were inspired by his idealism and vitality. Whether a Labour Party united behind the uninspiring leadership of Attlee would have been stronger is a moot point. And to imply, as many of Cripps's critics did, that the division within the party was mainly a result of his activities, was to put the cart before the horse. As Cripps noted in his article 'Stafford Cripps Replies to the Labour Party Executive', which appeared in Tribune on 20 January 1939,

1. Information supplied by John Parker.
2. See below, pp. 338-339.

'To suggest that objective discussion of the case for a combined opposition against the National Government is to create harmful confusion and division within the party, is to refuse recognition of the fact that there is already a ferment of opinion in the Party on the subject'. The same point could be made equally well in connection with Cripps's other campaigns.

It is not evident, however, that even if it is conceded that Cripps's campaigns caused 'harmful division' that this in itself justifies the charge of disloyalty. If this connection is accepted then anyone who raised a controversial issue would be in danger of being branded disloyal. Unity True or Sham? therefore also argued that Cripps's actions were disloyal because they contravened the obligations required by the Labour Constitution - especially Clause III 3a, which stated that each individual member of the party must 'Accept and conform to the Constitution, Programme, Principles and Policy of the Party' [1].

The programme which Cripps put forward in his memorandum was certainly open to the charge of disloyalty to the socialist commitment embodied in Clause IV of the Labour Constitution. However, Cripps had made clear to the N.E.C. at its meeting on 13 January that he intended some socialist measures to be included in the programme,

1. P. 9.

and in the memorandum itself he had stressed that 'there must be no permanent sacrifice of socialist principles'. Moreover, there was something ironic in the charge that Cripps was betraying socialism considering the nature of the socialism of most of his accusers. David Low, the outstanding cartoonist of the 1930s, captured this irony superbly in a cartoon which appeared in the Evening Standard on 28 January 1939. The cartoon depicted Low, accompanied by his ever faithful dog, being ushered out of Transport House by Colonel Blimp. The caption read:

> LOW EXPELLED FROM THE LABOUR PARTY.
> He applied for the job of nursemaid to George Dallas's socialism. No good. Not pure enough. Besides, Col. Blimp had already been appointed [1].

As far as loyalty to official policy was concerned, Cripps's argument was that there had been no proper discussion of the popular front in the party [2]. An undebated popular front amendment to the united front resolution at the 1936 Conference had been easily defeated. However, there could be no denying that support for the popular front in the Labour Party had grown vastly since 1936. During 1938 the N.E.C. had consistently refused to call an emergency Conference which, among other things, could have discussed the question of the popular front; it was difficult

1. Capitals in the original. It is clear from Low's cartoons at this time that he supported the popular front.
2. Memorandum in Cripps Papers, file 506.

not to conclude that one of the reasons for not calling the Conference was the fear that it would reveal considerable popular front support.

Nevertheless, such a Conference would almost certainly have defeated the popular front for the vast majority of the union leadership was strongly opposed; of the major unions only N.U.D.A.W. had voted in favour of the movement. If this had been the result of an emergency Conference it is unlikely that Cripps would have felt himself bound by the decision. In an article entitled 'I Will Accept their Decision', which appeared in Tribune on 24 February 1939, he offered to abide by the decision of a plebiscite of the Labour movement, but he refused to be bound by a decision under the existing voting arrangements, in which the operation of theblock vote 'at best' eliminates the minority ' and may in some cases actually be against the majority'. For Cripps, the issue of the popular front had become very closely bound up with the issue of the unions' role in the party, and the question of intra-party democracy.

Thus Cripps had written and circularised his memorandum both because he believed that he had a democratic right to do so, and also because he believed that since 1936 a large body of opinion had grown up in the Labour Party and in the country which supported the popular front [1]. The

1. Ibid.

reception which the memorandum received further convinced Cripps of the existence of such a body of opinion. Comments like that made in the Star on 25 January 1939 when it noted that 'he who has always been apart from the crowd and of whom men have said that he lacked the common touch, is now probably closer to public sentiment than he has ever been', reinforced his judgement and stoked the messianic fervour. It was this fervour which led Cripps shortly after his expulsion to decide to launch a national petition in favour of the popular front.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

REQUIEM FOR THE POPULAR FRONT.

In the closing days of January 1939 the messianic fervour of Cripps was never stronger, the belief in his own judgement and obsession with the popular front never greater. The method which he determined upon to further his cause reflects the intensity with which he had come to believe in the existence of widespread support for the popular front, for he decided to launch a petition 'of the British People to the Labour, Liberal and Co-operative Parties' calling on them to unite and drive out the National Government.

The omission of the communists did not reflect a change of heart on Cripps's part concerning communist participation. Cripps was in constant touch with Dutt at this time about the development of his plans [1]. And in a speech made in Bristol on 18 February he specifically stated that the omission of the C.P.G.B. from the list of parties to which the petition appealed was because there was no question of it not supporting unity [2].

1. Information supplied by Rajani Palme Dutt. Dutt would not state exactly what this involved.

2. Daily Worker, 20 February 1939. Nevertheless, it was an interesting omission because although the Co-operative Party and Liberals were divided over the popular front, they were committed to it in the sense that their last conferences had accepted the movement.

The policy put forward in the six points of the petition was basically a shortened version of that put forward in the memorandum, which was allowed to fade out of the picture after the expulsion. The petition, however, did contain three demands which were not included in the memorandum. Point four included a demand for the 'control' of the arms industry; point five called for a government which would 'DEFEND THE PEOPLE, provide effective protection for the common people against air attack and starvation in the event of war' [1]; and point six included a demand for the ending of the exploitation of 'subject races'. It is interesting to note in view of Cripps's contacts with Dutt at this time that these additions figured prominently in the C.P.G.B.'s 'Crusade for the Defence of the British People'.

Cripps believed that the petition would provide a focus around which the supporters of all parties could loyally rally. He hoped that the petition would convert the N.E.C. to the popular front by revealing the extent of the support for it which existed in the country. As Cripps noted in his address to the rally which launched the petition 'We want somehow or other to show those in authority <u>that the support is much more than they apparently think</u>' [2].

1. Capitals in the original.
2. <u>The Petition</u>, (Petition campaign pamphlet, 1939), p.8. Italics in the original.

Cripps set a target of two million signatures by the time that the Labour Conference met at Whitsun. This figure was to be achieved by a 'methodical house-to-house canvass of the whole voting population of England, Scotland and Wales' [1]. To organise this canvass a central petition committee was set up in London. The committee provided literature and speakers, and acted as the collector of the completed petition forms. The actual canvassing, however, was organised by twelve regional petition committees [2], which sought to promote petition committees in every parliamentary constituency. Lt. Commander E.P. Young, who had known Cripps since the early days of the Socialist League, was appointed to oversee this organisation.

Young was an archetypal middle class fellow-traveller. Before 1931 he had taken little interest in politics, but the events of that year, together with what he had seen in the Far East while in the navy, led him to a crude Marxism, and Young resigned his commission and joined the Labour Party. Young increasingly became an admirer of the Soviet Union, and his position on most issues was close to that of the C.P.G.B. In particular, he supported its line

1. Notes for Petition Canvassers, (Petition campaign leaflet, 1939).

2. The twelve were situated in London (2), Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Glasgow, Llandudno, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young. and G.R. Strauss.

on the popular front from the outset, and was therefore enthusiastic about the petition idea when Cripps approached him [1].

The petition campaign idea was conceived by Cripps during the weekend which followed his expulsion. It was a decision arrived at in almost total isolation. Although Cripps consulted Bevan and Strauss, he informed none of the other leading Labour supporters of the popular front of his plans [2]. Pritt and Ellen Wilkinson in particular were left in the dark until they received a memorandum from Cripps at the beginning of the week following the expulsion [3]. It is unlikely, however, that this influenced their decision not to support the petition campaign. Pritt and Wilkinson had never been as close to Cripps as Bevan and Strauss. At a greater distance from his infectious commitment, they saw more clearly the problems which the petition faced. Moreover, in Wilkinson's case the sense of loyalty to Conference decisions was far stronger than in Cripps [4].

1. Based on information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young and contemporary articles by Young.
2. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.
3. Shortly after the launching of the petition Wilkinson complained to Parker that Cripps had never consulted her over any of his plans. Information supplied by John Parker.
4. For a more detailed account of Wilkinson's reasons for not supporting the petition see her letter in the Times of 4 February 1939.

In spite of the opposition of Pritt and Wilkinson, Cripps went ahead with his plan to launch the petition at a rally, which had originally been planned as part of a campaign to boost the circulation of Tribune, in Newcastle on 5 February 1939. It was announced in advance that Cripps would launch his new crusade at this rally and the sense of expectation among the 3,000 present was high. Neither Cripps nor his audience were to be disappointed. After Cripps had read out the text of the petition almost the whole audience rose in acclamation. In an article entitled 'Sign the Petition', which appeared in Tribune five days later, Cripps asserted 'I have attended some wonderful meetings in this country, the launching of the Unity Campaign in the Free Trade Hall, at Manchester, the great Spain meetings in the Albert Hall and that of ten days ago in the Queen's Hall, and others, but I never recollect a meeting more expectant, more hopeful or more enthusiastic than that at the Palace Theatre, Newcastle, on Sunday last'.

The Newcastle meeting was followed by a series of rallies throughout the country. Packed halls greeted Cripps wherever he spoke. There was undoubtedly considerable support for the petition during its early days. During early March the British Institute of Public Opinion asked the question 'Do you approve of Stafford Cripps' efforts to get the opposition parties to act together to defeat the Government

at the next election?'. The survey revealed that 56 per cent of the sample did agree, that 21 per cent were opposed and that 23 per cent had no opinion [1]. These figures somewhat contradict the British Institute of Public Opinion's findings on voting intentions in a general election [2]. Nevertheless, they cannot be completely written off; they clearly indicate that support for Cripps was considerable.

Each week Tribune carried articles in favour of the petition, and its circulation rose from 25,000 in January to 30,000 in March, the highest of any of the left wing journals [3]. The campaign also received support from the Manchester Guardian and Daily Worker, which even published a petition form to be filled in by readers on 15 February. A special petition broadsheet, Unity News, was issued and appeared fortnightly for five issues. The petition also attracted the support of many of the leading supporters of the popular front, including Acland, Bartlett, Brailsford, Le Mander, Lindsay, Murphy, Roberts, Sinclair and Trevelyan, who chaired the Newcastle meeting and became the first signatory of the petition [4].

1. Lancien, op. cit., p.219
2. See below, p. 368.
3. Tribune, 28 April 1939.
4. Ibid., 10 February 1939. For a more complete list of those who supported the petition see the Daily Herald Daily Worker, Manchester Guardian and Tribune, Feb. 1939.

Nevertheless from the outset there were ominous signs. Pritt and Wilkinson were not the only prominent Labour popular fronters who declined to support Cripps; Cole, another man in whom the sense of loyalty ran very deep, also refused to back the petition [1]. There were also problems with press coverage. Cripps had hoped that he would receive support from the News Chronicle, Manchester Guardian, Reynolds News, Tribune, Time and Tide, and the Daily Worker, with the New Statesman and the Star possibly giving support [2]. However, these hopes were not to be fulfilled. The News Chronicle adopted a lukewarm attitude, preferring to concentrate on that Liberal evergreen - proportional representation [3] (although Cummings initially gave the campaign support [4]). The New Statesman, Reynolds News, Star and Time and Tide tended to ignore the petition.

1. Information supplied by Dame Margaret Cole.

2. Plan for the petition, January 1939. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

3. For example, see the 3 March 1939 edition.

4. For example, see his column in the News Chronicle, 7 and 23 February 1939.

Its bleak prospects undoubtedly played a major part in this, although Time and Tide on 18 February also stressed that Cripps was wrong to seek communist support for the petition.

The petition fared better with the Council of Action, which Cripps had not included in his list of organisations likely to help the petition [1]. Throughout 1938 there had been growing rumours that Lloyd George was planning to reenter politics seriously. Rumours that he was to launch a new progressive newspaper to accompany this reentry were even strong enough to prompt Sir Frank Newnes, the head of the Newnes Press, to write to Lloyd George on 5 July to ask to be allowed to quote for a run [2]. In January 1939 Bartlett had written to Lloyd George

> nobody can give a lead to get these cowards out of office. You played so great a part in winning the last war; I believe you are the only man who can play a great part in preventing another war [3].

1. The organisations mentioned by Cripps were: sympathetic Labour parties, union branches and Co-operative guilds, the 'Youth' movement, the C.P.G.B., the N.U.W.M., Left Book Club groups, sympathetic Liberal parties, and various individuals. Plan for the petition, January 1939. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

2. Lloyd George Papers, G/42/2.

3. Ibid., G/44/1/45.

However, as so often in the past, Lloyd George had no clear plan or purpose. Moreover, Lloyd George saw the problems facing unity much more clearly than Cripps, and others, did. On 4 March 1939 he wrote to Gollancz 'With determination and good organisation there ought to emerge, to my mind, a very solid Popular Front, but I expect it will take time' [1].

Nevertheless, Lloyd George, and especially the Council of Action, were not completely inactive. In particular, he appeared at the 1939 Left Book Club rally, held on 24 April and attended by 11,000 people. Among the other speakers at this rally were Acland, Sir Norman Angell, a well known political writer who had been Labour M.P. for Bradford during 1929-1931, Cripps, Gollancz, Pollitt, Roberts and Strachey [2]. Lloyd George also made at least one substantial donation to the petition campaign [3], and in some areas much of the grass roots organisation of the petition was done by the Council of Action's local committees [4],

1. Ibid., G/45/1/12.
2. Lewis, op. cit., p.86.
3. Letter from Cripps to Lloyd George, 5 May 1939. Lloyd George Papers, G/5/6.
4. Letter from Colonel Tweed to Lloyd George, 1 June 1939. Ibid., G/28/2/13.

which existed in all but a handful of English and Welsh constituencies [1].

In areas where the Council of Action was weak the organisation of the petition was often undertaken by the local Left Book Club discussion group. The relationship between the Left Book Club and the petition, however, was far from one of enthusiastic support. Left News virtually ignored the memorandum and the petition. Moreover, although Gollancz announced his own support for the memorandum in the Left Book Club pages of Tribune, which had been printing four pages of Left Book Club news each week since 23 September 1939, on 20 January, and was secretly attending the weekly central petition committee meetings [2], he refused to speak at the Newcastle rally and issued a circular to the discussion groups requesting that they should not associate with the petition [3].

Gollancz had always attempted to keep the groups out of direct involvement in constituency politics, but at the beginning of 1939 it was particularly important that the

1. Council of Action News Sheet 92, n.d.
   Ibid., box G/142.
2. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
3. Letter from Gollancz to G.D.H. Cole, 22 March 1939. Cole Papers, box.10.

Left Book Club should not appear to be involved in such activities. Left Book Club members were often the most prominent popular fronters in constituency parties and this, together with the distinctly communist-fellow-traveller line of many of the books and the way in which communists ran many of the club's groups, had led to growing trouble between the club and the Labour Party. In 1937 the club had attempted to improve relations by offering the Labour Party two pages in each issue of Left News for purely Labour news, plus two entire issues devoted to the Labour Party and containing articles written only by members of the Labour Party, but the offer was refused [1]. During 1938 relations between the club and the Labour Party deteriorated even further and the N.E.C. decided to set up its own club, the Labour Book Service, the formation of which was announced in the Daily Herald on 7 March 1939 [2].

Some idea of the fear which the Left Book Club's groups

1. Lewis, op. cit., pp. 92-95.
2. The Labour Party's shortage of intellectuals who did not support the popular front is revealed by the fact that three of the Labour Book Service's first four books were by supporters of some form of popular front. The books were Sir N. Angell, Must It Be War?,(1939), G.D.H. Cole, A Plan for Democratic Britain,(1939), and R.H.S. Crossman, How Britain Is Governed, (1939).

and their communist connections inspired in the Labour Party can be gauged from the reaction of the London Labour Party to the application on 10 October 1938 of an organisation called Labour Stage for official recognition. The organisation consisted of young Labour activists who were interested in the theatre. In a report written by the assistant secretary of the London Labour Party, D.H. Daines, the usefulness of such a group was conceded. Daines wrote 'A dramatic organisation without Communist affiliations would be useful for absorbing the energies of young enthusiasts who now have no alternative but the "Left" (Book Club) theatre groups'. Daines continued, however, on a more cautious note

> My only doubt is as to how long the 'ideological' neutrality would survive. The Choral Union, which started off with Elizabethan Madrigals, etc., now regards music as a mere vehicle for ultra-left wing propaganda [1].

Official recognition was not accorded to Labour Stage.

Gollancz's warning to the discussion groups proved ineffective and large numbers of them became involved in the organisation of the petition [2]. These activities led Shepherd on 1 March to issue a circular to all B.L.P.s and D.L.P.s advising that 'Since groups of the Left Book Club are not entitled to affiliation to constituency Parties, joint

1. Report in the London Labour Party Executive Agenda, 20 October 1938.
2. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

political activities with them should not be entered into, especially when these are in the direction of (the) so-called "Popular Front"'. Given the Labour Party's attitude to the popular front, this was hardly unreasonable, but many in the Labour Party were worried about the dark hint in the circular that the Left Book Club might soon be proscribed as a 'political organisation ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party' - an act which would have made membership of the club and the party incompatible.

On 22 March Gollancz wrote to G.D.H. Cole that he could 'just understand' the proscription of the groups, but that the threat to the club 'means in effect that the Labour Party, though "at this stage" it doesn't propose to do so, may contemplate saying that a person cannot be a member of the Labour Party if he reads certain books' [1]. In the editorial of the April issue of Left News Gollancz pictured a Gestapo-like network of Labour agents who would raid members' homes to seek out the prohibited material and ensure conformity. Cole shared Gollancz's amazement. On 23 March he replied 'It is appallingly difficult to see what one can do in the face of this Executive madness without making matters worse by getting oneself expelled from the

1. Cole Papers, box 10.

Party - which after all remains the one possible nucleus for effective opposition' [1].

It was not only members of the Left Book Club who faced the prospect of expulsion in March 1939. Supporters of the petition faced a far more immediate danger for the petition had immediately fallen foul of the N.E.C. At its meeting on 22 February it was decided to warn the leading Labour supporters of the campaign [2], and as a result five of the seven Labour M.P.s supporting the campaign, S.O. Davies, the M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil, Parker, Philips Price, Poole and Ben Riley, the M.P. for Dewsbury, withdrew, together with Will Lawther, the acting president of the M.F.G.B. [3]. The others, however, showed no inclination to retract and on 2 March Shepherd wrote to Bevan, Strauss, Trevelyan, Young and Robert Bruce, the Scottish petition organiser and the prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for South Aberdeen, to inform them that if they did not withdraw they would suffer the same fate as Cripps [4].

The N.E.C.'s case against the five was not the same as that against Cripps. The petition had introduced a new

1. Ibid.
2. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 February 1939.
3. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
4. This and the other letters which passed between Shepherd and the five may be found in the 1939 L.P.C.R., pp.50-53.

element into the situation and the main charge against the five was that they were supporting 'The creation of machinery with staffs and offices throughout the country for the purpose of undermining the integrity of the Party and the authority of the Annual Party Conference'. There was certainly no question of the fact that the five were attempting to alter a conference decision, but the charge of seeking to undermine the integrity of the party, unless it simply referred to supporting the popular front, was without the least foundation. From the outset of the campaign Cripps had been aware of the danger of allowing the petition to appear to be setting itself up as a rival organisation to Labour and at each petition rally forms were issued to recruit new members for the Labour Party. The Daily Worker on 11 May 1939 claimed that the petition resulted in 5,000 applications to join the Labour Party - and this at a time when individual party membership was falling [1].

In a circular issued on 1 March, however, Shepherd, far from welcoming these new recruits, warned constituency parties that agreement with Cripps did not constitute a qualification for membership of the Labour Party. Morrison

1. See below, pp. 380-381.

went even further and announced that in future the London Labour Party would investigate each application for membership with the utmost care - a statement which prompted 'Critic' in his 'London Diary' in the New Statesman on 8 April to note

> Herbert Morrison has announced that he cannot accept without careful examination the new recruits enrolled in the Labour Party by Cripps' campaign. Perhaps he is afraid that a Socialist might creep in.

The Labour Party's response to the petition provoked widespread criticism in the party. G.D.H. Cole and G.R. Mitchison, who had been treasurer of the Socialist League, wrote to the N.E.C. protesting about its threat to make further expulsions before Conference had a chance to discuss the matter [1]. Christopher Addison, J.A. Hobson, Tawney, the Webbs [2] and Leonard Woolf, a well-known Labour writer and publisher, were among those who wrote to the executive suggesting that it should enter into negotiations with

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1939.
2. The Webbs' position was stated in a letter from Beatrice to Morrison on 3 March 1939. She wrote 'so far as we have an opinion Sidney and I are against a proclaimed and publicly announced united front with the Liberals, or with anyone else outside the Labour Party, which would involve modifying the programme and necessarily admitting non-members into a future government. What we and many other old members of the Labour Party object to in the recent action of the National Executive is the much advertised expulsion of members because they differ as to tactics or even as to policy'. Passfield Papers, Letters II 4, 1939.

Cripps in an attempt to solve the dispute [1]. Addison, who had been a supporter of the popular front from the early summer of 1936 [2], made his position clear in a letter which appeared in the New Statesman on 25 March. Addison stated

> I for one, resent the irresponsible putting out of a half-baked programme of a dozen headings which I am perfectly sure would not endure a fortnight in a Cabinet of Labour and Liberal leaders....On the other hand, I cannot imagine a case for expulsion and heresy hunting in a Party that professes loyalty to freedom of speech and opinion.

The N.E.C., however, remained unmoved. At its meeting on 22 March it was decided by 13 votes to 7 to inform Bevan and the others that their replies were unsatisfactory and that unless assurances were forthcoming they would be expelled [3]. Two other votes on the petition were taken at this meeting. Pritt proposed a motion stating that in view of the gravity of the international situation in the aftermath of the German occupation of the Czech rump state, which took place on 15 March, and the letter which Cripps had sent to the executive on 21 March referring to this development, no further action should be taken against Cripps's supporters,

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1939.
2. See his letter in the Daily Worker, 19 August 1936.
3. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 March 1939.

and a meeting with Cripps should be arranged to discuss a reconciliation. This motion was defeated after a short discussion by 18 votes to 3 [1]. A third vote was taken on an Attlee-Morrison amendment to the first motion which would have had the effect of postponing the question of further expulsions until after the Labour Conference. This was defeated by 13 votes to 10 [2]. After further correspondence, Shepherd wrote to the five on 30 March to inform them that they were no longer members of the Labour Party.

The decision to expel the five caused considerable dismay in the Labour Party. In a letter to Attlee written during March Trevelyan, a man brought up in the more easy-going discipline of the Liberal Party, wrote

> The question to-day for every member of the Labour Party is: 'What future can the party have, which professes to be the bulwark of democracy, but whose leaders spend their time in finding excuses for destroying freedom of speech and discussion?' [3].

1. Ibid. Ellen Wilkinson and Susan Lawrence, whose D.L.P., Stockton and Thornaby, was one of the leading constituency party supporters of the popular front, made up the minority. Laski had still not returned from America.

2. Ibid.

3. Trevelyan Papers, 1930s box 3.

This was a question which was echoed by many in the days after the expulsion of the five. Brailsford felt so strongly that on hearing the news of the expulsions he wrote to Middleton

> Will you be good enough to convey to the National Executive my request that they should include me among the expelled? By word and act, on platforms and in the Press, I have committed all the offences with which the last batch of criminals is charged. With three of them I have sat on the working committee over which Sir Stafford Cripps presides. If your Executive requires evidence, I would remind it that in countries where the art of purging is better understood a confession is held to be sufficient. I can, however, with ease produce my witnesses. Finally, may I assure you that I shall repeat my offences? [1].

Brailsford's request, however, was never acceded to. The expulsion of the five came at a time when the petition campaign was running down, and when the N.E.C. next met on 26 April it was decided to make no further expulsions before the Conference met [2].

The reasons for the petition's failure were many.

Within the Labour Party official hostility was undoubtedly the most important. This was for primarily three reasons. First, was the fact that it was clear to many that the popular front campaign was futile. On 11 April 1939

1. Quoted in a letter from Brailsford to the Manchester Guardian, 5 April 1939.

2. N.E.C. Minutes, 26 April 1939.

Willard Sexton, the prospective parliamentary candidate for Hexham, wrote to Cripps's secretary refusing to sign a letter protesting to the N.E.C. about its actions concerning the popular front. He added 'I am still in favour of a Popular Front, but in my view it has been apparent for some time that there was not the slightest chance of carrying it at the Labour Party Conference' [1]. The second factor was the strong sense of disloyalty involved in defying the executive on any policy issue. The third factor was the discipline which the executive could bring to bear on those who did stand firm. On 24 March the editorial of the Manchester Guardian commented

> It is difficult not to infer that the Labour Party wants to stifle beforehand all discussion of the Cripps theory and to eliminate some of its most powerful advocates before the conference. Throughout the country Labour is threatening individuals with expulsion, withdrawal of the party endorsement of their candidatures, trade union officials are being threatened with 'discipline', discussion is being ruled out of order at branch and party meetings and the use of Labour halls is being refused to Labour party supporters.

The supporters of the petition faced more than just threats. Expulsions and reorganisations seem to have taken place in many constituencies. In late 1938 agreement was reached in Bury between the Labour and Liberal parties to

1. Cripps Papers, file 511.

put forward Sir Norman Angell, who in the past had been a Liberal, as a joint candidate in the next election [1]. In 1939 the D.L.P. came out in favour of the memorandum and petition, and as a result eleven members were expelled. Subsequently a survey of the party's membership revealed that 75 per cent of the 70 per cent who took part supported Cripps [2]. A similar situation occurred over the reorganisation of the Kingston (Surrey) D.L.P. The Kingston party had been a long-standing supporter of the popular front and when it came out in favour of the Cripps memorandum the district organiser decided to reorganise the party. This decision was endorsed by the N.E.C. at its meeting on 22 March, and the prospective parliamentary candidate for Kingston, the secretary of the Surrey Labour Federation and several other Labour worthies in Kingston were expelled. However, the expulsions did not go far enough for the reorganised party came out in favour of the petition and this led to the disaffiliation of the reorganised party [3].

1. Manchester Guardian, 17 December 1938.
2. Daily Worker, 6 April 1939.
3. News Chronicle, 4 April 1939, and Organisation Sub Committee Minutes, 17 May 1939.

These two examples serve to illustrate the depth of support for Cripps's proposals which existed in certain parties [1], but they also demonstrate the power which could be wielded against dissenters.

Another important factor in the demise of the petition was the ending of the Spanish civil war on 31 March 1939. For almost three years the war had provided many activists with the emotional experience of a lifetime. It had provided the main source of popular front activity in Britain, and the belief that the overthrow of the National Government would help the cause of the republic had been a major reason for supporting the popular front. With the collapse of the Spanish republic much of the heart went out of the popular front movement in Britain.

Official Labour hostility and the ending of the Spanish civil war, combined with growing fears of the effects of communist activity within the Co-operative movement, constituted the main reasons for the defeat of the popular

1. It is impossible to tell how many parties supported the petition. At the beginning of March the central petition organisation claimed that there were 70 D.L.P.s supporting the petition. Manchester Guardian, 4 March 1939. It is possible that this was an overestimate as it may have included parties supporting the memorandum or opposing the expulsion of Cripps. It might also be an underestimate as there were obvious reasons for parties to remain silent on the issue.

front at the 1939 Co-operative Party conference, which met during April [1]. The margin of defeat - 2,854,000 votes to 1,923,000 [2] - was a comfortable one, and confirmed the extent to which support for the popular front had declined since 1938.

Nevertheless, the petition might have fared better if more care had been taken to avoid giving the impression that the campaign revolved around Cripps. Many Conservatives and Liberals still remembered Cripps's extremism during the years 1931-1937 [3]. Even many in the Labour Party who had supported Cripps in the past were worried by a campaign which could produce a pamphlet entitled One Man Speaks for the People and which could hold a demonstration which resembled a little too closely the style of a Nuremberg rally.

This meeting was the national petition campaign rally which took place in the Empress Hall, London, on 12 March 1939.

1. The debate may be found in the 1939 Co-operative Party Congress Report, pp. 27-37.
2. Ibid., p. 37.
3. The Liberal agent in the Bridgwater by-election refused to have Cripps speak in the constituency for this reason. Information supplied by Harold Scholfield. The same agent had willingly accepted communist organisational support.

The following day the News Chronicle reported the meeting, which was attended by 9,000 people, in the following terms

> Rolling drums, four white spotlights across the darkened hall, and tremendous applause as he (Cripps) ascended to the white, solitary rostrum....To the strains of stirring music and with their movements precisely arranged, miners from Harworth led a march of unity, carrying pit lamps in their hands and wearing black pit helmets on their heads. With spotlights on them, carrying banners, they marched round the hall, followed by railway workers, busmen, printers, writers, artists and office workers.

This bizarre panoply prompted Time and Tide's leader writer to comment in the 18 March issue that 'no movement can fight Fascism by imitating it'. Cripps's role in the campaign was necessarily a leading one, but the manner of the concentration on Cripps was undoubtedly a handicap.

Four days after the Empress Hall rally Colonel Tweed sent Lloyd George his assessment of the petition. Tweed noted

> Like so many orators, Cripps believes in the illusory magic of great public meetings, without comprehending in the slightest that a movement does not evolve by spontaneous combustion; an adequate and competent organisation to cash-in on the enthusiasm engendered by the meeting is a pre-requisite.
>
> Cripps tried to create a National movement without adequate financial resources; an amateur organisational department, and woolly headed advisers. The Petition conception was a mistaken one, but having decided upon it, it should have been run intelligently. Press advertisments in leading papers containing a space for supporters to sign a Declaration of Support and to send it in, would have achieved the two million signatures within a week [1].

1. Lloyd George Papers, G/28/2/12.

Tweed's assessment was a shrewd one. Cripps certainly over-estimated the possibilities of public meetings. It was Cripps's belief in their ability to generate sustained enthusiasm, combined with his indomitable belief in his own powers of persuasion, that lay behind the concentration on Cripps, the leader, at petition rallies. And whilst it is difficult to accept Tweed's claim that the petition could have realised its target of two million signatures so easily, financial and organisational problems undoubtedly played their part in its failure.

Although Cripps was a wealthy man, his support of Tribune was draining a large part of his spare funds [1]. Tweed estimated that it would have required £20,000 to launch the petition properly. Cripps started the campaign on £5,500 - £5,000 of which, according to Tweed, was a loan from Lady Cripps. Cripps planned to raise further funds after the launching of the petition by collections at meetings and on 17 February Tribune announced the launching of a 100,000 Shilling Fund. It appears, however, that meetings and the fund produced only a trickle of money.

1. Tribune made a loss of £13,000 in 1938. Cripps Papers, file 566. Cripps made up a large part of this deficit. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that any amount of money could have solved the basic organisational problems which the petition faced. To some extent the financial problems were organisational ones. In his report to Lloyd George Tweed noted 'So bad is the Central Organisation that though amounts ranging from £50 to £100 have been collected at most of the big meetings addressed by Cripps, the Central Office has no idea of what has become of this money, and no attempt has been made to have any of it transmitted to Headquarters'. The main problem, however, was that the attempt to set up a national organisation from scratch proved a considerably more difficult task than Cripps had imagined.

In spite of the help given by the Council of Action's local committees and the Left Book Club's discussion groups, in many areas petition committees existed only on paper. A shortage of canvassers was almost universal and although by the beginning of April there were nominally 321 petition committees and petition forms sufficient for four million signatures had been issued, only 20,034 signatures had been received by Young [1]. In the west Midlands area, where there

1. Report on the 16 April 1939 petition organisation conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young. Almost a third of the petition committees were in the greater London area.

were supposedly 44 petition committees, only 216 signatures had been collected and sent to Young. In south Wales 'prolonged sickness' of the regional organiser meant that only 7 petition committees existed by the beginning of April, although south Wales was an area in which support for the popular front was strong, especially in the S.W.M.F. [1]. No one appears to have taken any steps to replace the sick organiser or send in extra help.

At a petition organisation conference held in London on 16 April Cripps confessed that 'So far the number of signatures collected at Headquarters is negligible' [2], but stated that he had always seen the opening weeks as a time in which the organisation could be perfected. However, the failure of the petition in its early days helped make this impossible. This was especially important in the case of communist support.

After the initial enthusiasm manifested by the Daily Worker and C.P.G.B. leaders, interest in the petition faded as its failure became clear. At the grass roots level support proved more durable [3], but even here

1. In April 1939 the S.W.M.F. Conference voted for the popular front by a four to one majority. Daily Worker, 17 April 1939.
2. Report on the 16 April 1939 petition organisation conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
3. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

there were problems. Although the C.P.G.B. had been pursuing a policy of attempted collaboration with Labour since 1933, and its members had formed the backbone of many local united and popular fronts dealing with concerns ranging from childrens' playgrounds to world peace, there was a section of the party which had never completely accepted the popular front line, believing that the new tactic was to 'soft-pedal in public whilst sticking to everything as before' [1], or simply rejecting the tactic completely.

In a revealing report to the Congress of the Scottish Communist Party on 25 February 1939 Peter Kerrigan, a member of the Central Committee, remarked on the sectarianism of a section of the party [2]. He noted that this sectarianism

> is reflected in a number of ways. Although there is good progress regarding the Labour Party work in Fife and one or two other areas, the necessary change in the District, as a whole, has not taken place. In many areas there is a contemptuous attitude to Labour which shows that we are not convinced that the closest association with Labour is necessary [3].

1. Hyde, op. cit., p. 56.

2. There were 2,815 communist members in Scotland at the end of 1938. This represented 18.1 per cent of the total C.P.G.B. membership. Scotland's March to Peace and Progress, (C.P.G.B. pamphlet, 1939), p. 9.

3. Ibid.

Communist discipline had tended to override this contempt when it was a question of cooperation in undertakings such as the hunger marches and Spanish aid committees which, if not successful in ending unemployment and saving the republic, were at least successful in publicising the plight of the unemployed and in sending medical supplies and food to Spain - and also in publicising the cause of the C.P.G.B. However, the futility of the petition undoubtedly led many communists to stand aloof, especially as the failure of the campaign became obvious. It is interesting to note that at the 16 April petition organisation conference E.A. Gower, the chairman of the Manchester B.L.P. and a long-standing supporter of cooperation with communists [1], recommended that the petition be wound up as it was futile [2]. In July Gower was to announce publicly that he had joined the C.P.G.B. [3], and he was almost certainly a cover communist at this time acting under orders at this conference.

There were also problems with the Liberal supporters of the petition. The Manchester Guardian and Liberal leaders

1. For example, see E.A. Gower, 'Manchester Fights for Unity', Discussion, March 1937.
2. Report on the 16 April 1939 petition organisation conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
3. Daily Worker, 7 July 1939.

who had announced their support for the petition showed an even greater tendency than the Daily Worker and communist leaders and activists to ignore the petition as the problems it faced became more clear. However, this tendency was not simply a result of the realisation that the petition was doomed to failure; it also reflected two other factors.

Although Sinclair and many of the young Liberals suported the popular front, there remained a section of the party which never accepted the tactic, only supported Lib-Lab agreements, or rejected any form of agreement. This division in the party led to a compromise Liberal Organisation circular being issued to all Liberal associations on 22 February 1939 which stated that the Liberal Party had supported the popular front at its 1938 conference, but that there could be no official Liberal participation in the petition, although individual members were free to participate [1].

This circular did not end the Liberal popular fronters' agitation for a more positive commitment. On 28 February Johnstone wrote to Sinclair that 'Until the Labour Party has altered its Conference machinery so as to allow greater

1. Thurso Papers, box 60.

representation of the constituency parties, I am afraid any Cripps Movement will be doomed to failure' [1]. On 1 March Sinclair replied agreeing, but using the problems the petition faced as an argument in favour of a more positive commitment. Sinclair wrote 'I agree with you that Cripps has not got much chance of success - that is obviously an argument against our committing ourselves to him as a Party, but also an argument for giving him as much help, short of that, as we can' [2]. By the end of March, however, Sinclair had given up his agitation for a more positive commitment to the petition and concluded that it was unlikely that a popular front would be achieved [3], for during March an event took place which opened a serious breach between many of the Labour and Liberal supporters of the popular front.

Until the German occupation of the Czech rump state the Labour and Liberal parties were united in their opposition to conscription, but after the occupation an increasing number of Liberals, not harbouring the suspicions about the National Government felt by many on the Labour left, came out in favour of conscription. Although the parliamentary Liberal Party voted against conscription

1. Ibid., box 65.
2. Ibid.
3. Liberal Organisation memorandum, 9 May 1939. Ibid.

when its introduction was announced in the House of Commons on 26 April, at the Liberal conference, which met between 11-12 May, conscription was accepted [1]. The Labour Party, however, remained bitterly opposed to conscription until the outbreak of war. The attitude of the Labour Party was summed up on a placard which was seen at the 1939 London May Day rally. The placard read 'Chamberlain conscripts 200,000 and refuses 12,000,000 Russian soldiers' [2]; the Labour Party believed that an alliance with the Soviet Union was needed more than conscription. And the lack of material with which to equip the conscripts raised fears, even in quite moderate Labour circles, that conscription might have some more sinister motive than national defence [3].

Nevertheless, there were those in the Labour Party who were not opposed to conscription, including many supporters of some form of popular front. In most cases these were the non-left supporters of the popular front, such as Crossman [4], and Wogan Philips, the

1. Manchester Guardian, 13 May 1939
2. Ibid., 8 May 1939.
3. For a more detailed account of Labour's attitude to conscription in 1939 see Naylor, op. cit., pp.280-288.
4. For an account of Crossman's position on rearmament see R.H.S. Crossman, 'Labour and Compulsory Military Service', Political Quarterly, 3/1939.

prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for South Oxford, who told Nicolson on 2 May that

> his chances have been ruined by the official Labour opposition. In his division conscription is immensely popular and they are furious with Attlee and the trade unions [1].

However, there were also those on the left who supported conscription. Brailsford, for example, wrote in his column in Reynolds News as early as 12 February 1939 that he had reluctantly come to accept the need for compulsory military service.

The support for conscription which existed among some of the Labour popular fronters and in the Liberal Party proved unfortunate for the petition campaign, for Cripps shared the official Labour attitude, and thus from the middle of March the petition became increasingly linked with the campaign against conscription [2].

Another factor which handicapped the petition was the decrease in public interest in foreign affairs during

1. Nicolson Diary, 2 May 1939. A British Institute of Public Opinion survey conducted during May asked the question 'Do you approve of the Government's decision to apply conscription, or are you in favour of leaving it to individuals to enrol voluntarily?'. The results revealed that 58 per cent of those interviewed supported conscription, 38 per cent opposed conscription, and 4 per cent had no opinion. Lancien, op. cit., p. 219.

2. Unity News, 19 May 1939.

the opening months of 1939. The petition campaign had come too late. The editorial of Time and Tide noted this on 3 June 1939 when it commented 'There was a moment last winter when, on the basis of crusading enthusiasm, the idea of the Popular Front could perhaps have swept the country.... there was so much disgust at the Government that a sufficiently strong attack might have got them down'. In the opening months of 1939, however, this disgust turned to confusion and the German occupation of the Czech rump state appears to have only increased the confusion as the National Government, worried by the fear that the opposition might benefit from its foreign policy, adopted a more resolute position in the face of aggression [1].

Mass Observation followed up its work in West Fulham in March and April 1938 with a series of reinterviews in March and April 1939. The survey revealed that whereas in the spring of 1938 40 per cent of those interviewed were bewildered or doubtful as to what foreign policy to follow, in the spring of 1939 the figure was 55 per cent and the number who believed that foreign policy was at least as important as domestic policy had fallen from 31 per cent to 21 per cent [2]. Harrisson concluded that 'The result

1. Cowling, The Impact of Hitler, esp. p. 271.
2. T. Harrisson, 'Is the Public to Blame?', New Statesman, 22 April 1939.

of the bewildering changes in the international situation is not to stimulate a wider interest in foreign affairs (though it stimulates an increased interest with the minority) but rather to make many persons increasingly retreat from the awful reality into greater preoccupation with private life'. Although the potential was still there for a strong lead, the task had become a much more difficult one. Certainly it was a task too great for the petition.

With this decline in interest in foreign affairs came an increase in support for the National Government. In January 1939 the British Institute of Public Opinion had conducted a survey which asked the question 'How would you vote in a General Election?'. The result revealed that 48 per cent would have voted for the opposition, 46 per cent for the government and 6 per cent were undecided. In April 1939 these figures became 54 per cent for the government, 38 per cent for the opposition and 8 per cent undecided [1]. In the only by-election in 1939 in which foreign policy did figure prominently, the result was hardly a success for the opponents of the National Government - especially the supporters of the popular front.

This election was the Westminster Abbey by-election,

1. Lancien, op. cit., p. 204.

which took place on 17 May. The opposition candidate, Gabriel Carritt, was the only candidate to emerge in 1939 as a result of local agreement [1]. Carritt was the secretary of the League of Nations Union Youth Group, but in the words of one of his leading supporters, Richard Acland, he was nationally 'an unknown man' [2]. He thus did not have the advantage which Bartlett had of being well known in the constituency. He received support from members of all parties, including the communists [3]. However, although the Conservative candidate suffered a 10.1 per cent swing, only 30.3 per cent of the electorate took the trouble to vote. The turnout in the 1935 general election had been low - 49.2 per cent in fact - but the Abbey poll serves as an excellent example of the apathy which again settled on voters in 1939, after having diminished considerably during the heady days of 1938. The average

1. T.L. Horrabin, a Liberal who held North Cornwall in a straight fight with the Tories on 13 July, made a specific appeal for all-party support at his meetings and supported the popular front. Information supplied by Sir Richard Acland.

2. Letter from Acland to Lloyd George, 17 April 1939. Lloyd George Papers, G/21/3/1.

3. Daily Worker, 8 May 1939.

fall in the poll in the 16 by-elections in 1938 in which accurate comparison with the 1935 general election can be made was 3.8 per cent. In the 17 by-elections from 1 January 1939 to the electoral truce which accompanied the outbreak of war the figure was 10.3 per cent.

Cripps in a speech at Stoke Newington on 18 May claimed that this apathy was the result of the absence of any effective opposition behind which the opponents of the National Government could rally [1]. However, he was crying in the wilderness. The petition campaign was effectively dead. The extent of the petition's failure can be gauged from the report presented by Young to the conference which wound up the petition campaign on 11 June 1939. According to Young only 292,661 signatures had been received by him [2]. It is impossible to say how many signatures remained with the local petition committees, but the campaign had clearly failed to achieve anything like the two million signatures which Cripps had initially

1. Manchester Guardian, 19 May 1939.
2. Report of the 11 June 1939 Petition conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young. The regional totals were - London and northern Home Counties - 19,956; London and the south eastern counties - 15,750; eastern counties - 6,171; east Midlands - 10,675; west Midlands - 23,481; Yorkshire - 19,708; Lancashire, Cheshire and north Wales - 20,559; northern counties - 29,459; England miscellaneous - 3,459; south Wales - 26,576; Scotland - 98,049. It is symptomatic of the petition organisation that these figures add up to 273,843.

hoped for.

It was against this background that the Labour Conference opened in Southport on 29 May. Cripps had notified the N.E.C. of his intention to appeal to the Conference against his expulsion as early as 28 January. This request had been referred to the Conference Arrangements Committee by the executive at its meeting on 22 February [1], and it was generally understood that Cripps would be allowed to present his case. When the chairman of the Arrangements Committee came to make his report on 29 May, however, he stated that there was no provision in the Constitution which allowed an expelled member to appeal to Conference. This was challenged by Lawther, and Conference voted by 1,227,000 to 1,083,000 to accept a temporary suspension of the Standing Orders to permit Cripps to speak [2].

Cripps spoke for barely half of the twenty minutes allotted by the Conference. The delegates listened in the irritable silence of those anxious to have the matter over and done, seemingly unmoved by the fact that they

1. N.E.C. Minutes, 22 February 1939.

2. 1939 L.P.C.R., p. 220. A third of the minority came from one union - the T.G.W.U. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.

were witnesses to the last act of a unique event in Labour history [1]. A young delegate from the St. Albans D.L.P. and T.G.W.U., a certain George Brown, summed up the attitude of many present in his maiden Conference speech when he claimed 'we have spent nine blasted months in a pre-Election year just doing nothing else but argue the toss about Cripps' [2]. In an article entitled 'Labour Lays a Ghost', which appeared in the New Statesman on 3 June 1939, Crossman concluded

> most of the rank and file were in a state of bored irritation....
> The Popular Front has made the rank and file suspicious of all criticism and at Southport if the Executive said 2x2 = 7, the floor would have condemned as an intellectual anyone who suggested that it equalled four.

Even Cripps's closest supporters were disappointed by the speech. He made no attempt to argue the case for the popular front. He virtually ignored 'the others' who had been expelled for their support of the same cause. The speech was more a legalistic attempt to justify the course of action which he had taken in connection with the popular front - a concern which confirmed the extent to which Cripps had become obsessed with the issue of intra-party democracy.

1. Other members of the P.L.P. have been expelled, but Cripps is the only leading member of the party to have suffered this fate.

2. 1939 L.P.C.R., p. 235.

Bevan and Strauss, who had first seen the speech only the night before [1], had both tried to impress on Cripps that the tone was wrong, that Conference was an emotional body which would not take kindly to a lecture on democratic rights, but Cripps had argued that it was too late to change the speech. There would also have been little point. The lines of division on the expulsion were drawn long before Conference met. The appeal to Conference was a charade; the only point in doubt was the size of the vote against Cripps, and on a popular front resolution which was also to be discussed.

Although four trade unions which had met in conferance in 1939 had come out against the expulsion, only one was of any importance in terms of voting strength. This was N.U.D.A.W., which voted in favour of the reinstatement of Cripps by 63,041-51,234 in April [2]. Of the other three, the S.W.M.F., which had voted unanimously against the expulsion [3], voted at Conference through the M.F.G.B., and the federation supported the expulsion. The shop assistants had voted

1. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss. Bruce and Young were not shown the speech. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
2. Daily Herald, 11 April 1939.
3. Manchester Guardian, 17 April 1939.

against the expulsion by 68-46 in April, but the union, which would have had 48,000 votes, was debarred from attending the Labour Conference on a technicality [1]. The National Union of Clerks had voted against the expulsion with only one dissenter in April [2], but they had only 2,050 votes at the Labour Conference [3].

It therefore came as no surprise when the vote was taken and the majority in favour of the executive was found to be a massive 2,100,000 votes to 402,000 [4]. And it was by the even larger majority of 2,360,000 to 248,000 that the Conference subsequently rejected a motion, moved by Murphy, supporting the popular front [5].

1. Daily Worker, 12 April 1939. In 1936 the shop assistants had lifted their ban on communists attending their Conference, and in the following year their Conference had voted 59-57 in favour of the unity campaign, although previously the union had been opposed to the united front. E. Trory, Between the Wars, (1974),p.78.
2. Daily Herald, 8 April 1939.
3. Of the seven major unions N.U.D.A.W. was the only one with a Conference mandate, either for or against Cripps. Only two of the major unions had mandates specifically on the popular front - N.U.D.A.W. and the N.U.R., which had rejected it by 62-18 at its 1938 conference. 1938 N.U.R. Annual General Meeting Report, p. 150.
4. 1939 L.P.C.R., p. 236.
5. Ibid., p. 299.

Many constituency parties voted against Cripps and the popular front. Almost all of the D.L.P.s voted for a hearing for Cripps [1]. But according to the editorial of the London Labour Party's London News 324,000 of 552,000 constituency party votes were cast against Cripps, and 167,000 of the votes for the popular front came from the trade unions. There is no reason to question the figure concerning the trade unions, but the figure for the vote against Cripps appears to have been arrived at by deducting the number opposed to the expulsion from the total, a method likely to exaggerate the anti-vote as it does not allow for abstention. Some D.L.P.'s opposed to the expulsion may have abstained, or even voted for the N.E.C.'s action, because of their opposition to the petition, which was undoubtedly seen by many as a confirmation of Cripps's disloyalty [2]. It is also important to remember that many of the leading popular front

1. Daily Worker, 30 May 1939.

2. At the 16 April petition organisation conference some delegates suggested ending the campaign because although there was widespread disgust in the Labour Party over the expulsion of Cripps and the five, feelings over the petition were mixed and this was harming the case against the expulsions. Report on the 16 April 1939 petition organisation conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

supporting D.L.P.s had been reorganised. Moreover, not all constituency parties are represented at Conference. In 1939 only 400 out of 614 were present, and it was among the smaller parties, least likely to be represented [1], that the popular front had enjoyed its greatest support. Support in these parties was still strong and had there been an election in 1939 or 1940 there would have been attempts at constituency arrangements along the lines of Oxford and Bridgwater in thirty to fifty constituencies [2].

Support for the popular front after the 1939 Labour Conference also came from the C.P.G.B. In a revealing article entitled 'People's Front', which appeared in the Daily Worker on 17 July 1939, it was stated that

> The People's Front is no temporary manoeuvre but a long-term policy....
>
> We are fighting now for what is immediately practicable, namely a new Government to replace Chamberlain, composed of the people who stand for a collective defence against Fascism.
>
> But it would be a dangerous illusion to suppose that it was a People's Government, i.e. a Government which the people could wholeheartedly support, a Government which would lead the people.

1. Dallas remarked on this fact at the 1937 Conference. 1937 L.P.C.R., p. 141.

2. Information supplied by John Parker.

This statement confirmed the drift of C.P.G.B. policy since 1937, namely to accept that electorally and in parliamentary terms in the short run they had little to offer. The stress on the longer term aspect of the movement reveals that the communists had not yet given up hope of achieving unity with Labour. Indeed, the party at this time had only just applied once again for affiliation to the Labour Party [1].

However, the popular front movement to all intents and purposes ends with the Labour Conference of 1939. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was to mean that shortly after the communists were to change their line. And the electoral truce which accompanied the outbreak of war ended the possibility of any further electoral agreements.

1. Daily Worker, 15 July 1939.

CHAPTER NINE:

POSTCRIPT TO THE POPULAR FRONT.

The events of 1931 had two major effects on the Labour Party. They helped produce a clarification and ordering of party policy and priorities; and they encouraged a reassertion of union influence within the party. Both results were to cause major problems within the party during 1931-1939. The delineation of policy made it more difficult for individuals and groups to project on to the party their various views. This was especially a problem on the left, for the leanings of most of the leadership, in particular the industrial leadership, were far from left wing. Moreover, the nature of the union influence in the party was the cause of growing discontent, notably among the constituency parties and on the left. During the closing stages of the popular front campaign this hostility to the union leadership's views and influence was to reach considerable proportions.

Whilst individual membership figures for the Labour Party must be treated with considerable caution, it is interesting to note that during 1938-1939 membership fell by 8.5 per cent, although in the period 1931-1937 it had risen by 50.5 per cent. If the drop is taken over the years 1938-1942 then the figure is 51.8 per cent. In a N.E.C. report to the 1942 Labour Conference this drop was blamed primarily on two factors. First, were the war conditions 'which adversely affect the capacity of Party Workers to collect subscriptions regularly and to give the time and consistent attention required in Party organisation'. Second, was the electoral truce which accompanied the outbreak of war and which meant the absence of elections and much consequent party work [1]. Undoubtedly these were major factors. However, they do not provide a full explanation. During 1943-1944 membership rose and in 1945 was 8.9 per cent above the 1937 figure [2]. This can in part be explained by the major effort at restoring organisation which the Labour Party launched after the 1942 Conference. The growth of discontent with the government during 1942, and especially during 1943 as a result of its dilatory attitude over the

1. 1942 L.P.C.R., p. 11.
2. 1946 L.P.C.R., p. 35.

Beveridge Report, also probably helped Labour, which was strongly stressing the need for post war reform [1]. Nevertheless, these factors do not explain why individual membership fell during 1938-1939.

Although the membership figures for individual D.L.P.s must be treated with extreme caution, it is interesting to note that there was a tendency for the fall in membership at this time to be greatest among the parties in which support for the popular front had been strong, although the pattern was not a uniform one.

	1937	1938	1939	1940	% change
Bridgwater	300	240	240	240	- 20.0%
Bristol East	1660	1416	910	1009	- 39.4%
Bury	906	674	509	389	- 56.7%
Ebbw Vale	557	534	534	534	- 4.1%
Hammersmith North	847	714	770	394	- 54.1%
Jarrow	1334	915	1002	626	- 53.2%
Kingston	1001	1052	903	503	- 49.8%
Lambeth North	907	851	874	386	- 58.5%
Oxford	451	606	475	240	- 47.0%
National average					- 32.0% [2].

1. R.B. McCallum and A. Readman, The British General Election of 1945,(1947),esp. pp. 5-8.
2. Compiled from lists of membership given in the 1939-1941 L.P.C.R.s.

Thus of the nine parties chosen [1], seven showed falls greater than average [2].

At a meeting of Labour agents before the Southport Conference Shepherd claimed that the fall in individual membership was a result of controversy within parties [3]. Certainly the popular front had been a major cause of friction within parties and this may explain why the falls in membership should have been higher in these parties. However, three other factors should be noted. First, many popular front-supporting parties would have contained cover communists, and at this time some of these were ordered out of the Labour Party [4], though from the evidence available it

1. The parties chosen were Cripps's, Bevan's, Pritt's, Strauss's and Wilkinson's - all which supported the popular front. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss. Four others which have been mentioned in the text as popular front-supporting parties are also added.
2. The constant Bridgwater and Ebbw Vale figures for 1938-1940 look somewhat suspicious, especially as Bridgwater was reorganised in 1939. Of the other parties the lowest fall was in Cripps's seat which actually registered an increase of membership in 1940.
3. New Dawn, 10 June 1939.
4. Hyde, op.cit., p. 66, claims that the cover communists were called out after Munich. However, the publicity given to recruits from Labour in the Daily Worker after Southport makes June 1939 a more likely date.

appears that the number involved was not that great[1]. Second, there were undoubtedly some explusions from these parties, though it is impossible to say whether the numbers involved were hundreds or thousands. Third, and most important, was the disillusionment which existed among many of the supporters of the popular front. This was especially the case among the middle class supporters of the movement, people who tended to be less imbued with the sense of loyalty so noticeable on the industrial side of the movement[2]- although it should not be thought that disillusionment was confined to the middle class. Undoubtedly there were many disillusioned members of the party who moved out of politics altogether, or who joined another party, a tendency especially strong among the young, as the delegate from the Wentworth D.L.P. pointed out at the 1942 Labour Conference[3].

The best known figure who decided to opt out of party politics at this time was Brailsford, whose letter to the N.E.C. requesting expulsion had been far from simply a publicity manoeuvre; he genuinely no longer wished to be a member of the party. In a letter to Cripps on 1 June 1939 he concluded

1. See below, p. 384.
2. See below, p. 398.
3. 1942 L.P.C.R., p. 106.

> My own feeling....is that I now see nothing the Left can usefully do.... My own decision is therefore to drop out of active politics for some considerable time [1].

Many others involved in Cripps's campaigns followed Brailsford out of party politics [2].

Others chose to join another party - in some cases this was the C.P.G.B., though some who did so were undoubtedly cover communists ordered into the open after the Southport Conference [3]. The most prominent member of the Labour Party to join the communists at this time was Willis. In a letter which appeared in the Young Communist League's journal Challenge on 15 July 1939 Willis stated that

> I've decided that the best way I can help defeat Chamberlain is to join the Y.C.L.... Every semblance of democracy in the (Labour) League (of Youth) has been trodden under.

For Willis the Labour Party's treatment of its youth organisation had finally proved too much.

1. Cripps Papers, file 510.
2. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
3. It is interesting to note that during July 1939 the Daily Worker gave considerable coverage to the party's recruits from Labour, including an editorial on 27 July, but it could only mention eight people - although it is true that they were all office holders in the Labour movement and there may have been lesser figures who came over. According to Hyde the communists made a great attempt to build up their cover operation during the early months of the second world war. Hyde, op. cit., esp. p. 91. Other activists, especially those at the 1974 South Wales Miners' Library seminars, have also given this as the date when a large number of communists went under cover.

Membership figures for the C.P.G.B. must, if anything, be treated with even more caution than those for the Labour Party. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in the period May 1937-July 1939 membership of the C.P.G.B. rose by 45.1 per cent. The potential for further increase is shown by the fact that after the Soviet Union entered the war in June 1941 membership rose rapidly and by December 1942 stood at 56,000, 322.6 per cent above the July 1939 figure and approximately 500 per cent above the June 1941 figure [1]. However, the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 August 1939 and the subsequent decision of the C.P.G.B. leadership to oppose the war, although only after a split in its ranks which had brought Pollitt and Campbell out in favour of the war [2], ended any possibility of a major influx of Labour members. There were few in the Labour Party who opposed the war. Moreover, the C.P.G.B's decision to oppose it confirmed fears that the party's allegiance was to Moscow rather than principle, and the Nazi-Soviet Pact reinforced doubts about the Spanish communists' suppression of P.O.U.M. and the Moscow trials. The god had not yet completely failed; but the

1. Pelling, op.cit., p. 192. N.B. that the C.P.G.B. has never issued a membership figure for June 1941.
2. Ibid., p. 113. Pollitt and Campbell as a result were temporarily relieved of their leadership functions.

purity of its creed, and benevolence of its pope, had been brought into serious doubt [1].

The impact of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the C.P.G.B.'s opposition to the second world war is symbolised by the Left Book Club's decision to publish as its November 1939 choice Leonard Woolf's Barbarians at the Gate, the first club book which was in any way critical of the Soviet Union. The decision to publish Woolf's book was opposed by Strachey [2], but behind the public veneer Strachey had been deeply disturbed by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. On 25 August 1939 he had written to the Conservative M.P. Robert Boothby

> You can imagine how staggered I am by the Soviet-German pact.... if....the Soviet Union were to go into benevolent neutrality to Germany my whole political position would be shattered[3].

The C.P.G.B.'s decision to oppose the war had the predicted effect and during the spring of 1940 Strachey broke with the party he had come to embrace after 1931 [4].

1. One communist activist of the time has told of his own doubts, and of how his brother left the party as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Darke, op.cit., pp. 74-75.
2. Lewis, op.cit., p. 119.
3. Strachey Papers, 1936-1939 file.
4. For a more detailed account of the reasons for Strachey's break with the C.P.G.B. see Thomas, op.cit., pp. 182-197 and below, pp. 405-406.

Had there been a large influx of Labour Party members into the C.P.G.B. it might well have rapidly lost them. It is doubtful if those who left the Labour Party in part because of their belief that intra-party democracy had become an illusion would have taken kindly to the C.P.G.B.'s Moscow-determined line and its internal 'democratic centralism'. Nevertheless, a sufficiently large influx of Labour members could have led to a significant change in the workings of the C.P.G.B. and the C.P.G.B. at least did not suffer from the problem of the trade unions.

It was not only members of the Labour left who moved out of party politics, or joined other parties, in the years after 1938. Disillusionment was not only strong on the left. Especially after the outbreak of the Spanish civil war the division in the Labour Party was as much one between the leadership and rank and file, as between the various ideologies in the party, and especially between the individual members in the constituency parties and the trade union leadership. The trade union domination of the party was particularly resented by many middle class moderates. The secretary of the Windsor D.L.P., a party comprising primarily members of this type, expressed the feelings of more than just the Windsor D.L.P. when he wrote to the secretary of the Labour Spain Committee on 5 April 1939

> My own Party has never supported the Cripps Memorandum, but the issue has become a much bigger one now. It is not too much to say that Parties like our one are asking themselves whether it is worth while working for the national Party under its present leadership. The N.E.C. must somehow be made to understand the sense of frustrations we are feeling[1].

For the 1939 Labour Conference the Ipswich D.L.P put down a motion requesting that in future the trade union block votes be cast in proportion to the views of their members; and the Pollock D.L.P. put down a motion that in future trade unions should affiliate only through the constituency parties. This latter suggestion had been by Hugh Ross Williamson, the Labour prospective candidate for South Dorset, in a letter which appeared in the New Statesman on 25 April. Williamson, who was an opponent of the popular front, also claimed that Henderson had told him that if he had had the chance to re-create the Labour Party he would have done so on a constituency basis[2]. The suggestion that there was a need to reform the unions' connection with the Labour Party also came from an American academic who studied the Labour Party in the

1. Labour Spain Committee Papers, 1/9 (5).
2. Williamson made a comprehensive attack on the unions' role in the Labour Party in his book Who Is for Liberty?, which came out in 1939. As a result of his attacks on the unions, his endorsement as a parliamentary candidate was withdrawn. N.E.C. Minutes, 26-27 May 1939. Williamson subsequently joined the British Union of Fascists. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley, p. 350.

late 1930's. He claimed that reform, in particular basing the party on individual membership, would mean that several unions would leave the party but that it would add immeasurably to the morale and effectiveness of the local groups [1]. However, it was clear that the major unions were unwilling to accept such a policy; the unions would have had to vote away their own power within the party, and this they would not do [2]. Nevertheless, the Ipswich and Pollock motions would have received widespread constituency support had the Conference Arrangements Committee been able to find time to debate them [3].

This disillusion among middle class members was reinforced by the Labour Party's decision to oppose conscription for it was among the middle class members of the Labour Party that support for conscription was strongest. Crossman, for example, was a leading critic of the Labour Party's opposition to conscription and believed that it proved that 'Underneath all the trappings of collective security, a pacifist heart still

1. D.E. McHenry, The Labour Party in Transition, 1931-1938, (1938), p. 306.
2. For example, the N.U.R. Executive on 5-6 April decided to oppose the Ipswich and Pollock motions if debated. N.U.R. Executive Minutes, 1939.
3. Information supplied by John Parker and Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

beats [1]. After a conversation with Crossman in Balliol College quad on 28 July 1939, Nicolson wrote in his diary that Crossman 'is disgusted with the Labour Party and wants to see a new party formed of young belligerents' [2]. Crossman remained faithful to the Labour Party, but there were others who felt similarly and some, such as Nield, undoubtedly left the Labour Party because of the power of the unions in the party, and especially their role in the opposition to conscription.

The problem for those who felt like Nield was that there was no obvious alternative spiritual home. A few of the moderate members who left the Labour Party in 1938 and 1939 joined the Council of Action. Ben Greene did after he had left the Labour Party because, as he wrote to Lloyd George on 3 October 1938,

> I have come reluctantly to the conclusion that nothing can be expected from the political Labour movement as it is constituted today .... Run as it now is purely in the interests of the larger affiliated trade unions, the Party is doomed[3].

1. Crossman, 'Labour and Compulsory Military Service', Political Quarterly, 3/1939, p. 315.
2. Nicolson Diary, 28 July 1939.
3. Lloyd George Papers, G/42/2.

Greene had been the most active member of the constituency party movement and felt that the reforms made at the 1937 Labour Conference in no way basically altered the power structure within the party.

In a letter to Lloyd George on 1 June 1939 Tweed wrote

> The original Free Church background of Council of Action has tended to diminish in both the number and authority of the Nonconformist adherents in the past year or so; but due to the initiative of the District Branches in connection with Spanish and China Relief, Refugees, and the ill-fated Cripps Petition, this wastage has not only been made good everywhere, but in many districts membership has been doubled and trebled from amongst the best class of socially conscious citizens....
> The mentality of the new adherents demands positive and personal action [1].

The need for Lloyd George to give a lead was not a new theme for Tweed. Indeed, his dismissal of the petition campaign in March 1939 had concluded that the Council of Action had the chance 'to build itself up into the most powerful Progressive Organisation in the country; perhaps even form the nucleus of that new Party that must sooner or later be created to provide an alternative to the dying Liberal Party and the dead Labour movement [2].

1. Ibid., G/28/2/13.
2. Ibid.

Tweed was being exceedingly optimistic to believe that anything associated with Lloyd George could have attracted a significant number of Labour supporters. Many in the Labour movement felt a distinct sense of hostility to Lloyd George, whose record and promises during the first world war had not been forgotten [1]. And Lloyd George's much publicised visit to Hitler in 1936 did nothing to increase his popularity in the Labour Party. In her chairman's address to the 1936 Labour Conference Mrs. Adamson commented

> Mr. Lloyd George came into politics as the embodiment of the militant Nonconformist conscience. He goes out of politics shaking hands with Adolf Hitler and saying 'a great man, a great man' 2.

Nevertheless, Tweed was right in thinking that there was a body of opinion which was seeking a new centre left grouping. Acland certainly was coming to this conclusion. As he was to write to Lloyd George on 17 May 1940 'In my view this country is filled with immense new moral forces which have been dammed back for ten years by the great dead bulk of the Labour Party machine lying like a fallen tree across the road to progress' [3]. The support which Acland's Common Wealth

1. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss and others.
2. 1936 L.P.C.R., p. 162.
3. Lloyd George Papers, G/1/3.

Party, which was formed in July 1942, attracted testifies to the existence of such a body of opinion [1].

In terms of becoming a major parliamentary force, however, Common Wealth was doomed from the outset. The outbreak of war had stopped the worst of the rot in the Labour movement. The outbreak of war not only led to the further discrediting of the C.P.G.B. It also resolved Labour's dilemma over conscription and removed any lingering fears about the party's 'pacifist heart'. But the most important effect of the outbreak of war on the Labour Party was that it was accompanied by an electoral truce, thus preventing a general election, which short of a miracle the Labour Party would have been bound to lose. The average swing from the National Government to Labour in the ten by-elections during January-August 1939 in which Labour came wither first of second in both 1935 and 1939, was 5.2 per cent, a figure which provided no grounds to question the claim made by Cripps in his memorandum that Labour alone could not win the next general election. Even the leader writer of Labour Organiser, who in February 1939 had described Cripps's claim as 'sheer madness', was by June 1939 admitting that Labour faced an uphill task. As it was, the outbreak of war prevented electoral disaster.

1. For an account of Common Wealth's history see D.L.Prynn, 'Common Wealth - a British Third Party of the 1940's', Journal of Contemporary History, 1-2/1972.

If there had been no war in September 1939 and the Labour Party had suffered a third general election defeat within a decade, the bonds of party loyalty would have been strained to the limit, not least for the paradoxical reason that defeat would almost certainly have been the replacement of Attlee as leader. Attlee's leadership had been a contributory factor in the discontent in the Labour Party, and at the 1939 Conference, meeting in secret session, a series of attacks had been made on his leadership [1]. An especially strong attack was launched by Bevin. And Citrine, although he did not participate in the debate, also sought a change of leader [2], for he had little time for Attlee, who he believed had sadly failed to give the party a lead on foreign affairs [3].

A leadership struggle in the Labour Party could have proved damaging for there was no obvious successor to Attlee. Morrison's stock had fallen since 1935 [4]; Greenwood had long since been written off as a drunkard; and although Dalton's stock was rising, he was distrusted by many on account of his deviousness [5].

1. Dalton Diary, 26 May - 2 June 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. Citrine, op.cit., p. 367
4. Donoughue and Jones, op.cit., pp. 243-248
5. Lord Francis Williams later wrote that if Dalton had become leader 'he would have started intriguing against himself out of habit'. Lord Francis Williams, Nothing So Strange, p. 135.

Such was the absence of a serious front runner that in November 1938 Brailsford and Sybil Wingate, one of the leading members of the Labour Spain Committee, separately wrote to Trevelyan suggesting that he might like to offer himself as an elder statesman around whom the party could rally [1].

Had Attlee been replaced his successor might well have come from the trade union movement in the person of Bevin [2]. Bevin would certainly have opposed the election of the three main contenders in the P.L.P. In the 1935 leadership election he had worked assiduously behind the scenes against Morrison, and nothing that had happened since 1935 had diminished his loathing for Morrison. Greenwood was despised by Bevin. Bevin was more favourable to Dalton, with whom he had cooperated closely during 1936-1937 in the development of Labour's defence and foreign policies, but Dalton was too closely associated with the middle class-intellectual side of the Labour Party for Bevin's liking. Moreover, in the past Dalton had made rather too many intemperate remarks about the unions. For example, at a conference held at Easton Lodge on 16-17 April 1932, he, referring to the role of the unions in

1. Trevelyan Papers, 1930s, box 3.
2. The following two paragraphs are based partly on confidential information.

the party, had spoken of the need to let 'sleeping dogs lie' because of Labour's financial problems. This had led Bevin to write to G.D.H. Cole, who had organised the conference, on 12 May 1932 'apparently from Dalton's observations, it would appear that we are only a useful adjunct because there is an unbalanced budget' [1]. Bevin was not a man to forget such attacks on the union movement, especially as in 1939 the large unions had had to contribute heavily to remove the £6,045 deficit which the Labour Party had run up [2].

The possibility must be faced that by 1939 Bevin was thinking of himself as a possible leader. Several people at this time undoubtedly encouraged Bevin to 'give the Labour Party the leadership of which it badly stood in need'[3], although it seems that Bevin was not enthusiastic. And at the meeting of the Policy Sub Committee which considered Nield's memorandum in November 1938, Dallas had warned against accepting any form of inter-party cooperation because it would anger the union leadership and that there was already considerable talk of the need for 'industrial leadership' of the party in union circles [4].

1. Cole Papers, box 5, folder 6.
2. 1940 L.P.C.R., p. 154
3. Bullock, op.cit., p. 629.
4. Memorandum on the meeting, Dalton Papers, file 14.

If an industrial leader had emerged it would have been difficult for it to have been anyone other than Bevin.

Although during the 1945-1950 Labour government he was to prove loyal to Attlee, this was mainly as a result of the respect for Attlee which he developed during the war [1]. There was little respect in 1939, as his attack on Attlee at the 1939 Conference shows. Had Bevin become leader the exodus of the left wing and middle class members could have been considerable. Moreover, it would be wrong to think that the unions would have necessarily been united behind him; there was a feeling of jealousy towards Bevin on the part of some union leaders [2]; and there were many Labour members of the union movement who did not share Bevin's views.

Nevertheless, even if Bevin had become leader the Labour Party would probably have survived. This would not only have reflected the lack of alternative home for dissidents, or the financial importance of the unions. It would also have reflected other powerful factors in keeping the party together. It is important to see the discontent in perspective. Undue emphasis should not be placed on those who left the party at the expense of those who stayed.

Individual membership of the Labour Party forms

1. A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. 2, (1967), esp. p. 392.
2. Information supplied by Lord Citrine.

only a small percentage of the total, although admittedly an important percentage in terms of electioneering and generally running the party. In 1939 individual membership accounted for 18.1 per cent of the total membership, and although it was declining non-individual membership had risen by 4.3 per cent between 1938-1939. Moreover, for every individual member who left the party during this time there were eleven who stayed, though the picture changes if the more problematical war years are taken into account.

The tendency to remain in the party was especially strong among the individual members of the party who were also active unionists. If the experience of south Wales was typical, and there is no reason to think otherwise, then the vast majority of affiliated unionists did not join the Labour Party as individual members [1]. However, some did and among these members the sense of disillusionment was less strong, partly a reflection of their sense of loyalty and partly because they had an opportunity to influence the unions from within [2]. Possibly this may be a factor in explaining the low apparent fall in membership in the Ebbw Vale D.L.P., for this party was dominated by active unionists [3].

1. S.W.M.F. Executive Minutes, 28 March 1939.
2. Information supplied by many activists of the 1930s who attended the 1974 South Wales Miners' Library seminars.
3. Ibid.

It is interesting in this context to consider the views of Murphy and Groves, both of whom were active unionists, and the Militant Group, whose position was close to Groves's.

Murphy was a man who had been active in the trade union movement from his youth. In 1934 he had written that he had joined the Labour Party as the 'mass political party of the workers' and placed emphasis on the need to work through the Labour movement to transform it [1]. He was strongly critical of the union leadership, and at the petition conference on 16 April 1939 he had argued that 'Evidence was not lacking that it was impossible to change the outlook and policy of the Trade Union bureaucracy who controlled the Labour Party'. However, his sense of loyalty, together with the fact that there was no obvious alternative, did not lead him to break with the Labour Party, but rather to stress the need for breaking the power of the union bureaucracy by socialists putting greater emphasis on work within the unions [2].

Groves and the Militant Group had always put great emphasis on the need for work within the unions.

1. J.T. Murphy, Preparing for Power, (1934), p. 18.
2. Report on the 16 April 1939 petition organisation conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young. And information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

In the 'Industrial Notes' in Militant for July-August 1938, for example, stress had been placed on the need to build up a militant factory organisation. By this means it was hoped that a radical change could be made in the union leadership, and with it not only a change in industrial policy, but also a change in the Labour Party's policy. It is interesting to note that Militant frequently criticised the block votes; in an article entitled 'Lessons of (the) Southport Conference', which appeared in the June 1939 issue, it was argued that the executive 'ruthlessly steam-rollered through the opposition by means of the block votes'. However, there was no call for an ending of the block vote system. Without actually openly stating so, it seems clear that the system was seen as offering great opportunities for disciplined minority action within the unions [1]. Groves for a time in the late 1930s considered forming a new party, but Labour's organisational ties with the unions, and the belief that their leadership could be changed meant that he stayed in the party [2].

However, it should not be thought that loyalty was simply a function of union membership. This can be seen clearly in the attitudes of the three major Labour theoreticians of this time - none of whom were active unionists.

1. N.B. the similarity with the communists, who by various methods and by both open and cover operations, also sought control over the unions at this time. See Darke, op.cit., pp 51-59 & 67-88.
2. Information supplied by Reg Groves.

Cole's views are especially interesting in view of the importance which he had placed on the role of the union leadership in 1931 in leading the Labour Party to a new conception of socialism. During the 1930s he had become increasingly critical of the union leadership. In an article entitled 'Unity and the People's Front', which appeared in Labour Monthly in March 1937, he had claimed that the union leaders 'are keener on presenting to the capitalists a United Backside than a United Front'. In The People's Front he wrote that he was doubtful if some of the leaders are any 'more Socialist than Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and Mr. J.H. Thomas'. He added that the leadership seemed less interested in 'leading and directing the spirit of Labour unrest than in damping it down, and in the political sphere, though they advocate measures of socialisation for this or that Industry and put forward a useful programme of moderate social reform, I cannot help feeling that what they want and believe in adds up to very much less than Socialism' [1].

By 1939 Cole had a less idealistic picture of unions, accepting that they existed 'under the shadow of capitalism' and were necessarily 'made to some extent in the image of capitalism' [2]. However, he did not despair of the Labour Party or the unions, although

1. P. 6.
2. G.D.H. Cole (ed.), British Trade Unionism Today, (1939), p. 24.

he came close to it [1]. He believed that the unions served a useful purpose in the party in that they help act as a 'guarantee of stability and an assurance against doctrinal splits' [2]. That is, Cole saw the emphasis on loyalty to organisation as vital to the long term survival of the party. Moreover, in the long term Cole believed that grass roots militancy in the unions would revive on a large scale, and with this would come a new union leadership [3].

Laski even in 1931 had seen that the union leadership would prove a handicap in committing the Labour Party to a more immediate and far-ranging conception of socialism. During the 1930s he had become, if anything, even more worried about the unions. He believed that the identification of the party with the unions had proved damaging in the 1935 general election [4]. In 1939 he wrote that the 'trade unions are certainly the millstone around our necks', a comment which referred to both the electoral prospects for Labour and the prospects of achieving a more left wing policy [5].

1. Information supplied by Dame Margaret Cole.
2. Cole, British Trade Unionism Today, p. 219
3. Ibid, esp. p. 172.
4. Laski, 'The General Election of 1935', Political Quarterly, 1/1936, p. 4.
5. Letter from Laski to Felix Frankfurter, 12 March 1939. Woodman Papers, Harold Laski file.

He had an especially low opinion of Citrine, and later in 1939 he wrote that Citrine made him 'sick', adding that 'If he sees the permanent secretary to the Treasury he thinks it a socialist victory' [1].

Nevertheless, Laski did not despair of the Labour Party. He saw the Labour Party as the only vehicle by which socialism could be achieved. As he wrote in 1936

> I have often disagreed with its decisions; I have often, as in 1924 and 1929-1931, been disappointed at results which, as I have thought, flowed from a lack of courage and determination. But I have always remembered that the historical mission of the Labour movement is to end the capitalist system and build the socialist state [2].

Moreover, in Laski the sense of discipline was especially strong. He believed that a party was only 'as strong as its discipline'. Writing after Southport he conceded that in the short run 'all of us must subordinate our personal views to the claim of the movement upon us' [3].

Tawney was also critical of the unions in the 1930s. He believed that the block votes were 'not

1. Letter from Laski to Frankfurter, 7 November 1939. Ibid.
2. H.J. Laski, review of Sir S. Cripps, The Struggle for Peace, (1936), in Left News, September 1936.
3. H.J. Laski 'Southport and After', ibid., July 1939.

defensible' [1]. He thought that the union sponsorship of parliamentary candidates led to a preponderance of old and not especially able officials in the P.L.P., that they caused the party to pay too much attention to immediate rather than long term issues, especially issues concerning the unions, and that they made the party look too much like a party of industrial workers, failing to appeal to others. However, he believed that the unions acted as a 'safeguard against the capture of the Party by astute careerists on the make', and in particular that they kept the party in touch with the working class [2].

The Labour Party would also probably have survived Bevin becoming leader because of developments which had taken place in the thought of some of the left during the 1930s, especially during the popular front era. These developments had helped bring them nearer to Bevin's conception of socialism, and with it to the Labour Party's policy for the Immediate Programme corresponded very closely to Bevin's views [3]. This can be seen clearly in the thought of the most widely read British Marxist theoretician of the 1930s.

1. Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', Political Quarterly, 3/1932, p. 328.
2. Lecture notes for Chicago 1939. Tawney Papers, box 15.
3. Bullock, op.cit., Vol. 1, p. 597.

In The Coming Struggle for Power Strachey had put forward a picture of capitalism in its final stages of decline. In The Menace of Fascism he portrayed fascism as the product of this crisis. The recovery of capitalism and the adoption of the popular front line therefore posed problems for him. Incapable of the highest forms of sophistry indulged in by Dutt and other communist theoreticians, the result was to lead him to question his conception of capitalism. On 19 May 1938 he wrote to Dutt

> I feel that if, for good or ill, we have adopted a People's Front politics, we must have a People's Front economics also. If we do not, the result will be not that we avoid being involved in a Reformist economic policy, but that we get a thoroughly bad Reformist economic policy.[1]

Strachey at this time was deeply impressed by Keynes's General Theory and by Douglas Jay's The Socialist Case [2], published in the following year and which openly acknowledged its debt to Keynes [3]. Together they led Strachey to a revisionist position and greatly facilitated his return to the Labour Party in 1942.

It is also interesting to note that Strachey had been a frequent critic of the union leadership.

1. Strachey Papers, 1936-1939 file.
2. J. Strachey, Labour's Task, (Fabian Society tract, 1951), p. 2.
3. P. x.

For example, in a letter that he wrote to Gollancz on 19 November 1936 he even went so far as to claim that 'In my view, Citrine, Bevin and the majority of the National Council of Labour are now attempting to take the Movement back from British Socialism to political Trades Unionism' [1]. However, in 1944 he wrote

> Britain cannot be made into a socialist country by any other agency except the Labour movement. That is why, for socialists, criticisms of the Labour movement are, in one sense, beside the point [2].

Strachey had also come to accept Labour's historic mission, and he now saw his task as one of working within the Labour movement to repair its defects, and to commit it to his conception of socialism, which increasingly became centered on the quest for equality.

Cripps's attitude to the Labour Party after his expulsion must be seen essentially in this context. Although critical of the block votes and union democracy, he accepted that the unions should form 'the backbone of the Labour Party' [3]. He believed that there was no place for a socialist other than in the Labour Party [4].

1. Strachey Papers, 1936-1939 file.
2. J. Strachey, Why You Should Be a Socialist, (1944 edn.), p. 94.
3. Cripps, 'I will Accept their Decision', Tribune, 24 February 1939.
4. Sir S. Cripps, 'Why We Want to Get Back', Ibid., 9 June 1939.

Moreover, the popular front had helped lead him to a revised view of the nature of capitalism.

In the early 1930s Cripps had refused to accept the possibility of even a revived capitalism. However, as capitalism began gradually to revive, so did the references to its imminent collapse decrease. In the early 1930s he had argued that the growth of state intervention would only serve to make 'its (capitalism's) operation so rigid that it cannot deal with any abundant production of goods; and that more controls would 'serve only to make its operation less efficient' [1]. But in 1934 and 1935 he had visited the United States and been impressed by the New Deal [2]. And the ideas put forward by Keynes in his General Theory also made their mark on Cripps [3]. The popular front hastened acceptance of these ideas. In 1939 he could write of the need for state intervention, intervention which must cure 'the most pressing problems of unemployment and poverty'[4],

1. Cripps, Why this Socialism?, pp. 63-64.
2. Cooke, op.cit., pp. 166 and 178-179.
3. Information supplied by John Parker. It is interesting to note that Keynes supported the petition. Estorick, op.cit., p.166.
4. Sir S. Cripps, Democracy up-to-Date, (1939), p.36.

intervention which was to mean much more than 'merely control(ling) the worst vices of the capitalist system and assist(ing) it at the various points where breakdown became imminent' [1]. Intervention was to ensure greater efficiency by coordinating the 'productive and distributive processes under state direction' [2]; it was to ensure greater responsibility by placing restrictions on employers 'for the greater good of a larger number' [3]; and it was to ensure everyone's right to 'enjoy a reasonable share of the country's wealth' [4].

The acceptance of the possibilities of interventionist economics did not mean that Cripps no longer sought the overthrow of capitalism. In his memorandum to the N.E.C. in January 1939 Cripps had stressed that the popular front was not to mean any permanent sacrifice of socialist principles, and he still saw socialism in part as involving the replacement of capitalism by public enterprise. As he stressed in 1945, there was still a need to abolish 'all types of private property that give one individual power over another, and to place that property in the hands of a democratically controlled State' [5]. However, Cripps's

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 18.
3. Ibid., p. 47
4. Ibid., p. 47.
5. Sir S. Cripps, Towards Christian Democracy,(1945), pp. 55-56.

campaigns of the 1930s, especially the popular front campaign, had another effect on Cripps, an effect that meant that he no longer sought a rapid and far-reaching movement away from capitalism. This effect was disillusionment with the immediate socialist potential of the electorate.

The plans which Cripps had attempted to convert the Labour Party to after 1931 had been put forward on the assumption that the electorate could be persuaded to support such a programme in the next election. He never sought to move faster than the electorate, holding that 'The speed of the change will depend on many factors, but the first and most fundamental is that the majority of the electorate should desire and vote for the change' [1]. By 1939 Cripps had come to hold less high hopes of the electorate. In his address to the conference which wound up the petition on 11 June 1939 he stated

> Our general experience has, I believe, emphasised the extraordinary degree of political unconsciousness that exists throughout a great part of the population of this country.
>
> We are all apt to think of politics in terms of our own interest, education and intelligence that it is as well we should realise two facts.
>
> First that the mass material we are dealing with electorally is on the whole apathetic and politically uneducated....

1. Cripps, Why this Socialism?, p. 9.

> Second that the number of actual keen workers who will give the time or money to real political activity - apart from discussion and talking - is in most districts appallingly small [1].

From 1939 on therefore the need for political education tended to take the place of the need for a forceful lead as a central aspect in Cripps's thought. As he wrote in 1939, 'The ignorance an inferiority complex which to-day render inffective so large a section of our democracy must be dispelled' [2].

These aspects of, and developments in, Cripps's thought had important effects on his attitude to the Labour Party after his expulsion. During 1939 Cripps received many requests that he should form a new party, or join another one, but he steadfastly refused. As he wrote in June 1939 in an article intended for Tribune, but never published

> Our quarrel within the Party - not with the Party - was that opposition to the existing policy and tactic of the Party was being crushed and deprived of its democratic rights of free expression....
>
> (but) Better one party, even if its policies and tactics are temporarily wrong, than two parties spending all their time and energy fighting one another and neglecting the struggle against the real enemy of the workers - the National Government [3].

1. Report on the conference. In the possession of Lt. Commander E.P. Young.
2. Cripps, Democracy up-to-Date, p. 11. Cripps therefore began to move away from the left during 1938-1939, rather than during the early part of the second world war, as many commentators have argued. For example, see M. Foot, Aneurin Bevan, Vol. 2, (1973), p. 38.
3. Cripps Papers, file 565.

In an article entitled 'Labour Party Desertions', which appeared in Tribune on 21 July 1939, Cripps strongly attacked the hundreds of people who he claimed had left the Labour Party since the Southport Conference.

Indeed, immediately after the 1939 Labour Conference had confirmed his expulsion, Cripps had applied for re-admission to the party. He was somewhat doubtful about applying for readmission so quickly after the vote. In particular,he thought that a lapse of time might be necessary to heal the wounds. However, Bevan was keen to reach a settlement as he was under strong pressure from the M.F.G.B. to end the dispute. As a result, at a meeting between Cripps, Bevan and Strauss immediately after the vote it was decided that it would be best if they acted together, and they decided to apply for readmission, as Strauss was also keen to reenter the fold [1].

Their application for readmission was considered by the N.E.C. at its June meeting. At this meeting, Morrison, strongly supported by Dalton, argued against such a course and was only narrowly defeated by 13 votes to 12 [2]. However, this did not mean that Cripps, Bevan and Strauss were automatically reinstated. Instead, their application was referred to the Organisation

1. Information supplied by G.R. Strauss.
2. N.E.C. Minutes, 28 June 1939.

Sub Committee, which produced a report that was accepted at the N.E.C. meeting held on 27 September 1939. This report recommended that Cripps, Bevan and Strauss should be made to sign a declaration expressing regret for their action and undertaking in future to refrain from conducting or taking part in campaigns in opposition to the declared policy of the party [1].

This was an impossible condition especially for Cripps, who not only passionately believed in the rightness of the course he had pursued, but also in his democratic right to have pursued that course. As Cripps wrote to Shepherd on 3 October 1939

> I am not prepared to express my regret at the action taken by me as I am now, more than ever, convinced that the action was not only justified but was the only action that I could have taken consistently with my duty to my own constituents and the best interests of the workers of this country....
>
> As to the second head of the document that I am asked to sign this might as well have been extracted from the credo of a totalitarian party. The declared policy of the Party can only be changed democratically by the agitation of a minority [2].

Cripps was also unwilling to sign because by this time he had decided that he could play a more effective role in stirring up opposition to Chamberlain outside the Labour Party and until the fall of Chamberlain in

1. Ibid., 27 September 1939.
2. Cripps Papers, file 572.

May 1940 he worked hard behind the scenes to achieve the kind of coalition which emerged under Churchill [1]. The fall of Chamberlain, however, did not lead to an immediate reconciliation between Cripps and the Labour Party, Cripps preferring to retain his independent political role [2]. It was to be December 1944 before he decided to follow Bevan and Strauss, who had made their peace with the Labour Party soon after war had broken out, and return to the fold [3].

The moment of Cripps's return was opportune for in the 1945 general election the Labour Party captured 48 per cent of the poll, a result which gave Labour 393 seats and its first majority government. The Labour Party had not only survived the 1930s, but had prospered. Nevertheless, but for the outbreak of war in September 1939 the decade might well have ended with the Labour Party in far greater disarray than in the aftermath of that day of infamy - 24 August 1931.

1. For an account of Cripps's activities at this time see Cooke, op.cit., pp. 242-265.
2. For an account of Cripps's activities during the Churchill coalition see ibid., pp. 266-330.
3. By this time Bruce and Trevelyan had also returned to the Labour Party. Young applied for readmission, but initially refused to sign the letter expressing regret etc. Letter from Young to Middleton, 31 October 1939. Cripps Papers, file 507. Subsequently Young reapplied but was refused membership, presumably because of the closeness of his views with those of the C.P.G.B. Information supplied by Lt. Commander E.P. Young.

APPENDIX 1:

LABOUR PARTY, C.P.G.B. AND I.L.P.

MEMBERSHIP, 1931-1939.

LABOUR PARTY.

	Individual		Trade Union	Socialist bodies, etc.	Total
	Male	Female			
1931	297,003 [1]		2,024,216	36,847	2,358,066
1932	371,607 [1]		1,960,269	39,911	2,371,787
1933	211,223	154,790	1,899,007	40,010	2,305,030
1934	222,777	158,482	1,857,524	39,707	2,278,490
1935	246,401	172,910	1,912,924	45,280	2,377,515
1936	250,761	179,933	1,968,538	45,125	2,444,357
1937	258,060	189,090	2,037,071	43,451	2,527,672
1938	250,705	178,121	2,158,076	43,384	2,630,286
1939	239,978	168,866	2,214,070	40,070	2,663,067

1. Total figure.

Source: 1941 L.P.C.R., p. 37.

N.B. these membership figures must be treated with caution. The individual figures, for example, undoubtedly overstate the number of active members. C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. figures must also be treated with caution.

C.P.G.B. AND I.L.P.

	C.P.G.B.	I.L.P.
1931 (June)	2,724	-
(Nov.)	6,279	-
1932 (Jan.)	9,000	16,773 [1]
(Nov.)	5,600	
1933	-	11,092 [1]
1934 (Dec.)	5,800	7,166 [1]
1935 (July)	7,700	4,392 [1]
1936 (Oct.)	11,500	-
1937 (May)	12,250	-
1938 (Sept.)	15,570	-
1939 (July)	17,756	-

1. Membership figure for the whole year.

Source: Pelling, op. cit., pp. 77 and 192.

APPENDIX 2:

VOTING STRENGTH AT LABOUR CONFERENCES,

1931-1939.

		Number Affiliated	Number Attending	Votes	Percentage
1931	Trade Unions	80	67	2,006	80.2
	Constituency Parties	608	357	436	17.5
	Socialist Societies	6	6	28	1.1
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	32	1.3
1932	Trade Unions	75	55	2,020	84.0
	Constituency Parties	608	302	353	14.6
	Socialist Societies	8	6	8	0.3
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	32	1.3
1933	Trade Unions	75	54	1,968	80.8
	Constituency Parties	612	321	425	17.5
	Socialist Societies	8	8	11	0.5
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	33	1.4
1934	Trade Unions	72	55	1,915	80.0
	Constituency Parties	614	329	432	18.1
	County Federations	28	8	8	0.3
	Socialist Societies	7	6	9	0.4
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	33	1.4
1935	Trade Unions	72	58	1,921	81.3
	Constituency Parties	614	290	396	16.8
	County Federations	46	6	6	0.3
	Socialist Societies	8	7	10	0.4
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	33	1.4
1936	Trade Unions	73	60	1,986	80.9
	Constituency Parties	614	285	414	16.9
	County Federations	45	6	6	0.3
	Socialist Societies	8	7	10	0.4
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	33	1.4
1937	Trade Unions	70	54	2,056	79.4
	Constituency Parties	614	323	480	18.5
	County Federations	47	9	9	0.3
	Socialist Societies	7	7	9	0.3
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	38	1.5
1939	Trade Unions	72	51	2,142	78.2
	Constituency Parties	614	400	546	19.9
	County Federations	14	9	9	0.3
	Socialist Societies	8	7	8	0.3
	Co-operative Societies	1	1	38	1.4

All votes x 1,000.

Source: 1931-1939 L.P.C.R.s.

N.B. It should not be thought that all unions, D.L.P.s, etc., cast their votes in the same way. The major union block votes, for example, often split.

APPENDIX 3:

MAJOR TRADE UNION BLOCK VOTES

AT LABOUR CONFERENCES, 1931-1939.

	A.E.U.	M.F. G.B.	N.U.D. A.W.	N.U.G. M.W.	N.U.R.	T.G. W.U.	U.T.F. W.A.
1931	77	400	86	250	242	240	194
1932	78	400	91	250	254	250	189
1933	71	400	94	250	235	255	182
1934	71	400	103	242	220	255	172
1935	71	400	116	242	209	248	148
1936	71	400	125	242	217	275	138
1937	71	400	137	242	215	301	131
1939	73	443	150	242	225	337	130

All votes x 1,000.

Source: 1931-1939 L.P.C.R.s.

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The Vvyan Adams Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science. A disappointing collection which adds virtually nothing to the tale of Conservative opposition to appeasement.

The Clement Attlee Papers, Churchill College. A small and not particularly important collection for the 1930s.

The Ernest Bevin Papers, Churchill College. A collection which contains nothing of real interest to the question of just how much power Bevin wielded in the party in the 1930s.

The G.D.H. Cole Papers, Nuffield College. A large collection, but most of the material on the popular front may be found in published form. There is, however, a small collection of letters of considerable interest.

The minutes and papers of constituency Labour parties. Unfortunately few such records seem to have survived for the 1930s. In particular the leading popular front-supporting parties, with the exception of Oxford, seem to have no records. The London Labour Party Minutes and Papers, Herbert Morrison House, are worth special mention for they contain important material on united and popular front activity in London.

The Co-operative Party and Union Minutes, 158, Buckingham Palace Road, London. As the correspondence for the 1930s has been destroyed, this collection contains little of real importance.

The Sir Stafford Cripps Papers,Nuffield College. Although Lady Cripps has retained some papers, the collection at Nuffield is large and constitutes one of the major sources for this thesis.

The Hugh Dalton Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science. The diaries contain little that has not already appeared in Dalton's memoirs. The papers, however, contain a small but important collection of material on the popular front and the state of the Labour Party in the 1930s.

The I.L.P. N.A.C. Minutes, British Library of Political and Economic Science. Useful for information on the united front.

The George Lansbury Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science. The collection of papers for the 1930s has little of interest, except for those interested in pacifism.

The Labour Spain Committee Papers, Churchill College. An important source of Labour left opinion during the Spanish civil war, and on general discontent in the Labour movement in the closing years of the 1930s.

The Labour Party N.E.C. Minutes and Papers, Transport

House. Although often a disappointing source for discussion within the N.E.C., these papers nevertheless comprise a vital source for any study of Labour in the 1930s.

The David Lloyd George Papers, Beaverbrook Library. A fairly large collection of material on the 1930s is to be found is this superbly catalogued library.

The Kingsley Martin Papers, University of Sussex. I am indebted to C.H. Rolph for allowing me to see these papers while they were in his possession. They contain a small, but important, collection of material relating to the 1930s.

The Mass Observation Papers, University of Sussex. I am indebted to Tom Harrisson for allowing me to see these papers. This collection promises to be an unparalleled source on public opinion and social history in the late 1930s and during the second world war.

The J.S. Middleton Papers, Transport House. A fairly important collection of material relating to the 1930s.

The Sir Gilbert Murray Papers, Bodleian Library. A large collection which contains a small amount of material on the popular front and Lib-Lab alliances.

The Harold Nicolson Diaries, Balliol College. The diaries contain only a small amount of information concerning the 1930s which did not appear in the published version.

The Passfield (Beatrice and Sidney Webb) Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science. A large collection,

but containing little of importance for the 1930s.

The South Wales Coalfield Project Papers, University College of Swansea and Maes-yr-Haf, Swansea. Includes many interesting items, such as the record books of several miners' lodges.

The R.R. Stokes Papers, Bodleian Library. Although a large collection, it contains little of importance to the popular front.

The John Strachey Papers. I am indebted to Hugh Thomas for allowing me to see these papers while in his possession. They contain information of the greatest value.

The R.H. Tawney Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science. Contains a small amount of information relating to politics in the 1930s.

The Sir Charles Trevelyan Papers, University of Newcastle. I am indebted to Mrs. P. Dower for permission to see these papers. It is a disappointing collection, however, containing only a small amount of information of any importance to the 1930s.

The Thurso (Sir Archibald Sinclair) Papers, Churchill College. This large collection of papers constitutes an important source on the Liberal Party and its leader during the late 1930s.

The minutes and papers of trade unions. The major unions do not seem to have any important material relating to their relations with the Labour Party in the 1930s. The T.U.C.

has a large amount of material, but it is not at present available for research - partly as a result of the sensitive nature of some of it (confidential information).
The Dorothy Woodman Papers. I am indebted to Christopher MacLehose for allowing me to see these papers while they were in his possession. They contain a small amount of material concerning Laski which is of great interest.
The Lt. Commander E.P. Young Papers. I am indebted to Lt. Commander E.P. Young for permission to see these papers, which contain important material, especially on the petition campaign.

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Miscellaneous Labour Party pamphlets, 1931-1939. The main Labour Party pamphlets concerning the united and popular fronts were - Democracy versus Dictatorship, (1933), The Communist Solar System, (1933), British Labour and Communism, (1936), Party Loyalty, (1937), Labour and the Popular Front (1938), Socialism or Surrender?, (1939),

and Unity True or Sham?, (1939). (These include N.J.C. and N.C.L. pamphlets).

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Miscellaneous S.P.G.B. pamphlets, 1931-1939.

Miscellaneous trade union conference reports, 1931-1939.

Report on the National Emergency Conference on Spain, 23 April 1938.

T.U.C. Annual Reports, 1931-1939.

C. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS.

This list does not include all newspapers and periodicals which could be considered in any way relevant to the British popular front movement. For example, it excludes the local press, although local papers are cited in footnotes. What this list does contain are all the newspapers and periodicals which made more than passing reference to the popular front, plus certain others which provided important background material.

Advance.

Challenge.

Communist International.

Controversy.

Co-operative News.

Co-operative Party Citizen.

Daily Herald.

Daily Worker.

Discussion.

Economist.

Evening Standard.

Forward.

Inprecorr.

Labour.

Labour Monthly.

Labour's Northern Voice.

Labour Organiser.

Left Book News.

Left News.

Left Review.

Manchester Guardian.

Militant.

Monthly Journal.

News Chronicle.

New Clarion.

New Dawn.

New Leader.

New Outlook.

N.F.R.B. Quarterly.

New Statesman.

Party Organiser.

Pioneer.

Plebs.

Political Quarterly.

Quarterly Journal of the N.F.R.B.

Railway Review.

Record.

Reynolds News.

Socialist.

Socialist Leaguer.

Socialist Standard.

Socialist Vanguard.

S.S.I.P. News.

Time and Tide.

Times.

Tribune.

Unity News.

Vanguard.

Week.

2. SECONDARY SOURCES.

A. BOOKS.

This bibliography does not include all the books which could be considered in any way relevant to the British popular front. For example, it excludes many books dealing with other popular fronts. What it does contain are all the books cited in footnotes, together with those relating specifically to some aspect of the British popular front,

and others which have provided important background material. As such, it excludes many good books and includes some not so good ones. An attempt is made to distinguish between some of these by means of glosses after some entries.

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