The Failure of a Dream

The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II

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Contents

Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASW	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
BLP	Borough Labour Party
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
CMA	Cumberland Miners' Association
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DLP	Divisional Labour Party
EC	Executive Committee of the ILP
G&MWU	General and Municipal Workers' Union
IBRSU	International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity
IE	Inner Executive
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ISP	Independent Socialist Party
LHASC	Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester
LP	Labour Party
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
MC	Management Committee
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MP	Member of Parliament
MRC	Modern Records Centre, Warwick University
NAC	National Administrative Council
NAFTA	National Amalgamated Funishing Trades Association
NCLC	National Council of Labour Colleges
NEC	National Executive Committee
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NUC	National Union of Clerks
NUDAW	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
NUJ	National Union of Journalists

NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
POUM	*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History
RPC	Revolutionary Policy Committee
SCWS	Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society
SDC	Scottish Divisional Council
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SPGB	Socialist Party of Great Britain
SSP	Scottish Socialist Party
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
SWMF	South Wales Miners' Federation
T&GWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCL	University College London
UMS	United Mineworkers of Scotland
UPA	United Patternmakers' Association
WCML	Working Class Movement Library, Salford
YCI	Young Communist International
YCL	Young Communist League

Preface and Acknowledgements

In recent years the changing politics of the Labour Party have reignited debates about the relationship between socialist strategy and the mass party of the working class. In these disputes, different images of Labour's past have been called upon to justify contemporary choices. The Independent Labour Party, after disaffiliation in 1932, in particular continues to serve as the standard cautionary tale for the left disillusioned with Labour's leadership. Yet despite widespread reference to the decline of the Independent Labour Party, it is only in the past few years that there has been even a cursory examination of older stereotypes. This book offers the first systematic study of this significant component of the 1930s left, as a lens through which such broader questions can be viewed. The study is a reworking of my DPhil thesis completed at the University of York, 1996-2000. The argument presented there remains basically intact, although it has been modified somewhat on the basis of rethinking and futher research, particularly in the Comintern archives in Moscow. David Howell, who supervised this work, never failed to astound me with his knowledge and understanding of the British labour movement. He gave me the confidence to search for evidence, and to follow the logic of an argument to its conclusion, even if it ran against preconceived ideas. Without the grant provided by the British Academy, the research would have been impossible. I am also grateful to friends at York who helped me intellectually and more importantly socially through the process, especially Sam Wallinger and Keith Gildart. Subsequently, working with Kevin Morgan has proved extremely stimulating. Discussions with Andrew Flinn and Lewis Mates have enhanced my understanding of labour history. John McIllroy and Alan Campbell provided me with further primary material. Although my own politics have changed I owe a considerable debt to those within the Socialist Party of Great Britain who set me on a path of thinking about socialist strategy and history, particularly Adam Buick, Dan Greenwood and Toby Crowe. I have relied extensively on the hospitality of friends, Thomas Schmidt,

Marek Dalibor, Laura, Barbara and Peter Johnson, and particularly the unending warmth of Greg Davies and Magdalene Vierra-Marie. I cannot stress too much the debt to my parents who gave me the values, if not the politics, which motivated me. Through both the excitement of discovery and the long trawl of writing up, Sarah has been a constant inspiration. She has put up with endless discussion of the niceties of the politics of the 1930s and somehow maintained an interest in my research in both intellectual and practical ways. Georgia provided the motivation to finally complete the thesis and continues to remind me of the many things more important; and even more fun, than political history.

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Introduction

When the Independent Labour Party (ILP) disaffiliated from the Labour Party in July 1932 it was over five times the size of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In the 1931 General Election it had returned more candidates than the Labour Party in Scotland. It had an extensive organisation at both national and local level, a well regarded national journal supplemented by many more local publications. Members of the ILP at the time believed they had prospects of building a powerful and influential movement. Yet influence plummeted and membership rapidly fell off. Subsequent commentators have largely eschewed detailed analysis and accepted that disaffiliation was a 'stupid and disastrous error' and that the Party rapidly disappeared into immediate 'irreversible decline'.[1] The ILP's failure has become the standard cautionary tale for subsequent Labour left-wings presented repeatedly to show that there is no prospect for a non-Communist left-wing outside the Labour Party.[2]

This study provides a re-examination of this verdict, providing a nuanced account of the Party's path in the period after disaffiliation and a reassessment of the reasons behind this trajectory. It looks at the way in which the Party made its own fortunes and the extent to which it was at the mercy of forces largely beyond its control. The aim is to present a picture which moves beyond a caricature to enable a more satisfactory explanation of the trajectory of the disaffiliated ILP.

In contrast to the ILP after disaffiliation, in the pre-1918 period the Party has been well studied. The ILP, formed before the Labour Party, was at the forefront of moves to secure labour representation and the eventually create the Labour Party. After 1906, it was by far the largest of Labour's affiliated Socialist Societies. As such, it was not only the primary locus for socialists within the early Labour Party, it was also the main vehicle for individuals joining the Party. In this period the ILP fits most neatly into the picture of a 'forward march

of Labour'.[3] In 1918, the Labour Party adopted a 'socialist goal' and allowed individual membership. With the ILP's two major contributions to the rise of Labour completed, with its 'historical mission' achieved, there has been much less interest in the study of the post-1918 ILP.[4] The neglect of the Party after 1932 has been even greater. The isolation of the ILP from action of importance, as defined by the teleology of the 'forward march' thesis, increased further. Most commentators explicitly or implicitly agree with the verdict of Keith Middlemass that 'because they had very little political power the main history of the ILP should end in 1932'.[5] The result of this approach has been to leave us, until recently, without any detailed analysis of the ILP in the period after disaffiliation. Instead we have a few powerful and enduring images which sit alongside some brief academic discussion of varying quality.

The images of the ILP are telling but in many ways contradictory. One popular viewpoint suggests the ILP, the original 'Party within a Party,' was increasingly of the intransigent left and dominated by the legacy of 'Red Clydeside'.[6] Another equally popular image is of an organisation which had lost all contact with its old working class roots and became dominated by middle-class eccentrics, the 'bearded fruit juice drinkers', to become the 'happy hunting ground of the crank'.[7] Still another view suggests the Party could be identified solely by its pacifism, which by the later part of the 1930s condemned it to irrelevance.[8] These stereotypes, and the attempt to move beyond them, provides one important line of investigation into the history of the post-1932 ILP.

There has been limited systematic study of the post-disaffiliation Party to set alongside these images. The most commonly cited analysis is presented in the final chapter of RE Dowse's *Left in the Centre*. In a way consistent with the 'forward march' view, the ILP emerges as an organisation doomed to failure by the post-First World War reformed structure of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, the commentary on the period after disaffiliation is rather thinly researched, and even areas which are identified in the text as analytically central, such as regional differences, are undermined by an approach that rejects working as a 'local historian', and effectively neglects the local picture.[9] An alternative analysis of the Party is presented by James Jupp, who considers the ILP as one component of his 'radical left'. This study provides much useful information on the relationship between the ILP and the CPGB. However, it also

problematically treats the 'left' as a constant mantle picked up at one moment by the ILP, at the next by the Communist Party and at the next it is shared by the two organisations. It also assumes that this was a controversy over agreed territory. If nothing else Ben Pimlott's presentation of a very different, much more organisationally orientated, conception of the 'left' in his *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* indicates the deeply contested framework that the conception of the 'left' provides.[10]

In Communist historiography an alternative 'forward march' is often presented with its telos in the wartime alliance against fascism.[11] Such discussions place the Communist Party at the centre of every element of the working class struggle with little room for discussion of alternative centres of radical thought and action. The ILP's marginalisation from such discussion is generally sealed by the opposition between the ILP and the Communist Party during the Spanish Civil War.[12] Partially as the converse of this reasoning British Trotskyists have developed a narrative account of the British labour movement which does place considerable emphasis on the ILP.[13] Indeed, the early British Trotskyist movement developed partially within the ILP in the 1930s and 40s and consequently such studies contain a wealth of detail about these relationships and activities often at local level.[14] However, the focus of these studies, of course, is on the relationship between the Party and the Trotskyists, rather than the ILP in its own terms. Perhaps even more problematically, these authors tend to assume rather than demonstrate both the appropriateness, and particularly the implications for the ILP's strategy, of Trotsky's characterisation of a centrist Party, standing between 'Marxism and Reformism'.[15]

In recent years there has been substantial change of emphasis and direction within the field of labour history. The teleology of the 'forward march' has been largely discredited and old images, explanations and emphases revisited.[16] This has led to a renewed interest in the study of the ILP sensitive to particularity and variation and a widening of the themes addressed and the chronology studied.[17] Most obviously in this respect, David Howell's recent study of the Labour Party of the 1920s uses the ILP as an effective study in the limits of Labour identity.[18] These trends, amongst other things, have made it possible for some recent authors to begin to address the nature of the ILP in the 1930s in some detail and to analyse the regional variations and political ideas within the post-disaffiliation

Party.[19] At the same time there has been a renewed emphasis on the ILP in relation to some of the key events of the decade, most notably in its activities during the Spanish Civil War and its responses to the Moscow Trials of the late 1930s.[20] Nevertheless, there remains no serious study of the Party nationally during this period which goes beyond the brief and problematic contribution of *Left in the Centre*.

This study aims to fill this gap, developing an understanding of the Party and an explanation of its trajectory in the 1930s. It aims broadly speaking to utilise the analysis of the ILP in its early years as a framework for developing this. As David Howell has suggested, the ILP of the 1890s can be understood as struggling for political space. This sees the Party as endeavouring to create spaces geographically, conceptually, organisationally and electorally in a hostile political environment.[21] In a political space framework like this there are broadly speaking two elements to explore. First, there are external elements, structures and behaviour beyond the control of the ILP. These external elements shape the spaces available. Second, there are the internal elements over which the ILP, or its constituent parts, had control. In this study external elements are conceived both domestically and internationally. Domestically the primary shapers of the political space in which the Party operated were the other major parties of the British left, the Labour and Communist parties. International political spaces are understood in terms of a further set of organisations with which the Party could enter into relationships, with international events also creating and removing opportunities for activity of various kinds. Other external elements, such as the economic, social and industrial environments also have a role to play. The questions remains as to how and why the Party reacted as it did to these opportunities, and what it did to create and alter the spaces open to it. These questions can be addressed by considering the different internal aspects, relating to the Party's own organisation and activity. The study highlights three complementary internal elements: individuals, institutions and ideas.

The development of such a study requires engagement with a range of different material. The major source for the study of the ILP in this period remains its published journal the *New Leader*, and later the Party's discussion journals *Controversy*, *Left* and *Between Ourselves*. These can be considered alongside other local and regional Party publications such as *Labour's Northern Voice* (Lancashire), *Revolt* (London) and *Scots New Leader*. Obviously material like this, national

and local, written for propaganda purposes needs reading cautiously. Nevertheless, taken together it provides information useful for understanding not only the political line of the Party and the disputes surrounding that, but also invaluable detail on the national and local activity of the Party. The Party archives, now held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, supplement these sources. This collection includes reports of conferences, activity, propaganda material, minutes of meetings at national and local level. It is of particular importance because it contains much which has not been microfilmed, particularly the National Adminstrative Council (NAC) minutes from the period 1932–37. This makes it a major source for understanding more of the disputes and the reasoning behind decisions, and for details not considered appropriate for public consumption in the *New Leader*. Nevertheless, it is indicative that there is more information on the ILP in this period in the archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain than in the Party's own archives. These sources give detailed insight into the operation of the Revolutionary Policy Committee (RPC), the negotiations between the ILP and CPGB at national level and reports of Communist activity within the Guild of Youth. Further rafts of information particularly on the Guild of Youth, but also relating to the Revolutionary Policy Committee, remain in the Comintern archives in Moscow. The relationship between the ILP and Labour Party is detailed not only in the ILP archives but also in those of the Labour Party, most importantly the minutes of Labour's Organisation and National Executive Committees (NEC). A limited amount of further information is found in MI5 and Metropolitan Police covert observations of the Party in the 1930s. A different perspective is revealed by looking at the papers of particular individuals, influential and otherwise. Papers consulted include those of national figures such as James Maxton, Fred Jowett, Francis Johnson and Bob Edwards, leaders of factions and related groupings such as Carl Cullen, Richard Rees, Jock Haston, Reg Groves and Denzil Harber, and those with more local or other significance such as David Murry, David Gibson and Frank Bunnewell. This has been complemented by a small amount of oral history material. Further details of local branches, where available, have been used to supplement and provide a corrective to the national picture. This more localised view is also developed by the use of, primarily local, newspapers.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that these sources, even when taken together reflect to a large extent the political viewpoint of particular actors, most obviously the limited viewpoint of leaderships, within the ILP and within other parties. Indeed, the self-assessment of the ILP's leadership has been central to traditional verdicts on the Party during the 1930s. Yet received wisdom, from participants in the events has often been shaped to serve later political needs and justify subsequent political choices. Indeed, as political views and priorities change over time, so too do the emphases which participants such as Fenner Brockway and Jennie Lee place on different aspects of their ILP experience.[22] Whilst the accounts of these individuals, and others such as John Paton, provide an invaluable source, the excessive reliance of some later commentators on such accounts has led to the regurgitation of an in-built political slant not necessarily endorsed by a more careful study. This problem is exacerbated by the extent to which Fenner Brockway produced or processed much of the source material. He was not only the author of numerous autobiographies, ILP biographies, Party pamphlets, policies, propaganda pieces and other books, he was also, for most of the period under review, editor of the Party's journal the *New Leader*, the major source for any study of the Party. The problems of biography of the ILP leadership are even more acute, especially with regard to the contrasting assessments of James Maxton. There have been four biographies of him. Of these John McNair's, which comments that Maxton 'approached perfection more closely than any other human being I have known,' represents the height of hero-worship. Gordon Brown, despite his subsequent reconsideration of the politics of the third way, provides the most detailed study of Maxton. Nevertheless, he remains wedded to the theme of his undergraduate thesis which contends that Maxton's importance as a thinker of the 'third alternative' was exhausted by 1931. William Knox's more recent biography of Maxton is similarly disappointing on the period after 1932. Thus, even the best of the work on Maxton is unable to engage seriously with the ILP's post-disaffiliation politics.[23]

This evidence is substantial but necessarily limited. Most obviously in order to address the question of why the Party declined it is necessary to understand why people left the organisation. Some reasons can be deduced from an analysis of high-profile defections or from the Party's responses to such problems. Some individuals appear later in the records of Labour or Communist Parties. A little

more can be inferred by the tentative application of generalised political reasoning. Yet the majority of those who left the Party did so without trace disappearing permanently from the historical record. Statements about their motivations necessarily remain tentative. Such considerations further extend the reasons for looking beyond the national picture to examine regional and local variations. Yet, it is necessary, particularly in searching for such local evidence to avoid over romanticising these fragments of often mundane and occasionally incompetent or even corrupt political processes.[24]

The remainder of this chapter provides a chronological overview of the Party in the period from 1918–39. Then chapter two provides an analysis of the disaffiliation decision in July 1932, with a focus on the different logics which led ILPers to endorse or reject the decision. Taken together these two elements provide a basic foundation for understanding the post-disaffiliation Party. The remainder of the book is structured thematically. Chapters three to six focus primarily on the internal elements over which the ILP had some control. Chapter three examines Party membership and organisation analysing patterns of membership, leadership, social, political and industrial activity, financial pressures and changes to the Party's formal institutional structures. Chapter four concentrates on the Party's electoral activity in parliamentary and local election contests. Chapter five examines the intense factionalism within the Party providing an account of the Revolutionary Policy Committee, the Unity Group and the Trotskyist Marxist Group. Chapter six looks at the development of the ILP's 'new revolutionary policy' and its evolution in the period to 1939. Chapters seven to nine turn to the external factors that shaped the political space in which the ILP operated. Chapter seven examines the relationship between the ILP and the Communist movement, looking particularly at the co-operation and competition between the ILP and the CPGB, Young Communist League (YCL) and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM). Chapter eight looks at similar questions with respect to the Labour Party. Chapter nine explores issues of international politics and how these impacted on the ILP, looking at the relationship between the Party and international socialist organisations, particularly the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity (IBRSU). This chapter also examines the Party's response to some of the major international events of the decade, the Abyssinian Crisis, the Spanish Civil War, the Munich Crisis and

impending World War. The conclusion returns to the internal and external themes and considers the contribution of each to the trajectory of the ILP in the 1930s. As will become clear there were significant limits to what it was possible for the disaffiliated ILP to achieve. Nevertheless, within these constraints, the conclusion does suggest a variety of different ways of viewing the significance the Party and the potential for rather different outcomes in these respects.

The Independent Labour Party 1918–39: An Overview

The ILP's role in the formation of the Labour Party and the iconic status of early leaders, most notably Keir Hardie, gave the smaller organisation enormous prestige within the wider movement. This image showed great persistence, but was modified as the ILP provided a focus for radical and socialist thought in opposition to the First World War. The new constitution of the Labour Party in 1918 left the ILP with a problematic legacy. Individual membership and an avowedly 'socialist goal' for the larger party meant the ILP had to rethink its position. The slow but steady drift of members from the ILP to the Labour Party seemed to rob the ILP of much of its identity and had sparked the suggestion, that the ILP should wind itself up.[25] Those who felt closest to the Labour Party left the ILP leading to an increasing proportion of the smaller party who felt frustrated with the mainstream of the Labour Party. This created an interesting dynamic for as the ILP was moving gradually away from the mainstream, its former leaders such as Philip Snowden and MacDonald took the reins of leadership of the larger organisation.

With the first Labour Government in 1924 disputes had begun even over the question of whether Labour should take office whilst not in a majority. The ILP's then Chairman, Clifford Allen, a close friend of MacDonald, argued that if forced to form a minority Government they should push through socialist legislation, forcing the Liberals to oppose or support a clearly socialist Government so clarifying political choices for the electorate.[26] However, the bold initiative suggested by Allen never happened and within the ILP there was much disappointment with the 1924 Labour Government. Additionally, the smaller party felt vindicated because of their belief

that the only real success story of the Government had been a member of the 'left' ILP, John Wheatley, at the Ministry of Health.[27]

Under Allen the ILP had developed the role of a Labour Party 'think tank', but the problems arose when the larger party rejected the proposals they produced. The idea had been to strengthen the Party's purpose after 1918, but the effect was to increase the potential for a breach between the two organisations. This left a legacy of very real tensions between the leadership of the two organisations, as MacDonald communicated to Allen:

> What disturbs me most about the [ILP] is a nasty small spirit that seems to be growing up in it. I am constantly coming against vanity and jealousy with not a little malice. … Were I to say that from the moment I took office to now I have not had a particle of support from the ILP I should be unfair, but it would only be an exaggeration and not an invention.[28]

These problems were to grow in the ensuing period. Whatever their strategic disagreements, Clifford Allen, as Chairman of the ILP, had maintained a close personal relationship with Ramsay MacDonald.[29] However, under the pressure of ill-health, and due to protracted conflict with James Maxton and others on the NAC, Allen resigned as Chairman in September 1925.[30] Fred Jowett temporarily replaced him, until the Party's Whitley Bay conference in 1926 when James Maxton was elected Chairman by a huge majority. The election of the charismatic left-wing leader of the Parliamentary ILP represented a significant moment in the distancing of the ILP and the Labour Party. For Maxton the Labour Party, in emphasising the need for obtaining power was losing sight of what its real goals should be, the primary duty of the ILP was to act as the guardian of socialism:

> The more the Labour Party becomes absorbed in the responsibilities of Parliamentary life and the more the responsibilities the Labour Party has to undertake, either as the official opposition or as the Government, the more will the tendency be for them to be entirely taken up with the immediately practicable which always creates a tendency to lose sight of the ultimate ideal. The ILP's duty is to keep the ultimate ideal clearly before the working-class movement of the country. Political success for the Labour Party is a certainty, but political success is itself a poor end unless, behind the Parliamentary majority, there is a determined revolutionary Socialist opinion.[31]

The 1926 conference also saw the adoption of the 'Socialism in Our Time' programme, based on Hobsonian under-consumptionist theory. This programme was in part a continuation of the work of Allen in terms of the preparation of a coherent, practical and radical policy, but it, along with the underlying *Living Wage* doctrine, was capable of more than one interpretation. Maxton argued that the programme be interpreted in a left-wing manner as a practical and rapid strategy for socialist transformation and that every effort be made to implement the programme at the earliest opportunity. Thus under Maxton the political programme of the ILP became almost entirely separate from that of the Labour Party.[32]

In 1927 the ILP reconsidered its official attitude towards MacDonald. He held the post of Treasurer of the larger party and his nomination for this position had traditionally come from the ILP. Despite the growing breach between them, this practice continued up to the 1927 ILP annual conference. However, the ILP chose that event to make explicit the divisions between the leaderships of the two parties as the delegates decided not to re-nominate him.[33]

In the following year tensions between the ILP and the wider labour movement were further heightened by the Cook-Maxton manifesto and campaign. The manifesto, initially influenced by leading members of the Communist Party, was a joint effort between Maxton and the controversial miners' leader AJ Cook. It was a denunciation of the politics of class collaboration that Maxton and Cook saw in both MacDonald's leadership of the Labour Party and the Mond-Turner talks of 1927–9, where the TUC and influential employers considered possibilities for industrial co-operation. The manifesto launch was to be accompanied by a speaking tour and campaign, but despite both men's oratorical reputation it was not a great success, in part perhaps because the strategic significance of the campaign was obscure.[34] However, the open attack on gradualism and the politics of the Labour movement widened the rift between the ILP leaders and the Labour Party. It also created further problems within the ILP.

Maxton had not informed the ILP of his intentions with regard to the campaign, an omission that caused ill feeling even where the campaign's aims were not disputed. It was especially difficult for many to understand how Maxton could reconcile his Chairmanship of the Party with keeping the ILP in the dark over the manifesto. The

ILP General Secretary John Paton, broadly a supporter of Maxton's anti-MacDonald line, considered resignation over the matter, but decided against when he 'was satisfied that there was no conscious breach of Party or personal loyalty'.[35] Much more aggrieved were those who did not share the sentiments of the manifesto and campaign. At the special NAC meeting called to discuss the manifesto on 30 June 1928, Emanuel Shinwell, Frank Wise and Patrick Dollan were all hostile. Dollan moved a motion that there should be no co-operation with the Cook-Maxton campaign. This was only narrowly defeated 7–5 and in the end a relatively weak motion was passed, which urged support for the campaign. [36] Thus the campaign received reluctant support from most of the ILP Divisions and none at all from the Scottish Divisional Council which argued that the object of increasing working-class backing for the 'Socialism in Our Time' programme could 'best be accomplished by working through the ILP and affiliated organisations'.[37] The manifesto and the subsequent campaign had two important effects on the relationship between the ILP and the Labour Party. First, it widened the rift between the Labour Party leadership and the ILP. Second, it increased the tensions within the ILP, cementing the growing division between those whose primary loyalty was to the Labour's leadership and those who sought to develop an independent role for the ILP.

The ILP in parliament in the 1920s was a numerically significant but extremely diverse group, covering the entire spectrum of opinion within the Labour Party. However, during the late 1920s tensions were raised as the leadership of this group, taken on by Clydesiders John Wheatley and James Maxton, took a turn to the left. Conflicts between Labour and the ILP came to a head during the 1929–31 Labour Government when the Parliamentary ILP, under this leadership, came to be seen as a real problem for the minority Labour Government. In 1929 the PLP tightened its Standing Orders which prevented the ILP from voting against the Government. This had major ramifications for the smaller party in parliament. The refusal of some ILP MPs to sign these revised Standing Orders and the eventual decision of the larger organisation not to endorse some ILPers in by-elections and then in the 1931 General Election led to a further escalation in the conflict, which impacted on many ILPers outside parliament. At the same time, with a deteriorating economic situation many within the ILP felt the Party needed to adopt a 'new

revolutionary policy', and to assert its independence from the 'gradualist' Labour Party. Those who focussed on this second point formed themselves into a 'Revolutionary Policy Committee' (RPC) during 1931. Taken together these disputes and arguments led many ILPers to support disaffiliation from the Labour Party. At a conference in Bradford in July 1932, primarily because of the Standing Orders dispute, but also influenced by the RPC, the ILP famously disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

Disaffiliation had a significant effect on the Party; approximately one-third of the Party's membership was lost, with Scotland, where the ILP was particularly strong, worst affected. The decision was taken as a statement of fundamental incompatibility with the Labour Party. It also led to a reorientation internationally, as the ILP also disaffiliated from the Labour and Socialist International and a fundamental rupture with the Trade Unions. At the same time relations with the Communist Party were at an historic low, with their 'social fascist' line towards the ILP. Nevertheless, the Party attempted to maintain its activity in such arenas as the Lancashire cotton strike and the national Hunger March during 1932. With Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the Party reconsidered its relationship to other components of the labour movement and attempted to form a United Front with other working-class organisations. When the Labour and Co-operative parties refused the ILP's invitations, the Party found itself working with a Communist Party only just moving out of its hostile Class-against-Class phase, when it had launched vicious attacks on the ILP as a Party of 'social-fascism'.

At the same time the ILP was developing its own 'new revolutionary policy', first through the decisions of the Party's 1933 Derby conference and then in a detailed statement by the NAC. The policy, which represented a considerable victory for the RPC, was based on a neo-syndicalist workers' councils programme. It also endorsed working to form a United Revolutionary Party with the Communists and approaching the Comintern to enquire about the conditions for sympathetic affiliation. The RPC, increasingly dominant within the London ILP, sought to build on this success and the ILP took an important role in the organisation of the 1934 national Hunger Marches. However, the leadership of the CPGB had never been satisfied with the RPC and ordered a small number of Communist infiltrators to establish a Committee for Affiliation to the

Comintern at the same time the Young Communist League began secret but systematic work to control the ILP's youth organisation.

The widespread perception of the 'new revolutionary policy' and the activities of the RPC and Communists alienated large sections of the Party who were committed to a more parliamentary approach. These members in London, East Anglia and especially Lancashire formed a 'Unity Group' to oppose the RPC and to overturn the 'new revolutionary policy'. When the Unity Group failed in its bid to overturn Party policy in 1934 its leadership decided to resign from the ILP and form a new Independent Socialist Party (ISP), taking the majority of the Lancashire Division with them. Although the Unity Group failed to get the Party to accept its ethical socialist policy, the RPC was on the retreat. RPC policy including affiliation to the Comintern was firmly rejected at the ILP's 1934 York Conference. In the wake of these decisions the Comintern Affiliation Committee, its connection to the Communist Party exposed, was wound up. Further opposition to the RPC came from the Trotskyists who joined the ILP from the Communist League in 1934 and formed themselves into a further faction, the Marxist Group.

By the end of 1934 it was clear the Party was in some difficulty. Factional fighting continued and membership was still declining fast. The Party had performed below expectations in three by-elections, in Kilmarnock, Upton and Merthyr. During 1935, despite a further clarification of policy, the Party's problems continued. The Party's youth section, the Guild of Youth, thoroughly infiltrated by Communists, voted to affiliate to the Young Communist International, just as the adult Party was moving away from such associations. Then the Abyssinian issue further divided the Party. Some sought to promote workers' sanctions against Italy, others argued that the workers' should not take sides in 'a struggle between rival imperialisms' whilst a third group, centred on the RPC supported the League of Nations. This line, directly following the Communists after their adoption of a Popular Front in 1935, was hotly disputed even within the RPC. Unable to resolve the disputes, and with its authority within even its London stronghold under attack, the RPC voted to join the Communist Party in November 1935.

The ILP performed well in its strongholds in the 1935 Elections, but was unable to make significant progress elsewhere. This electoral failure combined with the departure of the RPC nudged the ILP back

towards the Labour Party. Despite active participation in the 1936 national Hunger March and Unity Campaign, relations with the Communist Party, which was after 1935 pushing a non-class based Popular Front policy, were also becoming increasingly tense. The Spanish Civil War saw active fundraising and campaigning from the ILP. The Party also rejected outright pacifism and sent a unit to fight for the Republicans. Following bitter disputes over the conduct of the struggle, particularly the Barcelona uprising, the ILP broke irreversibly with the Communists. By the end of the decade the ILP leadership was largely committed to a return to the Labour Party. However, the outbreak of war saw the likely decision to rejoin the Labour Party postponed until after the Second World War. Having begun the decade a significant force, by the outbreak of war the ILP held a peripheral place in British politics.

2

The Split

In July 1932 the Independent Labour Party (ILP) disaffiliated in the most important left-wing split in the history of the Labour Party. Given the relative failure of both the ILP and the rest of the left during the 1930s, many who participated in the decision of the ILP to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in 1932 came to regard it as a huge mistake.[1] Historians agreeing with this verdict have characterised the decision as 'suicide in a fit of insanity'.[2] The argument of this chapter is that this verdict is not particularly helpful. 'Suicide' makes overly simple connections between the Labour Party and the ILP. The larger party pushed the smaller towards its death, and must bear some responsibility for its fate. Perhaps more importantly the charge of 'insanity' suggests that there is no reasoned way to make sense of the disaffiliation decision. In reality there was more than one way in which disaffiliation made sense. Reconstructing these differing logics of disaffiliation allows an understanding of both the decision itself and provides the starting point for an understanding of the trajectory of the ILP after 1932 which resulted from these divergent reasons for disaffiliation.

A Revolutionary Break?

The decision to end the ILP's affiliation to the Labour Party was taken at a specially convened conference in Bradford on 30 July 1932. After the conference the ILP Chairman Fenner Brockway explained his understanding of the decision. The Party needed to break with the Labour Party's undemocratic and non-socialist reformism because working class unity could only come under the 'red banner of revolutionary Socialism'.[3] Similarly sounding arguments had been developed within the London Division of the ILP by the self-styled 'Revolutionary Policy Committee'. Subsequently the RPC developed a distinct policy. However, prior to 1932 the main rallying point of

the RPC was a call for disaffiliation because the ILP rejected the larger party's gradualist politics.

These similarities between Brockway and the RPC were apparent at the Special Conference in Bradford where the only issue on the agenda was whether to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. The stage was set for a stark showdown between the Labour Party loyalists, led by Frank Wise, ex-civil servant and former ILP MP, and Pat Dollan, leader of the Glasgow Labour Movement, and the disaffiliationists, including Brockway and the RPC. After a debate, centred on issues such as the nature of revolution, class and party and the historic position of the ILP, the disaffiliationists won by a vote of 241–142. At Bradford those who argued for disaffiliation stood together in calling for revolutionary socialism and in their condemnation of the Labour Party.[4]

Thus, Brockway and the RPC used very similar 'revolutionary' language to justify the disaffiliation decision. This has led some to equate the positions of Brockway and the RPC and to suggest their 'revolutionary fervour' was the primary cause of disaffiliation.[5] However, this 'agreement' was partly an illusion, different meanings and trajectories lay behind the same rhetoric, and even this limited overlap was not shared across all disaffiliationists. Indeed, Brockway supported by the NAC and the majority at the conference, defeated an RPC motion to define the break with the Labour Party in definitely revolutionary terms. Further, even affiliationists did not seek to oppose revolutionary socialism, rather they suggested that a real revolutionary policy should come from within the Labour Party. Members of both subsequent affiliationist organisation the Socialist League and the Scottish Socialist Party were prepared to endorse forms of revolutionary Socialism.[6] The widespread use of revolutionary language was of limited significance with the Party at this time, given that the supposed alternative, gradualism, had been tainted by its association with Ramsay MacDonald.

Rather than simply representing a revolutionary turn, the roots of division between the ILP and the Labour Party lay in earlier disputes stemming from the Labour Party's post-war constitution. These tensions were evident during the 1924 Labour Government and particularly as the ILP moved to the left under Maxton's Chairmanship in the subsequent period. However, it was in the period from 1929 to 1931 that the split became a distinct likelihood. The 1929 election returned the Labour Party to parliament as the

single largest party for the first time but without an overall majority. Superficially the ILP appeared strong; the Party had sponsored 37 successful parliamentary candidates and a further 123 MPs were card-carrying members of the ILP.[7] However, this parliamentary group was politically very diverse, covering almost the entire range of opinion within the labour movement. Thus, there was considerable disagreement about the function of the group and the appropriate relationship to the ILP outside parliament.

The majority of the ILP members of parliament was not active in the ILP, either inside or outside parliament, and therefore had a limited interest in the decisions of that body. Nevertheless, some MPs considered that they had an important political affiliation to the ILP. These members can broadly be split into two groups. On one side there were those such as Maxton and Wheatley, who held that their affiliation to the ILP took precedence over their attachment to the Labour Party. On the other, those such as Shinwell and Salter, although having an important attachment to the ILP were, nevertheless, 'Labour' before they were 'ILP'. The conflict between the former group and the Parliamentary Labour Party was to prove the primary reason why the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

The criticisms of MacDonald by the former group of ILP MPs, and his stinging and often unjustified rebukes in reply to them had created a tense atmosphere within the ILP Parliamentary Group even before the 1929 election.[8] Nevertheless, the Maxton group of MPs was not prepared to stem its criticism of Labour just because they were now the party of Government. Their attacks began immediately with the criticism of the King's Speech by Wheatley and Maxton. They argued that the Labour Party was not attempting to carry through its election promises, suggesting as the ILP had done in 1924, that a bold policy would bear electoral dividends. These points were amplified through the columns of the *New Leader*, where Brockway was editor. Over the course of the Government, although other issues such as imperialism, India in particular, were important, the main disagreement between this ILP group and the Labour Party continued to be the unemployment benefits insurance system, and the lack of a coherent policy to eradicate unemployment. Maxton was able to gain the backing of the ILP Parliamentary Group for critical amendments to the Government's Unemployment Insurance proposals at an initial meeting on the 21 October 1929. But Maxton's idea of direct criticism was opposed by many who themselves had

reservations about the Government. This group largely consisted of Trade Union MPs who preferred a less confrontational approach of 'loyal criticism'. When a further and larger meeting of the Parliamentary Group was called the following week, with about 80 MPs present, Maxton's position was decisively defeated by 41 to 14. During the meeting Maxton pointed to the sovereignty of the ILP conference and refused to accept that he, or others, should be bound by a majority decision of the Group. In keeping with this, neither he nor his associates refrained from trying to amend the unemployment legislation. However, the majority of the Parliamentary ILP remained behind MacDonald and opposed to Maxton, with 66 ILP MPs signing an implicitly anti-Maxton declaration of support for the Government.[9]

Neither Maxton, nor much of the ILP outside parliament, agreed that it was legitimate for MPs who had only a nominal connection with the ILP to be able to block the implementation of ILP conference decisions. At the 1929 ILP conference the Party decided that proposed candidates supported by the ILP would have to give an undertaking that they accepted ILP policy. The 1930 ILP conference increased the pressure when it passed, by an overwhelming majority, a resolution reconstructing the ILP Parliamentary Group on the basis of acceptance of the policy of the ILP as laid down by annual conference, and interpreted by the NAC. The decision also limited the endorsements of future ILP candidates to nominees who accepted this basis.[10] Only eighteen out of the 160 ILP MPs accepted these conditions.[11]

The Dispute over Standing Orders

In the midst of the battles between the ILP and the Parliamentary Labour Party, the PLP had tightened the Standing Orders that governed its conduct. The key change was that under no circumstance were members allowed to vote against a decision of the Parliamentary Party, although the longstanding commitment to allow members to abstain on matters of conscience was maintained. Clearly this precluded the ILP from tabling amendments to Government policy, and voting against the Government. The reformed ILP Group, under the leadership of Maxton, determined to simply ignore the dictates of the Standing Orders.

The issue of Standing Orders has been presented by some commentators as being of relatively minor importance to the disaffiliation of the ILP.[12] Yet it is clear that to contemporaries within the ILP, especially the Parliamentary ILP, the issue was fundamental. Perhaps the most concerned amongst those members was a former Chairman of the Labour Party, the ILP veteran and Labour Party NEC member, Fred Jowett. Jowett argued against the requirement that MPs never vote against the Labour Party on the grounds that this was both impractical and unprincipled. He argued it was impractical from the record of the 'loyal' Labour MPs: 126 out of the 287 Labour MPs had voted against the Government on at least one occasion during the Second Labour Government.[13] He also suggested that the freedom of the ILP to vote for socialist policies was a necessary part of the compromise that had enabled the formation of the Labour Party.[14] That it was unprincipled came from his understanding of the connection between the responsibilities of representative government and his idea of political honesty. He argued that individual MPs were responsible to the men and women who elected them. During elections, promises would be made to the electorate and their subsequent votes in parliament would show whether they were acting as promised. It was up to the MP to recognise that the membership of a political party would restrict the way in which they would be able to vote. Therefore MPs should not *promise* those things which were not part of the party's programme, although they may suggest that they will try to see them implemented.[15] He argued that the PLP Standing Orders illegitimately interfered with this relationship between MP and electorate:

> The answer to those who demand [the ILP] must surrender the freedom of its MPs to fulfil their pledges honestly made in accordance with the principles and policy advocated officially by the Labour Party for election purposes is – NO – NO – Never.[16]

Jowett's concerns over Standing Orders were reinforced by the nature of the issues, such as unemployment benefit and the Means Test, on which there had been conflict. 'In all instances the [ILP Parliamentary] Group had championed working-class claims …surely something must be wrong with Standing Orders!'[17]

The impact of this dispute began to spread beyond the ILP MPs initially affected. The Labour Party tightened its own rules on the

selection of parliamentary candidates and decided that in order to be officially endorsed, all prospective parliamentary candidates would have to make a declaration that if elected they would accept the Standing Orders of the PLP. Such conditions were unacceptable to those who associated themselves with the Maxton group. The issue came to a head when Tom Irwin was selected to fight the marginal Tory seat of East Renfrewshire. Irwin openly declared that he would sign the statement of loyalty required by the 1930 ILP conference, and the Labour Party's executive responded just nine days before the by-election poll with a decision to refuse Labour Party endorsement. The ILP, riled by the perceived injustice, made a considerable point of campaigning for Irwin with its leaders all making the trip up to the constituency, although the Tories retained the seat. Considerable resentment on both sides flared over the result and such feelings were increased by the refusal of Labour Party endorsement to a number of other ILP candidates, most notably in Chorley. There were also selection disputes in Clapham, Kelvingrove and Camborne.[18]

It was events such as these that moved Standing Orders from an issue only affecting the ILP MPs to one of real concern to ILP activists around the country. Increasingly, ILP members were prevented from taking the active role in the electoral politics of the Labour Party that they desired and had previously taken. The point was underlined in the 1931 elections where nineteen ILP candidates stood, unendorsed by the official Labour Party. The Labour Party refused to countenance support for the ILPers in those nineteen seats despite the fact that some unendorsed members fought campaigns that were virtually indistinguishable from the mainstream of the larger party. This prevented normal working relations between the activists of the two organisations in those areas. In the event five of the ILP candidates were elected, whilst Labour Party representation was reduced from 287 to 46 seats.[19] Wherever the ILP had a substantial presence the tension between the two parties was evident.

Regional Attitudes

At the beginning of 1932, the conflict between the ILP and the Labour Party showed little sign of abating. Nevertheless, as the ILP met in its nine Divisional conferences in early 1932 a clear majority still preferred continued affiliation to the Labour Party. The debate

was impassioned as six of the nine Divisions, representing 80 per cent of the Party's membership, decided that they wished to remain within the larger organisation.

The most organised opposition to disaffiliation came from Scotland, the largest and most important Division, with 250 branches.[20] In Scotland the ILP was closer to the heart of Labour politics than anywhere else in Britain and dominated the movement in many areas. Disaffiliation would bring about ruptures in local political structures that would destroy the hopes for local political power and influence. These issues were most acute in Glasgow where the ILP, with the Labour Party which it dominated, held real hopes of obtaining a majority over the Moderates on the City Council. Their leader was Patrick Dollan, the Scottish representative on the ILP NAC. As he repeatedly pointed out, the main calls for disaffiliation came from those areas where the ILP played a relatively small role in Labour politics, such as London and the South West. He was frustrated by the damaging impact he felt the dispute was having on Labour's progress in Glasgow. Dollan, supported by influential figures such as Tom Johnston, editor of the Scottish Labour Newspaper *Forward* argued that those who sought to remove the smaller organisation from the Labour Party simply did not understand the ILP's history or strategy.

Although a majority of the Division supported Dollan's position, it was far from unanimous. The ILP dissident group in parliament, although reduced to five, contained four Clydeside MPs: James Maxton, John McGovern, George Buchanan and David Kirkwood. Of these only David Kirkwood regarded disaffiliation as a step too far. Maxton was the leading advocate of ILP independence in parliament. Buchanan followed Maxton's lead whilst McGovern had additional motivations having been expelled from the Labour Party after opponents had accused him of malpractice in his selection as candidate for Shettleston after the death of John Wheatley in May 1930. McGovern's actions fell inside the range of normal behaviour in the context of Glasgow Labour politics and it was accepted by all that they made no difference to the end result. Nevertheless, he was declared unfit to be a Labour MP and was expelled along with three branches of the Shettleston ILP.[21]

The situation in Shettleston meant that an important section of the ILP and one of its MPs already stood irretrievably outside the Labour Party during the disaffiliation debates. Feelings ran high during the

Scottish Divisional Conference and both sides had much at stake. However, Dollan's views were ascendant. The conference as a whole voted against disaffiliation by 88–49, giving a clear message of opposition to disaffiliation from the largest ILP Division. This was reinforced by convincing majorities in four other Divisions: Lancashire, the North East, Yorkshire and Wales all of which supported continued affiliation to the Labour Party. The Midlands Divisional Conference, the only place where the Standing Orders issue was directly considered, voted for continued affiliation on the condition that matter was 'satisfactorily resolved'. These decisions, however, did not necessarily signal a complete gulf between affiliationists and disaffiliationists. Both sides were highly critical of the record of the Labour Party, and were prepared to make declarations which claimed to recognise a 'rapidly approaching revolutionary situation'.[22]

The deliberations of these six Divisions showed there was a majority for continued affiliation. Still, there was a changing mood within the Party. Never before had three Divisions voted to leave the Labour Party. However, only in the relatively large London and the South Division could the vote for disaffiliation be taken to indicate a definite desire to break with the traditional policy of the ILP. In London the key factor was the influence of the RPC. In early 1932 the RPC was still a relatively loose organisation representing a wide spread of opinion drawing on a generation of young London based members many of whom had joined the ILP in the mid to late 1920s.[23] Although many of the ideas of the RPC, such as the belief that capitalism was collapsing, could strike a broad resonance with the mainstream of the Party there were other less popular propositions. Most importantly the RPC was committed to abandoning the Party's focus on parliament and elections, preferring instead to move towards affiliation to the Communist International and working with the Communist Party. On the basis of a platform centred on its disaffiliation position but incorporating these other policies, by the end of 1931 the RPC had gained widespread influence in London and controlled the Divisional Council. The decisions at the London and Southern Counties Divisional Conference for disaffiliation, and for working to join the Comintern thus represented votes for a definite rupture with the traditional position of the ILP, for a new revolutionary policy, and for the RPC. Nevertheless, there was still a substantial vote for continued affiliation to the Labour

Party showing there was a considerable diversity even within this most 'revolutionary' of Divisions.[24]

The two other Divisions that voted in favour of disaffiliation early in 1932 were the South West and East Anglia, the two smallest. East Anglia reported only ten branches to the 1931 ILP conference whilst the South West had twenty-one.[25] In the South West, despite the fact that the RPC was less evident than in London, the decision to leave the larger party was a compromise between the RPC and more traditional ILP elements. An RPC member, Robert Rawlings of Taunton seconded the disaffiliation motion which was passed with only three dissidents. The conference also supported, by a smaller margin, the RPC policy of leaving the Labour and Socialist International and joining the Comintern.[26]

However, the East Anglian decision for disaffiliation was in sharp contrast to that in London. The Divisional Conference was dominated by the overwhelming size of the Norwich branch, whose membership easily exceeded that of the rest of the Division put together. The Norwich ILP had been particularly frustrated by the attitude of the Labour Party towards the ILP over the Standing Orders issue. There was a history of ILP parliamentary candidacies in the dual member seat of Norwich, and the Norwich ILP had put forward Dorothy Jewson as their candidate in 1931. In the campaign Jewson had met with considerable hostility from the Labour Party candidate, WR Smith, as a result of her unendorsed status. The Norwich ILP argued that membership of the Labour Party was obstructing progress towards socialism. Consequently, they proposed disaffiliation. This was passed at the Divisional Conference by a vote of 12–8.[27] However, the Division showed no desire to approach the Communist Party and the Third International. Further, whilst the Division did vote for a 'revolutionary' policy, this meant something quite different from the suggestions of the RPC in London, being based on the 'ethical Marxism' of influential Norwich ILPer and literary critic John Middleton Murry. These differences were further clarified after disaffiliation when there was open hostility between East Anglia and the RPC.[28]

These Divisional Conferences highlight the disagreements within the Party over the correct attitude to take towards the Labour Party. Some individuals did oppose disaffiliation on the basis of their hostility to revolutionary politics, or alternatively on the basis of scepticism about the increasingly common view that capitalism was

about to collapse. However, a commitment to remain within the larger party did not seem to many to be incompatible with a revolutionary attitude. The disaffiliation debates were not reducible simply to attitudes towards revolutionary policy. Rather questions of theory, tactics, parliamentary strategy and morality crosscut each other in a complex manner. Indeed, if the Standing Orders issue could have been settled, there was no serious chance of the ILP voting for disaffiliation. Most members of the ILP, especially those who favoured continued affiliation, believed that it would prove easy to find a compromise acceptable to both sides. In reality things were significantly more complicated, so much so that no realistic solution to the Standing Orders problem was feasible.

Blackpool: Postponing the Inevitable

Extended discussions took place between the two parties through the period from 1930 to 1932. The principal negotiators for the ILP, Maxton, Brockway and Paton clashed with successive chairmen of the PLP, first with Arthur Henderson, a long term advocate of 'loyalty', and then with the left-wing pacifist and ex-ILPer George Lansbury.[29] The Labour Party NEC established a committee to deal with the crisis, aiming to stamp out the lack of discipline within the Parliamentary Party.[30] Parallels were drawn with the allegedly corrosive impact of the Minority Movement on the Trade Unions after 1926 whilst the dissident grouping of the ILP, Mosley and eventually MacDonald were brought together under the common anathema of 'intellectuals'. The ILP's primary concern was to allow its MPs to oppose measures that it considered anti-working-class. Whilst the discussions addressed the issue of the ILP's revolutionary position, the central question was to whom an MP was primarily responsible: their sponsoring body, the Labour Party, the Labour Party conference, the ILP conference or the electorate. There was no prospect of a settlement. The Labour Party would never accept a formulation that would allow the repeated attacks of a 'Party within a Party' and the ILP would not be prepared to sign Standing Orders which prevented them from openly expressing their socialist convictions. No formula could be found to mask the differences. This was recognised immediately prior to the ILP's 1932 conference, held in Blackpool, when the Labour Party Assistant Secretary, JS

Middleton, sent the ILP General Secretary John Paton, a letter quoting an NEC decision to the effect that the Labour Party was not prepared to reconsider the Standing Orders issue.[31] By the time of the Blackpool conference it was indeed obvious that there could be no solution to the Standing Orders dispute.

At the conference, where the agenda was determined by the Divisional Conferences, the NAC left three options open: disaffiliation, unconditional affiliation or conditional affiliation. Brockway, the Party Chairman, began the debate by attempting to spell out the full consequences of each possibility. Disaffiliation he suggested would lead to preparations being made for a new constitution, policy and campaign of action outside the Labour Party. Unconditional affiliation, he argued, would mean that the ILP's parliamentary candidates would again be entitled to sign PLP Standing Orders. Finally, Brockway accurately predicted that the third alternative of conditional affiliation would mean the ILP attempting to re-open negotiations with the Labour Party and, if no solution could be found, reporting back to a further special conference. Brockway, on behalf of the NAC, made clear that the leadership of the ILP considered unconditional affiliation an unacceptable option.[32]

The debate began with a statements proposing resolutions from each of the three points of view. Dr CK Cullen, the RPC Chairman, pushed for disaffiliation. Jim Garton of Rugby, the Midlands Divisional representative on the NAC, argued for conditional affiliation. Pat Dollan, the Glasgow power-broker, made the case for remaining within the Labour Party without qualifications on the constitutional issue. When Cullen stressed the difference in philosophy between the Labour Party and the ILP, the response from Dollan was bitter. He ridiculed the status of the RPC and the London Revolutionaries suggesting their revolution would start from the centres of the disaffiliation resolution (Winchester, Truro, Westminster and Norwich). For them a revolution would involve taking over the cathedrals and appointing the bishops to lead the workers. His argument rested on the suggestion that the ILP could only make a real difference to the working-class within the Labour Party.[33] Garton, perhaps expecting a leftward moving Labour Party to become more receptive to the ILP's ideas, was left to simply express a hope that the delegates would not be moved by the letters showing compromise impossible. Instead he argued that the important question was whether staying in or leaving the Labour Party would

lead to a speedier advance to Socialism. He suggested that if the Labour Party really was wedded to gradualism then the conditional affiliationists would be ready to go outside, but every avenue within the Labour Party must have been explored.[34]

A few things were notable about the Blackpool debate. First, there was an overlap of attitudes between opposing sides, particularly over the need for the Labour Party to accept well-defined socialist policies. However, there were also differences between the affiliationists and the disaffiliationists. The former were keen to stress the importance of the traditional educational and democratic values of the ILP, whilst the disaffiliationists pointed to the need to develop new policies and attitudes given the perceived potential for a total collapse of the capitalist economic system. There was little distinctive about the arguments for conditional affiliation. Second, the Blackpool conference was notable for the number of leading figures within the ILP who came out openly in favour of disaffiliation, many, most notably ILP General Secretary John Paton, for the first time.[35]

The rapidly changing attitude of ILPers towards the Labour Party following the 1931 election meant that no one could be certain about the result of the voting. Brockway and Paton were hopeful that the Party would accept their disaffiliationist line, whilst Dollan was confident that the Party would feel its future lay with the Labour Party. Voting was a tense affair. To the shock and disgust of some, unconditional affiliation was defeated by a resounding vote of 214–98. Following this the motion for immediate disaffiliation was defeated by a relatively small margin of 183–144. Eventually, the conference came to a decision in favour of conditional affiliation. By 250–53 the Blackpool conference voted to reopen negotiations with the Labour Party over Standing Orders.[36]

Attitudes of the two parties and the correspondence between Paton and Middleton had shown that the vote at Blackpool was a vote for an option that had already been closed off. However, the membership of the ILP was reluctant to take the decisive step of leaving the Labour Party, the majority in the Divisional Conferences had shown a strong desire to remain in the Labour Party. Nevertheless, many of the same individuals resented the way in which the Labour Party had treated the Parliamentary Group of the ILP, and the refusal of the Labour Party to endorse the nominations of ILP candidates at elections. These conflicting factors explained support for the position of conditional affiliation at Blackpool. But

the Blackpool vote was a victory for the politics of Micawber. Many members of the ILP were hoping against hope that some compromise could be found that would allow their principles to be maintained whilst remaining within the Labour Party. Such hopes were unrealistic, as John Paton retrospectively explained: 'It was obvious enough, however, to those who knew the Labour Party's firmness on the matter in dispute that this was merely postponing the inevitable.'[37]

Disaffiliation, Revolution and Standing Orders

By the beginning of June 1932 it was evident that there was not going to be an amicable solution to the Standing Orders dispute. Despite the importance of the issue there was really very little left to be said on the matter at the Bradford Special conference in July. The ILP had effectively decided to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in Blackpool, but at Bradford the RPC tried to give the formal decision to disaffiliate a revolutionary twist. Support for disaffiliation was for some based solely on 'revolutionary policy'; for others, opposition to disaffiliation was based on an opposition to the same 'revolutionary policy'. Neither group, however, had a clear definition of exactly what a revolutionary policy actually entailed. This left a significant middle ground, probably a majority of the Party, for whom the commitment to the nebulous idea of a 'revolutionary policy' was more ambiguous. Answers to questions about the meaning of, and commitment to, such a revolutionary policy would still not have given the ILP a ready-made position on its relationship to the Labour Party. As Brockway pointed out, in his Chairman's address, to the Blackpool conference although he desired a break with the gradualist policy of the Labour Party this did not necessarily imply a break with the machinery of the Labour Party, that was a further, tactical question.[38]

Given the subsequent prominence of the RPC within the ILP it is important not to neglect the impact that the increasingly revolutionary policy of the ILP had on the dispute between the two parties. Henderson had told Brockway that the details could be sorted out if the ILP would commit itself to non-revolutionary methods.[39] However, it is doubtful that such a commitment would, by itself, really have satisfied the Labour Party's NEC. Thus, it was the Standing Orders dispute that played the pivotal role in the decision to

disaffiliate. The Divisional Conferences and the Blackpool vote shows that the majority of the membership would rather have remained within the Labour Party if this issue could be resolved. Further, the support of most leading members of the Party for disaffiliation, including Jowett, Maxton and Brockway, stemmed from their belief that the dispute could not be settled.

It is only by understanding the way in which these issues were contested, and appreciating the gulf which lay between the positions of the leadership of the ILP and the RPC, that the dynamics of disaffiliation can be understood. It is true that the ILP was seeking a new and more revolutionary outlook in 1932, but Standing Orders lay behind the disaffiliation decision. However, following disaffiliation the differing reasons sprang to the forefront as they generated contrary expectations of the development for the Party. Opposing factions clustered around the differing points of view and each was able to present a coherent account of itself in the post-disaffiliation Party in which all sides could gain sizeable followings. Thus, the real problem for the ILP was not its 'insanity'; on the contrary divergent, but reasoned, arguments enable us to make sense of disaffiliation as a reaction to the ILP's situation in 1932. Rather part of its tragedy lay in the very divergence of those reasons for disaffiliation. Each implied a different course of action for the disaffiliated Party. When these expectations were dashed, factional fighting increased and ripped the Party apart. To understand the decline of the ILP it is crucial to realise that disaffiliation was not insane but appeared to many both justified and logical.

3

Party Membership and Organisation

'Whoever may claim to be the ILP, we in this hall are the ILP' claimed leading Glasgow figure Patrick Dollan to an audience of Scottish affiliationists as they were expelled from the Party.[1] For Dollan the local identity of the organisation was central. If the ILP in Glasgow with all its membership and traditions wanted to continue on a steady course, it did not cease to be the ILP just because someone from a very different part of the country passed a ridiculous motion at the national conference. At the same time, for the NAC the actions taken by Dollan and his followers, ignoring the democratically agreed line of the Party, meant that they had 'put themselves outside the ILP and must no longer be regarded as ILP members'.[2] Here the will of national conference, in accordance with the requirements of socialist theory, could remake the Party in a new image, perhaps at the expense of more traditional elements. Disaffiliation, and subsequent debates, raised fundamental questions about the nature and identity of the ILP to which there were no simple answers. Sometimes these issues raised themselves in terms of resources, about the ownership of property or expectations about contribution to, and receipts from campaigns. At other times they appeared in terms of sharply differing pronouncements on important topics emanating from different parts of the Party machine, each associated with a claim to speak on behalf of the Party as a whole. Similar issues were raised in debates about the collective responsibility of members to shape, follow, or dissent from the Party line both at the time of disaffiliation and subsequently. To understand the ILP then it is necessary to consider these competing identities, local and national and to recognise the ways in which they were negotiated within, and altered by, the particular organisational and leadership structures.

Membership

If the ILP is conceived as an organisation with its identity in its grassroots then membership lies at the heart of an adequate understanding of the Party. The sources available make it extremely hard to pin down most aspects of interest with any certainty. The ILP did not produce aggregate membership figures for the period after disaffiliation, let alone breakdowns by gender or occupation. Subsequent, widely cited, membership figures given to Henry Pelling by the ILP Secretary Francis Johnson are simple extrapolations from these affiliation fees.[3] With the increasing incidence of unemployment in the early 1930s it was clear that fee payment is not reliable proxy for accurate membership figures. Further, as may be expected declarations of membership in branch and Divisional sources are uniformly higher than would be suggested by the level of affiliation fees paid. Nevertheless, what evidence there is suggests that this method continued to provide the only way in which the Party centrally estimated its membership. In addition to Johnson's correspondence with Pelling, the estimate reached in this way for 1938 is scrawled in pencil on the ILP archive copy of Brockway's 1937 submission 'A Survey of the Party Position'. Further, the 3,680 members estimated using this method is rather close to the 3,751 party plebiscite ballot papers issued to members a couple of months later in 1936. Thus, provided such figures are used appropriately, with attention focussed at a rather general level, the trends in membership based on affiliation fees may be somewhat revealing.

In basic respects the picture generated, as the table below indicates, appears to confirm conventional images of the disaffiliated ILP as having committed a form of 'suicide'. Most obviously there appears to be a continuous decline in membership over the 1930s, with a particularly sharp drop in few years after disaffiliation. It is only at the outbreak of war that the downward trend of the 1930s was overturned with an influx of members into the Party because of its anti-war policy and tradition. However, a slightly closer reading of the membership figures suggests that alternative interpretations may be required.

Table 1: Estimates of ILP Membership, 1932–1939

Year	Membership
1932	16,773
1933	11,092
1934	7166
1935	4392
1936	3680
1937	3319
1938	2948
1939	2441

Source: Calculation from based on extrapolation of Francis Johnson's membership calculations and Affiliation fees given in NAC minutes and Francis Johnson papers.[4]

Perhaps most obviously, ILP membership had been in steady decline from its peak in the mid-1920s. In this way the disaffiliation decision, in the minds of some leading advocates such as John Paton was primarily a response to, rather than the cause of, decline. As importantly, the pattern of decline in the years following disaffiliation is rather different from that which would be expected given the 'suicide' characterisation. Party membership in 1933 was over 66 per cent of its pre-disaffiliation level. Decline on this scale was a relatively regular occurrence in other left-wing parties, for example in the inter-war Communist Party of Great Britain. Indeed, in the 10 months surrounding the disaffiliation decision the CPGB's losses, although scarcely its worst ever, were proportionately greater than the ILP's with November's membership standing at only 62 per cent of the January 1932 level.

Thus, the fall in membership of 33 per cent in 1932–3 was similar in scale to the ILP's decline in previous years and is comparable with that regularly experienced by other parties on the British left. In many respects it is surprising that so many members chose to remain, given the requirement to simultaneously relinquish their membership Labour Party. More worryingly for the ILP, its membership fell by 35 per cent 1933–4 and then by 39 per cent in 1934–5. Thus, the significant but far from catastrophic decline of 1932 was succeeded by two years in which the proportionate fall was actually greater. It is then a matter of some interest why so many individuals were prepared to take the apparently dramatic step of breaking with the Labour Party in 1932, only to remain so briefly with the ILP. At the

crude level of national membership these figures are obviously susceptible to a variety of different explanations. Rather than explaining the characterisation of the post-disaffiliation ILP, they raise a series of further questions about the nature, extent and periodisation of the ILP's decline.

The decision to retain or relinquish membership of the ILP in July 1932, or even to join for the first time, was formally an individual one. However, individual decisions, in 1932 and subsequently, were made in a collective context, with individuals engaging in different forms of activity in specific branches. Supporting affiliation and consequently leaving the ILP had a different character in Brechin, where this course of action was taken unanimously by the whole branch, than in Airdrie, where the two resigning were quickly dismissed in a branch which excitedly reported recruiting twenty-seven new members as a result of the disaffiliation decision. By considering the regional and local level which provided much of the immediate context for the activity of most Party members, a more nuanced understanding of these trajectories can be revealed.

Prior to disaffiliation the ILP was a central element in the Labour Party in many areas of Scotland. Partly as a consequence of this, many pre-disaffiliation Scottish ILPers' first loyalty was to the Labour Party and the Scottish ILP was particularly badly hit, losing 128 of its 250 branches in 1932, although it should be noted that these branches accounted for only 20 per cent Divisional affiliation fees.[5] Disaffiliation also saw the ILP presence retreat to Clydeside heartlands with the Party virtually disappearing in some other Scottish areas such as Edinburgh, where its most important branches voted for continued affiliation to the Labour Party.[6]

Other areas where the ILP's presence was based on deep roots in the Labour movement in England and Wales were also badly affected by disaffiliation. The Lancashire Division, which prior to disaffiliation claimed a membership of 5,266 lost fourteen of its eighty-six branches including some of its largest such as Manchester Central.[7] In Yorkshire, key areas such as Bradford, which lost half its members, and Sheffield were badly affected. The North East, heavily dependent on Yorkshire Divisional organisation prior to 1932, lost thirteen branches and created none. The Welsh Division saw its strongest areas in Cardiff and Mid-Glamorgan decimated, with particular distress caused by the affiliationist decision of Briton Ferry, the largest branch in the region.[8]

One consequence of these sharp declines is that the areas which were less severely affected became relatively more influential. In particular the second largest Division, London, saw much smaller losses. Disaffiliation caused the loss of only one of the Division's 89 branches, whilst eight new were formed. Of course these figures somewhat underplay the real loss many branches lost individual members and the one branch which was lost was Alfred Salter's Bermondsey, one of the largest and most active in the Division.[9] Nevertheless, compared to the substantial losses in Divisions such as Scotland and Lancashire, this was a significant increase in the relative weight of the London Division. The other Division which saw a substantial increase in influence within the Party due to disaffiliation was the East Anglian Division. Indeed the Norwich branch, which dominated the Division appears to have lost 'only a few paper members' as a result of disaffiliation.

Table 2: Loss of Branches in ILP Divisions, 1932–35

Division	Branches (post-disaffiliation)	Branches (1935)	Loss of Branches 1932–1935
Scotland	122	91	21
North East	36	21	15
Yorkshire	40	24	16
Midlands	37	22	15
East Anglia	8	5	3
London and South	88	56	32
South West	19	15	4
Wales	28	21	7
Lancashire	72	24	48
Total	450	284	166

Source: NAC minutes

In the years following disaffiliation national membership continued its sharp decline, with proportionate losses greater in both 1933–4 and 1934–5 than contemporaneous with disaffiliation. At a national level the ILP became centrally concerned with developing a 'new revolutionary policy' which entailed new forms of activity which sat uneasily with the traditional electoral focus of much of the Party's work. These moves towards were contested both by those, particularly associated with the Revolutionary Policy Committee, who

thought them insufficiently revolutionary and those, primarily associated with the Unity Group, who wanted to move back towards a more traditional conception of the ILP's role. As table two above indicates the distribution of opinion, and reaction to events, resulting from the dynamics of the disaffiliation process was again geographically uneven.

In this period perhaps the most dramatic decline in membership was seen in the Lancashire Division. Leading members of the Division such as Tom Abbott, who had joined the ILP in 1894, and Elijah Sandham, one of the rebel ILP MPs, had enthusiastically embraced the disaffiliation decision as the 'end of careerism and foolish stunting' within the Party.[10] Under the leadership of Abbott and Sandham in the period 1933–4 the Divisional Council allied itself to the anti-RPC Unity Group, and strongly opposed the development of the 'new revolutionary policy'. Eventually the Group became so frustrated with direction of ILP and the increasing prominence of the RPC that in 1934 the majority of the leadership, and almost 60 per cent of the membership, including sixteen complete branches, left the ILP. Some returned to the Labour Party most, at least initially, joined in the creation of a new Independent Socialist Party.[11] The Division attempted to refocus attention on the Liverpool area which had been much less affected by disaffiliation, losing just one branch in 1932, and which had become a centre for advocates of both the 'new revolutionary policy' and the RPC. However, the decline was not halted and the Division, which had claimed 5,266 members on the eve of disaffiliation had a paying membership of only 256 at the outbreak of war.

The Welsh Division also opposed the new 'revolutionary' policy, especially as it involved a commitment to work with the Communist Party. Despite the comparatively small loss of 25 per cent of branches between disaffiliation and 1935, Party membership in 1934, of about 400 was under half the pre-disaffiliation figure. From then until 1936, membership fell at the relatively slow pace of 10 per cent per year. Subsequently, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and increased conflict with the CPGB in the Division membership began to plummet again. By the end of the decade, the ILP had no effective presence in South Wales with the exception of its one stronghold in Merthyr.[13]

The London Division, the stronghold of the RPC where the traditional electoral approach of the ILP was almost universally

rejected, fared only a little better in terms of membership. During the period of RPC ascendancy within London, from disaffiliation until 1935, membership fell sharply, over one-third of the Division's branches were completely lost in this period. Some of this loss was explained directly by the departure en-mass of the RPC for the Communist Party in 1935, which involved somewhere between 50 and 100 individuals. However, many more were turned off by the vicious factionalism which pervaded the activity of the ILP in London. Indeed affiliation fees declined by one third in the year before the departure of the RPC. Later in the 1930s the decline of the London Division continued, spurred on by continued factional activity with the presence and subsequent departure of the Trotskyist Marxist Group. The implications of these changes also affected the balance within the Division, with the activity in a number of areas outside the city, such as Welwyn Garden City, where most of the leading members of the Labour Party had disaffiliated with the ILP in 1932, being better sustained than in central London.[14]

In the significant case of the Party's largest Division, Scotland, where debates about policy were to a great extent ignored, decline after disaffiliation was much less severe. Although Scotland saw a decline in branches from 1932–5, the fall was proportionately much smaller in the Party's largest division. In the Party's central area of strength in Lanarkshire it continued to maintain a significant level of support and membership in Glasgow and the surrounding region continued to hold up well. Losses in Scotland were to a large degree confined to more peripheral parts of the country. However, the picture in other regions was even less consistently bleak. Even where the direction of the ILP remained controversial, the 1930s could see periods of growth as well as contraction for the ILP in many areas. In Yorkshire, the impact of disaffiliation had been severe and many older members, such as John Fraser, the Divisional organiser, were lost, disillusioned by the Party's United Front with the Communist Party. However this loss was largely offset by the recruitment of new members, with an 18 per cent increase over the year 1934–5. [15] The crucial Sheffield branch, despite losing a large number of members immediately following disaffiliation, was quickly able to regain its previous size.[16] As significantly these new Sheffield members, led by RPCer Stuart Friedenson, were young, the Sheffield Guild of Youth alone claimed 40 members in February 1933, active, and distinctly 'left'.[17] In the North East, initial resistance to work with the CPGB

saw membership decline, but partly as a result of refocusing of the Division on the Cumberland federation, the Division was able to grow substantially in the period 1934–6, with a 25 per cent increase in paying membership in the second of these years.[18] In the South West, although working from a very low base paying membership rose by nine per cent over the year to 1935.[19] Most positive of all was the East Anglian Division. Traditionally amongst the smallest of the Party's areas, this Division was dominated by the overwhelming size of the Norwich branch. Both Norwich and the rest of the Division were relatively little affected by disaffiliation. In Norwich membership remained consistently at around 450 from prior to disaffiliation into 1933. A small decline at the end of 1933 was made up in the early part of 1934, the Party claimed further membership increases after the 1935 general election and a membership of 500 by February 1936. Membership declined slowly from the end of 1937 so that it stood at about 400 by the outbreak of war, and then grew during, and even after the end of, hostilities. Indeed, in 1947 the branch claimed some 930 members – almost 40 per cent of the total national membership, far exceeding the 37 Scottish branches combined. Such as story of growth fits rather uneasily into any 'suicide' narrative.[20]

This more local picture presents a rather different perspective on the ILP at the time of disaffiliation. In some respects the national membership figures which suggest a loss on one third of members understates the case. Important braches with long ILP traditions such as Bermondsey and Leicester were reduced to nothing, or almost nothing, overnight. In other places, in Bradford, in many parts of Glasgow, the ILP tradition was divided, as Katherine Glasier commented the split had 'worked a temporary havoc' in the Labour Movement in areas of Scotland 'separating even families with the futile bitterness of its "Wee Free" self-righteousness'.[21] In such areas, indeed across the country as a whole, membership was reduced by more than one third. Thus, it is of course correct to note that the disaffiliation decision, often completely and overnight, did end the ILP's presence in many parts of the country.

There is a second, less frequently observed implication, at least as significant for understanding the subsequent trajectory of the ILP. If more than one-third of pre-disaffiliation members left the Party then there must also have been places where membership was increasing. Stories of recruitment, spanning the country from Brighton's six to

Greenock's 40 new members, including the creation of new branches, such as the eight in London, filled the pages of the *New Leader* in the months after disaffiliation. Although appropriate caution is need in the treatment of such positive claims in obviously difficult times, some do bear out closer scrutiny and suggest substantial renewal was possible in both short and longer term. The appropriate picture of the disaffiliated ILP is not just as the remnants of the ILP prior to 1932, for they sat alongside substantial new elements. The relative strength of the new and old was different in different areas of the country and the result was often, although not always, tension. Nevertheless, the relationship between these different parts and its distribution plays a crucial part in understanding the implications of the sharp membership decline in the years following disaffiliation. In this respect at least disaffiliation can appropriately be seen as a partial remaking of the ILP.

Activity: Social and Political

A focus on membership helps outline some of the central issues which the ILP faced in the 1930s. However, in most respects the Party's leadership were more concerned with declines in activism rather than directly with membership itself. Indeed, whilst the NAC and EC minutes record no direct attempt to estimate membership in the 1930s the Party did undertake two national surveys, in 1935 and 1938, designed to ascertain levels of *activity*. These showed that activism was a continuing problem. The 1935 survey revealed only 100 of the 284 branches performed all of the three basic functions of Party activity; paying fees, operating the Power Fund and selling the *New Leader*. Whilst most branches were involved at least with the selling of the Party paper 25 branches had no real contact with head office and performed none of the functions. By the middle of 1938 the situation had deteriorated still further and out of the 220 branches only 124 had bothered to pay any affiliation fees.[22]

Party activity obviously took on a variety of forms. Despite the changing policy, electoral campaigning remained of great significance. Party members were also involved in a range of other campaigning, educational, social and industrial activity. Electoral campaigning is considered in the next chapter, whilst this chapter provides an

introductory discussion of the other forms of party activity framing the more detailed analysis of particular issues later in the book.

Certainly Party journals, particularly the *New Leader*, played a central role in activity. Members from across the country reported how a freezing evening spent chalking the streets with slogans from Friday's issue of the *New Leader* could cement their relationship to the Party. In 1933, the journal was reorganised to considerable effect with much greater emphasis on distribution by Party branches and much less on newsagents. In the middle of the decade they established regular sales competitions between branches which met in many places with an enthusiastic response.[23] In 1936, the Party supplemented these regular activities with the idea of social and discussion groups, *New Leader* fellowships, centred on subscribers. Still the *New Leader* stressed its distance from the populist, capitalist press:

> We are not attempting to make the paper worth buying according to the standards set by capitalist newspapers. We shall have no bribes to offer, no competitions and prizes, no insurances, no muck-raking, and no so called spicy news.[24]

Many branches complemented the national paper with their own local newssheet. One such venture was found in the tiny fishing village of Ferryden on the East Coast of Scotland just outside Montrose. By 1936 under the leadership of councillor John West, production of this local supplement distributed with the journal enabled the branch to ensure that all of the 850 strong population had a copy in their home.[25] In other areas though, most notably in Lancashire, where the Division produced its own profit-making paper *Labour's Northern Voice*, these local ventures took away from the primary stress on the *New Leader*. In order to enable intra-Party debates to be aired without interfering with propaganda an internal discussion paper *Controversy* was established in 1933. In April 1939 *Controversy* was replaced by the journal *Left* which had less of a focus on internal, organisational ILP debates and more on broader theoretical issues, with a new internal discussion journal *Between Ourselves* launched in July of that year. These journals provided one important focus for ILP activity.

Throughout the period from 1932–9 the ILP at local level was also active in the organisation of demonstrations and rallies. In the early

part of the decade, these focussed on unemployment and other domestic social issues, with the 1934 Hunger March and other related agitation particularly reflecting the Party MPs vocal stand against the Unemployment Relief Cuts.[26] This activity on unemployment and workers' rights did not cease in the later part of the decade and indeed very practical examples of ILPers organising and giving assistance on a range of related social issues can be found throughout the decade.[27] However, later in the 1930s the main subject of protest moved from unemployment to anti-fascist activity. Perhaps most obviously in the mid-1930s the Party played a prominent role in mobilising support against the Mosley marches through Jewish areas of the East End in 1936–7. The most notable of these occasion was the famous 'battle of Cable Street' in October 1936 when it was the ILP's propaganda which was picked up by the national press and Brockway's call to the government which led to the Commissioner of Police refusing the fascists further permission to march.[28] Subsequently attention turned to Spain, and the Party was again active raising fighters, money and organising marches to assist in the struggle.[29] These activities were particularly controversial with Catholic elites in the Party's strongholds in Glasgow, where the ILP's combative role in championing the Spanish cause undoubtedly led to some loss of position.

Much of this campaigning activity was undertaken jointly with the Communist Party, particularly in London. In 1933 regular co-ordination meetings between the leaders of the two parties began. Theoretically in the early period after disaffiliation, the focus of this activity was meant to be on establishing workers' councils, such as those set up in Camberwell and Wimbledon.[30] In practice it was usually more focused on specific events and issues, not only at national level, such as high profile co-operation in the Reception Committee for the 1934 Hunger March but also in more localised activity such as the Fulham organisational work 'against exorbitant rents' in St. Olaf's Road in June 1934.[31] Outside of London joint activity with the CPGB, although less central to the ILP's strategy, was also established. In Cowdenbeath for example following disaffiliation the branch held a joint weekly meeting with the CPGB and the NUWM. In Dundee the ILP, again working with the CPGB and NUWM worked tirelessly to press, and win, unemployed assistance cases rejected by the Labour council.[32] Co-operative

activity was common across Lancashire. However, in each of these areas where activity was undertaken it was also fiercely debated.

In the period after 1935 the acrimony which was developing between the ILP and the Communists nationally prevented much local co-operation. Of course sporadically, as during the Unity Campaign, joint activity was trumpeted. But even in this period the ILP gained little, with its increasing weakness highlighted; as an article in *Forward* noted of the joint ILP-Communist organised 'Socialist May Day' demonstration in 1937, for perhaps the first time at a joint event in Glasgow, the Communist Party presence seemed stronger than the ILP's.[33] Nevertheless, the downward spiral in relations was firmly established. Previously good local relationships were more than likely to descend into open warfare. For example even in Aberdeen, where the ILP was relatively prominent with two councillors, and had developed a reasonable working relationship with the Communist Party on the Aberdeen Spanish Aid Committee, the Communists refused any thought of unity on the basis that the ILP had been inactive in supporting the Spanish workers and because they had supported the 'Trotskyist' POUM.[34]

Alongside such campaigning activities political education also remained of central importance. The connection to Socialist Sunday Schools, often a feature of the ILP of the 1890s, remained in some areas through to the 1930s. The Party's renowned summer schools continued to be well-attended and were supplemented by further events of political education organised by both the national Party and by Divisions and local branches. The Guild of Youth was one of the organisations signed up so members could receive free NCLC courses.[35] The emphasis on education, already strong in the early 1930s, became even stronger in the later part of the decade. In particular CA Smith, a teacher and an academic, sought to increase the educational focus of the Party. From 1935 onwards, much of the *New Leader* was given over to his detailed articles on working-class history and later to political theory. He also sought to transform the 'summer schools' – both local and national – to make them less like political meetings and more like actual schools.

There was also a clear sense in the ILP tradition that the Party was about much more than simply political activity. As David Howell has show, the early ILP was imbued with a strong sense of 'living socialism', a 'religion of socialism' which was gradually pushed aside, but never completely destroyed, by electoral politics.[36] Even within

the ILP of the 1930s this tradition of 'ethical socialism' which saw the necessity of creating a party which contained the core of socialism within itself, was crucial. Many who stressed this ethical socialism were contained within the elements of the Lancashire Division who formed the Independent Socialist Party in 1934. This declared shortly after its foundation that:

> Men cannot be converted to Socialism by words alone. To create a movement of the quality necessary for this task, its members must know that they are required to be Socialists not only with their lips but in their lives.[37]

In such circumstances the culture of the Party remains central to understanding both the appeal and the trajectory of the Party in the 1930s.

Of course this ILP culture was a much varied thing. In Glasgow exuberant Party meetings, addressed by the ever-popular James Maxton, as much for raising members' spirits as 'making socialists', could frequently pack 3,500 into a hall.[38] ILP life was very different elsewhere. The Hayle branch in Cornwall had nine unemployed and ailing members struggling against the odds to raise money for the cause making blackberry and elderberry wine (picking was free) and hatching a batch of 'ILP chickens'.[39] Nevertheless, there were common themes.

The basic staples of ILP social activity were relatively consistent across the country and indeed did not vary much from the social activity of other political parties.[40] Thus, most branches held whist drives and socials with food and a band, dances and dancing classes and pageants. Alongside, and supporting such activities clubs and Party buildings remained an important focus for ILP activity in many places. This was perhaps most obvious in Norwich where the ILP club had been assessed in a 1910 social survey as the only place in the city 'to which a man can take his wife and child and enjoy a sober glass of beer under respectable circumstances'.[41] The club and the associated Keir Hardie Hall, with a main room which seated 500, committee rooms used regularly by Trade Unions, a bookshop and a club lounge, attracted a significant membership to the Norwich branch. After disaffiliation membership was always over 500 and in the immediate post-war period it rose to over 900. In 1947 when the club, for apparently political reasons, severed its links with the ILP,

the membership of the Norwich ILP fell overnight from 700 to nine. The struggle to establish Party buildings could also provide a focus to continuing Party activity, as in the vibrant South Bank branch near Middlesbrough which put considerable efforts in raising the money to buy premises for social and political function, eventually succeeding in early 1937.[42] However, in many ways the traditional focus of the Party on large, independent social clubs was declining. In Nelson, one of the areas of greatest Party strength, the ILP club in Vernon Street failed in 1934 after years of losses, and the premises were sold to the Labour Party. The failure of the Nelson ILP club perhaps also represented the dwindling of other ILP traditions. The club, in contrast to Norwich refused to sell drink. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, that the other alcohol free political organisation in Nelson, the Liberal club, was also in trouble.[43]

Yet as some traditional forms of Party activity disappeared, others were maintained. Rambling and cycling continued to be mainstays of ILP activity. As Nelson's premises in town disappeared, their countryside 'Clarion House', continued. Indeed, even in the twenty-first century over one hundred years after its foundation it remains a centre for walkers and cyclists in the Lancashire hills.[44] Similarly the outdoors gave a focus to much of the Scottish ILP's activity. The Glasgow Party in the 1930s, under the leadership of Jack Taylor the 1937 Scottish amateur cycling champion, ran a 'Cycling Corps' which rode out every Saturday to sell the *New Leader* in the areas surrounding Glasgow.[45] Images of health and freedom that came from such outdoor activities also made walking a central part of the social life of the ILP's youth section. Most youth camps held by the Party, alongside the sense of unity given by the red-shirted uniform of the Guild, placed a heavy stress on sports and rambling.[46]

Holidays and outings also played an important role in ILP activity. Some sections of the Party liked to holiday together, perhaps taking up the regular adverts in the *New Leader* for socialist-vegetarian or food-reform guest houses. Others saw a break at the sea-side as the ideal opportunity to sell the *New Leader* to a whole new holidaying audience. However, one of the real strengths of the Party was its ability to organise day-breaks for its members who would otherwise rarely be able to escape the hardships of everyday life. Especially in the poorest working-class districts, opportunities for a break could be an important reason for maintaining or joining the Party. Outings were often as simple as a visit to the zoo, but the response of some

branches was more innovative.[47] From Glasgow occasionally, this was a day out sailing on Loch Lomand, but more frequent were the 'sludge boat outings'. The 'sludge boat' went down from Glasgow to the Broomielaw to empty sewage; the ILP took advantage of this and organised regular trips for as many as 150 members at a time, and all the 'old women from Brigton Cross would go and have their day out down the river on the boat'.[48]

Some Party members also used their interest in films to give a focus to Party activity. ILPers were instrumental in establishing Workers' Film societies. This film-going came together with an abiding political interest in the Soviet Union and the *New Leader* regularly advertised Soviet Films. The showing of such films could give members an important sense of purpose, as could the organised trips to the theatre to see working-class plays.[49]

It was one of the ILP's enduring strengths that it was often able to make an explicit connection between the social and political aspects of its activity. Thus, the political aspects of the Party's activity often had a substantial social focus. For example, ILP meetings in Glasgow, particularly when addressed by Maxton, according to contemporary reports had a feeling much like a revivalist rally.[50] The ILP was also heavily involved in organising rallies and flag days.[51] Central to attempts to link the political and social were the annual May Day celebrations. During the early part of the decade, the ILP, together with the Communist Party, attempted to organise separate 'Socialist May Day' celebrations. However, by 1937 the parties were co-operating in a joint May Day demonstration with all working class organisations, which it was claimed was the 'largest in Glasgow since the war'.[52]

In a similar way, many of the social events described above, such as the 'cycling corps' had an explicitly political intent. Perhaps the most obvious example of this type came in the ILP's organisation of groups to travel round the Highlands visiting under-privileged or delinquent boys who had been put out to crofters by the town council. The purpose was not only to get its members out of Glasgow but also to keep tabs on the councillors who were meant to ensure that the boys were not being exploited. The overall effect was substantial. Even on departing the ILP for the Communist Party in 1935, John Lochore recalled the importance of its social aspects and the attempts to connect these to political understanding:

> There was a lot of socialising in the ILP. This was one of the great advantages of the ILP … It was done from a socialist point of view. This was one of the things I advocated when I did eventually join the Communist Party … We started working for setting up branches so that the Party could get in local people and make it more of a family, homely type of thing, like the ILP.[53]

There was thus considerable life in the ILP in the 1930s, but there were also forces dismantling the Party's 'inner spirit'. Factionalism at conferences could be met with humour, as the ILP's satirists at the 1934 York conference predicted in a mock weather forecast: 'A large number of disturbances have been moving North from London and the Midlands and are now centred over York. Further outlook – very unsettled.'[54] Such battles did much to damage fraternal feelings. The point was bleakly illustrated by the contentious London Divisional Conferences of 1935. All social events were cancelled to make way for further discussion of policy. Such problems did much to sap the inner life of the Party. There is little doubt that factional divisions, expulsions and splits undermined the spirit of much ILP activity.

Organisation and Leadership

The formal organisation of the ILP had continued, largely unchanged, from the Party's 1905 conference. The Party's central body remained the National Administrative Council composed of a Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, four national members and members from each of the regional divisions. The Chairman, Treasurer and national members were elected at annual conference. The Secretary was a paid party official whilst the Divisional members were selected at Divisional Conference. The only change in this regard prior to disaffiliation was the inclusion of a representative on the NAC from the Guild of Youth. Even though the body was labelled as *administrative* it had always had a role and responsibility which went well beyond simple administration.[55] Below the NAC, the Party remained organised into nine regional Divisions, further divided into branches, the units to which members belonged.[56] Where proximity made overarching organisation possible, branches were also organised into federations responsible for the coordination of day-to-day activity, as well as the larger Divisional unit.

For much of the period the Parliamentary Group operated as a largely autonomous entity wielding considerable influence within the wider organisation, although without explicit recognition in these structures. As a result of the disputes with the Labour Party, in 1930 the ILP had resolved that even its Parliamentary Group was required to 'accept the policy of the ILP as laid down by decision of annual conference, and interpreted by the NAC'.[57] This decision indicated the increasing formal remit of both the Party's annual conference and the National Administrative Council. However, these decisions can also be read as supporting Maxton's against the more MacDonald loyalist faction within the Party's Parliamentary Group.

Many ILPers were highly attached to these basic structures. Indeed, Fred Jowett, had placed substantial weight on the contrast with the Labour Party organisation in expressing dissatisfaction with the larger organisation. For Jowett the adherence of MPs to conference decisions was crucial to reconciling MPs dual roles as representing both constituents and a political party in an honest way. Adhering to conference decisions enabled MPs to make legitimate promises to the electorate. Although in many respects the formal structures of the Party did not reflect the way in which the Party actually operated, they nevertheless had an important role in structuring, constraining and legitimising different forms of activity.

However, there was considerable organisational change following disaffiliation, stemming most importantly from the perceived requirements of the Party's 'new revolutionary policy'. The Revolutionary Policy Committee argued that in an emergency situation the Party would have no decision-making structures. Their suggestion, that the ILP needed to adopt a form of 'democratic centralism', although an anathema to many members including Jowett, was eventually endorsed by the NAC. This was exacerbated, as reviews of party organisation made clear, by a range of other problems. Not only was membership falling rapidly but financially the Party was struggling with limited options available to curb spending except on staff. As a result of these challenges ILP conferences in 1934 and 1935 passed sets of wide-ranging organisational reforms that had a profound impact on the way in which the Party operated.

The main aim of the organisational changes was to strengthen central control over Party policy and activity. The 1934 reforms were aimed at this explicitly, with the hope of creating a degree of democratic centralist control over the Party. A National Executive

Committee (EC) and an Inner Executive (IE) were created to operate alongside the NAC. The EC and IE were both to be elected from the ranks of the NAC. The Inner Executive anticipated the possibility of the ILP being made illegal, although in legality it was meant to make decisions of limited political importance, restricted to the relatively uncontroversial realms of finance, organisation and in some cases discipline. The EC was to meet somewhat less frequently but was responsible for most of the operational activity of the Party, and was to have a more explicitly directive role than the NAC. Whilst these changes had no effect on the election and makeup of the NAC, its meetings were made less frequent and were based around an agenda and report decided upon by the EC. The already substantial powers of the NAC to influence policy through control of the annual conference agenda were also enhanced by the reforms, as conferences were restructured to revolve around an NAC policy statement.

At branch level a new set of structures were introduced. Larger branches were to establish a greater degree of internal organisation including sets of committees responsible for particular activities, and where possible, both workplace and residential organisation. Federations were requested to increase their input into Party organisation and to look for ways to expand co-ordination of activity. Whilst the nine Divisions were left intact, with unaltered coverage, concern was expressed at the fact that only Scotland had a full time paid organiser.[58]

There was also considerable change in the personnel of the NAC over the decade, which had an impact on its political makeup. In the period after disaffiliation, there were broadly speaking four distinct positions voiced on the NAC. The most influential single grouping were those, led by Fenner Brockway, who believed that disaffiliation implied the need to construct a new revolutionary policy. This group was flanked on one side by a more traditionalist section, which was much less convinced of the need for fundamental changes to the Party's outlook, and on the other by the supporters of the Revolutionary Policy Committee, whose main aim was to stimulate unity with the Communists. The members of the Parliamentary Group on the NAC operated as a further distinctive block.

In 1932 the traditionalist grouping was the largest. After the expulsion of the affiliationists Frank Wise and Patrick Dollan, they were led by Elijah Sandham, the Lancashire Divisional representative

supported by Fred Jowett, the veteran Party Treasurer, Dick Wallhead, MP for Merthyr, General Secretary John Paton and Allen Skinner and Percy Williams, the London and Yorkshire Divisional representative respectively. Following Brockway in advocating a new revolutionary policy were the Divisional representative from the North East, East Anglia, the Midlands and the South West, respectively Tom Stephenson, Dorothy Jewson, Jim Garton and Kate Spurell along with CA Smith, a national member and later Party Chairman. The Glasgow MPs Maxton and John McGovern were joined on the NAC by their close associate Campbell Stephen, from 1935 ILP MP for Camlachie. These three worked together, usually supporting Brockway, but with Stephen notably sympathetic to the traditionalists.

Despite their initial presence on the NAC, traditionalist numbers fell sharply. RPC leader Jack Gaster replaced Allen Skinner as London Divisional representative in 1933. Wallhead resigned from the Party and Paton from his post as General Secretary in the wake of the 1933 ILP conference decisions. Paton was replaced by Brockway and Wallhead, by Jennie Lee, another former ILP MP and vocal advocate of the new revolutionary policy. Following the continuing disputes Sandham resigned from the Party the following year, being replaced by his RPC supporting son-in-law, Bob Edwards.

Thus, the balance of power had shifted substantially by the middle of 1934. Most importantly the RPC had grown, most obviously Jack Gaster, as London Divisional representative was effectively the national voice of the Revolutionary Policy Committee. By 1934 the RPC had an organised fraction meeting prior to the NAC to discuss tactics and voting.[59] Although the composition of this fraction was not recorded it undoubtedly included Bob Edwards, the new Lancashire Divisional representative, recently returned from a Communist organised trip to the Soviet Union and the Guild of Youth's representative, a covert YCL member, Lewis Povey. It is also notable that in this period Tom Stephenson, the North East representative, and Sam Leckie, the new Midlands Divisional representative and identified by the RPC as one of its supporters, frequently voted with Gaster.[60] At the same time the traditionalist wing was disappearing, the single addition of East Anglian representative George Johnson, being set against the four losses. The fracturing of this group left adherents of this position in a largely secondary role, supporting the increasing powerful group led by

Brockway. With the resignation of the Revolutionary Policy Committee in 1935, Gaster was replaced on the committee by John Aplin, and Edwards adjusted his political outlook further strengthening this group.

These processes in part explain how, by the mid-1930s, there was an increasing unity of outlook on the NAC centred on support for the 'new revolutionary policy' and the combined leadership of Maxton and Brockway. This situation was to some degree a matter of conscious, and sometimes underhand, construction by the Party's leading figures. In part this could be seen in appointments to the Chairmanship and the NAC. There was rumbling disquiet about the lack of wider consultation prior to Maxton's unelected move into the position of Chairman after the reshuffle caused by John Paton's resignation as General Secretary in 1933. Further, fixing from the top against other factions came at the 1934 conference when RPC leader Dr Cullen came fourth, albeit narrowly, in ballot for the four national members. Apparently, rather than give the RPC a further place on the NAC, a run off ballot was held with Alex Smillie, who had come seventh in the original poll, elected.

However, controversial manoeuvring was most obvious in the case of the Party's new central machinery – the Executive Committee and particularly the Inner Executive. The EC, formed for the first time in 1934, consisted of Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary plus initially five, from 1935 three, elected by the NAC from its own membership. The Inner Executive chosen by the Executive consisted of initially four and later three members. The first Executive Committee included Maxton, Jowett, Brockway, Stephen, Stephenson, McGovern, Lee and Smith, with Maxton, McGovern, Stephen and Smith forming the Inner Executive. Within a few months of its formation Tom Stephenson was already concerned that the EC and the IE were exercising far too much power, making decisions they had no right to make.[61] Subsequently these problems became extremely acute. The reduction in size of both bodies came to see the increasing dominance of the Party's MPs. This could be seen in the Executive but it was clearest in the case of the Inner Executive. From 1935, this consisted of Maxton, Stephen and McGovern and meet, rather incongruently for a body set up in anticipation of the ILP's imminent illegality, in the committee rooms of the House of Commons. The body, without of course being established for this purpose, provided the Parliamentary Group with an important route

for influencing the Party. This they used to highly controversial effect during the Abyssinian Crisis when the forced their preferred policy through against a majority of the rest of the Party.

The Inner Executive despite its remit became a powerful and controversial force within the ILP most obviously in the disputes surrounding the Abyssinian Crisis, which resulted in the end of the Inner Executive. If the NAC has been portrayed as an oligarch, the Inner Executive was seen by its opponents as a 'dictatorship'.[62] Such mechanisms, depending on the interaction of informal connections and personal relationships with formal structures, which parts of the Parliamentary Group could use to obtain influence and power were of considerable importance and were to become more so over the 1930s. Thus, the impact of the reform of the central organisation of the Party was substantial.

There were significant other difficulties with the representative process within the ILP. Vacancies at Divisional level were frequently uncontested even where serious policy issues were at stake.[63] Women were also under-represented on the NAC with the only exceptions being Jennie Lee, who sat as one of the national members from 1933–5, Kate Spurell, the South West representative for most of the decade, and Dorothy Jewson, the East Anglia member until 1934. The under-representation of women was also exacerbated by organisational changes at lower levels. At the beginning of the period the Party had a separate Women's National Advisory Committee which consisted of the women members of the NAC plus one representative from each Division. However. the separate organisation of women within the Party had been waning prior to disaffiliation and the 1932 decision had weakened it still further. No Division was able to report any significant level of women's organisation and in some areas there were no active branches left at all.[64] Subsequent meetings did indicate a small level of recovery in women's organisation in particular areas, most notably in Merthyr, but this was at a very low level. Further the principle of separate organisation of women was heavily contested, particularly by the more 'revolutionary' wing of the Party.[65] With this limited implementation and lack of principled support for this continued separate organisation the Party's Organisation Committee recommended that the Advisory Committee be abolished and replaced by a Women's National Sub-committee.[66] The Women's National Advisory Committee was duly abolished in September

1933.[67] The wholesale reorganisation of the Party's central organisation agreed at the 1934 Easter conference saw all NAC sub-committee's abolished and replaced with the Executive Committee.[68] There was not even time for the Women's National Subcommittee to be created let alone have a significant impact of the development of the Party. The Executive Committee at no time gave any extended consideration to the women's organisation. The decisions of 1933–4 effectively ended the separate machinery for women's organisation within the ILP.

Difficulties in the relationship between the formal organisational components of the Party, exacerbated by differences of policy and outlook, were not restricted to national level. Numerous examples can be found at Divisional and local level, but the most extended and serious involved the Party stronghold in Glasgow. In Glasgow there was a significant dispute, lasting from disaffiliation to 1938 between those led by the controversial figure of Joseph B. Payne, who held positions in the Glasgow Federation and those including Tom Taylor, who operated through executive of the Scottish Divisional Council (SDC).[69] The Executive of the SDC regarded the Management Committee of the Glasgow Federation (MC) with disdain, and considered that they were incompetent 'village pump parish scale protectors' who were seriously mismanaging the Glasgow ILP.[70] Both groups were represented amongst the ILP's councillors, indeed, much to the amusement of the other parties the disputes were often played out inside Glasgow's Council Chamber. Under successive Chairmen of the Council group first one and then the other faction had been in control. In 1937 the situation reached new heights when Payne took Taylor to court. The SDC launched an investigation into the affairs of Payne and the MC, whilst the Management Committee systematically blocked the SDC attempts to gather information.[71] When the situation dragged on through 1937 the NAC was forced to take over and launch its own investigation. The inquiry found minor policy differences, the SDC took a more 'consciously revolutionary' view while the MC concentrated on 'the immediate grievances of the working class', but the dispute was mainly due to clashing personalities. The blame was placed at the door of the Management Committee, which had often 'been a hindrance rather than a help to the party'. It was decided that the Scottish ILP was in need of a wholesale reorganisation. The main positions in the SDC went to non-Glasgow figures, the leading protagonists, Payne, Taylor and

Carmichael were removed from official positions and Payne was barred from holding public office for the Party for a year.[72] Nevertheless the situation was not resolved, Payne for example did stand in the 1937 council election, unsupported by most of the Glasgow ILP.[73] There can be little doubt that the situation was highly damaging for the Glasgow ILP reducing their efficiency on the council, in electoral terms, especially in the Cowcaddens ward and in terms of their relationship with the Unions especially the Transport Workers. Such organisation difficulties, in part a result of competing locations of power, affected the Party's ability to be seen as a united revolutionary force capable of challenging both Labour and the Communist Party in Glasgow.

Finance

Under the Chairmanship of Clifford Allen in the mid-1920s the ILP had established high levels of expenditure which could not be supported even at the time. When middle class support for the ILP had drifted off as the Party moved to the left in the later part of the decade donations had dropped significantly. The increase in unemployment had also had a major impact in reducing income from affiliation fees. By the time of disaffiliation the financial situation was acute. Fred Jowett, the Treasurer, reported in July 1933 that the Party was insolvent and the *New Leader* 'hopelessly insolvent' with a regular loss of £20 per week and a net liability of £5,356. The Party looked to establish new ways of collecting money. In 1933 it introduced the 'Power for Socialism Fund' normally referred to as the Power Fund, an outgrowth of the '1933 special effort fund' which asked for the active co-operation of the branches, Divisions and federations in collecting money for the central organisation of the Party.

Although the deficit for the following year was declared at the relatively low level of £13, in private the assessment of the financial situation was very negative, and the problems of the early 1920s with an excessive reliance on donations were still evident. In 1935 an appeal was launched for £1,000 simply to maintain operations. By the following year the amount requested had risen to £3,000 despite the fact that they had failed to reach their target the year before. In mid-1937 John McNair was employed on a part-time basis to work on trying to improve the financial position of the Party especially in

regard to affiliation fees. McNair did secure increases in Yorkshire, East Anglia and Lancashire but despite this affiliation fees actually fell by £14 and the financial situation grew more difficult. The annual conference had predicted income of £1,900 and expenditure of £2,040 but the budget committee was forced to concede that the actual figures were more likely to show a shortfall of £1,055. In order to sustain itself the Party was forced to repeatedly borrow money from its Bilbao Fund. It was only on the outbreak of war that things began to turn round financially. In 1939 the Party managed to reach its fund raising target of £1,000 for the first time. Then by the end of 1940 the Treasurer was able to declare that Party finances could be 'considered as being very satisfactory', with accounts showing an interim surplus of £279. However, those involved in planning for the future of Party finance had always maintained the desire to be able to sustain the Party on affiliation fees alone. Even in 1940 such a dream remained as far away as ever. It was renewed donations that made the difference whilst affiliation fees were well down the list of income falling far below even other sources of income from branches such as income from the Power Fund.[74]

This problematic financial position in the years after disaffiliation was undoubtedly a significant constraint in many respects although, it is rather difficult to precisely specify the impact that lack of money and the need to fund-raise had on Party activity in general. However, there are a number of rather direct ways in which finances did impact on the Party's operations.

First, financial problems affected the personnel and staffing of the central Party organisation. As Fred Jowett, in his role as Party Treasurer, commented about the losses in 1933, the 'only substantial saving possible lies in reduction of personnel'.[75] This led to a reduction in the paid staff and continued pressure for low salaries for these posts. As Party Secretary in 1936, paid a salary of £260 per year, Brockway felt that finances were going to force him to resign and indeed was only persuaded to withdraw his resignation shortly before the annual conference. The following year the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) threatened to remove Brockway's membership as he was not paid for editing the *New Leader*. The problem was 'solved' by transferring his salary to the job of editor and increasing his salary on the understanding that he would pay the Party back the increased amount. Nevertheless, there was widespread acceptance that the low salary levels paid to Party officials was one cause of substantial

difficulties. Indeed, when Party finances did improve in the early stages of the Second World War one of the first steps to be taken was to increase the salary of the General Secretary.[76] In addition to any other difficulties, which may have been caused by these issues, financial difficulties were a significant factor in persuading the NAC that the 1934–5 organisation reforms discussed above were necessary.

Second, the financial situation had an impact on the production of the Party's central propaganda tool, the *New Leader*. The substantial and continued losses associated with the journal were a matter of increasing concern over the 1930s. Frequently the editorial board was forced to launch appeals for funds at the expense of other more political appeals. In 1933 and then again in 1937 the paper had to take on a new format to save money and the Party made repeated appeals to its membership to increase sales through branches. League tables of sales of the *New Leader* and inter-branch competition became a regular feature of the Party's paper.[77] However, despite changes and increasing stress on sales, losses were scarcely reduced even in the final years of the decade the Party was still advancing the journal an average of £500 per year. By the outbreak of war the financial situation had forced the Party to seriously consider turning the *New Leader* into a monthly magazine.

Such difficulties obviously had an impacted in numerous ways on the Party's ability to function effectively. These issues were particularly problematic where they overlapped with, and contributed to political tensions. In particular, in the immediate period after disaffiliation whilst the leadership of the Lancashire Division was in dispute with the direction of the ILP, it was also running a financially self-supporting newspaper, *Labour's Northern Voice*. This, rather than the *New Leader*, was perceived by many within the Lancashire Division as their primary propaganda tool. Elijah Sandham, the Lancashire Divisional representative argued that 'it was the feeling in his Division that the importance of Divisional organisation was not fully appreciated and did not occupy its rightful place in the deliberations of the NAC'. In addition to objecting to the policy and new organisation of the ILP, the Division never co-operated with the central allocation of funds through the Power Fund, or the constant requests to provide funds to the *New Leader*.[78] Where financial and political motivations combined they could be a powerful disruptive force.

Industrial Organisation and Activity

In the years before disaffiliation the ILP had relatively limited influence within the Trade Unions, and disaffiliation had worsened the situation in three main ways. First, as with local councillors, and those in other positions of authority, Trade Union officials were far more likely to remain with the Labour Party than the rank-and-file membership. Second, the disruption of disaffiliation left the ILP with relatively little co-ordination of its industrial activity. Finally, the Party had very little in the way of a considered policy towards Trade Unionism. On top of these, perhaps inevitable, problems of disaffiliation the Party chose to add another. The Bradford Conference voted that ILP members within Trade Unions 'must cease to contribute a political levy to the Labour Party and should seek to allocate it to the ILP'.[79] To extricate itself from this difficult position the Party needed to develop its industrial policy, increase its co-ordination of industrial activity and to make sure that Party members were much more involved in industrial activity. Developments over the period to 1939 showed progress in each of these areas and by the end of the decade the Party had an industrial profile including members on the executives of twelve Unions, a more considered industrial policy and a developing industrial strategy and organisation.

The extent of the Party's difficulties in the early period were demonstrated in the events surrounding the 'Black Circular', which from 1934 sought to prevent Communists from taking official positions within Trades Councils and Unions. ILPers were not officially covered by the circular but nevertheless, some were affected both because some Trades Councils did exclude ILPers and also because it brought to light the situation of some ILPers who 'illegitimately' held official positions in joint Trade and Labour Councils.[80] Even more worryingly the circular revealed the complete lack of central coordination, or even knowledge of, the extent of ILP industrial activity.[81]

The Party responded initially by attempting to establish the extent and nature of ILP Union and Co-operative membership and activity following the 1934 conference. In 1935 the Party established a central Industrial Organiser with each Division also expected to appoint an Industrial Committee and make moves towards the appointment of a

Industrial Organiser.[82] Further systemisation of industrial activity took place at the 1936 Keighley conference, which decided to establish a National Industrial Committee.[83] Considerable progress was made in these terms. Trevor Davies, a leading Welsh ILPer was appointed National Industrial Co-ordinator and most Divisions did establish Industrial Committees in 1935. The Party's National Industrial Committee was established on 2 May 1936, initially comprising; Tom Stephenson, Jim Davies, Wilfred Young, John Aplin, Trevor Davies and Jack Hammond.[84] By November of that year the committee claimed to have stimulated co-ordinated industrial activity, and with the assistance of Ernie Patterson, had initiated a regular industrial feature in the *New Leader*.[85] The following year Party groups had been established in a number of Unions with the Industrial Committee being particularly optimistic about the position in the transport and engineering industries.[86] In terms of organisation and central co-ordination there was a considerable improvement over the 1930s. Of course this did not necessarily translate to increased industrial activity and influence.

In terms of the TUC the Party was starting from a very low base. In 1935 the Party was aware of only one delegate to the TUC and the following year this had only increased to two, although one of the ILPers came from the Litho Workers' Union where the left wing faction was largely under ILP control. In 1936 the ILPers were, according to Party sources, 'lost in a sea of reaction'.[87] In 1938 the situation was only slightly improved, according to Bob Edwards's report of the 1938 TUC '[t]he decisions of this Congress were tragically reactionary and completely bankrupt of leadership on all the major issues affecting the working class movement'. With the Communist Party supporting a Popular Front, pro-League of Nations line the ILP, led by the 22 year old NUDAW delegate Walter Padley, was isolated in its opposition to the policy of collective security and military action against aggression.[88]

At the Scottish TUC, where there were a few more ILP delegates, the Party had somewhat greater input. ILP activity at the STUC was led throughout the 1930s by Tom Taylor, the young Glasgow councillor and representative of the National Union of Clerks (NUC). At the 1935 Scottish TUC, Taylor moved a resolution on war. Though defeated by 103 votes to 22, it was significant this represented the work of a distinctively ILP left not simply backing the Communist line. This point was not lost on Arthur Woodburn,

who in his fraternal greetings to the congress on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party, strongly attacked the ILP.[89] The ILP's prominence within the left wing of the Scottish TUC was re-enforced at the 1936 Scottish TUC. The left wing was led by the ILP in the debate on the Abyssinian War, in opposition to the TUC's support for rearmament, and calling for an end to class collaboration.[90] The ILP found itself in a similar minority with its anti-class collaboration line at other Scottish TUC conferences. For example in 1938 at the STUC, where there were seven ILPers acting as delegates, after the T&GWU withdrew their resolution in favour of Independent Working Class action against war it was left to the ILP, again led by Tom Taylor, to present such a case whilst the STUC establishment, supported by Communist representatives argued for the League of Nations line.[91] Despite vocal opposition the ILP was able to have little influence within either the TUC or the STUC.

This limited impact at national level reflected the weakness of the ILP within individual Unions, with ILPers in a position of relative isolation in almost all Unions in 1932. However, although never significant in the same ways as the CPGB, the ILP was able to build up something of a presence in certain Unions in particular places. They were able to have some impact in different ways within three of the larger Unions, the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB). They were also able to build up some strength within a number of medium sized and smaller Unions such as the National Union of Clerks and the Chemical Workers Union. The varying levels and mechanisms at work within these organisations, as well as in countervailing cases, shed some light on the position of the ILP in the 1930s.

The organisation of NUDAW saw individual branches directly represented at its annual delegate meeting.[92] This structure created spaces in which minorities could operate and enabled Ernest Fernyhough, then Secretary of the Audley (North Stafford) ILP and later a full time NUDAW official and Labour MP, to obtain some influence. In 1933 he managed to pass a national resolution against the injustices of the Anomalies Act, which had come to symbolise the ILP-Labour split pre-1931.[93] Later, he worked with Communists and other left-wingers and was joined by other ILPers including Walter Padley, subsequently General Secretary of USDAW, and Gilbert Hunter of Dartford ILP.[94] From 1937 Padley was sent as one of the

Union's delegates to the TUC and Hunter, at the 1938 conference, led a significant anti-Peace Alliance minority.[95] As a result of this influence there was considerable hostility specifically directed towards the ILP from the Union leadership. In 1935 the Union executive used part of its annual report to launch an attack against the Party, with subsequent stress placed on allegations about the financial irregularities between the ILP and the Labour Party in the final years of affiliation.[96]

The National Union of Railwaymen, despite a significant militant section within its membership, had a right-wing leadership complemented by some tradition of CPGB initiatives.[97] Although the ILP had established an industrial group in the mid-1930s with Glasgow councillor David Gibson as Secretary, they initially made a very limited impact with only a very small number signing up.[98] However, the ILP's influence within the Union appears to have grown in the last years of the decade. ILPer William Ballantine was elected onto the NUR executive in October 1936 representing an important section of the left which was militant but clearly not under the direct influence of the Communist Party.[99] Alongside Ballantine's prominence the ILP group stepped up its activity, with the support of the NAC it held well attended meetings and called for the unification of the rail Unions around a militant programme, released as a pamphlet *Railwaymen Unite!*, with a circulation of over 4000, which included demands about wages, holidays and working hours.[100] Ballantine worked on the executive in this period committed to an ILP and a militant left-wing agenda including promoting strikes over issues such as minimum wages and holiday deals.[101] Ballantine remained an important figure in the Union, rising to become Assistant General Secretary in 1958.

The Miners' Federation of Great Britain had a militant reputation, especially in some coalfields. Although severely weakened in the aftermath of the General Strike, the second half of the 1930s saw a significant rise in militant activity with the stay-down strikes and the struggle against company unionism. The federal structure of the Union further gave the space in which diverse and frequently militant political agendas could develop. In South Wales there were pockets where ILPers had managed to obtain significant influence. In Merthyr there was a significant ILP input, especially in the unemployed miners lodge where ILPer WE Rowlands was Chairman and was able to obtain the support of the executive of the South Wales Miners'

Federation (SWMF) after being excluded from the Merthyr Trades and Labour Council in the wake of the 'Black Circular'.[102] The ILP was also influential within the Nine Mile Point lodge, where Jack Marsden, with support from a number of other ILPers had become Chairman. However, Marsden was easily defeated when he stood as Vice-President of the SWMF. The ILP found itself further marginalised within the Federation when relations between the ILP and the Communist Party deteriorated during the Spanish Civil War and over the Popular Front.[103]

Only in Cumberland, under the leadership of Tom Stephenson, did the ILP achieve a really high profile within the MFGB. There the ILP had built up a significant base initially within the Walkmill Colliery at Morseby, where ILPer John Carvill was Secretary of the miners' lodge and Stephenson was checkweighman and Union delegate. In March 1934 Stephenson and fellow ILPer and Walkmill MFGB activist J Bell were elected to two seats on the RDC against Labour opposition.[104] In May 1937 Stephenson was elected as Financial Secretary of the Cumberland Miners' Association, and subsequently became the region's representative on the MFGB and later NUM national executive.[105]

The ILP was also a significant element within the left wing of the National Union of Clerks. ILPers were at the forefront of organising the broad left, which at the NUC 1934 conference could claim roughly one third of the conference votes, for such measures as affiliation to the British Anti-War movement and opposition to the Sedition Bill.[106] The following year the militant section of the Union led the conference as it voted to condemn the black circular and elected a member of its left wing, as a delegate to the TUC. Hardcastle of Bristol ILP stood against Elger of the Scottish TUC for the post of General Secretary and was defeated by a relatively slim margin, 4,202 to 3,321.[107] In 1937 two ILPers, Hardcastle and Harry Nutt, were voted onto the Union's executive. Much of this influence was based on the ILP's considerable strength within the Scottish NUC. The support for the ILP from within the Co-operative Society in Scotland, where Tom Taylor was an influential figure, was substantial.[108] This was true particularly within the Glasgow branches of the Union. Notably the Glasgow Food branch of the NUC, the largest in Scotland, had passed a resolution urging support for the ILP candidate at the 1934 Pollockshaws by-election. That decision aroused considerable opposition from the Glasgow BLP, who

referred it to the Scottish NUC General Council which, despite the appeal of Scottish TUC General Secretary, refused to disassociate itself from the actions of the branch.[109]

Within the Post Office Workers' Union ILPers were active throughout the 1930s. J Allen Skinner, the ILP's London NAC representative and Chairman of the London Divisional Council had been full-time assistant to the mainstream Labour MP George Middleton, during the latter's editorship of the Union's journal, the *Post*. In 1931 when Middleton resigned there was considerable support from Union branches for Skinner to take over, but it was decided that as an employee of the Union he could not stand. Instead the job was given to Francis Andrew, a Birmingham telegraphist and poet, who also remained with the ILP through disaffiliation and who used the *Post*, which he edited for fifteen years, as a vehicle for Guild Socialist writing and thought.[110] ILPers were also represented on the Union Executive. Marjorie Peake, of Preston ILP, was elected in 1935 and subsequently became Union Assistant Secretary. In the 1940s Jenny Duncan of Lochgelly ILP joined her on the Executive. Duncan was in the late-1930s the Secretary of the ILP group in the Union and was an active rank-and-file militant who, amongst other things, pressed for increased female rights within the profession.[111]

Within the small craft Union, the United Patternmakers' Association (UPA), where ILP MP George Buchanan was President, there had been serious tensions with the Labour Party at the time of ILP disaffiliation.[112] One branch of the Glasgow Patternmakers withdrew its affiliation from the BLP and subsequently branches of the Patternmakers had been at the forefront of calls for anti-fascist action and for extensive support for the Hunger Marchers. Buchanan remained popular within the UPA, and in 1934 was overwhelmingly re-elected as President.[113] Against the wishes of the Labour Party NEC, the Union held a ballot to see whether it would set up a voluntary fund to support Buchanan's campaign in Gorbals in the 1935 General Election.[114] Whilst a majority voted against the wishes of the Executive and in support of Buchanan, he did not achieve the necessary two-thirds verdict.[115] In 1939 Buchanan, unsure of his electoral future whilst still unendorsed by his Union, rejoined the Labour Party. This decision was symptomatic of the declining relevance of the ILP in the Union, many other ILPers within the Patternmakers' had over the period made the same political journey, and especially in Scotland where the Party's presence had been

greatest, influential ILPers of an older generation either retired or died.[116]

Within another small Union, National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association (NAFTA), Alex Gossip, the General Secretary from 1905 to 1941, was a member of the ILP.[117] He maintained a close interest in the political activity of the ILP and wrote on regular occasions for the *New Leader*. Gossip's politics were heavily influenced by support for the Soviet Union and a belief in united action by the ILP and the Communist Party.[118] His attitude towards the Soviet Union did not change in the same way as the ILP's and at the outbreak of war when he called for an immediate military alliance with Russia it was clear that, despite continuing membership there was considerable political difference between himself and the Party.[119] However, despite this personally important relationship with the ILP, the Party played a very limited role in his Union activity. After the disaffiliation decision the ILP's NAC agreed that whilst he should fulfil the conditions agreed at Bradford, including contracting out, he should take steps in doing so to safeguard his official position.[120] This provided him with all the cover he needed to develop his own political stance within the Union, without consideration of compatibility with the Party line.

These limited areas of some influence do not detract from the overall industrial position of the ILP. There were small spaces where Party members operated and large arenas where it had effectively no presence. These problems were exemplified by its situation with respect to the General and Municipal Workers' Union (G&MWU). The G&MWU had an active, if unthinking, anti-left wing policy and during the 1920s had led the attacks on Communism in the Trade Union movement. It was in most respects an unpromising arena for activity. At the time of the 'black circular' the Union decided to extend the general TUC ban on 'disruptive organisations' to exclude ILPers from holding official positions within the Union.[121] The widespread repercussions led to the closure of one of the Union's branches in Hastings and the exclusion of Councillor AE Nicholls from being nominated as representative of the G&MWU on the local Trades Council in Norwich.[122] Hard fought for ILP local influence was almost completely wiped out. Of course small ILP elements remained. Led by Albert Richards, the ILP's Welsh Industrial Secretary, was able to organise a fractional meeting at the Union's Biennial conference in Swansea in June 1936. In Nelson and Merthyr

ILPers were sufficiently secure in their posts to be unaffected by the decision and even attended the Union's national conference to put the ILP case on League of Nations sanctions against Italy.[123] Indeed, in Nelson, despite the national position the ILP dominated the local G&MWU branch which was of some significance for local politics. The Labour Party in Nelson was controlled by Nelson Weaver's, and the Labour Party in turn held an overwhelming majority on the local council. This position was resented by many non-weavers, and the G&MWU as the second largest Union in the town became the focus for opposition. The G&MWU was under the leadership of Dan Carradice (General Secretary of the Nelson G&MWU and Secretary of Nelson ILP) and William Smithson (Nelson G&MWU President) who left the Labour Party to join the ILP. It provided a centre for left-wing opposition to the Labour Party policy, local and national. In truth much of the dispute between the organisations was about the distribution of spoils on the council, with Smithson being overlooked for the position of Mayor as a particular issue, and between the relative claims of different occupational groupings, especially the treatment of municipal workers by the council. Each side accused the other of corruption and narrow sectionalism. Policy was more a vent for these issues than a motivating factor. In the later 1930s these issues were largely resolved as it became harder for the ILP to disapprove of the obviously left-wing stances taken by the council. Nevertheless, it is of some significance that, in a complete turnaround to the position nationally, the G&MWU in Nelson was a left-wing stronghold of the ILP.[124]

Thus, over the course of the 1930s the ILP had many problems in its relationship with the Trade Unions. Its weaknesses were obvious to those who seriously analysed its position, and it was through such considerations that the Party came to reform its industrial policy and structures. The ILP's position with respect to the Trade Unions was weak throughout the 1930s. However, through the changes which came about in the later part of the decade the Party was able to achieve a number of things. It was able to increase the number of members in influential positions within the Union movement. By its 1939 conference, Party members held executive positions in twelve Unions, with more on District Committees (or their equivalent) whilst fifty-two Trades Councils had two or more sitting ILPers. The description given by the NAC to the ILP's 1939 conference is apposite:

> The general position of the ILP industrial activity may be described as patchy, both in activity and organisation but with distinct signs of rapid improvement so far as activities are concerned.[125]

In part because of this weakness the ILP became an important focus throughout the period for those who were engaged in disputes with the official Labour movement. Thus, in December 1936 the unofficial dispute of the Glasgow Corporation Bus workers led the strikers to turn to the ILP for support.[126] Then, early in the following year, many of the men who had been involved in that unofficial action, because of their dissatisfaction with their Union, decided to form a new Transport and Allied Workers' Union in Glasgow based on workers within the Glasgow Corporation. Shortly after the formation the secretary of this new organisation approached the Glasgow Federation of the ILP for assistance. However, the District Council of the Transport and General Workers' Union (T&GWU) also approached the ILP's Glasgow Federation to try to ensure that they did not give support to the breakaway group and after consideration the ILP decided as a matter of principle not to support Union breakaways.[127] Similar approaches from transport workers in conflict with their Union were experienced in Norwich and elsewhere.[128]

The ILP was also involved in supporting the Beardmore Parkhead Forge workers in 1937 over pay and conditions. The strikers made an appeal to the Party for four specific types of help: to make the facts of the strike known, to provide halls and committee rooms for the strikers, for financial support and finally for help to win official Trade Union support. As the strike committee acknowledged the ILP played its role as requested placing the ILP in a favourable position in the eyes of the men when there were further disputes at the outbreak of war. Indeed when Parkhead Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) called all political organisation to a conference to discuss the formation of a Vigilance Committee on the Emergency Powers Act just after the declaration of war they chose to meet at the ILP Carling Place.[129]

Conclusion

Although the overall membership of the ILP in the 1930s declined sharply, patterns of change were varied. In some areas the ILP disappeared almost overnight after disaffiliation. In other places the Party had a much more sustained presence. Indeed, in particular areas and periods the Party was able to grow substantially in the 1930s. Continuing and developing activity was central to the purpose of the organisation. Some of this was in terms familiar to all political parties. There was of course considerable emphasis placed on electoral work and increasingly other types of campaigning. Political education also took a very prominent part in Party life. However, possibly the greatest strength of the ILP came on its social side. In many respects the Party had not only a vibrant social life, but was also able to create an effective link between this activity and its more political purposes. These patterns of membership and activity were underpinned by competing understandings of the identity of the ILP. Battles about what the Party was fundamentally about, from 'ethical socialism' to 'revolutionary policy' and Communist unity affected how activity was seen, focussed and undertaken. These debates underlay the restructuring of the Party's organisation in the 1930s, as a more democratic centralist structure was controversially adopted. They also lay behind the reorientation of the Party towards industrial activity, and the consequent small but significant increase in connection between the ILP and the Trade Unions. In terms of membership, activity and organisation the Party undoubtedly experienced considerable difficulties. However, other images must be placed alongside this conventional picture of decline. Throughout the period the Party was continually in the process of remaking itself.

4

Electoral Space

'Whilst it may suit Lord Rothermere … to discredit existing electoral machinery and the practice of government by elected representatives, it is *not a useful thing for Socialists to do*' argued ILP veteran Fred Jowett.[1] According this view contesting elections at national and local level was a fundamental component of the ILP's activity. Of course, part of the motivation for such engaging in these electoral battles was to obtain the power necessary to implement socialism, but for many the commitment went much deeper. Hence, Elijah Sandham suggested that 'the idea of parliamentary democracy has got so far into the blood' of both the general public and the majority of the ILP that discussion of 'dictatorships and revolutions' were in practical terms an irrelevance.[2] The Revolutionary Policy Committee on the other hand argued that 'existing organs of national and local government … cannot be employed as the main instruments for the capture of power' and the ILP should 'work alternatively for the creation of direct Workers' Councils'.[3] Such debates were pursued with extraordinary vigour within the ILP of the early 1930s with substantial implications for Party activity and influence. Both the debates and their significance can be better appreciated in the context of an understanding of the actual campaigning and electoral activity of the ILP in by-elections, national and local elections.

By-Elections 1932–35

The ILP stood in three by-elections in the period after disaffiliation, all prior to the 1935 general election. They were in Kilmarnock, Upton and Merthyr. The first of these was Kilmarnock, an area of considerable ILP strength. The by-election, held on 2 November 1933, was caused by the appointment of National Labour MP Cragie Aitcheson as a Judge. In the 1931 general election the ILP's John Pollock, unendorsed by the Labour Party, had been the sole

opponent to Aitcheson, who had won comfortably, polling 21,803 to Pollock's 14,767. In 1933 there were four candidates: Pollock (ILP), Rev James Barr (Labour), Kenneth Lindsay (National Labour) and Alexander MacEwen (Scottish Nationalist). The campaign was a complex struggle for different parts of the labour movement heritage. Lindsay, Barr and Pollock all claimed to be the 'authentic' voice of 'labour', whilst both Barr and Pollock claimed to represent the 'real' ILP. The Labour Party labelled Pollock the 'ILP-CP candidate' and, playing on tensions within the Scottish ILP, placed great stress on the 'new revolutionary policy' of the ILP, which Pollock himself barely mentioned.[4] Lindsay, aiming to discredit the Labour Party claimed the real fight in the constituency was between himself and the ILP.[5] Both ILP and Labour claimed the right to contest the seat, each arguing the other was splitting the anti-Government vote. The ILP pointed to Pollock's record as previous candidate in the constituency, but Barr, was a popular choice, a native of the district, something of an expert on the poetry of Burns and a considerable personality.[6] The ILP called in their most high profile speakers for the campaign including regular visits from Maxton, McGovern, Buchanan and Jennie Lee.[7] Only Alexander MacEwen, the Scottish nationalist stood apart from what appeared to some to be a fraternal dispute.[8]

The National Government candidate won the seat with 12,577 votes. However, the combined votes of the ILP and the Labour Party would have been sufficient to overtake Lindsay with Barr polling 9,924 votes and Pollock 7,575. This result caused considerable concern to both sides. The Labour Party NEC received a number of letters from Divisional Labour Parties urging a settlement be found with the ILP in the light of the Kilmarnock result.[9] At the same time Pollock's own branch of the ILP approached the Labour Party, enquiring about reaffiliation, immediately after the contest.[10] The Labour Party's official report on the by-election put the blame for the defeat squarely on poor organisation which resulted from the split, which 'not only divided Labour People, but created divisions in many Labour families'.[11] From the ILP point of view two things about the Scottish situation were made clear by the by-election result. First, that the dispute with the Labour Party was, in the short term, more likely to cause disruption of both parties' activity than to result in an increase in loyal support for either Party. Second, it was evident that the high profile dispute raging between Lancashire and London over

the new Party policy was largely irrelevant to the bulk of ILPers in Scotland.

The ILP also had a considerable tradition of parliamentary representation in Merthyr. It was the constituency where Keir Hardie had first been elected and later Richard Wallhead had carried the ILP banner as a rebel against the Labour leadership. Wallhead had left the Labour Party in 1932 with the ILP but had rejoined the Labour Party after the 1933 conference as the smaller party developed its new revolutionary policy. After being reluctantly welcomed back into the PLP he made a point of campaigning for the Labour Party against the ILP in the local elections in Merthyr late in 1933.[12] Despite his defection back to Labour, the by-election in May 1934, caused by Wallhead's death was seen as a considerable opportunity by many ILPers.

After Jennie Lee declined the nomination the ILP selected the former MP for Glasgow Camlachie, Campbell Stephen, a known opponent of the new revolutionary policy, as their candidate.[13] His campaign was based on attacking the Labour Party for its conduct over the Means Test and the Anomalies Act.[14] Stephen, buoyed by the Party's performance in the Merthyr municipal elections, pointed to the threat of fascism, and suggested the Labour Party would prove no barrier to its progress. There was little mention of the ILP's changed policy after disaffiliation.

The relationship with the past dominated the campaign in the Merthyr by-election. The ILP's claim to the constituency's radical tradition was challenged by all three of the other candidates. The Liberal Candidate, Victor Evans, was a radical Liberal. The Communist Party, despite an earlier electoral agreement with the ILP selected NUWM leader Wal Hannington to fight the seat. However, the biggest problem for Stephen lay in the choice of Labour candidate. SO Davies had been a long serving member of the ILP, and a critic of the Labour establishment. In his role as vice-president of the South Wales Miners Federation he had been on the Advisory Committee of the Left Wing Movement in the late 1920s. He had also been a prominent member of the Miners Minority Movement. In the by-election his platform was that the ILP had abandoned its historic task and all it was able to achieve in Merthyr was a splitting of the vote.[15] The Labour Party's strong candidate was backed by an effective campaign and support from all the major Unions. For the first time in the constituency they established a methodical canvass

and opened Committee rooms in every polling area, each with a working committee attached. Leading Union members also weighed in with attacks on the ILP, with NUR General Secretary, Marchbanks, charging the smaller party with having secret funds to conduct the Merthyr by-election.[16]

ILP hopes for Merthyr were clearly misplaced. The poll, which took place on 5 June, placed Davies as the clear winner with 18,645 votes over the Liberal's 10,376. Stephen ended up a poor third for the ILP with 3,508, less than 100 ahead of Hannington who polled 3,409. The Party made little attempt to hide its disappointment, its high expectations for Merthyr had been dashed. The ILP tradition in the area had been insufficient to present a serious challenge to the Labour Party.

The Upton by-election took place just three weeks before the Merthyr poll, with ILP General Secretary Fenner Brockway, the former MP for the neighbouring division of East Leyton, as the Party's candidate. In contrast to both Kilmarnock and Merthyr, Brockway was not just a keen advocate, but also a principal author, of the ILP's new revolutionary policy. His election address, which attacked the Labour Party as having 'feeble leadership' and 'flabby policies', began by stressing that the his was 'distinct from the policy of both the Conservative and Labour candidates'. In line with the new revolutionary view he spoke of the non-parliamentary 'organisations for the coming struggle'.[17] The London Party also made considerable effort to get the support of the Communist Party and industrial organisations. With Brockway able to agree with most aspects of CPGB policy apart from Soviet foreign policy, the Communists agreed to back him.[18] He also managed to get the support, by a unanimous vote of the West Ham branch of the Chemical Workers' Union and also from a number of railwaymen and transport workers.[19]

Ben Gardner, the Labour Candidate who been elected for Upton in 1923 and 1929, was a foundation member of the ILP and had remained a member of that organisation for the thirty-nine years up to disaffiliation. He ridiculed the ILP campaign, using Lancashire Division suggestions that Brockway was going to lose his deposit to claim that any vote for the ILP would be a wasted vote.[20] The result at Upton on 14 May was a disappointment for the ILP. The Labour Candidate was a clear winner polling 11,998 with a majority of nearly 3,500 over the Conservative candidate who received 8,534 votes.

Brockway trailed behind a poor third with 748 votes, a mere 3.5 per cent of the poll.

The 1935 General Election

Although initially deciding it would contest fifty seats in the 1935 general election, the ILP eventually contested only seventeen. Finance may have played a role in this reduction.[21] However, the Party also made a conscious decision to fight only those seats in which it believed that it had a realistic chance of doing well. It also stressed the need to choose candidates which it believed it could 'demonstrate genuinely had a claim to represent that division'.[22]

For James Maxton in Bridgeton, George Buchanan in Gorbals and John McGovern in Shettleston, the three ILP Glasgow MPs, the connections with their seats needed no further demonstration. Campbell Stephen, the candidate for Glasgow Camlachie, first a United Free Church Minister then a barrister, had been one of the group of Glasgow MPs elected for the first time in 1922. He continued to represent Camlachie until his defeat in 1931.[23] Fred Jowett in East Bradford had been MP for West Bradford in 1906, defeated after the war he was elected MP for East Bradford in 1922–31 and had served as Chairman of the Labour Party and as a Cabinet Minister in the first Labour Government.[24] Jennie Lee in North Lanark had been elected for the constituency in the famous 1929 by-election. She was defeated, polling just under 45 percent of the vote, in 1931 when she stood as an ILP candidate unendorsed by the Labour Party.[25] These had all previously sat as MP for the seat they fought in 1935.

Elsewhere the candidates selected were all supposed to be significant figures who ideally combined a connection to the seat with high profile personalities. In Norwich the ILP nominated Fenner Brockway, aside from Maxton probably the Party's leading personality. In Kilmarnock they nominated John Pollock, Chairman of the Scottish Area Council of NUDAW, who had stood for the constituency in both 1931 and in the 1933 by-election. In the areas surrounding Glasgow, apart from the MPs and Campbell Stephen the ILP nominated three of its most active and well-known councillors. In Tradeston the leader of the ILP's council group, James Carmichael stood. In Govan the ILP candidate was councillor Tom Taylor, later

Lord Taylor of Gryfe, and in Clackmannan and Eastern Stirlingshire it was councillor David Gibson. [26] In Merthyr they chose Claude Stanfield, a councillor elected against Labour opposition, well known for his work with the NUWM and as one of the leaders of the Welsh contingent in 1934 National Hunger March.[27] In Whitehaven the ILP candidate, Tom Stephenson, was not only active in numerous radical and socialist organisations in the area, he was a County Councillor, and a prominent member of the Cumberland Miners' Association (CMA).[28] In Aberdeen their candidate was Fraser MacIntosh, local councillor and Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (SCWS) Northern Area Chairman.[29] In Camborne they chose Kate Spurrell who had stood unendorsed but with the support of the local Labour Party in 1931 as an ILP candidate.[30] In Chorley Bob Edwards, one of the leaders of the 1934 Hunger March and wife of May Edwards, prominent ILP councillor was the candidate.[31] Only in Lanark South did the ILP candidate, William Carlin, who was Chairman of the South Lanark Federation of the ILP and had sat on the Scottish Divisional Council of the Party for four years and spent a year on its Executive Committee lack a significant presence. Still the ILP campaign there was closely connected with Jennie Lee's high profile campaign in the adjacent constituency. [32]

The ILP campaign, publicised in the *New Leader* and in a series of election leaflets, focussed heavily on the Abyssinian Crisis. ILPers were described as 'Socialist and No More War Candidates' standing for 'no war, no rearmament, workers' rights and socialism'.[33] Such international issues were placed to the forefront in the campaigns of several of the ILP candidates, most notably by Fenner Brockway in Norwich and a main author of the ILP policy on Abyssinia.[34] Claude Stanfield in Merthyr, Tom Taylor and James Carmichael in Glasgow, Tom Stephenson in Whitehaven and John Pollock in Kilmarnock also similarly ran campaigns which stressed the international elements in opposition to 'capitalist war'.[35] However, for the most important ILP candidates the national line was of secondary importance. The ILP's more senior figures, including the ILP MPs and Campbell Stephen in Glasgow and Fred Jowett in Bradford, chose to ignore the international focus of the election campaign suggested by Brockway and the *New Leader*. For these candidates stress was placed on domestic issues, the need for higher unemployment benefits and pensions, the repeal of the Sedition Act, and the defence of previous

activity including with the Hunger Marchers and of course the need for 'rebels in parliament'.[36]

In a number of important respects the ILP posed a significant challenge for the Labour Party. The Scottish Executive of the Labour Party was acutely aware that the ILP posed a potential danger to the Labour Party in Scotland. The smaller party had stood ten unendorsed candidates in Scotland in the 1931 election of whom Maxton, McGovern and Buchanan had been elected. Of the ten who had stood in 1931, these three and Campbell Stephen, Jennie Lee and John Pollock were standing again for the ILP. In March 1933, Labour's Scottish Executive had discussed the 'tremendous organisational difficulties' that they faced in Glasgow, the subsequent Kilmarnock result had stressed to them the importance of organising effectively against the ILP. The Executive thus attempted to ensure that 'people of public standing' were put in place at an early date to oppose the most prominent ILP candidates in Glasgow. The Glasgow BLP appointed a special committee for organisation and planning elections in ILP strongholds and the Labour Party's Scottish Executive gave an additional grant to the Glasgow BLP to help it with a membership campaign to dent the ILP. These activities were supported, morally and financially, by the Labour Party's NEC and National Agent.[37]

In some respects these aims were met. Tom Taylor's opponent in Govan, Neil MacLean, was one of only two non-ILP Labour candidates who had won Glasgow seats in the 1931 election.[38] James Carmichael's opponent in Tradeston, Tom Henderson, had held the seat prior to 1931. However, despite the desire of the Labour Party's Executive and Scottish Executive to produce a strong fight against the ILP in its heartland they had great difficulty in finding suitable candidates. In Gorbals the Labour Party candidate, Alexander Burnett, had no connection with the constituency. He entered the campaign late, and despite the extra funding from the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party and the NEC, the Labour Party's attempt to displace Buchanan was described by the *Glasgow Herald* as 'extremely lack-lustre'.[39] In Shettleston the Labour Party candidate, George Beggs, a Glaswegian native and NCLC lecturer, was faced with a Labour Party machine which had been effectively destroyed by a consistent ILP campaign dating back to the Shettleston ILP's expulsion from Labour in 1931.[40] In Bridgeton, Maxton's Labour opponent Samuel McLaren, Chairman of Greenock Trades and

Labour Council had great difficulty in generating any enthusiasm for his campaign. Only in Camlachie did the Labour Party find a popular candidate to fight a losing battle against the ILP. There the Labour Party, candidate, Ballie William Reid, a 'popular Sandyhills man who by 1935 had represented Mile-end on the Council for many years', was much better known than those who fought the sitting ILP MPs.[41]

The issue of finding Labour candidates to oppose the ILP was an issue in some other places outside Glasgow. In Bradford there was considerable internal pressure from sections of the Bradford Labour Party not to oppose the popular figure of Jowett, and the question had been left open until late in 1934. However, after further disputes between the two organisations which culminated in the Labour Party fielding an unsuccessful candidate for the ILP traditional stronghold of East Bowling in the 1934 municipal election, it became clear that Jowett would face Labour opposition.[42] The Labour Party in North Lanark was also divided about running a candidate and placed considerable effort into attempting to persuade Jennie Lee to run as official Labour Candidate.[43] In Norwich the Labour Party locally was prepared to consider running a joint slate but under pressure from the NEC, agreed that the national dimension was crucial in understanding why it was important to have an all-Labour ticket.[44]

This pressure the Labour Party machine placed on the Norwich Labour Party was experienced by any official labour movement body which considered giving any degree of support to the ILP. The United Patternmakers Association decision to ballot members on whether to provide financial support to their president, George Buchanan, earned a rebuke with a request from the Gorbals DLP to the NEC to declare the ballot 'an action inconsistent with the position of an affiliated organisation'.[45] Similarly, moves by the West of Scotland Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to promote negotiations to avoid conflicting candidatures between Labour and the ILP, although unsuccessful, were condemned in the strongest terms by both Labour's NEC and Scottish Executive.[46]

The ILP saw four candidates returned; its three sitting MPs along with Campbell Stephen in Camlachie. In all four cases the Labour Party candidate lost his deposit. There was some surprise expressed in Glasgow at the size of the ILP majorities and that even the relatively uncharismatic figure of Campbell Stephen had performed so well.[47] However, Stephen's performance showed up the significant weaknesses in their position as well. Stephen's victory was a

statement of support for an ILP candidate whose policy was not significantly different from his Labour opponents. The vote for Stephen showed a widespread acceptance that Camlachie was an 'ILP seat', it was a condition that could not be readily used elsewhere.

Elsewhere, only in Bradford and North Lanark was there a widely accepted argument that the ILP was the 'legitimate' working class party to contest the seat. For example, many of the larger party's supporters, including three councillors and a number of Trade Unionists, declared their support for Jowett, although the Labour Party acted quickly against them with reprimands and threats of disciplinary action locally from Party and Unions and from the NEC.[48] In both seats the result saw the Labour Party take enough votes from the second placed ILP to prevent the smaller party from winning the seat, and to hand victory to the National Government. The ILP had polled above the Labour Party, it was now necessary for the Party to ensure that this result translated into future legitimacy, to ensure that workers who had voted loyally for the Labour Party would in future vote ILP. As the Bradford ILP commented on the result:

> The figures prove that our party had the confidence of more workers than any other working class party in the division. It is obvious that a large number of workers have put their trade union loyalty before their own political interests.[49]

Elsewhere, the situation was even more problematic. For example in Kilmarnock the ILP was buoyed up by the relative obscurity of the Labour candidate in the 1935 election. The ILP tradition, an issue in the 1933 by-election, was raised again in 1935. However, the by-election result had seen Labour come narrowly ahead of the ILP whilst the Labour candidate in 1935, James Crawford, had been a member of the ILP until 1932.[50] The results, which showed the fragility of the notion of an 'ILP seat', effectively buried the ILP as an electoral force in Kilmarnock.[51] Similarly in Lanark South there were many factors which led some ILPers to believe that they would do well. From 1918–29 all nominees of the Labour Party had been ILP sponsored and 1931 the ILP candidate had been unendorsed by the Labour Party because of his refusal to sign Standing Orders. Many, including the *Glasgow Herald*, looked at the situation and concluded that the 'major anti-Government forces will favour the ILP'.[52]

However, the Labour Party candidate, Jack Gibson, had been that unendorsed ILP candidate in 1931. Gibson also made extensive use of the support he obtained from the Communist Party to stress his left-wing credentials.[53] The dismal poll for the ILP showed further difficulties of developing an electoral presence.

In such cases it was the question of the splitting the 'labour' vote which dominated ILP's electoral fortunes. Only in Merthyr, where the ILP alone stood against Labour, were the dynamics significantly different. The Labour Party and their candidate SO Davies dismissed the ILP campaign as 'a childish attempt at disruption in the working class movement'. Although the ILP candidate had to cope with accusations that he was attracting the support of anti-socialists he was able to gain the support of some significant local Labour figures, most notably, Alderman Sam Jennings who had been passed over the previous year for the Labour nomination.[54] The ILP was also able to obtain the support of the Communist Party in three boroughs despite the national line of the Communists. Although Davies comfortably retained the seat the ILP polled 32 per cent of the vote.

Local Elections

In terms of national visibility, parliamentary representation was of crucial importance. However, traditionally the ILP had seen its role very differently. Local council and municipal elections were as much, if not more of a focus for ILP activity as parliamentary elections. Local representation was particularly badly affected by disaffiliation. For example, in Nelson, where in 1932 all of the Labour Party members on the council were ILPers, and where the ILP branch voted by a substantial majority for disaffiliation, none of the councillors left the Labour Party. Even in the ILP stronghold of Glasgow where 40 of the 44 Labour councillors were ILPers, only seven could be persuaded to disaffiliate. Overall, the Party lost one third of its membership, but it lost virtually all of its elected representatives.

These loses did not remove the desire to carve out a local role for the ILP, and municipal elections remained central to that endeavour for many Party members. ILPers, especially of the older generation, discussing electoral prospects would frequently make a comparison between the situation of the disaffiliated ILP in the 1930s facing the

Labour Party machine at local level, and the ILP in the 'early days' opposing Liberalism. The ILP ran vigorous campaigns at local level, based on, but not limited to, their national programme of increasing health, housing, unemployment and education spending by means of a municipal income tax.[55] In some areas ILP candidates did find success in local government elections as shown in the table below. However, most voters did not appear to distinguish between the socialism of the ILP and that of the Labour Party. Thus, the meaning and significance of their success depended on the local context, and in particular on the relationship with the Labour Party. In a small number of cases the ILP was able to take on and defeat the Labour Party in a contest for the majority of the working class vote even at local level.

This was most notable in Glasgow, where the ILP group on the council grew from the seven who disaffiliated in 1932 to a peak of 14 after a by-election in 1936. By the middle of the decade the ILP was completely dominant in local politics in some areas of Glasgow. The six local seats in the Shettleston constituency were all held by ILPers, as were four of the six in the Bridgeton constituency. Some gains, in the period 1932–3 were made against Labour Party opposition. However, after 1933 when the Labour Party, with the support of the ILP, controlled the council and in the wake of an electoral pact between the Moderates and the Protestant League, the two parties reached an electoral agreement.[56] The pact only covered seats which were already held by one of the two parties. Where the Moderates were in control the two working-class parties still found themselves in opposition, frequently denying each other of victory.[57] During the period up to 1936, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the ILP was in places able to out-poll the Labour Party and to make significant challenges to Moderates. For example in 1934 the ILP gained Shettleston and Dalmarnock from Moderate and Protestant candidates respectively despite the opposition of Labour Party candidates.

Table 3: ILP Local Election Victories (Contested), Nov 1932–Nov 1938

Division	Place	'32	'33	'34	'35	'36	'37	'38
Scotland	Aberdeen			1	1			1
	Airdrie							1
	Ayrshire	1						1
	Barrhead			1	1	2	2	
	Clackmannan and Eastern	1						
	Cowdenbeath			1	1			
	Crossford	1						
	Galston			1			1	
	Glasgow	4	3	5	5	2	3	4
	Greenock	1						
	Kirkmuir Hill	1						
	Lochgelly				1		1	
	Neilston	1						
	Shotts	2						
	Stevenston	1						
North-East	Blaydon			2				
	Cumberland (CC)			1				
	Eston			4	1			
	Jarrow					2		
	Moresby			2				
	North Riding (CC)			1			2	
Yorkshire	Bentley		1					
	Bradford	1		1	1		3	
	Darfield			1			1	
	Keighley			1			1	
	South Hemsworth			1				
Midlands	Alfreton				1			1
	Derby			1			1	
	Donisthorpe			1				
East Anglia	Norwich		2	1	1	2	1	1
	Yarmouth						1	1
London and the South	Slough						1	
	Welwyn		1		1	1		
South-West	Bristol				1	1		
	Truro					1	1	

Continued

Wales	Bedwas & Machen		2			1		
	Merthyr	1	1	1	1	1		1
	Monmouthshire (CC)		1					
	Pontypool			1				
Lancashire	Chorley	1				1		
	Manchester	1						
	Swinton					1		

Note: These results are compiled from a range of sources, primarily the *New Leader*, annual conference reports, NAC minutes and local newspaper reports. It is clear from comparison of these sources that the ILP centrally was unaware of all the candidates put forward under the Party label. It is thus inevitable that a number of ILP local election victories, especially in RDC and UDC contests are omitted from the above table. 1932 results only include post-disaffiliation victories. Results have been classified by the Divisional affiliations of the members who won the seats.

During 1936–7 the ILP suffered a number of electoral set-backs in Glasgow. First, the Party's stand on the Spanish Civil War prompted the Catholic elites to withdraw support from ILP candidates in the Glasgow. This was widely accepted as the explanation for the loss of John Heenan's previously safe ILP seat in Shettleston in November 1936. Second, led by Joseph Payne, some of the ILP councillors, to the disgust of the rest, launched a series of attacks on the Glasgow tramwaymen. This alienated a large section of the T&GWU and led to a series of serious internal disputes within the Party. Eventually Payne, whose outspoken criticism of the tramwaymen had led to the one break in the Labour/ILP electoral pact in 1934, was suspended from standing as ILP candidate for the council. With the ILP weakened by the removal of a section of Catholic support and the internal disputes that removed some of its most well known council candidates, the Labour Party saw its chance to destroy the ILP stronghold in Glasgow and withdrew from the pact. The ILP on Glasgow Council did not immediately disappear, but its ability to stand up to a Labour onslaught had been seriously reduced. The Party lost one seat in 1936, a further two seats in 1937 and another one in the final Glasgow municipal elections before the Second World War. In the early 1930s the ILP in Glasgow had been able to present itself as a viable electoral alternative to the Labour Party. It managed this largely because, in its areas of greatest strength, it was the ILP and not the Labour Party which presented the greatest

possibility of defeating incumbent Moderate Councillors. By the outbreak of war it was reduced to an increasingly difficult struggle to hold onto existing seats.

In Bradford the ILP's base of support was narrower, confined to a number of wards in East Bradford, but the situation was in some respects comparable to Glasgow. In the early period after disaffiliation, despite considerable bad feeling caused by the disaffiliation decision the two ILPers serving on the council chose to sit with the Labour Party in the hope of obtaining positions on committees. The Labour Party initially made no moves to oppose these ILPers in the East Bowling and Tong wards, which were considered 'ILP areas'. However, in 1934 further disputes arose surrounding the question of whether the Labour Party would oppose Jowett in the 1935 election. This resulted in the ILP launching an attack on the Labour Party in a leaflet 'Workers' Rights v Party Dictators'. The Labour Party used this to justify reopening the assault on ILP. As leading Bradford Labour personality, and former MP, William Leach put it 'the ILP as we know it today is a brand-new party with no claim whatever to the forty-year-old name it bears.'[58] As a result of this increased tension the Labour Party opposed the ILP in the East Bowling municipal elections, yet the ILP held off the challenge of the Conservatives by 400 votes with Labour coming bottom of the poll.[59]

In Bradford from 1935–7 the Labour Party formally refused ILP suggestions of electoral pacts at both parliamentary and municipal levels but nevertheless at municipal level made no attempt to stand in 'ILP wards', allowing the smaller party to increase its representation on the council to four, a level which it maintained until the outbreak of war.[60] In 1938 Labour, despite internal dissent over the decision, put up a candidate against a sitting Conservative in Tong ward, and in response the ILP ran seven further candidates in 'Labour wards'.[61] The split in Tong ward cost the ILP victory, the Conservatives retained the seat with 1,518 votes against ILPer GE Wilson's 1,129 and Labour's 748 votes.[62] Elsewhere the ILP vote was derisory. In Bradford, as in Glasgow the ILP retained vitality as an electoral force, which the Labour Party found it difficult, although not impossible, to destroy, but only in very limited arenas established prior to disaffiliation.

Outside of the limited areas where the ILP had this kind of electoral tradition the smaller party's electoral opportunities were

even more dependent on the Labour Party. For example in Derby, where the ILP had maintained a group of three councillors following disaffiliation, the prospects for continued electoral success were almost completely dependent on the Labour Party. Two of the ILP group lost their seats as soon as opposed by the larger organisation. Of the original group only Tom Markland of the NUR seemed to have sufficient support in his ward to fend off a Labour Party assault, although he never had to face the challenge.[63] The group was bolstered when Harry Cheshire, who had been elected as a Labour candidate joined the ILP group in 1934, after being expelled from the larger organisation for working with the ILP.[64] Thus, whilst the ILP could maintain a group on the council its maintenance was heavily dependent on the lenient attitude of the local Labour Party.

Similarly, the fortunes of the ILP in Norwich depended on a complex and changing relationship with the Labour Party. Initially relations between the ILP and Labour in Norwich were extremely hostile. The two parties opposed each other in four wards in the 1932 municipal elections with the intervention letting in the Liberals in Catton ward.[65] The smaller party appeared unrepentant, with Alf Nicholls the defeated ILP candidate in that ward arguing that:

> He was pleased he had been the instrument by which the Labour candidate was kept out in the Catton ward… [as] he preferred to see a successful Anti-Socialist who in a straightforward fashion declared his position…rather than the underhand tactics of the Labour Party locally and nationally.[66]

However, after the initial acrimony the two parties came to a working arrangement for conflicting candidatures to be avoided. In 1933 the smaller party won two seats, and the combined forces of the ILP and Labour Party were sufficient to take control of the council. The smaller organisation added council members in each of the following two years with the co-operation of the Labour Party as part of an attempt to develop the 'best possible working relations'. These cordial relations with the Labour Party continued right up until the war.[67] Despite superficial similarities there were important differences between the situations in Derby and Norwich. In Derby the ILP's strength on the council depended largely on the personality of Tom Markland, his ward Labour Party arguing 'that 75 per cent of the people who vote were not interested in the ILP, but… would vote

Markland as a working-class candidate.' In Norwich the ILP vote, especially in the Catton Ward where by the end of the decade all three councillors were ILPers, was much less dependent on personality. Instead it reflected the considerable local activity in the ward where the ILP had a considerable following and the Labour Party had no ward organisation at all.

In Glasgow, Norwich and Derby the Labour Party was engaged in a delicate and ongoing battle with the more conservative elements for control of the council. In other places such concerns were irrelevant, either because the Labour Party was completely dominant or because it had no significant presence at all. The ILP could find something of a niche in either situation. The former case existed in Merthyr, in 1935 for example Labour held 22 of the 34 council seats, with only six 'independents' representing the more conservative elements within the town. Here, as in the 1935 General Election the ILP could oppose the Labour Party without serious fears of handing power to the 'independents'. Within the town the ILP managed to build up an electoral base in the Plymouth Ward, a by-election victory in 1934 adding to the 1932 and 1933 municipal election successes to give the Party three of its four councillors, a level which they maintained until the outbreak of the Second World War.[68] However, of equal significance was the way in which the Party built up significant opposition to leading Labour figures elsewhere in Merthyr, for example in 1933 they came within 89 votes of defeating the Labour candidate, a former mayor with twenty-five years of experience as a councillor.[69] The absence of a significant right-wing challenge to the Labour Party left the ILP freer to build up representation in the district.[70]

At the other extreme the ILP could also make progress in areas where the Labour Party had virtually no electoral influence. In some such places the ILP could advance by presenting itself as *the* party of working class interests, as in the Maxton's family home of Barrhead, where it was the ILP not the Labour Party which began and maintained the process of winning representation on the council during the 1930s. However, more usually, if the ILP played an active role at all in these 'backward' places it was in tandem with the Labour Party. In such places any electoral competition between the two parties claiming to represent working class interests could be extremely damaging. For example in Great Yarmouth competition and acrimonious relations between the ILP and the Labour Party split

the vote and prevented the first Labour gains in the town.[71] By repairing the relations and developing an electoral pact between the two parties both parties were able to maintain a substantial electoral presence. Indeed, by the end of the Second World War the ILP group on the council numbered seven, and combined with a Labour Party group of fifteen was nearly sufficient to gain a majority in the council.[72]

Conclusion

In diverse ways the ILP during the 1930s managed in some areas to build up its electoral base at local level. As in the early days of the Party some members found political spaces in which to operate and to rise to positions of local prominence. However, the difficulties the Party faced were substantial. Nowhere without a strong ILP parliamentary tradition did the Party manage to transform this local influence into the credible prospect of a parliamentary seat. The 1935 elections showed that such a transformation would be nearly impossible without some level of support from the Labour Party. Even when the Labour Party locally was amenable to such a relationship, as in Norwich after 1935, the Labour Party nationally refused to countenance such arrangements, threatening to disaffiliate the Norwich Party if it followed this course of action. The increasing nationalisation of politics made it extremely difficult to capitalise on local election success. Further, and perhaps more significantly, instances of ILP electoral success were few and far between. It normally proved impossible to transform areas with significant levels of Party activism into wards which would vote for an ILP candidate. These two problems combined meant that whilst the ILP could firmly establish itself in some wards for a limited period of time, in the longer run they were always vulnerable to a strong Labour Party challenge during moments of weakness. Once dislodged, and especially if defeated by a Labour candidate, it was virtually impossible to re-establish an area as an 'ILP seat'.

5

Divided We Fall

Working in the ILP of the 1930 was described by Fenner Brockway as 'an appalling experience of sectarian controversy about revolutionary theory'.[1] The ferocity of this sectarian opposition was increased by the formation of clearly demarcated factional groupings, each with their own vision of the ILP position and purpose. This chapter deals with the three major factions: the Communist inspired Revolutionary Polity Committee, the traditionalist Unity Group and the Trotskyist Marxist Group. Each of the factions had a different vision of the political possibilities for the disaffiliated ILP. Understanding the detail of these factional conflicts gives an insight into the development of the Party's policy and strategy. It also adds to the explanation of why the Party's membership and fortunes declined so sharply.

The Revolutionary Policy Committee

Dr Carl Cullen took the initiative for the formation of a Revolutionary Policy Committee in 1930. Cullen, born in 1893, had been a resident at Toynbee Hall from 1916–17 and then on leaving the university settlement had joined the Co-operative Party. A keen advocate of the benefits of a camping and an outdoor lifestyle for young people, in the early-1920s he was instrumental in the founding of the Woodcraft Folk and also served for four years of the London Co-operative Society's education committee. Already an ILP member and devoted follower of George Lansbury, Cullen had come to Poplar in 1923 to take up work as a Health Inspector concentrating on tuberculosis. Over the late 1920s Cullen had become increasingly attracted to Marxist ideas and frustrated with the Labour Party. By 1930, elected onto London County Council and as Chairman of the Poplar ILP, he was instrumental in establishing a committee for disaffiliation from the Labour Party. From this committee he

circulated the wider ILP with a call to form a 'Revolutionary Policy Committee' based on Marxist ideas.

This initial call drew significant numbers of ILPers towards the RPC, including Jack Gaster, who would later stand alongside Cullen as leader of the RPC. Gaster, born 1907, son of the Haham (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of England), had joined the ILP in 1926, in revulsion at the actions of one of his 13 siblings, who had acted as a blackleg during the General Strike. Under the leadership of Cullen and Gaster the Committee obtained substantial coverage in the *New Leader* throughout 1931. This was further intensified in the January 1932 when Cullen, through the Poplar branch, issued a 'Memorandum on the present political and economic situation and the ILP' which set the results of the RPC's discussions.

This memorandum outlined a basic understanding of the economic and political situation from the starting point that Capitalism was about to collapse, probably within the next year or two. It sought to downplay the place of parliament in socialist strategy, both because of the timescale of capitalist collapse and because the political machinery was weighted in favour of the capitalists, with people's capitalist prejudices only likely to be shaken in a revolutionary atmosphere. Instead the Committee argued that 'industrial upheaval [was] more likely to rouse the spirit of the workers than a general election'. In particular, they claimed the route to socialism was likely to be thorough a government attempting to crush a general strike, thus transforming it a political struggle. This was taken to imply that the lesson of 1926 was the need for a pre-existing structures which could offer effective national leadership required to achieve revolutionary transformation. Criticising both the ILP for its past reformist policy and the Communist Party for its 'tactics and unsound psychology' the RPC set out a view of an alternative strategy. They claimed that first the ILP needed to disaffiliate from the Labour Party 'not on the superficial grounds of liberty of action in parliament, but on the grounds of fundamental policy'. Once this was achieved they argued for further transformation: ILP policy should be scrapped and replaced with a new constitution that positively excluded 'gradualists', recognised the necessity of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and made definite practical physical preparation for a revolutionary situation, primarily by the creation of workers' councils.[2]

The RPC and associated members of the Disaffiliation Committee quickly came to play an important part in politics of the ILP. The Committee was particularly significant in the London Division. It held regular meetings, especially before the ILP's national and Divisional Conferences to decide votes on resolutions, which even before disaffiliation were able to attract representation from half the branches in the London Division.[3] The Committee also initially appealed for funds to keep up its activity and it started publishing its own monthly journal: *The London RPC Bulletin*.[4] Cullen was only narrowly defeated in his bid to be elected onto the NAC in early 1932, and when the position was again vacant in September it was taken, unopposed, by Jack Gaster, who acted effectively as RPC representative on the NAC until the Committee's departure in 1935. The nine members of the Divisional Executive included three RPC members Cullen, Hanson and Bert Matlow, an RPC member with Trotskyist sympathies. The wider Divisional Council included other RPCers such as Jack Huntz from the Party's youth section and Reg Bower the North London Federation Secretary.[5] Following disaffiliation the RPC attempted to spread its influence beyond London. The reference to London was dropped in the title of the *RPC Bulletin*. By 1933 the Committee claimed to exert significant influence in the Midlands and North East Divisions, although Lancashire and particularly the Liverpool federation was the RPC's main centre of strength outside of London.[6]

In addition to claiming a substantial number of adherents in the ILP and influence within the London Division the RPC came to the attention of the Communist Party, primarily as a fertile recruiting ground. Indeed, during 1931 and the early months of 1932 the CPGB did succeed in getting 'a few of them' to join the Communist Party.[7] These small number of Communist recruits from the RPC included, Dudley Edwards, the RPC's first Secretary and Clive Branson, editor of local ILP paper *Revolt*, together with his wife Noreen, later official historian of the Communist Party.[8] In early 1932 Cullen was sent by the RPC to the Comintern in Moscow with a mission later described by Jack Gaster as being to 'negotiate association without affiliation', which as he suggested 'didn't come off'.[9] The correspondence surrounding these meeting in the Moscow archives suggests that there were nevertheless substantial implications for the RPC and its relationship with both the Communist Party and the ILP. Whilst in Moscow Cullen appears to have had a number of informal meetings,

primarily with Gerhardt of the Anglo-American secretariat. In these meetings Cullen did restate objections to Communist tactics, particularly counter-productive personalised attacks on ILP leaders and even the ILP rank-and-file, he further questioned the Communist approach to 'the "truth" as a bourgeois moral'. However, he also made clear his basic agreement with the Communists' economic analysis and he appears to have stated that 'eventually his place, together with the best elements of the ILP [would] be in the CP'. Bellamy, a British referent wrote to Harry Pollitt indicating that Cullen was going to use the RPC to further the aims of the CPGB:

> He is very unclear politically, but seems sincere. He states that there cannot be another revolutionary party in England and said that he is working now in the ILP to bring the best elements in the RPC over to the CP, but indicates that this will take time. He said that half of the ILP membership in London (1,500 members) are lined up with the RPC.[10]

The same letter proposed that leading Communist JR Campbell should meet with Cullen 'to help to formulate a definite programme for the RPC'. In fact the conversations with Anglo-American secretariat had suggested a very different course of action from that envisioned by the CPGB. Cullen had been told by Gerhardt to continue his work with the RPC inside the ILP. Cullen returning from Moscow circulated a report claiming support from the Comintern for the view that the RPC and its adherents should remain within the ILP and work on United Front activity rather than joining the CPGB. When Pollitt attended the Bradford conference in July 1932 he found that the earlier resolution of a number of RPCers to join the Communist Party had been reversed. Pollitt demanded that Gerhardt write an article 'to correct the impression he [had] created in Cullen's mind'.[11] However, Gerhardt not only refused to write the article but confirmed Cullen's impression of their discussion. Pollitt was infuriated:

> But my dear comrade Gerhardt, it is easy to see from what Cullen says you have lost your heart to him, and helped him in his natural reluctance to join the Party, by placing on his head the halo of Moscow regarding the line of the Revolutionary Policy Committee.[12]

Pollitt's frustrations of course reflected the removal of the RPC as a source of additional recruits. However, the implication was also that for parts of the Comintern the CPGB was not the only legitimate party of communist operation in Britain. For the CPGB this was a far more serious issue.[13] Perhaps this explains some of the particular venom which Pollitt used when discussing the ILP and particularly the RPC in public at this time. The RPC was explicitly lumped together with the ILP in having a 'deliberate policy' designed to 'confuse the struggle'. The leadership of the RPC were named alongside the ILP as a whole as having 'nothing for anything but the capitalist'. As Cullen complained to the Comintern, the *Daily Worker* continually misreported RPC support for the leadership of the ILP and claimed the Committee was failing to give leadership to the left within the party: 'I understand the tactics of the *D[aily] W[orker]* quite well, including their desire to smash our group in the hope of pulling people over to the CP'.[14] Pollitt's position was rhetorically summed up in a comment directed explicitly at the RPC as well as the wider ILP: 'there can be no talk of unity, no talk of anything in common, there can only be a war to the death'.[15] Perhaps, given the wavering at the Comintern he was fearful about who would win such a battle.

Despite extensive canvassing, the Bradford Conference rejected the RPC's suggestion to define the break with Labour in 'revolutionary' terms. However, the conference enthusiastically accepted the RPC's proposal that the conditions of disaffiliation be made a compulsory condition of ILP membership. Following disaffiliation, with the ILP as a whole convinced of the need to develop a 'new revolutionary policy', the Committee continued the development of its position. By 1933 talk of economic crisis remained, but the idea of imminent economic collapse had receded. The Committee instead focused on trying to get the ILP to accept their suggestions for the objective, method and development sections of a revised Party constitution. The RPC proposed an entirely new constitution, accepted by the London and Southern Counties Divisional Conference early in 1933, and then considered at the ILP's annual conference at Derby in 1933. The RPC's proposed objective, corresponded to a more or less to a standard Marxist conception of Socialism:

> The Socialist Commonwealth is a classless society in which land and capital and all economic resources are communally owned and

> controlled; the power to live by rent, interest or profit is ended; all perform work of social value according to their ability and share in the common resources according to their need; and willingness to perform work of social value is the basis of citizenship.[16]

In terms of methods alongside proposals for regular work with the Communist Party, there was a commitment to a class-based struggle which carried with it the strong implication of the use of force. Most controversially of all they proposed abandon parliamentary and electoral struggle and look to establish a 'Workers' Dictatorship' through the development of workers' councils.[17]

> The existing organs of national and local government being part of the machinery of Capitalism, such organs can not be employed as the main instrument for the capture of power by the working class, and the ILP will work alternatively for the creation of direct Workers' Councils.[18]

The RPC's version of socialism was accepted as the Party objective by the slim margin vote of 80 to 87. The conference also accepted an RPC suggestion, moved by William Warbey, later a Labour MP, to require the NAC to investigate the possibility of affiliating to the Communist International on a vote of 83–79.[19] However, the longest and most crucial section of the RPC's proposal was defeated by a narrow margin, on a vote of 86 to 90.[20] Rather than accept the RPC constitution, a slim majority chose to accept a policy which gave greater emphasis to the role of parliament and less to workers' councils which were used only as an example of possible forms of non-parliamentary activity rather than as *the* route to socialism.[21]

Subsequently, in March 1933, as the Communist Party changed its line on the desirability of a United Front with the ILP, there was a thaw in relations between the CPGB and the RPC. The Communist journal, *Labour Monthly*, increased coverage of debates within the ILP, and attempted to take the lead in these announcing a discussion conference on ILP 'Revolutionary Policy'. The resulting conference on 11 March, attended by around two hundred ILPers and CP members, represented the beginnings of serious attempts by the Communist Party to openly influence the RPC's strategy and policy.[22] Dutt was still careful to distinguish the 'left centrist line' of the RPC from the revolutionary Marxist line. Subsequently William Rust dismissed the RPC's 'sheer drivel' arguing the RPC had distorted the

meaning of workers' councils, offering them as a 'substitute for the revolutionary party of the working class'. [23] Nevertheless, for the first time in public, leading Communists began to speak of attaining agreement on 'the basic political platform' and to suggest that 'secondary differences should not be allowed to stand in the way of the great objective union of the revolutionary forces in Britain'.[24]

However, privately the CPGB leadership remained unhappy with the leadership of the RPC. Dutt in particular, had never been satisfied with the leadership of the RPC, characterising Gaster and Cullen in late 1933 as 'ambiguous evasive left types'. His solution was to instruct the formation of 'a committee for affiliation' to the Comintern within the ILP.[25] This organisation did not function through the RPC. Instead Hanson and Morgan, two undercover CPGB members who were also ILPers, established the new Committee. There were able to build on some discontent which longstanding ILP members and RPC supporters had been expressing. In particular Bob Edwards, the former ILP councillor, future ILP Chairman and Labour MP, had written an article the August 1933 issue of *Labour Monthly* attacking the timidity of the leadership of the RPC. In continuing to push for sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern he argued that the RPC was pushing for a decision that had already been taken. Instead he suggested the need for a new and higher level of co-operation with the Communists both nationally and internationally.[26] Once formed the Affiliation Committee maintained its assault on the ineffectiveness of the RPC leadership for being 'silent' and making 'no attempt to organise the revolutionaries against the reactionaries'.'[27] At the same time it did invite the RPC to join in its activities – an offer which the RPC rejected, primarily on the basis that the RPC did not stand for immediate unconditional affiliation to the Comintern.[28] The Affiliation Committee, formed at the behest of the CPGB Central Committee thus stood outside the RPC attempting to push it further in its attempts to promote co-operation with and affiliation to the national and international Communist movement.

Through 1933–4 the RPC found itself opposed on two sides. An increasingly organised opposition from more traditionalist elements of the Party, particularly the Unity Group centred on Lancashire was proving effective in organising against the RPC from one direction. The Affiliation Committee, on the other side standing particularly for unconditional and immediate affiliation to the Comintern and an

unquestioning co-operation with the Communist Party, stood on the other. Although the Affiliation Committee had limited support it very presence appeared to give additional credence to some of concerns about the primary loyalties of the RPC. By the time of the 1934 York Conference the RPC's position within the Party had been significantly weakened. Certainly RPC proposals for a more democratic centralist structure were accepted by the NAC and the rest of the Party. However, the Affiliation Committee line that the ILP had already accepted the principle of sympathetic affiliation was made to look a little ridiculous when not only their amendment, but also the RPC case on International affiliation was lost at the York conference.[29] Subsequently the Affiliation Committee position unravelled rapidly.

First, the undercover Communist membership of the Affiliation Committee leaders Hanson and Morgan were revealed. This sent ripples through the Party and according to Gaster it sent shockwaves through the Revolutionary Policy Committee. In order to avoid the criticism of Communist entryism sticking, the RPC, in their dominant position on the London Divisional Council, was left with little choice but to come down heavily against the two individuals concerned. Hanson was immediately suspended from his position on the Divisional Council, and after an inquiry and consultation with the NAC the two were expelled from the Party.[30]

Only shortly before this, the Affiliation Committee had sent Eric Whalley and Bob Edwards as a delegation to the Soviet Union to try and clarify the Comintern's twenty-one conditions and alleviate the fears of some ILPers about what fulfilling those conditions would really mean. In order to facilitate this, the Committee got Hanson to make an appeal for money to fund the delegation by sending a circular to ILP branches. It was exactly this kind of money raising which the initial discussions between the NAC and the RPC had ruled out as a legitimate part of Party activity. At least as serious was the worry that the funding for the trip may also have been coming from Communist sources.[31] Edwards and Whalley published a pamphlet on their return, entitled *Revolutionary Unity* which gave the official Comintern answers to fifteen questions that Whalley and Edwards had asked. Perhaps the most significant question was the thirteenth, which asked 'what does affiliation of the ILP to the Comintern, as a sympathising party, presuppose?' The Comintern reply allowed the Party to retain its name, organisation and officials.

One single stringent condition would be applied, that the policy of the Party be in line with that of the Comintern.[32]

The links of the Comintern Affiliation Committee with Morgan, Hanson and the Communist Party, were added to the doubts about fund-raising for the trip. The NAC suspended Edwards and Whalley from the Party and sought assurances that their primary loyalty was not to the Communist Party. The impact of Edwards's suspension on the Chorley ILP were particularly harsh in the wake of the resignation of the Unity Group in Lancashire. The local federation wrote to the NAC requesting them to deal with the matter quickly, especially in view of Edwards's claim that he had a 'record of Party loyalty comparable with that of any member of the Inner Executive'. After considerable equivocation and dispute both men made satisfactory statements and their suspension was lifted.[33]

Whalley worked within RPC, joining the CPGB in 1935 and was appointed by that organisation as a political commissar in Spain during the Civil War only to be killed three days after his arrival. Hanson became an active member of the Communist Party and in September 1935 used his experiences within the Party to write an article heavily criticising the International position of the ILP and paving the way for the RPC to join the Communist Party.[34] Edwards, although retaining sympathy for the RPC for a short while, took a very different trajectory. Appointed to the NAC after the resignation of Lancashire ILP leader Elijah Sandham in 1934, he moved quickly to the mainstream of the Party, serving as Party Chairman after the Second World War. With the departure of Hanson and Morgan, and the evident disquiet over Whalley and Edwards the Affiliation Committee had rapidly disappeared.

Without the distraction of the Affiliation Committee to deal with, in the early part of 1935 the RPC began complaining formally about the attitude taken by the *New Leader* on the question of Soviet foreign policy. Tensions escalated in March 1935 when, in a move calculated to anger Brockway and bring to a head the question of the ILP attitude towards the Soviet Union, Jack Gaster wrote an article putting the RPC view on the subject. The ILP's London Divisional Chairman, Bert Hawkins, a CPGB foundation member who had been editor of the Communist journal *Workers' Weekly*, then submitted Gaster's article to *New Leader* requesting that it should be published. Brockway returned the article and reminded Gaster and Hawkins that the principle had been accepted that inner-party controversy should

be excluded from the columns of the Party's national journal.[35] Brockway's refusal to publish Gaster's article was endorsed by the Inner Executive but Gaster was determined to make an issue of the decision. At the next meeting of the full NAC he moved that the Inner Executive minutes be referenced back, claiming that his article was an elaboration of Party policy and was not controversial. He lost the motion, but backed by Tom Stephenson, Sam Leckie, Bob Edwards and Lewis Povey, only by a narrow 8–5 margin.[36]

Gaster also had serious disagreements with parts of the NAC policy statement for the 1935 Derby Conference. He refused to present the NAC case on a number of issues and complained vociferously that other Council members were going to present a line which had not been agreed. These fears were fully justified by the conduct of John McGovern and Campbell Stephen in their attacks on the Comintern.[37] However, the eventual conference decisions represented a series of blows to the RPC. The Party endorsed criticism of the Soviet Union's foreign policy, proposed by the NAC and opposed by the RPC. The RPC's call for affiliation to the Comintern and definite rejection of a Fourth International were defeated and unofficial groups within the Party, focussing on the RPC, were declared 'bad in principle'.[38] The 1935 Conference had been seen by the RPC as an opportunity to reassert its position and prominence. However, the conference had established the opposite, the RPC was a diminished force in the ILP and there was a growing feeling that the Committee was simply damaging the Party's activity.

The impact of the 1935 conference decisions was especially acute in the London Division where the Committee had maintained a majority on the London Divisional Council from the period immediately following disaffiliation. Tensions had been rising between John Aplin, the London Divisional organiser, and the RPC over a long period. Following the 1935 Derby conference the RPC adopted a series of more confrontational stances which brought tensions to a head. These tactics included the use of Communist Party instructors and speakers and the refusal of the RPC dominated London Divisional Council to appoint speakers on behalf of the ILP or to co-operate in the production of Party propaganda.[39] A speech given by Jack Gaster as the Divisional fraternal delegate to the CPGB's London District Congress in June 1935, where he set out a non-Party line on Soviet foreign policy, brought matters to a head.[40] Aplin believed that the time had come to make a definite stand

against the RPC. He resigned his office as London Divisional organiser in order to begin the task of organising Divisional opinion against the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the 'group system'.

The London Divisional Council denied that they were being used for group purposes by the RPC and claimed that Aplin's problems were really with his approach to Soviet foreign policy. The Divisional Council rejected by 10–6 a motion that Gaster's speech at the London Communist Party Conference had followed an 'anti-Party line'. However, the National Inner Executive ruled that the Divisional Council itself had failed to accept the Party policy on Soviet foreign policy and decided that 'the influence of the London leadership [was] weakening faith in the Party and its policy in the Division'.[41] This Inner Executive decision taken together with the conference attitude towards group activities within the Party meant that the NAC needed to act. However, whilst the conference had passed the condemnation of group activity it had rejected the disciplinary resolution which had been attached to it. The NAC was only able to issue a statement calling on loyal members of the Party to cease participation in unofficial groups.[42]

Even in 1935, although increasingly sensitive to Communist directives, the RPC did not act as a simple faction of the Communist Party within the ILP. On some issues the RPC opposed the CPGB line. For example during the summer of 1935 the RPC backed the NAC's removal of autonomy from the Guild of Youth as it tried to affiliate to the Young Communist International (YCI), preferring to defend the principle of democratic centralism over the support of the Communist position.[43] In the end the departure of the RPC did not come as a result of the actions of the NAC nor through simple convergence with the CPGB. Rather it came as a response to increasing internal dissent and decreasing external influence. The primary cause of the first of these problems was the Abyssinian Crisis.

The ILP as a whole was split over the correct response to the Abyssinian Crisis. Dispute centred on the question of how the ILP should seek to aid the Abyssinians against the Italians, through workers' sanctions or through the League of Nations, or indeed whether no support should be given because that there was nothing to choose between the two 'rival dictators'. The London Division Emergency Committee, with three RPC leaders amongst its members supported workers' sanctions. Their position was put by Jack Gaster

in the Party's internal discussion bulletin *Controversy*. Gaster's position, for the primacy of class struggle, supported by Hilda Vernon another of the leaders of the RPC was further outlined in the *RPC Bulletin*:

> The problem then presents itself as a conflict between the classes – each attempting to utilise the interests of the other for its own aims…. Working class interests are served by the defeat of both imperialisms, and it has therefore to oppose and frustrate Mussolini's aggression and at the same time oppose the Government which represents the equally oppressive interests of British imperialism… It must also be obvious that effective direct working class action against Italy's war plans would entirely alter the relation of forces internationally.[44]

A note appended to Gaster's *Controversy* article stated that it had been unanimously approved at a meeting of the Emergency Committee at which all members 'except Dr Cullen were present'. Behind this seemingly innocuous statement lay a crisis in the Revolutionary Policy Committee.[45] Whilst Gaster supported the class-based line of Brockway and many Trotskyists for workers' sanctions, Cullen, with the backing of the majority of the RPC, supported the Communist Party's line of League of Nations sanctions. He argued that the Soviet Union had transformed the League of Nations when it joined in 1934. In this new situation the League was capable of 'postponing war while [the working class builds] up their own forces'.

> In 1935 we have the existence of the League, set up by the capitalists as a Golden Calf for the workers to worship but capable of being used as a stalking horse by the workers in the fight for their own objectives; and in that League we have our own powerful representative leading and consolidating the opposition to the designs of the Imperialist Powers.

Indeed Cullen went along with the logic of the Communist Party's Popular Front policy change presenting an argument which suggested the need for an anti-war anti-fascist alliance with as broad a base as possible, rejecting notions of purely working class action:

> Not only the workers desire peace. The petit bourgeoisie want peace. The smaller capitalists, insecure already, are made more insecure by war. The smaller countries want peace… Even the capitalist parties have to pose as the friends of peace or the guardians of security. We see therefore a real community of interests amongst the workers and a

> limited and temporary community of interests amongst the general mass of the population including the middle classes.[46]

The result, as the *RPC Bulletin* conceded, was a crisis which went to the very heart of the Committee:

> Yes, there was a crisis in the RPC… There was a sharp cleavage of opinion on the Abyssinian question and the line we should take on Sanctions and on our attitude to the broad peace movement. There were several conference of RPC supporters, a few "personalities" exchanged together with some real straight from the shoulder hitting, a general election of the committee resulting in one or two changes in personnel, a great deal of heart burning and a devil of a lot of hard thinking, a determination to maintain revolutionary unity, – and the RPC proceeds with its work.[47]

Despite the debates within the ILP as a whole about the Abyssinian Crisis there were limits. Cullen's suggestion not only that assistance should be given by the League of Nations, but also that this should include the possibility of military sanctions appeared to many to cross the boundary of the acceptable within the Party. The Inner Executive, dominated by those who were most opposed to supporting Abyssinia, decided that Cullen, together with other leading RPCers who followed his line, should be deleted from the National Speakers list.[48] At the London and Southern Divisional Conference the regular agenda was suspended for three weeks so the complete weekend could be devoted to the Abyssinian Crisis. The scene was set for a showdown between the two factions within the RPC, in a situation complicated by the significant Trotskyist presence as well as those opposed to any form of factional organisation. Jack Gaster moved a motion stressing the necessity of working-class organisation against Italian Fascism and all imperialist oppression. He found his motion supported by the Trotskyists and John Aplin, whilst he met opposition from his colleagues in the RPC who moved amendments suggesting the use of the League of Nations machinery. It quickly became clear that the combined forces of the dissidents within the RPC, the Trotskyists and those centred on Aplin who opposed group organisation held a large majority at the conference. No amendments were carried to a statement supporting workers' sanctions which was passed by a five to one majority.[49]

When the Division met to discuss the adjourned business, there were again sharp divisions over electoral policy and sanctions. However, by this time, at the end of October, the leadership of the RPC realised that it could not expect to have its policy accepted by the Division. This was partly because of the anti-group feeling at the conference; a resolution affirming the positive role of groups within the ILP was only carried by the casting vote of the Chairman, RPC member Bert Hawkins. The RPC's failure was also partly due to the opposition of the Trotskyists to their policy, and their support for Aplin against the RPC. However, perhaps the most significant reason the RPC was defeated was because for the first time their leaders could not agree amongst themselves as to the correct policy to push.[50]

As a response the Committee staged a dramatic walkout from the conference over its failure to accept the RPC line, despite its own failure to agree such a policy. The sensational exit from the conference on the 27 October was followed by a special RPC conference two days later. This conference decided with only six dissidents to dissolve the Committee. The final issue of the *RPC Bulletin* available after the decision, called on 'all revolutionary socialists in the Party to follow their example and make application to the Communist Party for membership'.[51]

The leading members of the RPC sought to emphasise the effect which their departure had on the ILP. They suggested that hundreds of members had joined the RPC defection to the Communist Party, and in a recent interview Jack Gaster suggested that one third of the ILP had left the Party as a consequence.[52] A number of important members were lost. The most obvious departure was that of Jack Gaster. He had played an important role on the NAC, as a speaker and also as one of the few left-wing lawyers of the period. In an example of the sectarianism of the Communist Party in this period, the CPGB passed up much of the publicity to be gained by the defection of a leading member of the ILP when Dave Springhall refused him entry to the Communist Party because of his stance on Abyssinia. Eventually Gaster was allowed to join after making a direct appeal to CPGB General Secretary, Harry Pollitt.[53] He went on to play an important role in the Communist Party, which he remained a member of until the late 1980s. He was elected as a Communist councillor for Mile End onto London County Council in March 1946

and served as chair of the National Jewish Committee shortly after the War.[54]

The ILP maintained the impact of the RPC's departure was much more minimal stating that '55 members have resigned altogether, of these, less than half were active members and only about half of them are joining the CP.'[55] In the private a more honest assessment was only slightly worse, conceding that sixty members in London and three outside London had left the Party.[56] The departure of the RPC did not represent the end of explicit factions within the ILP. The Marxist Group was still in existence and a minority within the RPC had decided to carry on calling itself the 'Communist Unity Group'.[57] Nevertheless, the departure of the RPC did mark a significant change in both the style and content of the ILP's politics. Most particularly there was a definite movement away from factional politics; even those who were involved in the remaining factions had increasingly to stress their loyalty to the Party.

From Unity Group to Independent Socialist Party

Those opposed to the RPC had two rather different concerns. First there were worries about their policy, which cut across a more traditional concern with the parliament and elections. Second, they challenged the organisational form of the RPC; the ways in which it met, was funded and attempted to influence the wider Party. These concerns were voiced even before disaffiliation, a special meeting of the NAC had considered these questions in March 1932 but had decided not to act accepting the argument that attempts to quash such groups were likely to be counter-productive.[58] However, as RPC influence grew within the Party the opposition to it became more organised and more vocal itself, forming an alternative faction, the Unity Group, based on the Lancashire ILP. Eventually, disillusioned with the direction the ILP was taking, feeling it dominated by the RPC, in 1934 the Unity Group split from the ILP and established the Independent Socialist Party, taking over half the Lancashire membership of the ILP with it.

In 1931 Allen Skinner had been re-elected as both Chairman and NAC representative of the London and Southern Counties Division. Skinner moved the successful motion for disaffiliation from the Labour Party at the Special Conference in Bradford.[59] However,

following disaffiliation and the loss of a number of many 'traditional' members of the Party Skinner felt under considerable threat. He began raising concerns about the working of the RPC and spoke at the ILP summer school about the dangers of organised groups within the Party. On the NAC, he raised similar questions about the organisational form of the RPC and its appeals for money. Brockway, typically, hoped that the situation could be resolved in a friendly manner and reported that he had already had a number of informal meetings with leading members of the RPC. [60] However, in Skinner's view the situation was getting worse not better. Probably aware that he would be defeated by the RPC, he stood down as both Chairman and NAC representative at the September 1932 London Divisional Conference.[61]

After the considerable successes of the RPC at the 1933 Derby conference opposition to the Committee became more frustrated. Dick Wallhead, one of only four ILP MPs, resigned because the decisions relegated 'the use of parliament to a minor place and substituting for it a physical force revolutionary thought Workers' Councils'.[62] Of even greater significance was the resignation of John Paton as General Secretary, although he did briefly maintain his membership of the Party and held back his resignation of the post until the end of the year to allow the Party to make adequate preparations. Skinner argued that if action was not taken then the RPC would 'win by default', as its leading opponents were leaving the Party. He wrote an extended letter to the *New Leader* arguing that the RPC represented a real danger to the 'traditional, democratic' structures of the ILP. Skinner ended his letter with a suggestion that the opposition to the RPC needed to form itself into an equally organised faction.[63]

Skinner's opposition to the RPC found little support within the London Division but frustrations were growing elsewhere. The Welsh Divisional Conference in September of 1933 passed resolutions, which not only criticised tactics based on co-operation with the Communist Party but also called for the suppression of group organisation such as the RPC.[64] In East Anglia the Norwich branch unsuccessfully moved an alternative policy statement to the new revolutionary policy. However, the strongest area of opposition to the RPC was the Lancashire Division, which also coincided with the RPC's second largest area of influence within the ILP. Following the Derby conference and the unwillingness of Brockway and the

NAC to take action against the RPC Skinner wrote to the Lancashire Division newspaper *Labour's Northern Voice* to begin the task of organising an anti-RPC faction:

> I am writing to the No. 9 Division organ as representing the area from which the RPC is likely to draw its main strength after London, and whose Divisional Council is probably next in order to be captured. I suggest that, regrettable as is the necessity, the members of the Party who have no intention of being associated with the RPC should form their own protective caucus.[65]

Skinner suggested that the main activity of the faction should be focused on elections to official positions within the Party. On the one hand they would point out which candidates supported the RPC and on the other they would create a list of candidates opposed to that Committee. There were some differences between Skinner's concerns, based on internal democracy, and those of the Lancashire Divisional leadership, based on policy disagreements with the RPC. Nevertheless, Skinner was able to obtain the backing of a large number of members within the Lancashire Division and on this basis the 'Unity Group', a new anti-RPC faction, was created.

The Unity Group, despite its London origins, was overwhelmingly based in Lancashire.[66] Indeed, the Unity Group leadership was virtually synonymous with the Lancashire Divisional Council. The Divisional Council passed, without exception, resolutions supporting the Unity Group. For example on the Group's formation the Council immediately announced that it was ceasing joint activity with the Communists and declining to support United Front activities for branches. Indeed, in direct contravention of national policy, on the 20 June the Divisional Council sent a letter to each branch suggesting that joint activities with the Communist Party should stop. The Unity Group also effectively controlled the ILP's resources in the Division, whilst the new Group established its own bulletin, the focus for the Unity Group remained the Lancashire Division's official monthly newspaper *Labour's Northern Voice*.[67] That is not to say that the Division unanimously accepted the Unity Group position. Particularly in Liverpool there was significant opposition to these actions. The Liverpool federation, continued to engage in United Front activity and argued that the ILP could work with the Communist Party without losing its distinctive identity.[68]

Subsequently the federation withdrew its endorsement of Elijah Sandham, the Divisional Chairman, as the prospective ILP candidate for the Liverpool constituency of Kirkdale, where Sandham had previously been an MP and they accused the rest of the Division of being stuck 'in the reformism of pre-Bradford days'. Liverpool threatened the rest of the Division suggesting that whilst they would accept disagreement with the policy, they could not accept the flouting of the policy.[69]

In addition to United Front activity the Lancashire Divisional Council was deeply concerned about proposals to introduce elements of democratic centralism to the Party, including in the financial focus on fund-raising for central, rather than local, initiatives.[70] These matters were raised on the NAC where Jack Gaster, supported by CA Smith and Jim Garton called for immediate action because of Lancashire's refusal both to co-operate with the Communist Party and to operate the expected fund raising structures.[71] The NAC sent John Paton, who had considerable personal sympathy with the Lancashire position, to try to sort matters out. However, his trip to the Lancashire Division was unsuccessful and the Divisional Council refused to withdraw its anti-United Front circular with the Divisional Conference passing a further resolution against the United Front by a vote of 31–26.[72] As a response Gaster argued that the Divisional Council should be expelled or, failing that, that its grant should be withheld. This was rejected, although the NAC did pass a censure of the Lancashire Council.[73] The Unity Group dismissed the censure arguing they were acting in accordance with the constitution of the Party, which contained specific reference to the importance of parliamentary activity and that only conference, not the NAC, could override the constitution. For the Unity Group the suggestion of disloyalty could only appropriately be aimed at the RPC, which they argued it was destroying the Party.[74]

By the beginning of 1934, the Unity Group's opposition to the RPC in Lancashire had crystallised into complete and open opposition to the ILP's national policy. The report of Lancashire's January Divisional Conference in *Labour's Northern Voice* was entitled 'Lancashire Again says no', they saw themselves as rejecting the Communist inspired politics that had been adopted nationally and arguing for a return to the earlier constitutional policy of the ILP:

> 'No' to the wrecking policy of the Communist Party
> 'No' to the advocates of working-class insurrection and violence
> 'No' to the abandonment of legality that is strength
> 'Yes' to the policy of constitutional advance to working class power and the Social Revolution.[75]

The Lancashire conference voted 29–16, for the Party to revert immediately to the policy subscribed to before the 1933 Derby Conference. A further motion, passed by 29–14, criticised the new ILP policy and called for a constitutional approach:

> The present official policy of the ILP is not a revolutionary Socialist policy for this country, has not been deduced from the facts (historical, political and economic) of this country and has no relevance to the serious revolutionary business of achieving Socialism in Britain…
> Socialism must be presented as a constitutional end to be sought by constitutional means and enforceable by a majority when the people will by the constitutional use of every force by a Socialist Government, against any anti-democratic and unconstitutional opposition by the King, the House of Lords, or by capitalistic or by financial revolutionaries. This conference believes that such an approach is acceptable to the majority of the British people and is therefore real revolutionary policy.[76]

Finally, by a vote of 21–16, the conference, although accepting continued connection with the group of international 'left' socialist parties, called for a return to the Second International, on the basis that the ILP should be aiming for an inclusive International and that the Second International had the closest connections to the organised working class.[77]

Prior to the 1934 York Conference, there was a debate within the Unity Group about whether to continue within the ILP. Some, including Elijah Sandham remained committed the ILP, others argued that the Unity Group should instead join with Stafford Cripps and the Socialist League. *Labour's Northern Voice* warned that if certain of the RPC resolutions were passed then many within the Lancashire Division would find it difficult to maintain their membership of the Party.[78]

The RPC resolutions which the Unity Group objected to were mostly defeated at the conference. However, despite Tom Abbott's

objections, the conference followed the NAC report in accepting criticism of the Lancashire Divisional Council's attitude to the United Front, *Labour's Northern Voice*, the Power Fund, the *New Leader* and the Hunger March, by a vote of 135–31. The Unity Group's ethical socialist policy was rejected by a vote of 101–61. This policy moved was on behalf of Manchester City branch by Norwich's John Middleton Murry the motion emphasised the ethical basis and parliamentary traditions of the Party:

> In a country where the industrial working-class is in a majority, a socialist regime can only be firmly based on the enlightened democratic assent of the majority of people. It is therefore an essential part of the work of a Socialist organisation to propagate not merely "Collectivist" as an economic necessity (for in this the "National Socialists" and Fascists will be equally successful), but Socialism as an ethically superior social system. Thus the ILP's propaganda must not be merely economic and addressed to the political intelligence of workers', but also idealistic and addressed to their humane intelligence, as was the practice of Keir Hardie and the pioneers of the ILP.[79]

This was further compounded by the acceptance of the organisational reform of the Party, moving to more democratic centralist structures, which were passed with 'overwhelming support'.[80]

In this situation some of the leading members of the Lancashire Division that they could have no future within the ILP. The Lancashire Divisional organiser, Tom Abbott, wrote a letter to his branch resigning his membership of the Party. Abbott's complaint was that the conference decisions removed 'every bit of autonomous freedom which members and branches have enjoyed since the Party came to life in 1893'. He was equally critical of the policy of the Party arguing that 'Workers' Councils as outlined by the ILP, will, in effect, if operated sabotage the Trade Union and other working-class instruments of struggle with capitalism.' Overall he blamed the RPC for changing the ILP into a 'fundamentally different' Party from even the one which had disaffiliated from the Labour Party less than two years earlier. Abbott had joined the ILP in 1894 at the age of 21. He had been a leading member of the ILP in Lancashire and the resignation of someone with his longevity and seniority was seen by others within the Division as definitely marking the 'end of an epoch'. Other leading members of the Lancashire Division to quit included Samuel Higgenbotham, the editor of *Labour's Northern Voice*

and Arthur Mostyn, an ex-councillor and the *Labour's Northern Voice* cartoonist. Yet the break for many was a troubling decision as the behaviour Sandham himself indicates. Prior to the York Conference Sandham had pledged his future to the ILP. He did not attend the initial meetings of the Independent Socialist Party and turned up at the meetings of those 'Revolutionary ILPers' who were planning to reconstitute the Lancashire Division.[81] Only when he was clearly rejected by the ILP and recognised that all of those with whom he had been working with in the Party had left did he join the ISP, some two months after its foundation.[82]

Those who left the ILP with Abbott were undecided about what their future held. There were two major opinions. One group, led by Abbott and Mostyn, favoured forming a new party. The others, led by Higgenbotham supported the idea of joining with the work of the Socialist League.[83] At the conference, called by Abbott on 13 May 1934, they chose to follow the first option, and to form themselves into the Independent Socialist Party, although with an eye to the Socialist League. The logic was that when the Labour Party forced the Socialist League out, there would be 'a live Independent Socialist Party to which they can turn'.[84] The conference accepted a commitment to revolutionary transformation although it affirmed that this transition 'can only be accomplished by the enlightened democratic assent of the majority of the people'. The ISP also maintained that Socialism should be presented not only as an economic necessity but also 'as an ethically superior social system'.[85] Although formally taking a position independent of any political party *Labour's Northern Voice* also effectively came over to the ISP.[86] When Sandham finally resigned from the ILP, the month after the ISP was formed, he explained his reasons; disillusionment with Maxton who had 'unexpectedly' sided with the 'Communistically minded' and the 'inner dictatorship' perhaps more that the RPC. Despite his resignation from the Party to join the ISP he did not really feel he had deserted the ILP, as he argued that the job of the ISP was to keep alive the spirit of the ILP.[87] Sandham was appointed as the first official Chairman of the ISP at its first annual convention held in Manchester on 29–30 September 1934, with Tom Abbott as the General Secretary.[88]

The formation of the ISP had led to the decimation of one of the two largest and most influential English Divisions of the ILP. Sixteen of the Party's fifty-three Lancashire Branches were lost totally and the

disruption in other areas was significant membership loss. There was also the old spectre of property disputes between the ILP and those who had left.[89] The effect of the formation of the ISP on the ILP in Lancashire cannot have been anything but disheartening to those who were trying to develop and maintain the prospects of the ILP in the area. As Maxton had pointed out at the end of 1933, whilst trying to push his traditional position of wide tolerance in all matters, 'it was obvious folly to attempt to chop away a whole Division and add to their present troubles the task of having to form a new one.'[90]

Trotskyism and the Marxist Group

In the 1930s Leon Trotsky devoted considerable time to considering and analysing the British political situation and held two separate meetings with leading members of the ILP in the period after disaffiliation, first with John Paton and then in August 1933 with CA Smith.[91] Trotsky, certainly impressed Paton with his detailed knowledge 'of even the by-paths of the English political situation'.[92] Trotsky was aware of the distance between the political reality of the ILP and his conception of a revolutionary party.[93] Nevertheless he argued that the ILP could play an important role in presenting a clear opposition to Stalinism. Thus, Trotsky urged his followers to not only to enter the ILP, but to do so wholeheartedly not to join the Party to split it and win over some of its members.[94]

The Balham Group of early British Trotskyists had had contact with members of the ILP in the South-West London Anti-War Committee and there were a number of ILPers in the London area who were sympathetic to Trotsky's ideas. Indeed, the early RPC, contained a number of Trotskyist sympathisers including Bert and May Matlow, Ernie Patterson and Sid Kemp. Reg Groves, although operating outside the ILP, devised a plan for the group to form an organised faction within the ILP's RPC.[95] By July 1933 the group had established a committee to develop and co-ordinate its ILP work.[96] However, following fierce discussions and consultations with the International Communist League, Trotsky's proposal for the group to join the ILP was put to a vote at a meeting on 17 December 1933. The majority of the group, led by Reg Groves, voted to maintain their organisation, separate political identity and paper. They argued that the best way to win over sympathetic ILPers was to debate with

the ILP, where possible, speaking as an organisation to branches of the Party, but to work with it only on definite proposals. This they argued would also have the advantage of being an appealing strategy to militants who were not members of the ILP.[97] Whilst they accepted that the ILP could become involved in the work of winning the working class to a correct revolutionary policy, they claimed that the ILP was a centrist organisation which made it 'politically shapeless and lacking any clear political position on the problems confronting the revolutionary movement'.[98]

The minority, including Denzil Harber, Stuart Kirby, Wally Graham, Dr Worrall, Max Nicholls and Margaret Johns, who favoured Trotsky's proposal, believed that an opportunity was being missed to create support for the Fourth International. Their request that the International Secretariat issue Groves's group with an ultimatum to join the ILP was been turned down, despite the International Secretariat strongly disagreeing with the British majority opinion.[99] With the British Trotskyist movement unable to agree on its future and the International Secretariat unwilling to force a decision either way, the Communist League decided to split, with the minority group joining the ILP.

The division of the small British Trotskyist movement into two sections was endorsed by the International Secretariat, which gave them equal status internationally, and the minority finally joined the ILP in February 1934. On their entry they wrote to the ILP's NAC declaring their 'sincere intention of participating in all possible Party activities,' whilst maintain the right to criticise the Party line:

> We wish to retain the right of comradely criticism and the right to fight and propagate (within the limits of the Party Constitution and discipline) our opinions, in particular the necessity for the ILP helping to build the Fourth International.[100]

There was considerable opposition to the Trotskyists within the ILP. The RPC remained strong and by this time they were firmly opposed to Trotskyism. Trotsky's contribution to the ILP's internal discussion journal *Controversy* had drawn strong rebukes from a number of RPC supporters.[101] In any case, particularly given the existing trouble with factional organisation, the ILP's NAC was never going to allow entry as 'an organised group… advocating a particular policy'. The

members of the minority within the old Communist League were permitted to join as individuals, although not as a group.[102]

The ex-Communist League members saw themselves as strict adherents of the Bolshevik-Leninist position. They contrasted their disciplined stance with that of the small number of Trotskyists in the ILP before February 1934 and clearly regarded their views as being somewhat in advance of the ILPers who maintained a Trotskyist position.[103] There were considerable tensions between these two groups of Trotskyists. Indeed initially they could not agree to even organisational unity. The ex-Communist Leaguers organised themselves into a secret fraction, which excluded those who had come to round to Trotsky's position within the ILP. Organisational unity was only secured after the failure of the secret faction to have any influence on first the 1934 ILP conference and then when their call for the formation of a Fourth International and democratic centralism within the ILP elicited virtually no response.[104] After these failings in autumn 1934 the two groups of Trotskyists joined together to form the Marxist Group.[105]

However, organisational unity was no guarantee of common purpose. By early 1935 some of the Bolshevik-Leninists who had come out of the Communist League had grown so frustrated with the functioning of the Marxist Group that a number of them had left the ILP.[106] Some of the remaining ex-Communist Leaguers felt compelled to write to the International Secretariat to complain about the 'old ILP comrades':

> With regard to the internal position of the group of Bolshevik–Leninists, the position is far worse today than it was a year ago. A dangerous spread of centrist tendencies is to be observed within the group itself. This is of course due to the centrist environment, and has been accentuated by the fact that many of the old ILP comrades who have linked up with the Minority of the old Communist League since the latter entered the ILP have never been more than left centrists, who set a sentimental loyalty to the ILP 'their' party above the principles of BLism.

They illustrated the danger of 'making a fetish of doing ILP work and of "loyalty" to the ILP leadership and constitution' by the case of a comrade Johns, a member of the committee of the Marxist Group. At a private discussion two South African Marxist Group members privately discussed with Johns the idea that the Labour League of

Youth might under certain circumstances be a better field of work than the ILP. Johns took this discussion to his ILP branch committee and moved their expulsion from the branch and Party.[107]

These problems were then exacerbated early in 1935 when a decision was made to try to operate an inner fraction within the Marxist Group, controlling policy and corresponding with the International Secretariat. However, according to some ex-Communist League members 'there were invited a number of members of the Marxist Gr[ou]p who were by no means yet fully won over to our principled position.' The result was the initial meeting had to be aborted because a number of people walked out, some, 'the unreliable elements', because they were opposed in principle to relations with any body outside the ILP. A second meeting was called which did set up such an inner fraction. However, the inner fraction did not involve many of the prominent members of the ex-Communist League causing much resentment.[108]

Despite these problems the Marxist Group did come to have some influence within the ILP. When the Group had been formed it claimed a membership of sixty. One year later it claimed a membership in London of seventy, of whom between thirty and forty were active. Added to this were a small number of sympathisers outside London. For example, Liverpool, Keighley and Sheffield ILP all had more than one member of the Group on their respective executive committees. Based on this membership, the Group managed to win control of six branches of the Party: Islington, Holborn and Finsbury, South Norwood, Finchley, Hendon and East Liverpool. The Group did a large amount of active propaganda work through the ILP, with most notable success relating to Abyssinia and particularly when associated with CLR James, the West Indian cricket journalist and noted Marxist Theorist.[109] The Marxist Group was at the forefront of those who supported the line of workers' sanctions in Abyssinia against the ILP's Parliamentary Group, with James writing a number of influential articles in the *New Leader*. At the ILP's 1936 annual conference in Keighley the Trotskyists had considerable success in pushing the ILP towards taking a definite line supporting workers' sanctions. Indeed, James proposed a motion which was initially accepted, dissociating the Party from the Inner Executive. However, the Parliamentary Group, which dominated the Inner Executive, and Maxton in particular then pushed the conference to withdraw its decision by threatening to resign. Instead, they

pressurised the conference into delaying their decision and holding a full plebiscite of Party members on the issue.[110] The Group did also have some influence of the course of other debates. For example, at the 1935 Derby conference the Trotskyists presented amendments and resolutions to the entire policy of the NAC, and was not inappropriately described as a 'three-sided battle' between RPC, Trotskyists and the NAC.[111]

However, in the period outside of the Abyssinian Crisis it would be mistaken to suppose that this indicated a 'new balance of forces' within the ILP.[112] Marxist Group resolutions, especially where advancing a distinctively Trotskyist resolution such as a proposal for a Fourth International, received very small votes at most conferences whether Divisional or National. Further, in 1935 members of the Group were forced to concede that 'since the entry of the Minority of the old Communist League into the ILP not one old member of the Party has been won over to our position in the London Division.' Numbers were increasing only because of new members whom they 'had converted to Bolshevik-Leninism before they joined the ILP'.[113] The Group also remained fundamentally divided in its primary loyalty. Indeed the primary loyalty to the ILP decried by the London leadership of the Marxist Group became another of the stock defences of the Marxist Groupers. As a resolution adopted by Liverpool Marxist Group argued that the difference between the RPC and the Marxist Group was that the former attempted to win a few over the CPGB and to smash the ILP whilst the latter 'strives to win the ILP to a new ILP'.[114] A similar point was made in a letter from seven members of the Marxist Group to members of the ILP in March 1936. This stated that 'A Marxist Grouper is first and foremost a loyal and hardworking ILPer' although arguing for 'a clear revolutionary policy based on a Marxist analysis of the world situation'.[115]

These problems were exacerbated by an increasing antagonism towards the Marxist Group from other sections of the ILP.[116] The tensions within the Group added to the anti-factional feeling within the wider Party. Alongside the debates about the Abyssinian Crisis the Keighley conference also gave overwhelming support to the banning of internal factions – of which the Marxist Group was the only remaining example. In the six months following the conference the Group lost half its membership of just over fifty as it split into three factions. One group had found a political home within the ILP

and, aware of the allegations of disloyalty that would follow defection, argued for continuing membership of the Party. A second grouping led by Bert Matlow argued for entry into the Labour Party as suggested by Trotsky, another was led by CLR James who wanted to form an independent organisation. In the period up to October there was a gradual haemorrhaging of members. As the pressures on the Group increased so those who had been prepared to remain in the ILP accepted that they would have to leave. On 10 October a meeting was held of the Marxist Group at which there was strong pressure from Liverpool, London and Glasgow to leave the ILP. The following day a conference was held of the three major Trotskyist organisations with thirty-nine delegates from the Marxist Group, twenty-six from the Trotskyists in the Labour Party and three Marxist League delegates. A number of members including Cooper, Pawsey, Ballard and Marzillier decided to stay on within the ILP with the aim of 'splitting off the best elements from the ILP leadership'. However, the bulk of the Group and most importantly the London Marxist Group passed a resolution moved by CLR James to leave the ILP and establish an independent organisation as quickly as possible. The departure of the main group of Trotskyists from the ILP was announced in the *New Leader* with the larger organisation estimating that about thirty members were involved. Those Trotskyists who remained in the ILP were to maintain a vocal importance throughout the remainder of the decade.[117]

In the immediate aftermath of the departure of the Marxist Group, the relationship between the ILP and the Trotskyist movement was strained. Brockway, although maintaining some sympathies with their analysis was heavily critical of their conduct within the working class movement. As he put it during the Unity Campaign negotiations:

> I believe they hold a truth… yet the Trotskyists are everywhere a source of mischief in the working-class movement. They remain conspiratorial cliques in what ever Party they attach themselves to, disintegrating it, making it less effective in the class struggle, antagonising other sections of the working class.[118]

This tension further developed when the ILP refused to take the strong line required by Trotsky against the Moscow trials, when Brockway suggested a committee of independent socialists to look into the allegations.[119] Trotsky accused Brockway of being a 'Pritt No.

Two', and suggested that he could not be considered in any way a neutral arbiter. Brockway's responded that 'no "Committee for the *Defence* of Trotsky" could be regarded as fulfilling the necessary conditions of impartiality.'[120]

Despite the increasing distance, a relationship remained between Trotskyists and the ILP. Some Trotskyists, such as Ben Elsbury, joined the Party in the period 1936–9 and the small number of Trotskyists within the Party after 1936 played a highly vocal if not particularly effective role at conferences. Some worked their way through to positions of significance, within the Party organisation, most notably Ernie Patterson's activities on the ILP's Industrial Committee, where he was a member by 1938. However, the influence was most significant at local level. For example in Norwich the ILP and the Trotskyists worked together in defence of POUM whilst in Liverpool, despite the relative inactivity of the ILP the Militant Group maintained one leading member of the branch inside the ILP. Nevertheless, this pattern of mutual support was not uniformly maintained. In many areas the organisations recruited largely at the expense of one another. Thus, when the five members of the Marxist Group left the Party and joined the Militant Group the ILP branch collapsed. Conversely, in Leeds the ILP recruited four members from the Militant Group.[121] Thus, it seems that even when the number of Trotskyists in the organisation was small they could obtain positions of influence at national or local level and, albeit largely in a disruptive way, have an important influence on the wider Party.

Conclusion

Decentralised organisation and the relatively autonomy of Divisional machinery, together with leadership attitudes tolerant of dissent, gave factions space to develop. With no consensus on the meaning of 'revolutionary policy' there was little way of providing 'ideological regulation' of the acceptable limits of debate.[122] Thus, the factions in many respects mark out the limits of the ILP's ideological space, from ethical socialism to Communist and Trotskyist sympathy. Each of the factions examined had a significant impact on the policy, membership and direction of the ILP. At national level controversies over International affiliation, working with the Communist Party, internal organisation and the Party's constitution were heavily

influenced by factional activity. At Divisional level, factional organisation particularly affected London and Lancashire, thus impacting on the interplay between geographical and ideological factors within the Party. Whatever the reasons for the extent of factional activity it caused much disillusionment within the Party. Whilst most of the rest of the Party was able to experience a brief period of growth in the period from 1933–5, London and Lancashire saw sharp declines. In addition, the departure of the factions from the Party further reduced ILP membership, in the case of the Unity Group, cutting the Lancashire Division's membership in half. Factionalism remains central to understanding the ILP in the 1930s.

6

Towards a Revolutionary Policy

'At Bradford, the ILP had scrapped gradualist policies, had become a revolutionary organisation'.[1] The implications of this were to dominate debates within the Party for the next few years. At the time those involved were convinced that new formulation provided a 'clear lead' and should draw 'thousands of Socialists in the ranks of the ILP'.[2] Subsequent commentators have been less kind, with Party policy described as 'revolutionary posturing' and 'quotation mongering' and the policy makers as 'cranks' and 'ideologues'.[3] Clearly socialists were not drawn into the ILP in the numbers the Party hoped for. Nevertheless, the study of Party policy is of central importance in understanding the ideas of Party members in the 1930s. Certainly Party members took the formulation of policy seriously, as an important means of expressing their political aims and objectives. Policy, created by the Party, provided one primary means of presenting itself to a wider population of potential members and supporters. Unpicking the arguments and theme of these complex debates enables a fuller understanding of this aspect of the Party activity.

A 'New Revolutionary Policy'

The vote for disaffiliation had marked an important turning point for the policy as well as the practice of the ILP. Despite the organisational and other issues involved, the ILP decision in July 1932 had cast the breach as a clear statement of incompatibility with the Labour Party and its philosophy. The need to develop a new and revolutionary policy for the Party had become accepted by almost all those who were in favour of disaffiliation. The question of what was meant by a 'new revolutionary policy' was a major, perhaps the main, subject of debate within the disaffiliated ILP. By the end of 1933 the

Party had adopted a 'new revolutionary policy' which was to remain the basis of its programme until the outbreak of war.

In the initial debates over the creation of this 'new revolutionary policy' there were broadly three different positions evident. The first position, led by Fenner Brockway, and eventually supported by the majority of the NAC, were the main advocates of the framework which was to become the 'new revolutionary policy'. This position retained a place for parliamentary activity, but suggested the development of workers' councils as a supplement. They also promoted activity within Trade Unions, accepted the place of joint work with the Communist Party and argued for affiliation to the International 'left' socialist parties. Second, the Revolutionary Policy Committee, dominant in London, was developing a complete constitutional alternative to the NAC vision. The RPC argued for workers' councils as *the* focus for activity replacing the parliamentary struggle, for unification with the CPGB and sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern. Third, the opponents of the RPC in Lancashire and elsewhere attempted to locate the Party's new revolutionary policy within an ethical socialist framework. The downplaying of the place of parliament and its implications, ethical and otherwise, and co-operation with the Communists at local, national or International level, particularly concerned them. At a surface level three issues distinguished these position: the place of parliamentary versus non-parliamentary activity, the question of joint work with the Communist Party and the question of International affiliation. However, even where there appeared to be agreement between the different section, the language they used often concealed significant differences of motivation and meaning. This was most obvious in alternative understandings of the role of workers' councils.

In 1933, the policy of workers' councils had been introduced by the RPC with the intention of moving the Party away from its focus on parliamentary activity. These arguments had been accepted by many others including the non-RPC leadership of the London Division, John Aplin and CA Smith. As Smith argued that there was an urgent need to build workers' councils as *the* way to Socialism.

> [T]he workers must devise their alternative instrument now that the time has come for them to rise to the position of ruling class. That instrument is not new; but it must now take on a new and more

> permanent form. … It is the democratically elected Workers' Committee, the Council of Action, the Workers' Council.[4]

For rather different reasons sympathy for workers' councils extended well beyond this group, encompassing even members of the Parliamentary Group. The reasons for this more widespread acceptance in part came from a deep scepticism about Trade Unions combined with the lack of a coherent industrial policy within ILP at the time of disaffiliation. The Trade Unions were, in the minds of many ILPers at root connected with the politics of gradualism, and the failures of 1929–31. During that period and following disaffiliation Trade Union leaders made some of the most vicious attacks on the ILP whilst the ILP had not spared the Union leaders from their criticism. As Maxton argued, it was not possible to use Trade Unions for revolutionary purposes because 'in their essence they were completely reactionary' so he preferred the idea of 'local geographical organisations' to 'narrowly industrial organisations'.[5] He did not see any reason to keep friendly connections with anti-socialist organisations such the Trade Unions.[6] At the base of his views lay his own recollections of radical movements in Britain, and especially his own experiences of the Clyde Workers' Committee:

> In the two circumstances in which there has been something akin to conditions of revolution in this country – during the war and at the general strike – I saw how the workers' Councils came into being. In the war on the Clyde, in the form of the Clyde Workers' Committee, in the general strike in the form of the Strike Committee.[7]

This view was shared by the other members of the Parliamentary Group, despite their much more vigorous opposition to the new policy of the ILP.[8] Indeed, well before workers' councils had become a major issue Campbell Stephen writing with George Buchanan had written an article for the *New Leader* calling for increased emphasis on workers' councils in the working class movement

> Is it too much to hope that in every district there can be created the local machinery for Workers' Councils, which will rule out no section of the working-class movement, in an endeavour to fashion an instrument to secure victory in the struggle for a new Social Order.[9]

The widespread acceptance of the discourse of workers' council in the post-disaffiliation ILP came in part from the overlap of language but not meaning between the RPC and the longstanding interest in syndicalist ideas within the Party. Such an overlap could be used to forge short-term alliances but such agreements formed the basis for longer term conflict.

The conflict between the three positions was evident at the Party's 1933 conference. A report entitled 'The Place of Parliamentary Activities', set out the NAC position. This report, moved by Maxton, the ILP's parliamentary icon, although allowing that the House of Commons was one instrument and 'should not be thrown away' argued that the Party needed 'to disabuse the minds of the workers that parliament alone could bring about the establishment of a Socialist State'. The NAC position emphasised the importance of joint work with the Communist Party. Whilst suggesting continued affiliation to the International 'Left' socialist parties the rejection of closer relations with the Comintern was framed in terms of tactics and organisation rather than fundamental policy. A number of the RPC's proposals were broadly acceptable to the majority on the NAC. These issues included a Marxist socialist objective, opposition to Imperialism and to Imperialist war, support for the USSR, a United Front with the Communist Party, reduced emphasis on parliament and use of workers' councils and the declaration of the NUWM as the only viable unemployed workers' organisation.

However, there were also differences of some significance for understanding the political trajectory of the Party. The RPC named workers' councils as *the* alternative to parliament; the NAC saw them as one possible arena of struggle. On the question of International affiliation the RPC suggested moves to affiliate to the Comintern, rather than focus on the International 'Left' socialists. The RPC also wanted a definite commitment to the Party working for the creation of a workers' dictatorship:

> The ILP will thus endeavour to plan and to pave the way for the setting up of a Workers' Dictatorship upon the attainment of power for the carrying out of working class measures necessary in the transition period.

Supporters of the ethical socialist tradition argued it was difficult to distinguish the RPC and NAC positions, believing that the NAC had

conceded the whole of the RPC case. At the 1933 conference voices protesting against the NAC and RPC line on the rejection of parliamentary activity and work with the Communist Party, came from across the country. The overall feeling of this group was expressed by the recently deposed chair of the London Division, Allen Skinner, who claimed that the proposals were essentially just a set of Communist Party tactics. Norwich's John Middleton Murry, the noted literary critic, argued that the report was 'unbalanced, wrong in theory, and not Marxist' not least because it ignored the psychology of the British working class. Similarly concerned was Fred Jowett, the veteran Treasurer of the Party, as a pacifist and a parliamentarian argued his absolute opposition to the ILP achieving power by 'civil war' against both NAC and RPC.

The 1933 conference votes were split between support for the NAC and RPC. Parts of the RPC constitution were accepted. The section on the responsibilities of membership was passed by a vote of 142 to 37, that on the development of world socialism was passed by a vote of 91 to 68, whilst the proposed objective just scraped through by a vote of 80 to 87. The crucial section of the RPC's proposed constitution, relating to parliament and workers' councils was rejected by a narrow margin, 86 votes to 90.[10] Thus, in this respect, the constitution remained as at Bradford, with some emphasis given to the role of parliament. It made no specific mention of workers' councils, although it maintained the central importance of lines of struggle outside parliament.[11] This was accepted along with the NAC report on the place of parliament which, although less forceful than the RPC position, did give a specific mention to workers' councils.

These decisions at the 1933 conference did not resolve the central ideological disputes within the ILP. They did give the ILP a slightly altered constitution, and committed the Party to a position which reduced the place of parliament within Party activity. However, the most controversial sections of the RPC's constitutional changes had been rejected and the NAC's report contained recommendations rather than policy proposals. The conference therefore had not given the ILP a new revolutionary policy. The way in which this position should be taken forward remained controversial. Those opposed to thrust of the Derby decisions insisted that policy decisions would have to be revisited at the next annual conference. The majority on the NAC did not agree, although the body's formal role had not changed the *Administrative* Council decided that it would take upon

itself the job of formulating the detail of the Party's 'new revolutionary policy'. The NAC appointed a sub-committee, without representation from the more traditionally oriented sections of the Party, to draft a new revolutionary policy based on the principles which had been laid down at the 1933 Derby conference. In August 1933 the NAC largely accepted the policy suggested.

The new policy statement set out a comprehensive vision, which stretched from an analysis of the political and economic situation to a detailed prescription for the organisation of the ILP. The report was based on the economic collapse of capitalism, and the expected fascist response from the capitalist class, with the likely result being the outbreak of imperialist or nationalist war. The report took an extremely positive view of the Soviet Union, and committed the Party to the defence of Russia.[12] In line with the Derby decisions the new policy gave a limited role for parliamentary and electoral activity. The main use of parliament was to be dissemination of propaganda and gathering information. On the issue of co-operation with working-class organisations the first step was to secure this with others that shared the ILP's 'revolutionary outlook'. The aim was to build local 'united effort organisations' such as Anti-War Councils or Tenants' Defence Committees in the longer term into 'definite Workers' Councils, representing all sections of the working class and acting as the instrument of the immediate struggle and of revolutionary action'. The policy did state that ILP 'members must be conscious of belonging to "THE" Party which will be the spear-head of the united revolutionary movement in this country.' For the time being at least a distinctive ILP identity remained important:

> ILP literature should always be kept to the front. Distinctive propaganda meetings must be maintained …and branch personnel must be used so as to retain efficient officials for the branch itself.[13]

However, especially troubling for its critics the policy also anticipated a possible merger between the ILP and the CPGB:

> The co-operation of the ILP and the CP is beginning to unify their revolutionary activity and may well facilitate the creation of a united revolutionary movement.[14]

The broad outlines of the 'new revolutionary policy' which the ILP maintained as the basis of its position were in place at the end of these discussion.

Refining Policy

In formulating the 'new revolutionary policy' considerable ground had been given to the RPC. Even those on the NAC responsible for this appear in the longer term to have felt rather uncomfortable about these compromises. The RPC itself, far from being satisfied with the 'new revolutionary policy' saw it simply as a starting point from which further developments could be attained. At the same time, for more the more traditional wing in the Unity Group, there was deep disquiet about the NAC role in formulating policy, exacerbated by the content of the 'new revolutionary policy' which in a number of respects appeared to go beyond what the national conference had agreed. Of particular concern were, first, the more definite role for workers' councils and second, and perhaps more significantly the long-term aim of forming a United Revolutionary Party with the Communists. The 'new revolutionary policy' rather than creating the basis for a new consensus merely outlined the terrain for continued disputes.

The Unity Group made a concerted but largely unsuccessful effort in 1933–4 to present an alternative policy to the RPC. Although organisationally strongest in Lancashire, others had a crucial role to play in the development of its policy. Indeed, it was supporters of the Unity Group in the Norwich branch, led by John Middleton Murry and AW Votier, who developed the most comprehensive set of policy alternatives. This group presented a special East Anglian Divisional Conference with an entire manifesto attacking the 'new revolutionary policy' and stressing the importance of constitutional means. The conference rejected the manifesto (14–5) although it did accept proposals against day-to-day co-operation with the CPGB (20–3) and against workers' councils (14–5).[15] The 1934 annual conference in York rejected similar ethical socialist proposals moved by Middleton Murray by a substantial majority without providing the compensating support for his other motions. These decisions led to the immediate departure of the Unity Group from the ILP. At the same time the RPC also attempted to develop its own position,

attempting to introduce forms of democratic centralism into the ILP's organisation, secure a merger with the CPGB, affiliate sympathetically to the Comintern and defending its interpretation of workers' council. In some respects the RPC did make further advances. Most notably, the organisational reforms accepted at the York conference were in line with the democratic centralist notions of the RPC. However, in most respects the advance of the RPC was checked after 1933. The 1934 conference took a definite step away from the Comintern, voting to end continued communication over sympathetic affiliation. As the RPC's own summary of the treatment of both itself and the Unity Group read: 'The right wing has been soundly defeated but the lead of the left was also rejected.'[16]

In the period to 1935 there were a number of other attempts to alter the emphasis of the ILP's policy which were in many respects more successful. Perhaps most notably, a significant group of ILPers, particularly those with closer connections to the Trade Unions, presented an influential case against workers' councils. Tom Stephenson, the North East Division's representative on the NAC, supported by the veteran Fred Jowett, led this group. Stephenson was an official with the Cumberland Miners' Association and he later became Cumberland's representative on the MFGB, and subsequently the NUM, executive.[17] He criticised workers' councils as a scheme that would sound 'quite unreal' to the working class also contrasting his view of the 'reality of the working class movement', with its strength in the industrial sphere, and the concentration of the ILP on electoral work. He argued that the ILP's role was to transform the Unions from mere bargaining organisations into democratic revolutionary organisations. This, he suggested, would require Party members to attempt to destroy the Union's sectional basis, making them into class organisations.[18] Similarly, Jowett argued that there was no need for the ILP to build any new form of organisation such as workers' councils. Although he accepted that in a crisis advanced forms of 'Councils of Actions' would probably function, but they would be built on Trade Unions and would develop from an extension of normal Union activity.[19] Thus, until such a situation arose ILP work should be concentrated on working for an effective policy within and towards the Unions.[20]

Stephenson and Jowett made a number of important distinctions in the argument. First, they addressed the issue of whether workers' councils were seen as a substitute primarily for electoral or industrial

activity. Second, they stressed the importance of distinguishing between revolutionary and non-revolutionary situations, which Brockway's formulations about the collapse of capitalism had enabled the Party to initially ignore. Although the ILP made no formal change to policy on the basis of their arguments there were substantial informal shifts towards this position. These were presented at the 1935 ILP conference, again held in Derby, where the NAC produced what purported to be a 'clarification' of the ILP's new revolutionary policy. On the issue of workers' councils in particular as well as on a range of other issues this presentation masked considerable shifts of emphasis. In the 1935 statement workers' councils maintained an important place, but the policy declared that their relevance would be primarily in 'actual revolutionary crisis'. The commitment to 'consistently prepare for their organisation' fell far short of the RPC's interpretation of workers' councils as an immediate replacement for parliamentary and industrial activity apparently accepted in the 1933 policy statement. There were other shifts away from the RPC as well. In 1933, there had been also been a commitment to work for unity with the Communist Party, as the only named organisation of 'revolutionary socialists', and to look for sympathetic affiliation with the Comintern. In 1935, these were made with qualifications that had not been present in the earlier statement. Stress had shifted to a search for unity with *all* revolutionary socialists including those who remained in reformist organisations such as the Labour Party and the Labour and Socialist International, moving away from the CP and RPC proposals for unity with the Communists at an early date. There was also an acceptance of a role for non-NUWM unemployment organisations. Each change moved the Party towards a slightly more flexible outlook, accepting the view that somewhat different practical considerations applied in different areas. The changes also tended to move the Party back towards a view of continuity with the ILP's past, stressing the evolution of its 'revolutionary policy' since 1925, rather than the view that post-1932 policy was a radical break with the earlier period.[21]

The 1935 policy decisions were designed in part to marginalise the impact of the RPC and represented the beginning of an effort by the Party's leadership to ensure a unity of outlook and operation. From 1935, conference debate was tightly structured around a programme of high profile policy issues decided on by the NAC and the 1936 Keighley Conference outlawed factional activity within the ILP.

These attempts at control were partially successful. In 1936 Brockway argued from the proceedings of the conference that 'the ILP is developing a clear and consistent line of Revolutionary Socialist Policy and action.' He felt able to make similar assessments of the conferences from 1937–9. Indeed his view of the 1938 Manchester Conference was unequivocal:

> A feature of the conference was the unanimity of the delegates on basic principles. During the last four years the policy of the Party has been so clarified that the whole membership now starts all its thinking with a common attitude of mind.[22]

According to Brockway this common ground came from the shared understanding of all Party members as to the nature and consequences of the Capitalist system. This generated a set of 'basic principles' which he suggested could be put into a single sentence:

> War, Fascism, Imperialism and Poverty – all are the result of Capitalism; Capitalism can only be fought by the method of the class struggle; therefore the results of Capitalism can only be resisted by intensifying the class struggle.[23]

There was indeed an appearance of unanimity and agreement particularly at the 1938 Manchester Conference and to a lesser extent at the 1937 Glasgow Conference. However, Brockway's presentation of unanimity of fundamental outlook as the basis for this apparent unity is rather misleading. In part the apparent unanimity was a result of the organisational changes, which enabled the NAC to structure the main debates precisely around those issues on which there were no major conflicts, such as the condemnation of Imperialism, expressions of support for the Spanish Republic and attacks on the Means Test. Thus, the lack of conflict represented as much a conscious attempt to foster unity within the Party as an indication that there were no important issues on which the Party was fundamentally divided.

Further, the Party's policy did see considerable controversial change in the period 1935–9. One fundamental change was the development of the initial United Front strategy into the distinctive Workers' Front policy. The Workers' Front was developed in the wake of the Unity Campaign and first introduced at the Party's 1937

Glasgow conference. As in its United Front policy, despite maintaining a stringent criticism of the Labour Party especially on foreign policy issues, the need for unity with working class organisations was stressed. However, the Workers' Front, saw a federation of working class organisations coming together under the framework of a Labour Party with centralised discipline relaxed.[24] Within the ILP the most controversial aspect of this outlook as elaborated in Brockway's 1938 book *Workers' Front*, was the attempt to redescribe the labour movement in a way which encouraged attempts to rejoin the Labour Party.

As discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters the ILP also reconsidered its attitude towards the Soviet Union. Developments in the International sphere; the Soviet Union's decision to join the League of Nations, the Communist response to the Abyssinian Crisis, the conflicts with the Communists during the Spanish Civil War, culminating in the 'Moscow Trials' were behind these changes. The initial uncritical stance seen in the *New Russia* supplement to the *New Leader* was revised in stages. By the end of the decade, although residual admiration for the Soviet Union remained, particularly relating to economic structures and apparent economic successes this was outweighed by an increasingly outspoken critique of the methods of government in the USSR, and of Stalin himself. Along with these changing attitudes towards Russia came a changing approach to questions of International affiliation. The Comintern fell off the Party's agenda and along with it any thoughts of developing a united revolutionary party with the CPGB.

The debates behind these changes were not always fraternal in nature. Indeed, the arguments over the Party's attitude towards fascism and war were sufficient to cause some of the most acrimonious debates in the ILP's history. These divisions were evident over a long period of time, but came to a head in two separate debates surrounding the actions and attitudes of the Parliamentary Group in the second half of the decade. First, the debates about the Abyssinian Crisis, which after the departure of the RPC, saw a division between a pacifist inclined element within the Party, which wanted to remain neutral between rival dictators, and those who argued for workers' sanctions against Italian imperialists. In these debates the Parliamentary Group, used its privileged position within Party's Inner Executive to push the neutrality line. Eventually, when the 1936 conference voted in favour of workers' sanctions

Maxton, by stating the Parliamentary Group's refusal to implement this policy, effectively blackmailed the conference into reconsidering. Second, the Parliamentary Group, again basing it actions on a reasoning which saw war as the worst of all possible options, offered support to Chamberlain's Munich Agreement in 1938. For Maxton this support was tempered by a distancing from Chamberlain's political philosophy and was run through with a clear anti-imperialist stance, but John McGovern offered much more wholehearted endorsement of the Chamberlain's actions. The NAC and the Party as a whole were fundamentally divided over the Parliamentary Group's actions. The implication was that far from having reached a point of carefully considered consensus, basic questions such as the appropriate response to fascism and war, remained capable of exposing fundamental divisions within the ILP.

Conclusion

By the second half of the decade, Brockway portrayed the ILP's policy consensus as its greatest strength. Other noted commentators have been equally convinced that the ILP's policy remained 'indefinite and hazy', vacillating between incompatible poles.[25] The implication in either case is that policy is crucial to understanding the prospects and potential for the Party. The ILP's 1933 'new revolutionary policy' was presented as a significant break from its earlier 'Socialism in Our Time' stance. This policy represented a rupture with parts of the ILP's traditional position and was a significant victory for the Revolutionary Policy Committee, although also linked with the ongoing syndicalist sympathies of many other Party members. This 'new revolutionary policy' remained central to ILP's political outlook until the outbreak of the Second World War. However, by redefining terms and removing ambiguities significant changes were made, which represented the changing balance of power within the Party. The detailed analysis of the changing policy of the ILP indicates the part which the Party's political theory had in the struggle between competing factions. Such a study also shows the way in which, at times, such as during the Abyssinian Crisis, the leadership could manipulate contested elements of policy to suit their own needs. Many of those who disagreed strongly with policy would leave, in the case of the ISP and the RPC taking significant sections

of the organisation with them. In these ways the detailed policy of the Party was crucial to retaining members. A different policy for the ILP could perhaps have helped the Party lose less of its members. However, there is little indication, particularly when policy is considered alongside electoral and local activity, that a changed political philosophy could have provided the ILP with a significant tool for recruitment during the 1930s. A study of the Party's policy reveals much about the disputes within the ILP, but tells us little about how the Party could have recruited more effectively.

7

Infiltration and Co-operation
Communism and the ILP

'We say in all seriousness that the principles for which the ILP stand represent…an opportunist poisoning and a foul corruption of the workers' movement which it is our job to drive out of the working class.'[1] So Harry Pollitt summed up the Communist attitude towards the ILP in its Class-against-Class period. On the ground the CPGB may have found it difficult to continuously sustain opposition between the parties, indeed in January 1932 the CPGB Central Committee had noted that '[p]articularly dangerous deviations were made by the Party in the struggle against the ILP which is an inseparable part of British social fascism'.[2] By the mid-1930s the CPGB line had changed. No longer was it arguing that they were 'not interested in any false and unprincipled unity with the leaders of the ILP'.[3] Instead they were 'thoroughly convinced that the creation of a united mass revolutionary party through the unification of the ILP and the Communist Party is only a matter of time. The first steps have been taken, and we must hurry to complete the job.'[4] ILPers struggled to come to terms with this changing Communist line. Even those most sympathetic to the CPGB accepted it could appear 'to some ILPers as largely a party of jargon and phrases with a rank-and-file prepared to substitute blind faith in those phrases for a reasoned understanding.'[5] Opponents of association with the Communist Party were obviously more hostile, 'certain that there [was] a real majority who [were] sick of [the ILP's] futile association with the CP and all that it entails'.[6] The question of relations between the ILP and the Communist Party oscillated wildly as the respective organisations changed their lines. The only constant may have been the controversy which the issue aroused.

From 'Class-against-Class' through 'United' to 'Popular Front'

From 1917 substantial sections of the ILP had been enthusiastic in their support of the Russian revolution and in 1921 the ILP had famously considered and then rejected affiliation to the Comintern. Throughout the 1920s the ILP had maintained a position of support for Communist affiliation to the Labour Party and its members had been prominently involved in a number of initiatives to bridge the gap between Labour and Communist parties such as the National Left Wing Movement. Building on these activities and attitudes as the ILP sought to develop it new revolutionary stance after disaffiliation, the question of relations with the Communists was an important yet contested issue. As in the 1920s, the question of attitudes towards the Communist Party and attitudes towards the Soviet Union were separate but linked. The Revolutionary Policy Committee was at the forefront of moves to increase connections with the Communist movement both domestically and internationally.

Some leading members of the ILP, including Brockway, were also convinced of the need for united action with the Communists, and were at the forefront of calls for unity. However, there was also widespread scepticism about the CPGB and its role in the working class movement. As John Paton later suggested many within the ILP viewed the CPGB as practically useless:

> [I]t must be remembered that the history of the Communist Party up to this point had been one of consistent and gross failure. It had proved completely incompetent to turn to account in any effective way a situation of economic and political crisis which seemed made for it. Every single policy and tactic to which it hand put its had had ended in futility and frustration.[7]

Even for ILPers sceptical of the united action with the CPGB the Soviet Union could be a counter-acting force. At the time of disaffiliation the ILP promoted an almost completely uncritical admiration of the USSR most obviously expressed in the Party's *New Russia* supplement to the *New Leader* which came replete with accounts of social and economic progress and images of clean modern Russian constructions. Even those critical of the CPGB such as John Paton shared in this view, arguing that the 'reflected glory of

the immense Socialist achievements in Soviet Russia' was the CPGB's only strength.[8]

However, those elements seeking to push the ILP towards the CPGB in 1932 could expect no reciprocation from the Communists. The Communist Party's 'Class-against-Class' policy, introduced in 1928, attacked left-wing 'social democratic' organisations such as the ILP for blocking the progress of an 'increasingly revolutionary' working class to the Communist Party. As time passed the Communist attacks on the Labour Party and the ILP became more vicious and the accusations made against them became more outrageous. Whilst overlooking perhaps more obvious examples such as slavery, child labour and actual fascism, by 1932 the CPGB claimed the ILP's declarations of left-wing intent were the 'greatest crime ever committed against the working class'. Harry Pollitt, argued that there could be no common ground between the ILP and the Communist Party:

> Comrades, [the ILP's] confusion is not accidental, not a result of stupidity, not a mistake. It is the deliberate policy of the ILP. It is consciously thought out, fostered and stimulated in order to confuse the struggle, to create doubt and hesitation in the minds of the workers ... with such a party there can be no talk of unity, no talk of anything in common, and there can only be a war to the death.[9]

Despite such rhetoric the ILP thought it detected changes in the Communist Party's line towards the end of the 1932. The CPGB decided to extend it 'United Front from below' that is to work with the ILP rank-and-file but not with the leadership.[10] The CPGB argued that this would allow joint activity against fascism and war without the Party becoming tainted by its connection to the social fascist ILP leadership. In most respects this attitude precluded the ILP from accepting the proposed activity. Nevertheless it signalled a change tactics from the times when Communists had been expelled as 'Trotskyists' for working with ILP members.

Some of these tensions could be observed in the 1932 Hunger March. The March, organised by the Communist-led NUWM was prepared to accept some help and assistance from the ILP and other labour movement organisations. However the organisation was reluctant to give credit non-Communist organisations. In Lancashire, where anti-Communist Party feeling was especially strong the

Division voted to give no support to the March. Even where the ILP was prepared to assist there were difficulties, which were especially evident where the ILP was a stronger force than the Communists. In Norwich, for example, where the ILP dwarfed the Communist Party, the ILP voted to support the March but in practice played no perceptible role in organisation.[11] Pre-existing bad feeling between the ILP and the NUWM was exacerbated when the Marchers reached London. On their arrival, John McGovern's request to present the Marchers petition to parliament was refused after a meeting with the March leaders, Wal Hannington, Sid Elias and Harry McShane. A furious McGovern, returned to parliament and gave an infamous speech denouncing the leaders of the Hunger March for refusing to accept constitutional techniques, claiming they were going to rely on 'their massed strength to force parliament to allow their deputation to appear'. McGovern's speech was widely cited by the press as proof of the intentions of the Marchers.[12]

The tentative 'unity from below' policy, with associated tensions, was radically transformed into a real 'United Front' policy following the rise of Hitler to power early in 1933. On 4 March the ILP's NAC wrote to the other 'working class' organisations to suggest common action.[13] The following day the Communist Party issued a similar invitation. John Paton, ILP General Secretary, stressed that the aim of the proposals was to get joint activity with *all* other working class groups 'from the Co-operative Party on the right to the Communist Party on the left', primarily with the Labour Party and the TUC.[14] He hoped that some local links with the Labour Party could be maintained by the ILP, even after its 'clean break' with the larger organisation. However, after the Labour Party executive, the TUC General Council and the Co-operative Party all declined the invitations the ILP was left in a United Front with only the Communist Party, which represented a significant victory for the RPC.[15]

Beginning on 17 March 1933 the two parties began a series of talks about joint activity. At the first meeting, the parties agreed to pursue joint action particularly at the local level and ideally including other working class organisations. Critically the agreement also suggested that both parties should completely abandon 'inter-party attacks and criticisms' in any joint activity, and accepted that there should be a 'sincere concentration on the common objectives'.[16] The first such shared organisation secured was a mass demonstration against

Fascism on 2 April.[17] This combined activity with the CPGB appeared to both critics and advocates to represent a new direction for the ILP. Consequently it was one of the items most fiercely debated within the Party, not least at the ILP 1933 conference in Derby. With the RPC at the height of its influence there was widespread support for a policy of joint activity with the Communist Party. In line with the moves in this direction already in place, the NAC case, put by Maxton's was that the ILP could engage with the CPGB without subordinating their identity.[18] There was also considerable discontent at these proposals from many of the ILP's strongest Divisions including Lancashire and Scotland on the basis that 'experience has shown that common action with the Communist Party is impossible.'[19] The subsequent 'clarification' of the policy decisions within the NAC took matters further accepting the RPC's proposal to form a united revolutionary party with the Communists and other revolutionary elements.[20] Similarly the Communist Party adopted a policy of working towards unification with the ILP.[21]

Despite moves towards unity the relationship between the ILP and the CPGB remained troubled, with these difficulties perhaps most evident in the Party's relationship with the NUWM. During 1933, as relations between the ILP and the Communist Party relaxed, so the ILP, on a motion from the London Division, made the significant declaration that the NUWM was the only 'genuine movement of the Unemployed'.[22] Those who opposed this decision, including important voices from Glasgow, Norwich and Bristol as well as the bulk of the Lancashire Division, argued for the need to support 'all organisations that fight the cause of the unemployed'.[23] Many of these organisations had been set up by the TUC to oppose the Communist dominated NUWM and in some places, such as Norwich, were supported by the ILP.[24] There were also a series of unemployed organisations set up and run by the ILP including the Chorley Unemployed Workers' Rights Committee set up by the ILP in June 1932, and the Ferryden Workers' Rights Committee, the only two for which any extensive records appear to remain.[25] As Scottish Hunger March leader and Communist Harry McShane noted the ILP attitude towards the NUWM was far from consistent:

> The ILP seemed to do strange things at times. Sometimes they would support us. Then they tried to form separate Unemployed

> Committees, separate entirely from us. They and the British TUC were doing the same thing, forming rival bodies.[26]

Thus, whilst the relations between the ILP and the NUWM improved significantly between 1932 and 1934, significant issues remained unresolved.

Nevertheless, the change in attitude of the from the CPGB did enable the ILP to play a significant role in the 1934 Hunger March. In the call to establish the 1934 March and Council Committee the ILP, Labour and Communist parties were all reasonably equally represented.[27] John Aplin, the ILP London Divisional Organiser took on the role as joint Secretary of the March and Alex Gossip sat on the Council as well. Of the nineteen signatures to the manifesto presented to the meeting at the end of the March, five were of ILPers.[28] ILPers also played significant roles in the Lancashire, South Wales, East Anglian and perhaps most notably the Scottish contingents of the 1934 Hunger March. In Lancashire this was largely through the influence of Bob Edwards, who claimed that by the end of the March he was doing most of the actual planning, was elected Chairman of the Lancashire contingent's Marchers Control Council, and felt himself to be the 'real leader' of the March.[29] In the South Wales contingent the ILP had some influence through Claude Stanfield, a Merthyr councillor eventually elected as one of the contingent leaders and WE Rowlands, the chair of the Merthyr Unemployed Miners' lodge who was active in organising the Merthyr section of the March.[30] In Norwich, where the Communist Party had little influence, the ILP joined up in a 'Unity Committee' with the relatively weak NUWM to organise the East Anglian contingent.[31] John McGovern's autobiography claimed a significant role for himself in organising the 1934 Scottish contingent, although this is contested by Harry McShane's whose recollections written in 1978 make a point of playing down McGovern's involvement.[32] However, other members of the ILP played a perhaps less contested role. John Heenan, one of the ILP's Glasgow councillors was amongst the official leaders of the contingent together with McGovern and McShane, Peter Kerrigan and George Middleton of the Communist Party. Together with Heenan, other ILP councillors including Joseph Taylor and David Gibson, joint Treasurer of the campaign committee, put considerable particular effort into the March. Despite conflicting recollections of respective contributions, both ILP and

Communist Party accounts suggest that the co-operation made the conduct of the March much easier than in the sectarian conditions of 1932.[33]

These developments also affected the ILP in its relationship with the Communist Party more directly. As an NAC survey of branch activity in early 1934 revealed many branches took the instructions seriously and engaged in co-operative activity with the Communist Party. The survey, which elicited responses from 137 of the 353 branches contacted, also revealed some rather surprising patters. 45 of the branches were engaged in general co-operation with the Communist Party, but a greater proportion were engaged in such activity in Lancashire (4 yes 13 no) than London and the South (5 yes 21 no). Scotland had the greatest proportion of branches engaged in general co-operation (20 yes 15 no). This joint activity appears to have done little to enamour the CPGB to ILPers. As John McGovern, a noted adversary of the CPGB, argued, 'in all parts of the country members are "fed up" with the behaviour of the Communists.'[34] The survey of branch opinion showed a small but clear majority against co-operation between the two parties in general activities (63–58). 66 branches were for limiting future co-operation with the CPGB to specific issues, 44 were against such a limitation. 30 branches including seven in Lancashire were for complete discontinuation of co-operation with the CPGB.[35] The decisions to increase co-operation with the CPGB led to the loss of leading members such as MP Richard Wallhead and General Secretary John Paton, but must also have led to the departure of many lower level activists. In light of this survey the 1934 ILP Conference, with the RPC on the defensive, decided to limit co-operation to specific matters. The following year in correspondence with the Communists, Brockway outlined three common problematic elements ILPers experienced in attempts to work with the CPGB. These were: sectarianism 'which saw a CP faction formed in every committee', 'appointments to positions ... on party lines rather than on the suitability of the person for the job' and 'over summoned committees' leading to excessive amounts of work for very little return. In addition to this Brockway noted there were often specific local factors citing Merthyr where the CPGB had used the NUWM against the ILP in the 1934 by-election.[36]

A further step away from unity was taken as the ILP adopted a more critical stance towards the Soviet Union. After the Soviet Union

joined the League of Nations in 1934 the USSR's foreign policy became a major issue within the ILP. Many within the ILP remained convinced that the League was in Lenin's words a 'thieves' kitchen'. Having developed a revolutionary policy which stressed the centrality of class in the construction of unity and action they could not accept the reversal which appeared to lie at the heart of the Soviet policy. Brockway was amongst those most troubled and himself wrote a series of strongly worded criticisms in the *New Leader*. Under the influence of the RPC in April 1935 the London Divisional Council, unsuccessfully attempted to prevent Brockway from attacking the diplomacy of the Soviet Union in the *New Leader*.[37] However, doubts about this aspect of Soviet policy even extended into the upper reaches of the RPC. Jack Gaster, controversially attending the London District Committee of the CPGB as a fraternal delegate did stress his desire for a united revolutionary party, but he also questioned the CPGB's manner of communicating about the Soviet Union:

> I ask you therefore if you wish to assist closer unity not to repeat just the phrase that Soviet Union foreign policy is a weapon in the hands of the workers for the preservation of peace for the time being. … [It is] difficult for ordinary workers to understand when they have drummed into them from a hundred and one sources that this shows growing unity between the Soviet Union and Capitalist countries in contradistinction to the growing unity between the Soviet Union and working class forces.[38]

These questions, in Gaster's case, indicated deep doubts about the wisdom of Soviet policy itself. For the CPGB these questions about the Soviet Union were central to understanding the failings of the ILP. Pollitt placed the blame for the difficulties in relations on the lack of lead given by the NAC and the attacks on Soviet foreign policy in the *New Leader* along with a 'bias against those proposing United Front activity'.[39] This was combined with the CPGB's move from United to Popular Font, aiming to establish co-operation against fascism and war including with non-working class organisations. This raised the spectre of an increasing ideological difference between the ILP, who retained the centrality of class in their analysis, and the Communists.

> CP policy is to build up the widest possible front for the maintenance of the "status quo" both by independent working-class action and by support of any Capitalist government which will take a sufficiently resolute line of opposition to Fascist countries… Before we are taken in by talk of "collective security" let us ask ourselves "collective security of what?"[40]

Although both parties retained their official position of working towards the formation of a united revolutionary party through to 1935, relations were becoming increasingly strained.[41] By the middle of 1935 blunt criticism between the two organisations was again a frequent feature of both parties' propaganda organs. The *Daily Worker* criticised a wide range of ILP policies, particularly relating to the Communist International and for trying to find 'the impossible ground between the Communist Party and the Labour Party'. The ILP in return accused the Communist Party criticisms as 'repetitive propaganda speeches'.[42] After the RPC left to join the Communist Party in November 1935, and the decision of the CPGB to withdraw its support from ILP candidates shortly before the general election, the previously frequent meetings between the leaderships of the two parties ceased.[43] At the ILP's 1936 conference in Keighley this breach was formalised. The NAC indicated that, despite continuing activity at local level, co-operation with the Communist Party was declining.[44] The conference reversed the 1933 policy statement and declared that it was no longer working to form a united organisation with the Communist Party.[45]

This increasing distance between the ILP and the Communist Party could be clearly seen in the organisation of the 1936 Hunger March. There were no ILPers on the Marchers Council in 1936 whilst the thirty members of the London Reception Committee included only three ILP members, in sharp contrast to the situation in 1934 when there had been eight ILPers on the Committee.[46] With no ILP representation on the Marchers Council, which was responsible for the reception in London, no ILP speakers were included in the official greeting of the Marchers.[47] An even clearer snub was delivered when the Council did request ILP speakers for its meetings in the ILP stronghold of Glasgow.[48]

These forms of exclusion were all the more problematic because the ILP sought to fully engage itself in the 1936 March. The ILP

made efforts to suggest the importance of the March, as the London Divisional Council put it, the March had:

> Struck a resounding blow against the means test and marchers played a 'decisive role' in breaking the reaction decision of the TUC and the Labour Party against the United Front.[49]

In London John Aplin was picked out by the Police Special Branch as one of the main activists on the London Reception Committee.[50] The ILP assisted with the contingents where it could, most notably in South Wales, where the contingent contained over thirty ILP members, including Trevor Williams and WJ Powell of the ILP's Welsh Divisional Committee. Perhaps the most famous image of the 1936 March, of one of the Marchers carrying a red flag past Windsor Castle was an image of a Merthyr ILPer. Doris Young, wife of the ILP's South West Organiser Wilfred Young, kept with the March from Bristol becoming known as the 'General Secretary to the March', producing the Welsh Marchers' bulletin from ILP head-office and typing 'innumerable' letters every day. The ILP was also prominent in helping the South Wales Marchers en route. At Cardiff the ILP branch put two halls at the disposal of the Marchers. At Newport it was Albert Richards, an ILP stalwart who was responsible for raising the money to make them comfortable. At Bristol, where Fred Berriman, was joint Secretary of the Reception Committee, the ILP branch accommodated 85 Marchers and the ILP's Kingsley Hall, acted as the Marchers' headquarters. In Swindon the Marchers stated that if it had not been for the ILP they would have been left stranded. Whilst passing through Slough and Staines the organising Secretary of the Reception Committee was TS Porter, Secretary of Slough ILP.[51]

The apparently conscious exclusion of the ILP in official receptions for the Marchers caused considerable resentment with the ILPers in the contingents, especially the Welsh contingent. As a response the ILP leadership organised its own reception addressed by Maxton, Campbell Stephen and Frank Gant.[52] Only after extended negotiations did the ILP secure some involvement in the official demonstration and the end of week meeting in Trafalgar Square.[53] These frustrations were exacerbated when they heard that, the Popular Front policy of the Communist Party meant that they would be expected to pay tribute to the Cenotaph war memorial. The Welsh ILPers approached the Party leadership, which advised them to

maintain solidarity but to sign a letter of protest.[54] The Welsh Marchers led by the ILPers, but supported by others, including five Communists, refused to participate in the ceremony. The CPGB suggest that the ILP leadership had organised this protest in order to disrupt the arrival in London.[55] The Welsh Marchers objected:

> It cannot be too plainly stated that the protest was purely spontaneous from rank-and-file and did not come as a suggestion from any 'ILP leader'. Only after we had reported our opposition did the ILP leaders intervene. Then the national Council of the party whilst endorsing our protest instructed us to take part in the ceremony.[56]

Contrary to the suggestions of leading Communists the ILP had no representation on the Marchers Council, which had decided to march past the cenotaph, and there had been no ILP presence in the majority of the official organisation and speaking arrangements. In contrast to 1934, despite the attempts of Party members to take an active role in the organisation and conduct of the March, the ILP was increasingly marginalised from major parts of the militant working class movement.

The Unity Campaign

The Socialist League was formed in 1932 by an amalgamation of ILP affiliationists and a small number of Labour Party intellectuals. Members of Socialist League, by refusing to split from the Labour Party were denying the validity of the disaffiliated ILP's political project. Thus, it was inevitable that initial relations between the League and the ILP would be antagonistic, often spilling over into legal disptues about the ownership of property.[57] However, by the middle of the decade, with many of the immediate conflicts that surrounded disaffiliation receding into the distance, contacts between the two organisations began to increase. Before the 1935 ILP conference Brockway and Maxton engaged in talks with the Socialist League in order to try to achieve some basis for united action.[58] The Labour Party heard about the meeting and challenged the executive of the Socialist League on their relationship with the ILP. JT Murphy, the League's General Secretary, was quick to strip the meeting and agreement of any significance, claiming that 'the members of the Socialist League who were present… were there in their personal

capacity and in no way representing the Socialist League.'[59] Following the CPGB's Popular Front turn many in the Socialist League, which still followed a United Front line, believed that the ILP, represented the best hope for a real revolutionary socialist party.[60] The ILP too was showing signs of further warming towards the League. Brockway noted of the 1936 Socialist League conference that there 'was ability' and there was a 'revolutionary spirit among many of the delegates'. He also commented that there was less evidence of the 'careerist elements' although, he remained sceptical about the overall position of the League:

> But one had the feeling of a small group of intellectual leaders without followers, and one saw, inevitably, exclusion from the Labour Party if the ideas of the resolutions and speeches are carried out. It all seemed depressingly futile.[61]

Thus, the ILP's appeals for unity continued to be directed towards the CPGB, the Labour and Co-operative parties, rather than attempting direct contact with the Socialist League.[62]

The initiative for the Unity Campaign thus came not from the ILP but from the Socialist League. Following the Labour Party's 1936 Conference HN Brailsford and a number of others led a call for a united campaign by the Socialist League, the ILP and the Communist Party. Following this the Socialist League organised a series of meetings between themselves, the ILP and Communist Party.[63] These meetings led to the endorsement in principle of a joint campaign of the three organisations. The meetings also allowed Maxton, Brockway, Cripps, Mellor, Pollitt and Gallacher to agree to a number of joint demands such as those expressed in a joint letter to the National Council of Labour urging a Campaign to demand facilities for the provision of arms to the Spanish Government.[64]

In the negotiations that surrounded the Unity Campaign the CPGB supported a programme based on the Popular Front. For the sake of unity the Socialist League followed. However, the ILP would not accept such proposals based on attempts to unite all 'democratic' forces regardless of their class position:

> We must be quite clear, however, about the basis of unity. We do not want a unity so wide that it would involve giving up the fight against Capitalism. We do not want a unity which means the surrender of the

> class struggle. For this reason the ILP rejects unity on the basis of the Popular Front. We are not prepared to become allies with the Liberal Party, Tory "democrats," or other sections of the Capitalist class.[65]

The Party was also sceptical about the Unity Campaign proposal that all three organisations should be seeking to work for immediate affiliation to the Labour Party. The ILP declared that there would need to be significant changes to the Labour Party before reaffiliation was a serious consideration. In particular, they focussed on the need for 'democratisation of its structure' and the adoption of 'an uncompromising Working-class and Socialist policy'.[66] Thus, the ILP negotiators, under instruction from their Executive Committee, agreed to sign up to the Unity Campaign, but only on the condition, opposed by the Communist Party, that they could express their reservations with the manifesto when it was published.[67]

The Unity Manifesto was launched at the beginning of January 1937 and the campaign began with a 'vast and overflowing' meeting in Manchester's Free Trade Hall. The initial meetings of the Unity Campaign certainly seemed to many within all three organisations, and beyond, to be a huge success and apparently indicated the possibility of building a mass movement. That the three organisations which constituted the majority of the self-consciously socialist 'left' in Britain could come together so publicly seemed to give a signal of hope, and the follow up meetings around the country were enthusiastically attended, as one supporter later put it:

> The greatest meetings were addressed by Maxton, Cripps and Pollitt. Each of the speakers had his own personal following and together they were irresistible. The first two or three months of the campaign proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the mass of the British workers were ready for unity. They were prepared to forget bygone differences and misunderstandings and go forward under the inspiration which the campaign gave. It is probable that we shall never see such great public meetings again in this country.[68]

However, behind this facade, from the beginning the Unity Campaign was troubled. From the ILP point of view unity was only worth achieving on a basis that did not require the sacrifice of principle. The primary principle at issue was the centrality of working class activity. As Maxton wrote in *Controversy*:

> Mere unity is barren and futile. Even unity of working class organisations is futile. The only unity that is fruitful is unity in working-class struggle. If the theoretical teachings of Marx had not in themselves been sufficiently convincing the actual experiences of the last twenty years would have proved that truth. [69]

That the Unity campaign really offered 'unity in working class struggle' was seriously questioned by many within the ILP. Indeed, the Party had agreed to the Unity Manifesto only by distancing itself from the Popular Front basis and calls for immediate affiliation to the Labour Party. Nevertheless it was prepared to stand relatively united behind the decision of the leadership to endorse the Unity campaign and at the ILP's 1937 conference the campaign was adopted with only four (Trotskyist) dissidents.[70] *Tribune* claimed that the vote 'scotched' the rumours of a split in the ILP.[71] However, the conference also clearly underlined the overwhelming sentiment of the Party against the Popular Front. The ILP's position towards the Popular Front and the consequential criticism of the Comintern and the Soviet Union drew the inevitable criticism from the Communist Party. These Communist critics were joined by some from within the Socialist League who attacked the ILP for its 'pure romanticism'.[72]

Thus, even during the most enthusiastic points of the Unity Campaign, the ILP saw a need to maintain a principled stand against the Popular Front, and the relationship which the Unity Campaign suggested towards the Labour Party was far from being universally accepted. This, combined with a reluctance from many Socialist Leaguers to enter into the Unity Campaign at all, and existing tensions between the ILP and the Communist Party in any event would have put a severe strain on the Unity Campaign. However, such dynamics had no time to work. The Labour Party NEC intervened. As soon as the campaign began they decided that the Socialist League should be disaffiliated from the Labour Party. They followed this two months later with a further decision, operational from 1 June, that membership of the Socialist League would be made incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. The Socialist League, influenced, many have suggested, by Pollitt, decided to dissolve itself before the June deadline as a 'conscious political tactic'.[73]

The ILP was sceptical about the decision to disband, whilst recognising the pressures that had led to the decision and seeing the

organisational advantages, it stressed the two disadvantages. First, the 'psychological effect of the dissolution of the League' encouraged 'the view that those within the Labour Party who support unity are on the retreat'. Second, the 'organisational disadvantage of the Socialist League decision' was that it would make it more difficult for the ILP or the CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party.[74] Within the Socialist League there was also some disquiet at the decision to disband. Some suggested, perhaps with foundation that the 'dissolution of the League was foisted on [them] by the Communist Party'. A group led by D Baker and M McCarthy, argued the need for 'a new organisation of militant Socialists within the Labour Party'. The policy of the new organisation with its anti-Popular Front, anti-League of Nations line, was similar to that of the ILP, especially as the latter had modified its attitude in relation to the Labour Party during preparations for the Unity Campaign. The policy of the proposed new group was set out in an eight point programme in line with ILP policy calling for a Workers' Front, resistance to 'imperialist war', support for colonial independence, aid to Spanish workers, the democratisation of the Labour Party and actively fighting for workers' immediate demands.[75]

Nevertheless, in public the ILP indicated that the Unity Campaign without the Socialist League could still expect to gain significant support '[t]he movement is bigger than the official prestige of the Labour leaders or their ideas of policy. It is a force which will gather strength to sweep away Capitalism'.[76] The Unity Campaign carried on with support of the National Labour Unity Committee. However, the NEC quickly stamped down on this initiative. Members of the Labour Party were forbidden from appearing on platforms with members of the ILP or Communist Party and the campaign had to be relaunched with separate meetings for Labour Party speakers and CPGB/ILP speakers. The first such meeting was held in Hull on 1 June. The advertised speakers were Maxton, Pollitt and Strauss, but because of the NEC's decision, Cripps and Mellor took the place of Pollitt and Maxton at the actual meeting.[77]

Although the ILP decided to maintain its support of the emasculated Unity Campaign it was clear that in practice this had little meaning. Branches were circulated with a petition in favour of unity with the Labour Party and Trade Unions by the Labour Unity Committee. However, the ILP went so far as to decide that its Branches should be instructed not to act on any Unity Committees with members of the Communist Party only.[78] The Labour Party

supporters of Unity hoped to make a significant impact at the Labour Party conference to rejuvenate the campaign. Instead they were heavily defeated in an atmosphere where they made little impression. However, by this stage, as Brockway put it, 'the inner spirit of Unity was dead'.[79] The situation in Spain had led to such a deterioration in relations between the CPGB and the ILP that there could be no prolonged hope of united action between the two parties.

Relations with the Communist Party 1937–39

The opening of the Unity Campaign had led to a temporary thaw in relations between the ILP and Communist Party, but the improvement was extremely short-lived. The breaking point came over the situation in Spain, and the May uprising in Barcelona in particular. Fears for the position of POUM members, and the ILPers associated with them in Spain, had been rising following the sacking of POUM leader Andres Nin from the Catalan Government in December 1936. Early in 1937 the ILP sent a circular letter to Communist Party branches raising concerns about the positions of Bob Smillie and John McNair along with Nin and Julian Gorkin, General Secretary of POUM.[80] However, it was the events in Barcelona in May which were primarily responsible for the irreversible decline of the relationship between the two parties. The Communist Party denounced POUM for its supposed part in the Barcelona uprising which the CPGB declared to be a 'fascist plot'. The presence of the ILP battalion in Barcelona along with its connection with POUM meant that denunciations of the ILP soon followed in the Communist press. The ILP responded by declaring the Communists to be involved in a 'Counter-Revolution in Spain' in which 'the Communists were on the wrong side of the Barricades'. John McNair, the ILP representative in Spain challenged Palme Dutt in an open letter about his 'slanders' against the ILP and POUM.[81]

It was quickly evident that there was little prospect of the spirit of the Unity Campaign being continued in an atmosphere where one of the three participating organisations had been disbanded and the other two were viciously attacking each other. When Brockway visited Spain in July as part of the French Committee for the Defence of the Spanish Revolution he returned talking of strong reactions against Communism and of disillusionment in the International

Brigade.[82] When Bob Smillie died of appendicitis in a Spanish gaol, due to the extreme neglect of his Republican captors, this further inflamed tensions. In Tom Buchanan's recent discussion of this episode he suggests three reasons why the ILP did not attempt to turn Smillie's death into a political issue: the protection of Republican Spain, the maintenance of relations with the Communist Party and the possibility of helping other Spanish prisoners. Whilst the first of these considerations was certainly crucial and the third also played an important role in restricting the ILP's actions, the second factor may have been of less relevance. Certainly the denunciations of the two parties had been increasingly fierce in the period after May 1937, and the ILP was not afraid of criticising the CPGB on other issues. As Brockway wrote in the *New Leader*

> The Communist Party not only in Spain, but everywhere has ceased to be revolutionary. Its Socialism is as unreal as that of the Labour Party. The object, the concern, the anxiety of the Communist Party is not Socialism but capitalist democracy. [83]

The disputes over the Spanish Civil War continued to dominate the relationship between the ILP and the Communist Party, especially after the suppression of POUM which followed the Barcelona uprising. The ILP continued its support of its brother-party in Spain and its conduct in the Spanish Civil War. The Communists continued to attack the ILP as Trotskyists and fascist agents. The *Daily Worker* first refused to print adverts for the ILP pamphlet *The Truth About Barcelona* in June and then subsequently refused to advertise any ILP material at all.[84] As the year wore on relations became even worse. ILP members writing about the 'murderous foulness of the Communist Party'.[85] Debates between the two organisations were increasingly vitriolic, with the question of Spain at the centre of immediate disagreements.[86] Those most closely associated with the ILP in Spain were given short shrift by the Communist Party. Stafford Cottman the one member of the ILP contingent who had left for Spain a member of the YCL was expelled on his return to Bristol for 'taking part in a fascist uprising'.[87] By the end of the Year, with the ILP completely hostile to the Popular Front and the Communist Party convinced that the ILP was aiding fascism, it was absolutely clear that no reconciliation could be expected.

These developments in the relationship between the Communist Party and the ILP were combined with a reanalysis of the nature of the Soviet Union. The Party had begun the decade with an official position which was strongly favourable to the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet decision to join the League of Nations, in the wake of the internal troubles with the RPC, started the Party on a path of revaluating its attitude towards Russia.

This situation was given further impetus by the situation in Spain and then crucially by the 'Moscow trials'. The ILP first debated the trials at its the 1937 conference where there was some support for Moscow, led by Jack Huntz and Bill Jones from Glasgow. Leading the opposition to the trials were the Trotskyists, Ernie Patterson of Clapham and Harry Cund of Liverpool argued the trials were 'frame-ups'. The NAC position at the conference was equivocal. Carmichael, speaking for the NAC, was not prepared to declare either way, and called for further evidence and an international inquiry by 'representative Socialists'.

In the course of 1937 the position of the Party's leadership clarified. Brockway and Maxton both expressed open condemnation of the trials and purges. By January 1938 the Party the ILP described the 'growing evidence of political tyranny'.[88] By the Party's 1938 conference the NAC had decided that the issue of the Soviet Union should form the central debate with the argument focussing on the trials and their implications. The NAC position, made by Brockway, now sought to reconcile condemnation of the internal politics of the Soviet Union with a continued defence against aggression of what was still perceived to be the world's only Workers' State.

> The ILP declares it to be the duty of the working class to defend against Imperialist aggression the USSR as a Workers' State in which the foundations of a Socialist Society have been laid.
> It deplores the continued political persecution in Soviet Russia which is undermining faith in the Socialist Regime among workers all over the world and which is being extended by the Communist International to other countries.
> It urges that there should be a return to proletarian democracy in Soviet Russia, so that the danger of bureaucratic oppression may be overcome.[89]

The NAC defence of this position placed great stress on the 'conflict between the bureaucracy and the remnants of Socialist principles' whilst suggesting three areas where some vestiges of socialism remained:

(1) Industries are still nationalised
(2) New types of collectivised peasantry exist
(3) No economic exploiting class remains in the Soviet Union.

Thus, the NAC contended, 'the basis of the Workers' State remains'. However, on the other side the NAC resolution listed a number of 'developments of a reactionary nature,' which it summarised through four points:

(1) Soviet organs of the working class have been destroyed
(2) The Trades Unions have lost their independence to fight for the working class
(3) Inner democracy of the CP has been destroyed
(4) State bureaucracy is now in control.

The overall vote of the 1938 conference was overwhelmingly in favour of the NAC line, condemning the internal developments in the Soviet Union, but maintaining support for it against 'capitalist aggression'.[90]

As a result of these decisions the ILP Parliamentary Group was instructed to write a letter of protest to Stalin, which was sent, amid considerable publicity, to the Soviet Embassy in March 1938. The letter contained 'a clear message to Stalin' calling on him to end his 'savage terror' and the 'regime of blood' associated with the show trials. The Soviet Ambassador returned the letter to the Parliamentary Group undelivered stating he 'did not feel inclined to pass it on to Stalin'.[91] There was a considerable period of time in which the ILP's position on the internal politics of the Soviet Union had been rather unclear, but by the end of the 1938 ILP conference their condemnation of Stalin was unequivocal.

This new line on the Soviet Union was, as would be expected, accompanied by a further deterioration in the already frosty relations between the ILP and the Communist Party. In this respect particularly, the 1938 ILP conference represented something of a turning point. The ILP position prior to the 1938 conference was

critical of the Communist Party for betraying its revolutionary ideals. Nevertheless, the tone of the criticism was rather moderate. For example, in early 1938, at the Scottish ILP conference, Maxton argued that the CPGB was not a revolutionary party:

> It is difficult because of its traditions to convince the ordinary man that the Communist Party is not a revolutionary party. Yet such is the case. The policy of the Communist Party to-day is not the policy of a revolutionary working class party.[92]

Brockway and CA Smith echoed the same line of criticism in the run up to the national conference when they had argued that 'the only party for revolutionary Socialists is the ILP It alone rejects class-collaboration and raises the slogan of Independent Working Class Action.'[93] The 1938 conference decisions saw a significant change in this tone and a move towards much more aggressive attacks on the Communist Party. Thus, in commenting on the CPGB's 1938 conference the ILP was prepared to strongly attack not only the policy of the Communists, but also to compare their action with that of the fascists:

> The CP is evidently as much an automaton as any Nazi party. The delegates acted as one man sang the "Internationale," clapped, shouted "Hurrah," stood up in respectful show of admiration waiting for signals to cheer or sing, just as you would expect a trained corps of Nazis to do. There can be no hope that a Party of this kind can bring human liberty.[94]

The contempt was mutual. The Communist Party continued to suggest that the ILP was receiving special favours from Franco as a Trotskyist organisation. Then during the CPGB's about turn on war in September 1939 the Communists launched concerted attacks on ILP supported organisations such as the No Conscription Fellowship. The ILP found some such attack particularly offensive such as the comments made by the Communist Party in Glasgow about the cowardice of the League:

> The No Conscription League is not a new organisation – it is an organisation formed during the last war by those people who were of military age but were too afraid to fight.[95]

The Communist dominated executive of the Glasgow Trades Council also ensured that Maxton was excluded from the speakers in all demonstrations despite, the ILP claimed, the wishes of the wider body.[96]

This mutual contempt between the two parties inevitably spilt over, preventing even the limited levels of joint activity which had previously been possible. At demonstrations and conferences ILP and CPGB delegations found themselves attacking one another. For example, in July 1938 at the Conference on 'Peace and Empire' organised by the India League in conjunction with the London Federation of Peace Councils there was a significant dispute between the ILP and the CPGB over the nature of the relative threat posed by fascism and imperialism. The *Daily Worker* commenting on the conference referred to 'a tiny minority of disrupters'. According to the ILP its delegation consisted of 45 out of six hundred delegates, that it had obtained support from Jawaharlal Nehru in the opening speech and from 'most of the delegates from the colonial workers' organisations. It did in fact obtain the votes of about one-quarter of the delegates. It was increasingly clear that at both national and local level the Communist Party had little interest in the ILP except in so far as it could belittle it in order to destroy it. Despite the fraternal gestures of the period 1933–5, by the end of the 1930's relations between the ILP and Communist Party were even worse than during the hostility of the Class-against-Class period. Yet even in the earlier period, despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Communists had had little regard for the ILP, as was most clearly demonstrated by the Young Communist League's actions towards the Guild of Youth.

The Guild of Youth and the YCL

The ILP's youth organisation, the Guild of Youth, established in 1924, had always been relatively weak. In 1932 the Guild had 64 active branches, with 36 sending frequent reports of their activities to head office. Two Guilds were lost through disaffiliation but in London a number of London League members came over to the ILP.[97] By October 1933 the Guild barely existed across many parts of the country. Only in Scotland, London and the Midlands was there a real network of Guilds although there were active but isolated Guilds in Wales and Yorkshire. The work of the Guild nationally was

hampered not only by lack of numbers but also by its weak financial position with some Divisions, most notably London, failing to return affiliation fees.[98] This weakness made the Guild of Youth an important target for the Communist Party, thus providing the clearest example of the damage resulting from Communist infiltration.

In 1932 the ILP allowed its youth organisation to decide its own policy supposedly free from any interference. Before disaffiliation the policy of the Guild had been to the 'left' of its adult party. The Guild had withdrawn from the Second International before the ILP and its acceptance of a revolutionary policy had been much more enthusiastic. Soon after disaffiliation it established a close relationship with the Young Communist International (YCI). By the end of 1933 the Guild NEC was prepared to sign up to the majority of the YCI platform. The only substantial disagreement came over the YCI's soon to be dropped social fascist discourse.[99] By March 1934 the Guild had decided to approach the YCI to consider affiliation.

The likelihood of a close relationship between the Guild of Youth and the YCI whilst the ILP was moving away from the Comintern, was a matter of major concern at the ILP's annual conference at York in 1934. The NAC report noted not only that there had been a slight decrease in numbers in the Guild but also that there had been an increasingly close working relationship developing between the ILP's youth organisation and the YCL, the possibility of conditional affiliation to the YCI was also raised.[100] The conference debate indicated discontent with the Guild's position. The Guild acknowledged that to completely ignore the ILP's wishes would be 'a fatal thing to do' whilst stressing that 'the Guild is autonomous and not bound by the decisions of this conference.' Brockway and Maxton attempted to calm the situation confirming that the Guild was within its rights and that it had 'expressed its desire to keep in line with the adult party,' and an initial motion criticising the Guild was thus defeated.[101] Nevertheless, the battle lines were drawn, the ILP was not prepared to allow the Guild of Youth to develop ever closer ties with the YCI and YCL, the Guild saw itself as an autonomous organisation with the right to develop its own policy.

This conflict was indisputably exacerbated, if not caused, by the activity of Communists within the Guild. From the time of disaffiliation the YCL had made a concerted effort to become involved in the work of the ILP's youth organisation, to win over both individuals and the organisation as a whole for the Communist

cause. The thoroughness of this organisation is indicated by the tremendous volume of material on the Guild which survives in the Manchester archives of the Communist Party, and even more by the extent correspondence and reports in the Comintern archives in Moscow. Both of these collections are several times the size of the material on the Guild in the ILP's own archives. This shows the YCL had begun organising in the Guild around the time of disaffiliation. By December 1933 the YCL was beginning to gain a foothold in England. The South East London Guild Federation was operating under the direct control of the YCL Central Committee, there were two YCL members in the Portsmouth Guild and the South West Ham Guild and single YCL members in Derby, Nottingham and Bradford. In Scotland their position was stronger still with significant influence in Govan, Bridgeton, Clydebank and Aberdeen.[102] By the early period of 1934 leading members of the Guild had been recruited to the YCL including National Secretary, Lewis Povey, and plans were underway for a co-ordinated resignation from the Guild.[103] Clearly some Communists in the Guild, such as John Lochore, later YCL organiser in Glasgow, were from a traditional ILP background, later won over to the Communist Party. Others such as Joe Goss in London joined the Communist Party first, linking up with the ILP and the Guild of Youth with the sole intention of infiltration. The YCL leadership was systematically touring the country meeting with Guilds to stir them to further action.[104] By January 1935 John Lochore was able to report that the YCL had 'penetrated into the heart of the party (sic) in Scotland'.[105] In February 1935 the YCL was able to establish a national fraction taking in every Guild Division and including leading figures such as Lewis Povey (North East and General Secretary), Joe Goss (London), Howard Hill (Yorkshire) and Sam McAskie (Scotland). The initial small scale infiltration by the YCL had built up to a situation where a majority of the Guild's leading officials were also members of the YCL, in regular correspondence with both the national leadership of the Communist youth organisation and their International organisation in Moscow.

In these circumstances the conclusion of consultations between the Guild and the Communist movement were a formality. In May 1934 three representatives of the Guild of Youth, Lewis Povey, Jack Huntz of London and Comrade McFarlane of Bridgeton, attended a meeting with the YCI representatives in Paris, to create a recommendation about whether to affiliate to the YCI. Despite the

oversight of NAC representative John McGovern, the eventual recommendation that the Guild should affiliate was never in doubt, especially given that two of the three Guild representative were in fact YCL members and the third was extremely sympathetic to their position. This report was considered at the 1934 Guild conference, held from 20–21 May in Norwich, although the report was not prepared in time to have been previously circulated. The National Guild Committee, supported by the ILP representative Fenner Brockway, opposed the reports recommendation. Brockway argued that the Communists only wanted to use the Guild of Youth 'to strike a blow' against its adult party and passed on thinly veiled threats to remove the Guild's autonomy or cut the Guild off from the adult party. The Guild choose to ignore the warnings and voted to affiliate to the YCI by 18–12.[106]

The NAC retaliated, initially refusing Lewis Povey, the Guild's representative on the NAC, entry to its meeting, then later declared that sympathetic affiliation to the YCI was incompatible with the Guild remaining the youth section of the Party.[107] The National Guild Council pleaded for time, but the NAC, in no mood for compromise made clear that a choice had to be made between the ILP and the Young Communist International:

> As an autonomous organisation the Guild must choose between its connection with the ILP and the YCI. If it decides in favour of the YCI, the ILP, as an equally autonomous organisation, will then be at liberty to reconstruct its Youth section.[108]

The National Guild Council at this time had five members of whom two, Sam McAskie and Lewis Povey, were YCL members. Of the other members Chamberlain of Leicester, Bromley of London and Evelyn Hurp of Bradford, were all hostile to YCI affiliation, indeed Hurp had connections to the Trotskyist Marxist Group, although the YCL appears to have unaware of these.[109] The Guild National Committee, accepted the need to call a special conference, recommending the termination of sympathetic affiliation by a predictable vote of 3–2.[110]

The special conference of the ILP's youth organisation, was held in Derby on Sunday November 18 1934. The National Council recommended that the Guild 'act in harmony with the ILP in national and international policy'. The conference did agree, by 22 votes to 11,

to suspended sympathetic affiliation. However, it also maintained the principle of sympathetic affiliation, making clear that it agreed to suspend affiliation only to prevent the NAC splitting the ILP and the Guild. This was combined with a forthright condemnation of the NAC.

The NAC in response, unhappy with the potential for continued conflict, carried through the threat made prior to the Guild's Derby conference, persuading the ILP's national conference in 1935 to remove the Guild's political autonomy.[111] The Guild National Council was reconstructed to give a majority of those loyal to the adult party, with an ILP NAC member, initially Jennie Lee, placed on the Council.[112] Continuing dissent from the YCL faction, led to a further round of reform by the ILP, with the adult party completely reconstructing its youth section, permitting membership only to those who supported the ILP's line.[113]

Thus, the Guild of Youth held its Special Conference in Armley in June 1935 without those who had long supported YCI affiliation. The main thrust of the conference was to reassert links with the ILP, and to set out an agenda of work consistent with the wider Party programme. First, the principle of closer connection with the ILP was endorsed. Second, the International question was resolved with the Guild accepting a policy of aiming for a united International drawing together the revolutionary elements of the Young Socialist International, the YCI and the Independent Revolutionary Socialist Youth. A resolution of protest against the decision to call the special meeting of the Guild was defeated by a two to one majority. The Guild of Youth had been dragged back into line by the ILP.[114]

The leadership of the Guild was largely reconstructed with Bob Smillie, son of the Scottish ILP Chairman, as Chairman and the Guild started a new supposedly loyal journal *Rebel Youth* which was edited by General Secretary Fenner Brockway's daughter, Audrey Brockway. Although able to report the formation of a few new branches the support of the Guild at the Leeds conference was bought at a significant price.

Following the reorganisation of the Guild at the Leeds conference a number of Guild branches joined the YCL. There were majorities against the restructuring in Aberdeen, Bridgeton, Rutherglen, Derby, Leicester and Portsmouth and overall 25 per cent of the Guild membership refused to accept the new basis of the youth organisation.[115] With the Guild weakened by these disputes over the

relationship with the YCL and the YCI it was susceptible to further difficulties. The Guild as a whole expressed discontent with the NAC reversal of line on the workers' boycott of war materials to Italy.[116] It sent a letter to the ILP unanimously supporting 'independent working class action', refusing any Guild member the right to advocate any other policy.[117] These continuing divisions with the adult party led to a deteriorating internal situation in the Guild. By the end of 1936 there was a permanent division into groups on the National Guild Committee, over the question of loyalty to the ILP. The NAC was once again compelled to intervene in the activity of the Guild, planning further controls on its activity and increasing levels of supervision.[118]

These further restrictions placed the appointment of the Guild's officials in the hands of an ILP committee and they predictably decided to appoint known supporters of the Party line to these positions. Most notably Bob Smillie, who was at that time already in the Spanish Prison he was to die in, was re-appointed Chairman with Kathleen Ellis of Leeds as Treasurer. The new mandate for the Guild stressed a breadth of non-political activities in addition to 'putting the socialist case,' including encouraging the organisation of sport, the development of craftsmanship and the stimulation of speaking choirs and socialist drama. The name the 'ILP Guild of Youth' was maintained. However, these overarching changes in effect meant the closing down of the Guild of Youth as it had previously existed. Indeed a range of activities which the Guild wished to continue such as the production of *Rebel Youth*, the recently established Guild of Youth newspaper which had been causing much of the trouble, were discontinued by the NAC to lessen the opportunities for disruptive powers to operate through the Guild.[119]

Following the reconstruction of the Guild a major effort was made to build up the youth section. A speaking tour had been planned for Bob Smillie on his return from Spain. Of course when he died in infamous circumstances in Spain the campaign had to be rearranged and was eventually conducted by Dan McArthur, the National Guilds Organiser.[120] At a superficial level the results appeared impressive enough with rapid growth reported.[121] By the ILP's Manchester Conference in 1938 the NAC described the Guild's membership as being 'of the reliable type', a significant contrast to the situation in any other period following disaffiliation.[122] However, in reality few of the Guild branches formed had any extended

existence and it is clear that, disrupted primarily by Communist infiltration, the membership and influence of the Guild of Youth had declined even faster than the adult party.

Conclusion

The events of the 1930s saw rapid changes in the relationship between the Communist Party and the ILP. The beginning of the decade had seen the ILP inside the Labour Party, critical of the Communist Party, but moving towards a more revolutionary position. Prior to 1933, the Class-against-Class line of the Communist Party saw them arguing for a 'war to the death' with the ILP. The change to a United Front line in 1933 had led to much closer relations and the development of an official policy on both sides for an eventual unification of the organisations. During 1933–4 in many parts of the country the two parties had made serious attempts to work together. However, operational difficulties, the concerted and deliberate attempts of the CPGB and YCL to infiltrate the ILP and Guild of Youth, the departure of the RPC and most importantly the adoption of the Popular Front line by the Communist Party in 1935 signalled the end of realistic possibilities of working together in the longer term. Despite the apparent promise of the Unity Campaign, the period from 1935–9 was characterised by increasing hostility between the two organisations. By the outbreak of war, following the arguments over Spain and the Moscow show trials relations reached a new low. In 1932 the ILP had been accused by the Communist Party of 'social fascism'. By 1937 the Party was accused of 'fascism' of the straightforward variety.

8

Against the Machine
Labour and the ILP

In July 1932 the ILP had declared its politics incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. Subsequently the Party had to consider its relationship with the larger organisation. The Party claimed that was 'very clear that a large mass of the rank and file, while still organisationally loyal to the Labour Party, is in thought and feeling much nearer to the ILP.' The ILP pitted Labour 'Men versus the Machine', Labour members and supports against its dictatorial organisation.[1] This placed the Party in a difficult situation, it recognised the importance of the Labour Party, it also saw many problematic aspects. It was a relationship which could not be overlooked however difficult it became. As all other independent left initiatives had and would find, these institutions simply could not be ignored.

The Labour Party

In the immediate period after disaffiliation the ILP adopted an extremely hostile position towards the Labour Party, arguing that it could aim to replace it as the Party of the working class. They refused to accept the easy answers proposed by most Labour Party members that the problems had been caused by the personal defects of MacDonald. Instead, they argued it was the absence of a revolutionary policy which condemned the Labour Party to pursuing futile activity. With the ILP claiming that the block vote and attitude of the leadership gave no opportunity for real democracy the Party argued that there was no alternative but a 'clean break'.[2] As Fenner Brockway argued in his speech after the Bradford Special Conference, Labour was a spent force: 'The Labour Party has failed

to adapt itself to the Socialist need of this new age, and today the ILP must carry the struggle a stage further'.[3]

With Hitler's rise to power in Germany the ILP changed line and began approaching the Labour Party, and other working-class organisations, to get them to engage in joint activities. The ILP issued a call for united activity on 4 March 1933, sending a letter to this effect to the Labour Party's NEC. A similar letter from the Communist Party followed the next day. Within the Labour Party's leadership only Stafford Cripps was in any way supportive of the idea of working with the ILP, and the NEC rejected the 'try-on by the ILP flea'.[4] Even where local Labour parties were in favour of united action the national party intervened to prevent it. For example, in Norwich, where the Labour Party depended on the ILP support for its majority on the council the local party moved against forming a permanent joint committee of the parties only on the direction of the NEC.[5] In February 1934 the ILP proposed a United Front over the Austrian situation. The NEC rejected the suggestion out of hand after a consultation meeting with Brockway and Maxton revealed the involvement of the CPGB. At the time of the 1935 general election the NEC authorised special grants of £80 to support the Labour Party in constituencies where the ILP was expected to do well. At the Labour Party's 1935 conference, as a result of ISP activity within the Labour Party, the ILP was made a proscribed organisation.[6] The NEC repeatedly advised constituency parties against sending fraternal delegates to ILP meetings.[7] Thus, the Labour Party nationally was firmly resolved to take strong action against the ILP and to prevent the emergence of local alliances with the smaller organisation.

However, in considering a United Front proposal over the Austrian situation in 1934, a meeting did take place with ILP, and it was the CPGB's involvement which led to the automatic block being placed on the suggestion. Immediately after the vote which proscribed the ILP, the National Agent, George Shepherd, speaking for the NEC, stressed that they would be prepared to accept the ILP back into the Labour Party.[8] In 1936 when a further set of communications were received from both the ILP and the CPGB the NEC resolved that communications from the Communist Party 'be not acknowledged nor brought to the attention of the NEC'. The letter from the ILP was simply 'left to lie on the table'.[9] Although the Labour Party would not engage in, or really countenance, joint

activity, it is clear that the Labour Party attitudes towards the ILP and the CPGB were significantly different.

These calls for joint activity with the Labour Party did not arouse much controversy within the ILP. It was only in 1936 that the ILP's attitude towards the Labour Party became a major subject of debate within the smaller party. In the context of emerging debates about the Workers' Front policy, Brockway, was amongst those leading consideration of this relationship. He suggested, contrary to the Party's position in 1932, that the ILP would not be able to replace the Labour Party as the mass party of the working class, and thus accepted that it was likely that at some point in the future the ILP would have to consider reaffiliation. However, the condition he suggested for reaffiliation was that the Labour Party be ripe for conversion to revolutionary socialism. This condition, in his view, had not been fulfilled:

> The moment for the ILP to consider the question of affiliation to the Labour Party is not when the Labour Party has been made the finished instrument for Revolutionary Socialism, but when it becomes evident that the Labour Party can be made such. I do not think that moment has come and it is still uncertain whether it will ever come.[10]

The Party agreed that it could not 'consider reaffiliation to the Labour Party whilst restrictions remain forcing ILP members of parliament to advocate a reactionary policy'.[11] However, it was notable, in line with Brockway's argument the reasons for the rupture with the Labour Party had been redefined. The revolutionary basis for the breach was downplayed and instead organisation difficulties were brought to the fore. The ILP was outside the Labour Party 'not so much because of its reformist policy as because its bureaucratic machine does not give a reasonable hope of changing that policy and because it places unacceptable restrictions on revolutionary advocacy and action'.[12]

Following these debates, in 1937, Brockway conducted a detailed review of the Party's position and concluded in terms favourable to reaffiliation. He did discuss what he perceived to be the disadvantages of reaffiliation, primarily that the ILP would become identified with the reactionary views of the Labour Party. However, his focus was on the advantages, presenting a federal conception of the Labour Party examining how the ILP acting as a united body

within the larger organisation could have substantial influence. In line with his earlier view he stressed the need for affiliation to be on appropriate conditions. A considerable portion of the report was devoted practical and organisation issues relating to reaffiliation. He stressed the requirement for the Party not to split over reaffiliation and to persuade the Labour leadership of the need to accept the ILP back. Primarily for Brockway this meant building the strength of the ILP and making contacts with networks of 'lefts' within the Labour Party and Trade Unions. It also pointed him to the importance of working for agreement on specific matters such as electoral arrangement in places like East Bradford, North Lanark and Norwich. His discussion stressed the need for the appropriate terms of affiliation including the right to an independent ILP voice, inside and outside parliament, with the right to publish its own material. However, much more significantly, he accepted that this would not necessarily give the ILP the right to vote against PLP decisions. The conclusion that reaffiliation was 'now a tactic' was significant enough in itself, but given the other concession that were made the fact that this document became the basis of debate within the ILP was an indication of how far the mood within the Party had changed since 1932.[13]

As a result of Brockway's paper the NAC submitted a resolution to its 1938 conference calling for a 'permanent structure for common [working-class] action on a federal basis'. A composite amendment was considered, instructing the NAC to 'approach the Labour Party for the purpose of securing the maximum common action against the National Government, united action on class issues and an electoral understanding'. Carmichael, speaking for the NAC, claimed that reaffiliation was not the issue, the NAC insisted that any 'proposals involving change in the organisational relationship of the Party' would need to be submitted to a special conference. Despite these claims the debates centred on reaffiliation. Thus, the vote, which carried the amendment 55–49, reflected the deep divisions in the Party over the question of reaffiliation.

Debate continued after the 1938 conference. However, its conduct was very different to the disaffiliation debates in 1932. In part, this was because the Party was much reduced in size and of course there were significant differences in what was at stake in 1938–9, particularly due to the much smaller number of ILP councillors.[14] In addition the Party leadership consciously decided to try to calm

discussion. After a strongly worded letter against reaffiliation in the *New Leader* from the Birmingham Quaker Joseph Southall, one of the leading advocates of disaffiliation in 1932, it was decided not to print any correspondence about the issue in the Party's weekly journal. Instead, debate was restricted to the lower circulation and less frequently published discussion magazine, *Controversy*. Extended debates with long and heated exchanges across the country were not possible in such a format, making the tone of the printed debate considerably less sharp than had been the case six years earlier.[15] Although all accepted the need for 'class' based, 'revolutionary' politics the ILP remained split over the issue of reaffiliation. Some suggested that opposition to reaffiliation was based on a 'pure but impotent' view. The main issue was whether this line could be most effectively promoted within or outside of the Labour Party. Those who supported reaffiliation argued that with the rise of fascism a united working class movement was essential and that the revolutionary party needed to help promote a Workers' Front from within the Labour Party.

> A few thousand disciplined clear Socialists can exert a world of influence, can popularise the Workers' Front against the Eden Front. *That is the job of a revolutionary party inside the Labour Party*…The essential conclusion remains inescapable: the ILP must re-affiliate to the Labour Party.[16]

Those opposed to reaffiliation saw the Labour Party very differently. Concerns over Standing Orders and the dictatorial machinery of the Labour Party from Fred Jowett and others were prevalent in the debate.[17] This was backed up by arguments from the experience of the Socialist League, suggesting that it would be impossible for the ILP to operate effectively inside the Labour Party.[18] It was also far from evident, particularly to those working in Glasgow, that disaffiliation really had isolated the ILP from the Labour Movement.[19]

As a result of the 1938 decisions the ILP announced that it had 'decided to approach the Labour Party Executive for common action on class issues against the National Government and the Capitalist Parties'. It proposed an electoral agreement to avoid conflicting candidatures and a discussion of the general relationship between the two parties.[20] When the Communist Party approached the NEC for

such talks it was not dignified with a response and even the ISP had been summarily dismissed without its request being passed to the NEC. Thus, the NEC 13 to 4 decision to meet with the ILP was not without significance.[21]

At the meeting held on 14 June 1938 the Labour Party was represented by Mrs Aryton Gould, James Middleton, George Dallas, Hugh Dalton, James Walker, George Lathan, Harold Laski, and George Shepherd and the ILP by James Maxton, John Aplin, Campbell Stephen, John McGovern and Fenner Brockway. The composition of the ILP's side was of considerable significance. Brockway's support of reaffiliation has already been outlined. Campbell Stephen and John McGovern were both outspoken advocates of reaffiliation and in 1938 John Aplin was prepared to support such moves because of his view that the ILP could act as a united revolutionary force within the Labour Party. James Maxton's position on the question of reaffiliation is less clear and has been a matter of some contention. Certainly during this period Maxton was reluctant to explicitly state his view on the reaffiliation question in public. He did not, for example, speak in these debates at either Divisional or national level. A number of commentators have suggested that Maxton opposed reaffiliation. McNair states that Maxton 'had no intention of going back to the Labour Party himself unless he had complete freedom to express his socialist and anti-war convictions'.[22] The view that Maxton opposed reaffiliation is even more emphatically put in a recent biography of Maxton by William Knox who argues that Maxton remained hostile to reaffiliation throughout the period from 1932 to his death. Knox's claim rests on three points: Maxton's attitude to Labour in 1945, his feelings in 1938 that re-affiliation would impose restrictions on his anti-war activities and the actions of his sisters and son who remained in the ILP after his death.[23] The contrary position, that Maxton came to support reaffiliation in the late-1930s was suggested in Brockway's *Inside the Left* and others have subsequently claimed this about Maxton, although often on a rather insecure evidential basis.[24]

The evidence provided in these accounts is insufficient to resolve disputes about his views. Inferring Maxton's attitude to reaffiliation in 1938–9 from later recollections is hampered by Maxton's position within the Party and the high regard in which he was held. The temptation has been for individuals to rewrite Maxton's attitudes in their own preferred image. The result is that those who favoured

reaffiliation, such as Brockway, 'recall' Maxton's support for such a line, whilst those who favoured continued ILP independence, such as McNair, argue that Maxton agreed with this line. However, Knox's evidence regarding Maxton's position appears even more misleading. On Knox's first point, Maxton's attitude towards reaffiliation was complex, influenced by a variety of factors, including such things as his own state of health, his understanding of the possibilities for the ILP, the attitude of his family and friends and the state of international affairs. With such matters changing rapidly it was quite possible for Maxton's attitude in 1945 to be different to that in 1938. Knox's third tactic of inferring Maxton's attitude from the rest of his family is even more dubious. In particular Maxton's sister Annie Maxton had her own forthright opinions on reaffiliation and as the sometime chair of the Scottish Divisional Council was capable of developing independent thoughts about the ILP. Indeed evidence suggests that her attitudes towards disaffiliation were much stronger than James' and it was in part her influence along with his declining health and the weakness of the Party, which made James so hostile to reaffiliation after the war. However, there is more direct evidence of his attitude at the time. Public statements and behaviour point in conflicting directions. Although not directly addressing the question of reaffiliation in his 1938 speech to the ILP's Scottish Divisional Conference he argued that 'the Labour Party is indistinguishable from the National Government in outlook and political action on the major issues of the time'.[25] Maxton also voted against reaffiliation at the 1938 Scottish Divisional Conference. Thus, Maxton appears in public to be an opponent of reaffiliation, although his vacillating statements about the Labour Party and his reluctance to contribute to debates explicitly about these issues suggest his position was far from firm.

However, evidence suggests that in private his opinion was the opposite. Certainly Maxton came under substantial pressure from Brockway and particularly his parliamentary colleagues to support reaffiliation. Unfortunately there are no surviving copies of NAC minutes from the middle of 1938 to the outbreak of war, but there are a number of contemporary comments on the discussion which took place in that forum. CA Smith, a consistent opponent of reaffiliation, in particular is explicit about the disagreements between himself and Maxton on this point and on Maxton's (not necessarily enthusiastic) support for reaffiliation.[26] Thus, whilst later recollections

are frequently confused and certainly contradict one another contemporary evidence points in the direction of Maxton being privately a supporter of reaffiliation in 1938–9, albeit a reluctant convert to this position.

This means that despite the divisions within the ILP over the question of reaffiliation, in discussions with the Labour Party the ILP was represented entirely by supporters of reaffiliation, albeit some more reluctant than others. Indeed, it was precisely in this meeting that Maxton made his most emphatic surviving statements in favour of rejoining the Labour Party. Maxton pressed his and the Parliamentary Group's views, which made clear his hope for reaffiliation, arguing that the 'isolation of the ILP is no longer defensible' and that 'some members of the Labour Party were at greater variance with its principle and policy than were the ILP.' Maxton also outlined one major concession to appease the larger organisation, suggesting that the smaller party was 'principally concerned with spreading Socialist propaganda'. The NEC pushed the question of whether the ILP would accept PLP Standing Orders. McGovern showed some reticence pointing to the 'anti-working class' uses to which they had been put. However, Maxton effectively cleared the obstacle which had seemed insuperable seven years earlier stating clearly:

> The signing of the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Party were not such an important matter now for the ILP as in 1931. It was in fact of quite small importance to-day.

Other possible sticking points were also quickly cleared. Brockway noted that it was unlikely that ILP work with the Communist Party would lead to any problems as the relations with the CPGB were 'extremely bitter'. Further whilst the ILP contingent did suggest that they would desire electoral adjustments to be made in North Lanark, East Bradford and Norwich, Maxton said that he did not think that the 'inability to secure such adjustments would prevent agreement'.[27] At the end of the meeting it seemed that only two obstacles stood in the way of affiliation. First, the Labour Party NEC expressed some concerns as to the possible damage 'to the Party machine due to the establishment of ad hoc committees for propaganda which ought to be done by the Labour Party itself'. Second, and crucially, the ILP

had no formal conference decisions to allow them to pursue such a course of action.

The NAC and the Labour Party continued a dialogue but little further progress was made beyond the discussions at the initial meeting. The Labour Party was prepared to co-operate with the ILP by allowing reaffiliation on conditions identical to those in existence before disaffiliation, but in no other way.

> …after consideration it takes the view that the affiliation of the ILP to the Labour Party would be the satisfactory way of bringing about co-operation between the two parties.

The ILP negotiators had no mandate to reaffiliate on these or any other terms.[28] To try and clarify the course of action that the Party should take the NAC established a sub-committee to consider the alternatives. This was composed of James Carmichael, Percy Williams, John Aplin, Emrys Thomas and Bob Edwards with John McNair as Secretary, which reported to the 1939 annual conference.[29] Bob Edwards presented the committee report, which argued that the ILP as an organisation should continue its independent existence, but that individual members should be encouraged to join the Labour Party. Brockway supporting the report spoke in less than stirring terms that its suggestion would allow ILPers to work within the 'mass movement' if affiliation were not possible. However, despite Edwards's confidence, support from the majority of the NAC and Maxton's assertion that the Party was equally divided on the report, few were prepared to speak in favour of its conclusions.

Indeed, even John Aplin, a member of the committee chaired by Edwards, by the time of the conference had changed his mind to oppose the committee report. His change of mind had come as a result of the Parliamentary Group's actions over Munich, which Aplin had been extremely forthright in criticising, had 'disillusioned him as to the ILP's ability to act as a revolutionary party united on principle'. Further, the committee made no attempt to deal with the fact that their suggestion of dual membership had been ruled out by the Labour Party when they had decided in 1935 to proscribe the ILP.

Arguments for continued independence received a large measure of support, in particular from Scotland, the largest Division. Some such as Lachlan McQuarrie of the Scottish Divisional Council and

David Gibson, the newly elected NAC representative for Scotland, argued from the organisation failings of the Labour Party. Others most notably Fred Jowett placed more emphasis on the impending war situation. He was joined by Jennie Lee, who argued that the Labour Party was on the point of disintegration. It was 'lining the workers up behind the Government for War,' thus it was exactly the wrong moment to 'consider going inside'. Further she pointed out that 'once inside the bloc vote will ensure defeat for whatever we say':

> We don't accept their policy, we don't respect their leadership and if we can hold out a little longer we shall find our allies coming to us from many quarters.

Nevertheless, the majority of contributions came from those who were advocating a return to the Labour Party. The driving force of the affiliationist case was the isolation of the Party; outside the Labour Party, they suggested, the ILP had limited influence, inside, the Party would have a chance to give a definite lead to the working class. As Tom Taylor, the former Glasgow Councillor and Co-operative activist put it:

> The fate of the workers was bound up with the fate of the Labour Party and the tendency if the ILP remained outside was for it to become a second SPGB.

The attack on the isolation of the ILP was continued by another of the Glasgow Councillors, James Carmichael, who had changed his position from the previous year, two leading members of the Norwich Branch, Reg Spraggins and Arthur South, and Maurice Lechstein of the Welsh Divisional Council. In addition a number of other arguments were advanced for reaffiliation. Members from Wales and Derby, both areas where the Party had suffered considerable setbacks, argued that their local experience was sufficient to suggest reaffiliation, although this was countered by Frank Stone, Chairman of Yarmouth Trades Council, where the Party was making progress at municipal level, who suggested that his local experience pointed to continued independence.

The voting was close, reflecting the deep divisions within the Party over its relationship with the Labour Party. The possibility of attempting affiliation without any conditions was considered first, but

was defeated by a vote of 63 to 45. Then the committee report was considered and rejected by 68 to 42. This left a simple decision between seeking affiliation to the Labour Party if suitable conditions could be agreed upon as against retaining the Party as a completely independent body. In moves reminiscent of the decision at the Blackpool conference seven years earlier the vote, by 69–40 went in favour of conditional affiliation.[30]

Superficially the ILP's position with respect to the Labour Party in April 1939 was identical to the position seven years earlier. The challenge for those ILPers who sought to be affiliated to the Labour Party was to find 'conditions' which both organisations would find acceptable. However, the attitude of the leadership of the Party had changed significantly between 1932 and 1939. The Parliamentary Group was in favour of reaffiliation; Campbell Stephen and John McGovern had been outspoken in their support whilst George Buchanan decided unilaterally to rejoin the Labour Party following the Scarborough Conference's equivocation on the question.[31] Even Maxton, who often appeared the most strident of isolationists, privately supported moves towards reaffiliation. On the NAC the only opponents of reaffiliation were Fred Jowett and CA Smith, who became Party Chairman in 1939, joined by David Gibson after the 1939 conference. At the same time Brockway moved the rest of the ambivalent, Bob Edwards amongst them, towards more explicit support for rejoining the Labour Party. With support for reaffiliation from the NAC and Parliamentary Group the prospects for finding a settlement in 1939 were much greater than in 1932.

Following the 1939 conference the NAC attempted to gain further clarification from the Labour Party NEC on the questions of organisational independence, Standing Orders and International Affiliation. The ILP was seeking some reassurance from the Labour Party that it would be able to retain its own propaganda and organisational machine that its MPs would have the right to abstain in parliament if they opposed the official Labour Party line and that they would be able to maintain their affiliation to the International Bureau.[32] This was clearly a much less demanding set of conditions than the ILP had insisted upon in 1932, in particular the MPs were asking for the right to abstain in votes, which was in any case allowed by the Standing Orders of the PLP. On the organisational issues the ILP requirements were no more than they had always been allowed. The question of International affiliation held the most potential for

disruption of the reaffiliation process. However, the Labour Party had stated during the 1938 negotiations that it would allow reaffiliation on the same terms which the ILP had previously been affiliated and the Party's connection with the International Bureau predated disaffiliation. The Labour Party had no interest in further negotiations. It felt that its conditions had been laid out clearly the year before. The ILP would have to accept the conditions obtaining prior to its disaffiliation if it wanted to return to the Labour Party. The only further comment was on the thorny question of International affiliation where the larger organisation expressed its scepticism over the ILP's desire to maintain affiliation to the International Bureau, although it stressed that 'there is no intention or disposition to create or encourage difficulties in this direction'.[33] The NAC faced a stark choice, there was no possibility of moving the Labour Party towards a more sympathetic position. The choice was between accepting a set of conditions which the NEC had placed on the table in 1938 and rejecting re-affiliation.

The Party was relatively evenly split over the question of reaffiliation; although Scotland and London both supported continued independence, there was strong support for reaffiliation from Lancashire, South Wales, the Midlands, and the increasingly important East Anglian Division. The NAC met on 5 August and decided to give a lead to the Party recommending reaffiliation and calling a special conference for 17 September. With the Party so divided an NAC lead would likely have been decisive in convincing the vast majority of those who had supported conditional affiliation at Scarborough to vote for reaffiliation. The decision seemed to make reaffiliation inevitable. It was not. War was declared on 3 September and the NAC suspended the conference, taking the view that 'under present War circumstances it is not desirable that the Party should apply for re-affiliation to the Labour Party'.[34]

Conclusion

Disaffiliation injected considerable hostility into the relations between the ILP and the rest of the Labour Movement. However, as the ILP's close co-operation with the Communist Party broke down, and the rise of fascism convinced the ILP of the need to work with other working-class organisations, so the Party's attention turned back

towards the 'official' organisations of the Labour Movement. The initial hostility towards the Labour Party from many ILPers was tempered in 1933 and eased even further during the rest of the decade. The Party remained convinced that it had a 'revolutionary' policy distinct from the Labour Party. Many believed that this distinctive policy justified organisational independence. However, an increasingly significant section of the Party argued that the ILP's socialist goals would be better pursued within the larger organisation, and that disaffiliation had been required only as a temporary measure to allow policy clarification. Immediately prior to the World War Two those advocating reaffiliation almost certainly formed a majority of the Party.

9

Pacifism, Wars and Internationals

The ILP in the 1930s has generally been seen as a pacifist organisation. Such a view is present in general histories, with AJP Taylor arguing that the ILP in 1939 took the line of the 'prewar pacifists'.[1] More focussed studies of the Party have concluded that its understanding of international events and its pacifistic outlook were a mess – 'a convoluted exegesis of Marxist classics'.[2] Even from a Trotskyist perspective is has appeared that ILP policy during the 1930s was marked by the victory of pacifism over revolutionary politics.[3] Such portraits sits uneasily alongside other well known images, particularly of the Party's wholehearted support of military action against fascism in Spain. The result may be, as some have argued, that the Party was a mass of ill-thought through contradictions which make it difficult if not impossible to answer at least one basic question – what sense can we make of it all?[4] Contradictions can certainly be found in both the Party's official pronouncements on specific situations and between responses to different international events. In some cases these contradictions indicated confusion and error, in other cases they suggest change over time, in yet others they point to fundamental disagreements within the Party. These contradictions may also be more apparent than real. Developing a clearer understanding of participation in, and organisation in respect of, international events and institutions helps explain the ILP's trajectory and clarify which of the possible competing explanations are most adequate.

A Question of Internationals

Through the 1920s the ILP found itself consistently located somewhere between Labour and Communist Internationals. This was the case, most famously, with the ILP involvement with the Vienna Union, derisively known as the Two-and-a-Half International, formed

in 1921 with the express purpose of bringing the Second and Third Internationals together and wound up two years later. By the end of the 1920s the ILP's leftward move meant that its delegates to Labour and Socialist International (LSI) Congresses were increasingly unhappy with what they saw as 'the practice of using revolutionary rhetoric to cover up motions with no content relating to positive Socialist action'.[5] At the 1931 Vienna Congress of the LSI the ILP together with the Bund and the ILP (Poland) put down a 'left amendment' to every single declaration, which they insisted on debating at pushing to a public vote only to be defeated by about 300 to 5. The ILP adopted a similar role within the LSI to the one it had chosen within the Labour Party, as self-appointed conscience of the organisation.[6] The ILP leadership almost welcomed this alienation from the mainstream of the International both because it rejected the gradualism of the LSI and because it had become involved with the Left International Committee of like minded parties, later known as the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity.

When the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party the LSI launched an uncompromising attack on it. The NAC proposed withdrawing and argued that an alternative International association could be provided by continued connection with the Left International Committee. During 1932, with the disaffiliation issue to the fore the question of Internationals was a secondary issue. The RPC wanted the ILP to affiliate sympathetically to the Comintern, but had not pushed the issue to a vote during the disaffiliation debates. Given the failure of the Vienna International, and that the Bureau was new and its status as an International was unclear, it is perhaps not surprising that the RPC was able to gain significant support. The 1933 Derby Conference, against the wishes of the NAC, voted with the RPC to approach the Third International to investigate the possibility of affiliation.[7]

Following the Derby conference, there were important differences in interpretation of the decision to approach the Third International. Whilst Brockway and other members of the Party leadership made the formal enquiries of the Comintern required by the 1933 decisions, their primary commitment was to what had become known as the International 'Left' Bureau. Indeed they argued the ILP should not determine its attitude to the Comintern independently from the other parties of the International Bureau.[8] The contrasting view of the RPC was that the vote for sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern was of

overriding International importance.[9] After extended but fruitless correspondence with the Comintern the NAC took the view that, although opposed to the formation of a new International, it would work with the Bureau towards the formation of an inclusive revolutionary International.[10] It was this line that was submitted to the 1934 annual conference in York.[11]

At York, the RPC proposed further enquires to the Third International to clear up the difficulties in moving the ILP towards sympathetic affiliation. However, the mood of the Party had moved against the RPC and the motion was lost 98–51. Instead, the NAC line of working with both Internationals in united action against fascism and war, with the aim of creating a unification of 'all genuinely revolutionary sections of the working class' was passed by a vote of 102–64.[12] The following year the ILP's relationship with the now renamed International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity was firmly cemented. The NAC statement accepted by the conference, argued that the IBRSU should be striving to bring the Internationals closer together. The statement also called for sympathetic affiliation to the Communist International and opposed the formation of a new International.[13] This opposition to a Fourth International brought inevitable resistance from the Trotskyists within the Party, who objected to the idea of attempting to bring together 'two bankrupt Internationals'. Using this opposition to Trotskyist proposals, the RPC argued that the NAC line would lead to Fourth International, bankrupt of any principles. The already heated debate was wound up by Campbell Stephen, who joined John McGovern in attacking 'Moscow Gold', a move that reportedly caused howls of protest from the floor. Maxton, in the chair, was forced to state that whilst Stephen was speaking at the request of the NAC it could not take responsibility for the speech. In the event all the amendments were defeated, and a resolution to continue co-operation with the Comintern but not to affiliate was carried along with the NAC statement.[14]

With the RPC out of the picture from 1935 it was left to the Trotskyists to raise questions of International affiliation. In 1936 their motion to push for the creation of a Fourth International was overwhelmingly defeated and the conference also passed an amendment stating resolute opposition to the formation of such an International.[15] The Trotskyist demands, despite the departure of the majority of the Marxist Group in 1936, were again raised in 1938 and

again overwhelmingly defeated. The battles of the first half of the 1930s, when it was unclear which International affiliation ILP conferences would vote for, were over. The ILP, by 1935 was firmly connected to the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity.

The International Bureau

The Left International Committee, never intended as an alternative International, was made up of a number of socialist groups who found themselves uncomfortable with both the LSI and the Comintern. The Committee, formed in 1931, initially had seven affiliated parties. Apart from the ILP, only the Polish ILP and the Polish Bund had an affiliation to the LSI. The two Polish parties worked in difficult conditions, which meant that it was impossible for the Bund, a Jewish socialist organisation, to get a representative to the 1932 foundation conference, and it was represented by the Polish ILP, which had a membership of approximately 3,000.[16] Of the four other parties the Norwegian Labour Party was by far the largest, with a membership of 80,000 as well as considerable influence within the Norwegian Trade Union movement.[17] The Norwegian Party, which dropped out of the IBRSU in 1935 because it supported League of Nations sanctions against Abyssinia, was unique at the conference in being the largest party representing labour interests in its own country.[18] Of the remaining three parties the Bulgarian left was the smallest, and whilst it remained within the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party publishing a paper with a circulation of about two and half thousand, it felt restricted by the larger organisation.[19] In Holland, the Bureau was initially supported by the 'Left' of the Socialist Party, later joined by the Dutch Trotskyist organisation the RSP. The 'left' of the Socialist Party, led by PJ Schmidt, found itself in increasing conflict with the larger organisation. After its paper was suppressed it disaffiliated to found the Independent Socialist Party, claiming 78 branches, over 6,000 members, and a paper whose circulation had risen from 5,000 to 15,000.[20] In 1935 the RSP and ISP amalgamated to form the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party, which left the IBRSU in order to support Trotsky's moves to create a Fourth International.[21] In Germany the SAP, which joined the Bureau and remained a member until 1938 when it left in support

for the a Popular Front line, had been formed out of the SPD for similar reasons. The strength of fascism and the German Communist Party's vicious attacks on the SAP led to a temporary return to the SPD.[22]

Subsequently a number of further parties were drawn into the IBRSU, particularly in the period after 1935. These further parties most famously, and indeed most significantly from the ILP's perspective, included the Spanish *Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista* (POUM). However, from 1935 a stress was placed on the wider development of contacts with 'lefts' in the Second International and on collaboration with socialist organisations in colonial countries, especially in India, Egypt and Palestine, the IBRSU also claimed that constant contact was maintained with 'lefts' in the Dominions and South America. In 1938 the Bureau also welcomed new affiliation from the Palestine Workers Party, the Archo-Marxist Party of Greece, and the 'Alarm' Group of Czechoslovakia whilst the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist League renewed its affiliation to the Bureau. In 1939 the International Communist Opposition applied for affiliation and a number of other organisations signed up to the principles of the bureau. Others associated themselves with the International Workers' Front Against War, considered 'an enlargement of the Bureau which included those organisations who broadly agreed with its principles but were unprepared to apply discipline on certain points'. This Front included the International African Service Bureau, the newly formed French Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants, the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, the Indo-Chinese Workers' and Peasants Party, Palestine Federation of Socialist Communes, the German Neuwe Weg Group and the Austrian Funke Group.[23]

From 1935–39 in the period the Bureau, although usually referred to as the 'London Bureau', was formally known as 'the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity', it declared itself an association of

> Revolutionary Socialist Parties' unaffiliated to either the Second or Third International who had joined together with the purpose of 'developing common international action between its own sections and with other revolutionary sections of the Working-class movement; with the object of preparing the formation of a reconstituted International on a Revolutionary Socialist basis.[24]

This they suggested was in opposition to 'the reformist and compromising policies of the Second and Third Internationals'. The Bureau stood on a class based programme which opposed 'collaboration with the Capitalist Class, Capitalist Governments, or Capitalist Parties in time of either war or peace'. This they took to include revolutionary resistance to any war conducted by a capitalist government whether through the League of Nations or not. Their position against the Third International and against the League of Nations and an insistence on the need to maintain freedom of criticism of Soviet Russia placed them firmly in opposition to the Soviet Union despite their recognition of it as the first Workers' State.[25]

In 1935 when, with many members of the IBRSU operating in illegal conditions, the ILP took responsibility for the Secretariat of the Bureau. Its headquarters were moved to London, hence its common designation at the 'London Bureau', where they remained until January 1939 when they were transferred to Paris. The formal organisation of the Bureau was tightened and from November 1935 it published a bi-monthly *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*.[26] The Bulletin drew together reports of independent left wing activity from about eighteen countries including Spain, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Poland, Romania, USA, Ceylon, India and Egypt.[27]

In October 1936 the Bureau arranged an International Revolutionary Socialist Congress, the first large scale delegate congress it had organised. Inevitably the issue of Spain dominated the agenda. The Spanish delegation numbered twenty-two, the second largest delegation, and contained representatives from POUM, UGT, CNT, Workers' Culture Movement, Communist Youth Federation, Clothing Workers, Assurance Workers, Barcelona Section Air Force and Militia Delegates from the main fronts.[28] The congress agreed that the issue was not 'Capitalist democracy versus Fascism, but of Workers' Power versus Fascism'. Thus, they argued 'it is the duty of the whole working-class movement and each working-class Government to go to the active aid of the Spanish workers and their Government by the provision of arms.' Julian Gorkin obtained the support of the Congress for POUM's actions in joining the administration by stressing the anti-Popular Front line, that it had only 'agreed to go into the Government because it had accepted the socialisation of land and of industry as its immediate programme'.[29] A

further conference was scheduled for Barcelona in January, but following delays it was scheduled to take place in the early weeks of May 1937, which explains the presence of so many members of the IBRSU office in Barcelona during the events at this time. As a result of these events the full congress was postponed and took place in Paris the following February.[30] At the 1938 congress the ILP delegation declared itself broadly satisfied. They suggested there was an appearance of increasing co-operation with attendance by members of the International Communist Opposition and some workers' organisations in colonial countries. The congress agreed to a broad set of seven principles to which all affiliated organisations were expected to subscribe in a disciplined fashion. Nevertheless problems of co-operation and unity remained, with the Bureau rejecting the Trotskyist pressure for a Fourth International.[31] However, there were two issues on which the ILP delegation were less happy about. First, the conference was influenced by the International Communist Opposition, suggesting that revolutionary socialist parties should under *no* circumstances take part in a Popular Front. A compromise statement was eventually agreed which accepted the correctness of the Workers' Front line but allowed for temporary agreements with petty bourgeois organisations providing the scope for independent revolutionary class action was not limited. Within the year the SAP had left the Bureau over the issue.[32] Second, the conference rejected the ILP suggestion of a universal condemnation of alliances between Workers' States and Capitalist States.[33]

During the final period of 1938 the operations of the Bureau were further consolidated. During the September crisis an International Workers' Front against war was established on the initiative of the Bureau, the French PSOP, the Dutch RSAP and the ICO, an appeal to 'Workers of the world' was released and a detailed statement on war was adopted. This was followed at the beginning of 1939, by a proposal from the American Independent Labour League (until shortly before the American section of the ICO) for the establishment of an International Revolutionary Centre. The same discussions also saw the ILP relinquish the Secretariat which it had held since 1935, with the position initially transferred to Paris.[34] With the outbreak of war the organisation was renamed as the International Marxist Centre with the following affiliates: the Swedish Socialist Party, British ILP, Dutch Revolutionary Socialist League, POUM, the Italian Socialist Party, Palestine Workers Party, Greek

Archo-Marxist Party, French Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants, International Labour League of America and the International African Service Bureau. It changed name to the International Revolutionary Marxist Centre and its headquarters moved first to New York, and then following the dissolution of Independent Labour League, to Mexico, with Julian Gorkin of POUM as Secretary.[35] Throughout the period the ILP was a prime mover in the Bureau and it provides an important context for understanding the Party's responses to international events.

Abyssinia

The international crisis which surrounded the Italian invasion of Abyssinia was an important turning point for the ILP. Even as Italy was mobilising troops and threatening Abyssinian borders in early 1935, the ILP, in the *New Leader*, was attempting to make clear its position on the impending crisis, identifying the cause of the Abyssinian dispute as the rival imperialist interests of the different countries, with the focus firmly on their economic interests.[36] As the crisis accelerated in September, the ILP began mobilisation against what it had declared to be another 'Capitalist and Imperialist war', which it uncompromisingly opposed 'whether sanctioned by the League of Nations or not'. The newly created Inner Executive of the Party, controlled by the Parliamentary Group, immediately issued an anti-war declaration signed by the MPs James Maxton, John McGovern and Campbell Stephen calling for 'maximum opposition' to the National Government's policy on the crisis.[37] The NAC released a further manifesto also calling for working class mobilisation:

> Refuse to support the National Government in imposing sanctions or waging War for British Capitalism and Imperialism!
> Carry on the struggle against the National Government, Capitalism, Imperialism and War!
> Carry on the struggle for Workers' Power and Socialism![38]

Across the country the ILP launched itself enthusiastically into a 'Resist the War' campaign and thousands of working-class organisations were circulated with an anti-war letter signed by Maxton and ILP General Secretary Fenner Brockway.[39] The response

to the crisis appeared to unite opposing factions. In London the heart of factional activity, an emergency committee even managed to bring together Jack Gaster, Hilda Vernon and Carl Cullen of the Communist inclined RPC, Bert Matlow of the Trotskyist Marxist Group and John Aplin, a strident opponent of factional organisation of the Party.[40] To many activists the crisis appeared to re-invigorate the Party. The ILP's initial response seemed to be principled and united. The crisis quickly became an important focal point for ILP propaganda and the *New Leader* gave prominence to a large number of articles on events including those written by the Marxist Group leader CLR James calling for workers' sanctions.[41] Galvanised by a degree of support from outside the ILP, including a front page article by key Scottish Labour Party figure, Thomas Johnson, in the Scottish Labour newspaper *Forward*, the workers' sanctions line, increasingly identified with the ILP, assisted with party mobilisation.[42]

However, the reality of the Party's position was very different. In fact the initial campaign had revealed three distinct positions within the ILP. First, the Parliamentary Group and consequently the Inner Executive and NAC, supported by the many pacifists within the ILP, advocated a position that the working class should not take sides in the dispute between the 'two rival dictators' in Abyssinia and Italy. They declared that 'the difference between them ... [was] not worth the loss of a single British life' and called for the working class to show in every way possible 'their determination that they are not going into another blood bath under the false cry of a small defenceless nation'.[43] Second, in complete contrast to the neutrality of the Parliamentary Group, Dr Cullen, the RPC Chairman, led a majority of that Committee to a position of support for Abyssinia by working through the League of Nations. Cullen argued, following the line of the Communist International, in favour of League of Nations sanctions, including military sanctions, because the League had been fundamentally transformed in 1934 when the Soviet Union had joined. Thus, the League could be used as 'a stalking horse by the workers'. He also followed the broader Communist Popular Front line in arguing for a cross-class anti-fascist anti-war alliance based on a 'limited and temporary community of interests amongst the general mass of the population including the middle classes'.[44] Finally, a substantial section of the Party including Jack Gaster and Hilda Vernon of the RPC, CLR James of the Marxist Group and Brockway from the ILP leadership, supported a 'workers' sanctions' position.

This view, which was also the official line of the ILP's sister parties in the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity, differed from the NAC position by indicating that there was an important difference between Abyssinia and Italy, because Italian action was imperialist. However, they also argued against the Popular Front line supported by Cullen and against the League of Nations. Particularly central to the workers' sanctions position was the idea that opposition to Italian aggression, if conducted by the workers rather than the League of Nations was also a challenge to British Imperialism.[45] The manoeuvres of those adhering to the different positions as they tried to influence political debate had a number of important consequences in terms of the makeup of the ILP and its relationship with other organisations. This ultimately affected its ability to respond to events as they unfolded in the late 1930s.

The division in the RPC leadership, with Gaster supporting workers' sanctions and Cullen the League of Nations, was the first public split in the leadership of the Committee since its formation. As Gaster himself acknowledged, this represented a 'crisis in the RPC'.[46] Further, Cullen's line supporting League of Nations' military sanctions against Italy fell outside what many non-RPC Party members considered acceptable. The widespread criticism of this position was welcomed by the Party leadership who were opposed to both the factional activity of RPC and to the Communist position of support for the League of Nations. The Inner Executive, dominated by those who were most opposed to supporting Abyssinia, decided that Cullen, together with other leading RPCers who followed his line, should be deleted from the National Speakers list.[47] The split within the RPC came to head at the 1935 Summer Divisional Conference of the London and Southern Counties ILP. The regular agenda was suspended so the conference could be devoted to the Abyssinian Crisis. The conflict was played out against a backdrop of a significant Trotskyist presence as well as substantial numbers of those opposed to any form of factional organisation. Jack Gaster moved a motion stressing the necessity of working-class organisation against Italian fascism and all imperialist oppression. The motion was supported by the Trotskyists and John Aplin and opposed by his colleagues in the RPC who moved amendments suggesting the use of the League of Nations machinery. The combined forces of the dissidents within the RPC, the Trotskyists and those supporters of Aplin who opposed group organisation held a large majority at the

conference and workers' sanctions were supported by a five to one majority. This represented a considerable setback for the previously dominant RPC.[48] When the Division met again at the end of October, it had become clear to the leadership of the RPC that the Committee could not expect to have its own way on either Abyssinia or other issues discussed by the Division. A combination of mounting anti-factional feeling, a growing Trotskyist presence and continuing divisions within the RPC meant that large swathes of its policy were rejected by the very Division in which its strength was greatest.[49] In response the Committee staged a dramatic walkout from the conference followed by a call to 'all revolutionary socialists in the party to follow their example and make application to the Communist Party for membership'.[50]

After the departure of the RPC the ILP was able to agree on the negative aspects of its policy on Abyssinia: opposition to war, the League of Nations and its sanctions.[51] However, this did not resolve matters. Indeed, the conflict between the Parliamentary Group championing a neutral position and the supporters of workers' sanctions intensified with major consequences for the ILP. These frustrations were dramatically played out at the ILP 1936 national conference held in Keighley. This conference was the first official opportunity to debate the way in which the Party leadership had handled the crisis. Central to the dispute was the way the initial declaration in the *New Leader* in support of Abyssinia had been reversed by first the Inner Executive and then the NAC. CLR James received support from ILPers across the country and from the Divisional Councils of London and Lancashire, when he attempted to refer back the NAC report, arguing for the centrality of struggle against imperialism and the need to assist colonial peoples. The argument also received some support from NAC members themselves, most notably from Fenner Brockway. Few from the conference floor were prepared to support the Parliamentary Group's position and the MPs were left largely to defend their own actions arguing that 'the only way to fight Imperialism was to smash Imperialist Britain'. When it came to voting, James' reference back of the NAC report was joined by a resolution from Lancashire Division Council backing the early *New Leader* line and stating that the action of the National Council was 'in direct conflict with declared Party policy and a contradiction of Party discipline'. The Lancashire resolution was carried by a substantial majority on a vote of 70 to 57.

The reference back was also carried but by a margin of only one vote. It appeared that a considerable victory had been won against the Parliamentary Group.

This impression was swiftly reversed. Following the day's proceedings the Parliamentary Group met and decided to continue its opposition to the workers' sanction line despite the conference decision. The next morning Maxton presented the conference with a set of options which many considered unpalatable. Bearing in mind the narrowness of the vote Maxton asked the conference to reverse its line, putting the policy to a Party plebiscite after three months had elapsed. The alternative was to be the open revolt of the Parliamentary Group who felt 'unable conscientiously to operate the decision'.[52]

The position of the Parliamentary Group was met with fierce anger from some of those, most notably the Marxist Group, who felt that they had won a legitimate victory the previous day. Equally, many of those who had supported the sanctions line the previous day, led by Brockway, were not prepared to lose the Parliamentary Group. Brockway stated that though he supported the decision of the conference he felt it would be 'a bad blow for the Party' if the decision taken the day before involved the loss, in particular, of the Chairman. He urged the delegates to accept the proposal for a plebiscite of the membership for 'the sake of the maintenance of the ILP and its work' and after a heated debate the proposal was carried by 93 votes to 39.

Following the conference, and after extended discussions the NAC decided the plebiscite should be split into two questions. The first asked whether the ILP should have 'declared against Italy and in favour of Abyssinia by the refusal of war materials to Italy'. The second reversed the question and asked whether the Party should 'have refused to back either Italy or Abyssinia and opposed the sending of war materials to either side'. These matters were debated in a special issue of *Controversy* devoted to the question of whether workers should take sides in the struggle between Italy and Abyssinia. Two members of the Parliamentary Group, Maxton and McGovern argued the case against along with the Birmingham pacifist and Quaker Joseph Southall. The contrary position was put by Fenner Brockway, Bob Edwards the Lancashire NAC member and West Indian Marxist Grouper CLR James. The debate was ill-tempered; CLR James bemoaned the 'waste of ink and paper' in dismissing

arguments about British Imperial interests and pointing out that Italy was seeking to 'make Abyssinia a colony' questioned whether there was 'any child of five' who did not know this. Indeed, it is difficult to identify any new substantive issues that were raised in the discussion. However, two factors combined in favour of the Parliamentary Group position. First, by the time of the plebiscite, the immediacy of the crisis had passed. The policy of workers' sanctions may have seemed plausible at the outbreak of the crisis almost a year before. By the time of the actual plebiscite in May, Haile Salassie, the Emperor of Abyssinia, had been forced to abdicate and Mussolini had proclaimed the foundation of a new Roman Empire. It was no longer clear what impact an ILP declaration for workers' sanctions could be expected to have even in theory. Second, a declaration for workers' sanctions would split the Parliamentary Group from the Party, a consequence which many of those who might otherwise have supported workers' sanctions wished to avoid at all costs. 3,751 papers ballot papers were sent out, 1442 were returned (38%), of which eighteen were spoiled. To the first question, 'should the ILP have taken sides with Abyssinia by refusing war materials to Italy' the results were: Yes 576 (40%), No 734 (51%). To the second question, should the ILP have remained neutral the results were: Yes 809 (56%), No 554 (38%). 660 (46%) of the papers gave consistent support for the neutrality position. 462 (32%) of the papers gave consistent support for the workers' sanctions position.[53] Given the importance and national status that its MPs continued to afford the Party, it is perhaps not surprising that the results of the ballot supported the Parliamentary Group's position by a considerable majority.

In terms reminiscent of the debates over fusion with the SDF in 1898, the way in which the Parliamentary Group had forced the issue indicated much about the real distribution of power within the ILP. The plebiscite was a defeat for those who sought a more interventionist opposition to imperialism across the world, and a victory for the more pacifist line of the Parliamentary Group. However, the dubious circumstance of this victory meant that Executive Committee and the NAC took on the task of attempting to square the circle; finding a logical justification of the expedient policy reversal from the vote for workers' sanctions at Keighley and the rejection of this policy in the plebiscite.[54] The resulting policy sought to do this by giving conditional support to a general policy of

workers' sanctions in principle. This policy which was passed at the 1937 Glasgow conference was a defeat for the of the Parliamentary Group, it supported the initial decisions of the 1936 conference and opposed the result of the plebiscite in backing workers' sanctions.

> In the event of an attack by an Imperialist Government on a subject people, it will be the duty of the British working class to take all possible action in support of the subject people, including organised action to refuse war materials to the Imperialist Government.[55]

There were a number of conditions which made the resulting policy slightly more palatable to those who had been victorious in the plebiscite. The NAC was given discretion to allow for alteration to this policy if British (or other) Imperialism would be assisted by this action or if the leadership of the subject people were not of a 'character which will eventually make for the emancipation of the working and peasant populations'.[56] Nevertheless, the temperament of the decision was clearly in line with those who had supported a policy of workers' sanctions. The plebiscite was a short-term measure to keep the Parliamentary Group within the Party. The tensions were evident, but by the time they were exposed the situation had changed substantially; not only because of the rapidly changing situation in Abyssinia, but more importantly, because of the civil war in Spain.

Spain

British involvement in the Spanish Civil War is still to a great extent underwritten by a dominant Communist narrative. Of course the ILP perspective has scarcely been ignored. George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, one of the most widely read commentaries on the Spanish Civil War, was based on his time with the ILP unit. Ken Loach's recent film *Land and Freedom* was inspired, at least in part, by the recollections and instructions of Stafford Cottman, another of the members of the ILP unit. Thus, images of the ILP contingent have formed an important part of the story of the British contribution to the Spanish Civil War. These images, Orwell's more than Loach's, tell an important part of the truth of the impact of the Spanish Civil War on the ILP. The suppression of POUM and the events in Barcelona in May 1937 transformed the war for the ILP. However, the reality of the ILP's position was more ambiguous. Even in the initial phase of

the war there were serious concerns from many leading ILP members. Either because of concern about the Catholic reaction to this position or because of pacifist feelings they felt unable to fully support the Party's position on the war.

Support for the Nationalists in the Civil War dominated the leadership of the Catholic community throughout Britain, and even most of those who opposed this view argued for neutrality. The transmission of this perspective meant, as Tom Buchanan has shown, that 'hostility to the Republic was, therefore, widespread amongst working class Catholics.'[57] This posed an acute dilemma for the ILP, all of whose representatives in Glasgow considered themselves dependent on Catholic support. This problem was emphasised by the defeat of Catholic Glasgow ILP councillor John Heenan in the 1936 local elections. Members of the Catholic community saw Heenan's defeat as an expression of the power of the Catholic vote to dislodge those who were not sufficiently sympathetic to their case, and other ILP representatives were threatened with a similar fate.[58]

The response of the ILP leadership in Glasgow varied, particularly where it overlapped with electoral concerns. John Heenan, for example, after losing his council seat rejoined the Labour Party complaining that the ILP did not recognise the importance of attending Mass for Catholics fighting Franco. George Buchanan, was only less explicit, remaining silent on the issues surrounding the conflict and privately refusing to accept the Party line of support for the Republican Government.[59] Of course, this reticence was not universal. John McGovern was possibly the labour movement's most combative speaker on behalf of the Republican cause. On returning from an investigative trip with John McNair in November 1936, he published *Why Bishops Back Franco*, which obtained a circulation of 28,000. The pamphlet argued that Franco was using Churches as fortresses whilst claiming that Catholics were well treated by the Spanish Republic.[60] He subsequently participated in perhaps the country's most high profile public debates on Spain against prominent Catholics, most notably those with Glasgow Catholic journalist Douglas Jerrold in June 1937.[61]

The most important constant in the official analysis of the Spanish situation by the ILP was the stress on working class activity and the Workers' Front policy. This line suggested that united working class action independent of other classes was the only policy which could defeat fascism. It was the basis of an uneasy compromise which

allowed those with pacifist leanings to support the Spanish Civil War whilst not feeling as though they were compromising their general anti-militarism. Thus, the Party stressed the role of the working class in the short-term process of preventing the immediate victory of the fascist revolt. As John McNair wrote in the ILP's 1936 pamphlet *In Spain Now!*:

> It must never be forgotten that Spain was not saved by the Government in Madrid, by loyal elements in the Army or even by the loyalty of the larger part of the fleet. Spain was saved by the spontaneous and united efforts of the workers and in the beginning they were not even armed.

This analysis allowed McNair to unite anti-fascist and revolutionary socialist sentiment to declare complete support for the Republican side.

> We say to our Spanish comrades quite simply: "We are with you in every fibre of our bodies and minds right up to the end. Your sufferings are our sufferings because your fight is ours, and when victory finally comes to you it will be to us a source of happiness to realise that we at least have not hindered, but, to all the extent of our powers have tried to help you towards that triumph.[62]

The 1937 ILP annual conference stood entirely behind McNair's sentiments declaring 'complete solidarity with the Spanish workers in their war against Fascism and in their use of Workers' Power for the Social Revolution in Catalonia and other territories of Spain freed from Fascism'.[63]

In these initial stages of the conflict the Party's support for the Republican side was demonstrated in a number of practical ways. The Party sent John McNair to be sent to Barcelona as an envoy. McNair, up to that point had been acting as Assistant Secretary of the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity. He arrived in Barcelona in August 1936 taking with him the first £100 that the Party had raised to assist the Republicans.[64] McNair then worked to establish an international committee of the Bureau in Barcelona with him acting as Chairman, and Bob Smillie as international representative.[65]

They also set out plans for an exhibition on the subject of the Spanish Civil War which aimed to coordinate the Spanish Medical

Aid Committee, the London Trades Council, the London Labour Party and the Communist Party. For the ILP, Edward Fletcher of Birmingham, later Labour MP for Darlington, went out to Barcelona with Bob Smillie. He was joined by Roland Penrose to collect material for the exhibition. In the event the other organisations declined to participate and the Spanish Exhibition, which opened 20 February 1937 at 36 Ludgate Hill, London, consisted entirely of ILP material.[66]

Brockway outlined the chief aims of the ILP's fundraising strategy in the *New Leader*; in addition to obtaining medical supplies and medical units he stressed the necessity of raising money for weapons, getting relief to the victims of the war and of stopping transports getting through to the Nationalists.[67] As a result of these efforts they bought and equipped an Ambulance, which they named after Joaquin Maurin, the POUM leader who was then widely believed to be dead. This was driven to Spain by WB Martin, described as an 'artillery expert', who then volunteered on the Huesca Front.[68] They also raised clothing and food through a series of appeals in the initial phase of the conflict. They were successfully involved in lobbying the Co-operative movement to revise its attitude and send food and medical supplies to Spain, canvassing support at both national and local levels.[69] On the personal side the Party held a socialist self-denial week for Spain in which members and sympathisers were encouraged to give up a luxury for one week and to contribute the money saved to the ILP, raising £144.[70] Indicative of the gendered appeal of such a humanitarian crisis they also directed appeals specifically at women to knit clothing to help the Spanish workers: 'To Women Readers – Are you knitting those sweaters and socks for the Spanish Workers? They are needing them very badly – both for adults and children'.[71]

The Party also sent a group of fighters out to Spain to demonstrate in the most practical way possible their support for the cause. The police, aware of the attempts to recruit fighters had been keeping a close eye on the Party. Special Branch's botched attempts to keep a surreptitious watch on the Party's headquarters, which resulted in them being forced to decline the offer of a cup of tea from staff inside, made the national news. Brockway later claimed that three members of the police also failed in their attempts to be recruited to the ILP contingent. Nevertheless, with this and other police attention and the awareness of impending Government legislation to prevent further military aid to Spain, the contingent had every reason to be

careful. Thus, the march to the train at Victoria Station on 1 January 1937 of the group of about twenty-five soldiers-to-be, singing the Internationale, under the charge of Bob Edwards, although hardly inconspicuous, was seen by only a few trusted members of the Party who were informed of the departure details. The press were informed only later along with a claim that the Party intended to send a further one hundred or so men out to Spain.[72]

No further contingent was sent, but a number of other individuals did join the group. Although there is no precise list of the members of the contingent there are a number of sources which when combined come close to providing such an enumeration. Stafford Cottman, asked by Peter Thwaites provided thirty names, including two Americans who served with the contingent, Archie Buttonshaw and Harry Milton. There are a small number of conflicts between this list and contemporary sources. There is no mention of Paddy Thomas, from Careglefn, Anglesey who is reported as being wounded in a night attack in the *New Leader*, and there are a number of other cases where first names are given differently in different sources, or likely nicknames are used. Whatever the case it would appear that the final size of the contingent was somewhere between 30 and 35.[73]

The war, for the contingent, famously described by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia*, was in the main a relatively quite affair. The initial group of twenty-five was joined in Spain by a number of others, including Eric Blair, then not using his pen name George Orwell. Along with Blair, came Bob Williams, a Welshman married to a Spanish girl who joined up with his brother-in-law, Ramon.[74] The contingent was also joined at this stage by Bob Smillie, the grandson of the famous Scottish miners leader Bob Smillie. Smillie had been working with John McNair as the representative Youth section of the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity. However, he quickly became convinced that he would be of most service at the front and persuaded McNair to agree to him signing up when the ILP contingent came over.

Eric Blair's childhood experiences in India, at prep school and at Eton are well known. The backgrounds of the other members of the contingent were diverse. Members were recorded as coming from Belfast, Chorley, Larkhall, Glasgow, Anglesey, Manchester, Bristol, Dartford, Bingley, Twickenham and Golders Green. Three had fought in the First World War: Charles Doran of Glasgow, Harry

Thomas of London and Arthur Chambers. Few others, apart from Harry Webb the stretcher-bearer and Paddy O'Hara, from Belfast, who had some training in first aid, had either military or medical experience.

The journey to Spain was relatively uneventful, with the group claiming widespread support from those they met:

> From Perpignan right to the Spanish frontier the clenched fist was our welcome, and garage-workers, mechanics, small shopkeepers, agricultural workers in the fields, the women-folk and all the kiddies, there is not the slightest doubt are solid for the workers' cause.[75]

On arrival on 10 January at the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, where they were initially stationed, a discussion circle was formed to address political issues. A social secretary was also appointed to 'arrange concerts and entertainments' and a sports secretary was elected with a hasty football match organised between the ILPers and a team of Spanish militia-men. Orwell later described the barracks in bleak manner:

> The whole barracks was in a state of filth and chaos… We ate at long trestle-tables out of permanently greasy tin pannikins, and drank out of a dreadful thing called a *porrón*.[76]

The contemporary descriptions of meal times which appeared in the *New Leader* was altogether more favourable:

> The food is good but it will take the lads a week to get used to the drinking of wine at practically every meal. A packet of cigarettes is supplied to each man per day, and the pay is 10 pesetas.[77]

The training received at the Barracks was notoriously short and at the end of January the ILP contingent, as the British section of the POUM militia, began their journey, stopping off at Lerida, where they were visited by John McNair before leaving for the area surrounding Huesca on the Aragon Front on 2 February.[78] At the front the contingent took over three advanced posts, about 100 yards distant from the others, joined by communication trenches. The outposts, on the slope of the hills looking west, were about two hundred yards from the nearest fascist lines on the opposite slopes looking east.[79]

Bob Edwards, the brigade commander, reporting in the *New Leader*, was keen to stress the most 'exciting' aspects of the unit's work. He wrote about scouting within hearing distance along the fascist lines with Blair, of holding their position and dealing with the desertion of fascists. The reality of the contingent's activity was much more mundane. It largely consisted of building roads from their dug-out to the nearest Spanish position and creating a dug-out for community purposes where they could meet to talk and receive instructions.[80] In terms of fighting the fascists the contingent saw relatively little action. As Orwell later put it:

> Meanwhile nothing happened, nothing ever happened. The English had got into the habit of saying that this wasn't a war it was a bloody pantomime.[81]

Indeed, the main descriptions of fighting against the fascists which appears both in *Homage to Catalonia* and in the *New Leader*, concerned a night attack in which some of the contingent took part. The plan initiated by the position captain, Benjamin, a French speaking Polish Jew, involved fifteen English volunteers in a plan to storm a fascist parapet and seize the machine gun which dominated the POUM line. The attack, with Paddy Donovan second in command to Benjamin, initially went according to plan. The men crawled across the mud of no man's land and captured the parapet. However, the machine gun had been removed and the co-ordinated manoeuvres to capture other necessary strategic positions failed. The group soon found themselves under attack from all sides and retreated with only a small quantity of fascist bombs and injuries to, amongst others, Reg Hiddlestone, Paddy Thomas and Douglas Thompson, to show for their efforts.[82]

The contrast between this brief moment of close combat and the everyday experience of the trenches was summarised, in Orwell's recollection, by someone shouting 'This is war! Isn't it bloody?' Nevertheless injuries to the contingent were not restricted to that 'dirty' April night. Arthur 'Lanky' Clinton, from Lancashire and the humorist of the contingent, was injured in the shoulder during shelling at the end of March. Philip Hunter, of Dartford ILP, and Buck Parker both sustained leg injuries shortly before the night attack. Bob Williams broke his ankle during shelling in February 1937 and Eric Blair was shot through the throat by a sniper. Alongside these injuries Stafford Cottman, the youngest member of the

contingent at only eighteen years old, was hospitalised with suspected TB.[83] Thus, despite the limited military role of the contingent, a number of its members were injured during the Spanish Civil war. This effort signified for many the attitude of complete and unqualified commitment of the ILP towards the War during its early phase.

Whilst the ILP contingent may not have played a major part in the military side of the Spanish Civil War it was nevertheless involved in the events in May in Barcelona that were to transform the ILP, and other, attitudes to the Spanish Civil War. In these events the ILP contingent, on leave in Barcelona from the end of April, became caught up in the fighting between the rival anti-fascist groups. During the initial fighting the ILP contingent was split into four separate groups, with eight members in Hotel Falcon, the main residence for POUM militia men in Barcelona, six across the road in the Comité Local of POUM at the Plaza del Terato, four in the barracks and one or two with John McNair at the Executive Committee's head-quarters at 10 Ramblas de los Estudios. The members of the ILP contingent between them had very little idea of exactly what was happening. Nevertheless, most of the contingent managed to congregate at the Hotel Falcon and Comité Local and kept up their spirits in the following days by singing reading and talking whilst those who had been on night duty slept. None of the ILP contingent were drawn into the fighting in any extended way.[84]

The significance of these events for the ILP lay primarily in reactions to the situation. The Communist press had been running a long-standing campaign against POUM, which was stepped up immediately after these events, claiming they were solely responsible for the fighting and were in league with the fascists in doing so. These accusations appeared in Britain in the *Daily Worker* on 11 May. There was no immediate attack on the ILP and the *New Leader* the following Friday was surprisingly quiet on the issue. However, the following week, 21 May, the *New Leader* carried extensive comment on the 'Counter-Revolution in Spain'. Brockway argued that the Communists were on the wrong side of the barricades and were now 'committed to the defence of property', suggesting that the Communist Parties not only in Spain, but everywhere, had ceased to be revolutionary parties.

> Sincere revolutionary Socialists will increasingly turn to the Parties in each country which carry on the revolutionary tradition. In Spain that party is the POUM. In this country that Party is the ILP.[85]

The articles also gave the first account of the ILP contingent's presence and activities during the events. The response from the Communist Press was immediate. JR Campbell wrote an article asking 'Is the ILP for winning the war or aiding Franco?' for the following day's *Daily Worker*. In the same issue Palme Dutt accused the ILP of having involved itself in 'the criminal armed attempt against the Spanish Peoples Front'. Following this, the accusations from the Communist Party against the ILP flowed thick and fast, with considerable attention being given to the subject at the 14th National Communist Congress later that month. Gallacher and Campbell in particular were vitriolic in their attacks whilst Pollitt's speech signalled the effective end of the Unity Campaign. Stafford Cottman found himself expelled from Bristol YCL for 'taking part in the fascist rising in Barcelona'.[86]

These tensions between the ILP and the Communists were exacerbated later in the year by the reporting of statements alleged to have been made by Frank Frankford, an ILP contingent member. Frankford was arrested by the police and held for some time whilst the police investigated the theft of some paintings about which it was suggested that he had evidence. He was eventually released, he believed because of the influence of Sam Lesser, a member of the International Brigade and then a *Daily Worker* journalist. Frankford gave an interview to Lesser which was transformed into a statement which appeared in the *Daily Worker* on 14 September. The statement accused the POUM contingent of working for the fascists and contained specific allegations that there had been collaboration between the fascists and the POUM. The allegations were attacked in the *New Leader* first by John McNair and then in detail by Orwell who answered the allegations individually. Orwell's article was signed by the fourteen members of the contingent who could be contacted at short notice.[87] Brockway later wrote that Frankford came to the ILP and withdrew the allegations:

> A few days later the boy arrived in London and came at once to McNair at the ILP Head Office. He broke down crying and begged

> forgiveness. He had been imprisoned in Barcelona and had been presented with the document to sign as a condition of freedom.[88]

The *Daily Worker* undoubtedly distorted the facts of Frankford's interview with Lesser, it was forced to correct certain points of the interview two days after it was published. The allegations themselves were clearly without substance. However, it appears that Frankford himself was not necessarily opposed to the gist, that there was a certain fascist outlook amongst the POUM. In an interview with Bernard Crick in 1979 Frankford maintained that 'there are things still to be explained' and stated that the *Daily Worker* article, which he agreed he had never signed, was 'quite legitimate in politics' as he was 'a realist'.[89]

The relationship between the ILP and the Communist Party was never to recover from these blows. By the end of the year all cordial relations between the Parties had broken down with the Communists, with attitudes reminiscent of the Class-against-Class phase, treating the ILP as in some ways more dangerous than the fascists themselves. For example the *Daily Worker* refused to publish adverts for the ILP's Socialist Bookshop, *Controversy* and other publications whilst at the same time carrying an advert for *Secrets and Secret Societies* by Graham Seton the founder in 1933 of the fascist and anti-Jewish National Socialist Workers' Party.[90] The response of the Communist International to the events in Barcelona in May 1937 had a profound impact on the relationship between the ILP and the Communist Party, removing permanently the idea of united left wing action between the two parties.

The situation for the members of the ILP contingent in Spain was made extremely uncomfortable by the attacks on POUM and it became more so as moves were made to ban the ILP's Spanish 'brother party'. The ILP made considerable efforts to get contingent members home safely and several of the contingent made furtive returns home escaping police arrest.[91] For example Cottman, McNair, Blair and his wife Eileen O'Shaughnessy made an escape across the border by train after posing as wealthy English businessmen.[92] Not all of the ILP contingent returned home as the suppression of POUM began. Arthur Chambers, Bob Williams and Reg Hiddlestone all stayed on to fight in Spain. Williams returned home in December 1938 after being injured three times, Hiddlestone was the final member of the contingent left in Spain, returning home in February

1939, leaving Barcelona only hours before the fascists entered. Chambers was not so lucky, being the only member of the ILP contingent to be killed in combat in Spain when he was shot by a fascist sniper in August 1938 after transferring to a CNT unit.[93] Other members of POUM were arrested and some assassinated. Of those closely associated with the ILP brigade the arrest of George Kopp, the unit commander, and Harry Milton, one of the American members of the contingent, were of particular concern. Milton did not spend long in gaol, as McNair ensured his release. Kopp despite attempted intervention on his behalf by the ILP, remained in prison for a further eighteen months. However, most attention both at the time and since, has focused on the case of Bob Smillie who died in gaol in Valencia.

The disputes and difficulties within the ILP Guild of Youth had been extensively dealt with by the Party's 1937 Easter Conference. There it had been decided that Smillie, as both a hero of the Spanish Civil War and supporter of the Party leadership, should lead a campaign to reinvigorate the ILP's youth section. He set out to return home on 10 May and was arrested the following day. Initially Spanish Government authorities told the ILP's representatives that the arrest was 'merely a technical matter'. As he continued to be held both Brockway and Maxton wrote to the Spanish Ambassador who assured them that the matter would be investigated.[94] However, at the beginning of June, Smillie's case was transferred to the Secret Police as investigations started into his role in 'rebellion against the authorities' in the events in Barcelona. As these investigations began, the authorities reported that Smillie had been taken ill and on Friday 11 June shortly after he had been transferred to Provincial hospital they claimed he had died of peritonitis.

Smillie's death has been surrounded in mystery, and has been the subject of much speculation. The official ILP report into the investigation, conducted by David Murray of Motherwell ILP, found that the authorities were guilty of carelessness rather than violence or direct malice:[95]

> We consider that Bob Smillie's death was due to great carelessness on the part of the responsible authorities, which amounted to criminal negligence.

Against this position it has frequently been asserted that Smillie was 'done to death' by the Communist authorities. A recent analysis by Tom Buchanan, of the evidence surrounding Smillie's death, focusing on that collected by David Murray, suggests that the full facts will probably never be known. However, he makes clear that there are good reasons to believe that Smillie did indeed die of appendicitis. Nevertheless, Buchanan stresses the restraint of the ILP leadership and the lack of political use made of Smillie's death. He concludes that

> [T]he events surrounding his death suggest a degree of neglect for which the official ILP formula of 'criminal negligence' barely appears adequate.[96]

John Newsinger has presented a letter from Georges Kopp to the ILP, which seems to indicate that the appendicitis was imaginary and that Smillie was in fact kicked to death by his Communist interrogators. The letter is based upon Kopp's claimed recollections of a dossier which he claimed to have had in his possession which he had stolen from the Secret Police headquarters whilst imprisoned. Buchanan has subsequently convincingly questioned many of the facts which Kopp claims to have established from his reading of the dossier. Most importantly it is clear from a range of sources that Smillie had been unwell for a long period of time with symptoms consistent with appendicitis. Given this it is unlikely that the appendicitis was 'imaginary', simply a 'cover story' invented by the authorities. Buchanan also questions Kopp's integrity as an historical witness, although relying on the viewpoint of Orwell's biographers to establish these points.[97] This negative view of Kopp's reliability was shared by many of those who fought alongside, and even considered themselves friends of Kopp. For example Bob Edwards knew and admired Georges Kopp, but nevertheless considered him an unreliable witness, and one who was prone to extreme exaggeration:

> I suppose I knew Georges Kopp better than any other person. We lived and worked together during the Spanish Civil War on the Aragon Front for three months…. Georges Kopp was one of many courageous men who came to Spain to fight because fighting was a kind of career for them….He was inclined to exaggerate. For example, he told me he was a friend of Henry Spaark, the Socialist Foreign

> Minister of Belgium. I met Spaark and discussed the plight of Georges Kopp with him and indeed it was Spaark's intervention that had Georges Kopp released from prison. But Spaark denied any knowledge of Georges Kopp, and as far as I am aware, he had no background of activity in the Labour Movement of Belgium.[98]

Given these considerations it seems reasonable to adopt an attitude of some scepticism to Kopp's letter and to suppose that the findings of the initial ILP report were largely accurate if somewhat underplayed. Smillie died of appendicitis, but he would never have done so if he had not been a badly treated political prisoner.

The Party's reaction to Smillie's death was an illuminating indication of their political position. Inevitably tributes to Smillie flowed in. Stress was placed on his personal qualities: his enthusiasm, friendliness, and repeatedly on his love of singing. Emphasis was also placed on his political heritage, as Maxton wrote:

> We knew the stock from which he came. We saw his father and mother living a strenuous existence on their little farm in Lanarkshire, toiling early and late on the soil, but still with surplus energy to devote to the Socialist Movement, to the unemployed, to the improvement of the conditions of the miners living around them.
>
> We knew his grandfather – that strong leader of the miners, who pioneered their organisation first in Lanarkshire, then in Scotland and Great Britain, finally to become a great International working-class figure. We knew his grandmother, a great woman who to this day at advanced years maintains a spirit of sturdy independence, and staunch adherence to the workers' cause.[99]

His own political activity and role in the working class movement also played a major part in the tributes: his participation in the Lanarkshire section of the 1935 Scottish Hunger March, his role within the Guild of Youth and the International Youth Bureau, and of course, his activity with the ILP contingent in the Spanish Civil War.[100]

Despite all of this, and the growing antagonism with the Communist movement, there was no attempt to make Smillie into a heroic victim of Stalinist oppression in Spain. Indeed mention of the way in which he died was almost absent from the Party literature dealing with the incident. For example, the official tribute to him *We*

Carry On carefully avoided mentioning the issues which surrounded his illness and death. It simply recorded that Smillie had 'died in a hospital in Valencia'. There was not hint of any controversy about the way in which he was treated. His arrest received only a quick mention: 'It was while he was on his way home to undertake a national campaign for the Guild of Youth and the Spanish workers that he was detained by the authorities'. There was a stark contrast between this, and the way the Communist Party used the reporting of deaths for political purposes.

The events in Barcelona and the resulting suppression of POUM changed the ILP's outlook and activity with respect to Spain. The ILP had, of course, always supported POUM. The ejection of Andrés Nin from the Catalan Government in December 1936 for example had brought a series of letters of 'wholehearted support' from the ILP expressing agreement with the POUM line, and calls from the Party for an international investigation into the charges against the Spanish party.[101]

However, support for POUM against the Communists and Socialists in Spain, once seen as a relatively small part of the Party's Spanish concerns after the suppression of POUM soon became the major focus of their activity. In July Party policy pointed to the overriding importance of tolerance, to secure unity for the defeat of the fascists.[102] The ILP leadership became increasingly involved in attempts to secure this tolerance on the ground in Spain. Brockway, for example, visited Spain in July as part of the French Committee for the Defence of the Spanish Revolution. Then two months later, following the assassination of Nin, Maxton went to Spain as part of a deputation from the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity. Both Brockway and Maxton returned further disillusioned about the role which the Communists were playing in the Civil War.

Maxton met with both the five leading POUM figures who were being held and a number of leading figures in the Republican Government including the Prime Minister, the minister of justice, the minister of the interior and the attorney-general. He reported back an overall feeling that the Government 'intends to see that they have a fair trial' and that 'no one takes seriously the charge of espionage and that there is no desire to pass vindictive sentence for the May events in Barcelona'. However, he noted that this did not match the attitude of the Communist Party:

> Against this I have to say, and I say it with regret, that the Communist Party in Spain carry on a day-to-day campaign in their Press, calling for the most drastic action…. If it is strong enough to secure the death penalty on our POUM comrades, against the better judgement and understanding of the members of the Government in Spain, it will be a very bad day's work for the Government's cause in Spain.[103]

The Party press increasingly focused on attacking the Communist Party in Spain, with articles on these matters by ex-members of its Spanish contingent, on supporting POUM and carrying articles written by the Spanish Party's leadership.[104] Behind the scenes the Party was working, trying to raise money to support POUM and establishing contacts with the Spanish Republican Government to secure the release of the POUM prisoners, and attempting to win support for POUM within the British working class movement. In these efforts the Party was careful to avoid liaison with the Trotskyist movement which they felt would have, however unjustifiably, leant support to the charges against POUM.[105]

The only relief activity which the Party was directly involved after May 1937 came through their assistance in arranging a Basque Children's home in Somerset. The forty-one children the ILP made itself responsible for arrived at the Grange in Street, Somerset on 7 June 1937. The Grange, an old country house with large gardens which had previously been used as a home for mentally deficient children, was offered to the Party for use in housing the Basque children by Mr and Mrs Clark, of the shoe family, in Street.[106] The home stayed open for exactly two years, until June 7 1939, at which time twenty-six of the children returned to their families. The fifteen remaining children were found temporary or permanent adoption places in Britain by the combined efforts of the Street Committee and the ILP. During its time of operation the home was mainly administered by the residents of Street. The Party's input was nevertheless substantial in terms of the sums of money being raised.[107]

In 1936 the ILP had understood the Spanish Civil War as a revolutionary struggle against fascism and capitalism. By the middle of the following year the Party accepted that serious revolutionary hopes had disappeared. The changing situation lead to changing attitudes. The ILP maintained its overall support for the war, whilst increasingly attacking the role of Communists in Spain. After May

1937 it would no longer be possible to argue, as Jennie Lee did at the 1937 Easter Conference that 'differences with the Communist Party should not blind us to the great work that the Communists are doing in Spain'.[108] Neither was it possible for Spain to be the great rallying cry within the ILP that it was within either most of the rest of the left in Britain or within the Party in the early period of the War. Indeed by the end of the Spanish Civil War the focus of the ILP's activity was on trying to secure safety for its Spanish comrades from both Republican and Nationalist gaols.[109]

Munich

Perhaps the most public controversy within the ILP during the 1930s came in September 1938 over the Munich Agreement, with Chamberlain's acceptance of Nazi control of the Sudentenland and agreement to peaceful resolution of future disputes. The conflict within the ILP was again between the line of the Party, this time agreed by the NAC, and the rather different position adopted by the Parliamentary Group. In September 1938 the NAC issued a manifesto in which the Party declared 'unconditional opposition to any form of support to the Government for war,' and drew explicit comparison with its position on the 1914–18 War.[110] The manifesto was referred to in a BBC News Bulletin and in the press and a further pamphlet was published dealing with the political issues involved in the crisis. The NAC report the following year claimed that these declarations had brought much good publicity for the Party.

The Parliamentary Group took a rather different line. Concerns were raised when Maxton wished Chamberlain well in the House of Commons before he departed for Munich. Things got worse following Maxton's speech during the Commons debate on the Munich Agreement. Speaking to a crowded House on 4 October, Maxton announced his opposition to war as 'the one great over-riding evil of humanity' claiming 'nothing could justify it'. He was sceptical of the Munich Agreement, arguing he 'did not believe that we've got World Peace', or even the foundations of peace, which would require a socialist revolution to abolish of imperialism and capitalism. However, he suggested that the Agreement represented 'breathing space' and, whilst distancing himself from Chamberlain's

social and political philosophy, he went so far as to 'congratulate the Prime Minister on his work'.[111]

Maxton's comments were sufficient to attract the attention of the press gallery, and a number of London members of the Party appealed to the Parliamentary Group to explicitly distance themselves from Chamberlain. However, John McGovern, who never let slip an opportunity to amplify his colleague's most controversial statements, made a speech which added to the problems. Although he reiterated much of what Maxton had said, much of the nuanced wording of Maxton's declaration was missing. Indeed McGovern's speech contained almost none of the condemnation of British Imperialism that was central to both ILP policy and Maxton's speech. The only part of the statement which related to Imperialism sounded as a defence of the British:

> I recognise that the country does not want war. Britain has a great colonial empire, and wants to pursue a policy which would ensure its continuation in an orderly way. But Germany and Italy are bound to challenge the supremacy of the older empire.

However, the most challenging aspect of his speech for other members of the ILP was his almost unequivocal support of Chamberlain:

> If he averted war and gave a breathing space to the world for reason to operate – they were entitled to say to him generously "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."[112]

The BBC and National Newspapers picked up on the statements of first Maxton and then McGovern, predictably highlighting the support that the two ILPers appeared to have given to the Prime Minister.

Groups within the ILP were furious at the action which they perceived Maxton to have taken, and at the association of the ILP with support for the Munich Agreement. A number of branches and federations immediately issued statements distancing themselves from the Commons speeches of the MPs.[113] However, the greatest controversy came in the NAC, where Fenner Brockway and John Aplin, the London representative, were particularly frustrated.

Brockway later stated that he felt the 'speech was regrettable from a revolutionary socialist point of view'. He gave two reasons:

> First for the praise of Chamberlain and, second, for its omission of any denunciation of the terms of the Munich pact.[114]

Brockway requested an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee at which he and Aplin raised their objections to the impression that had been given of the Party's policy by the parliamentary speeches. Feelings were running high, but it appeared something of a stand-off had been reached when the Executive agreed to 'put no obstacle in the way' of Brockway and Aplin if they distanced themselves from Maxton and McGovern. Maxton also asked that Brockway wait twenty-four hours to think over his position before issuing any statement. However, Brockway, to his later regret, was not prepared to delay and released a statement the following morning publicly dissenting from what he described as 'the unreserved praise given to Mr Chamberlain's actions' by members of the Parliamentary Group.[115]

The Party press attempted to play down the divisions over the Munich Crisis. The *New Leader* editorial on the 14 October briefly acknowledged the disagreements over 'the Prime Minister's role in the recent war crisis'. It stressed that there was no disagreement about the Party's attitude towards war nor to the policy to now be pursued:

> We are unanimous in our view that the present Imperialist Peace will lead to war unless the workers are mobilised, first in resistance to the War Danger and then in the supreme task of overthrowing Capitalist Imperialism.

Behind these claims to unity there was deep division which fundamentally altered the way in which a number of ILPers saw the future. There is little doubt that Maxton himself was deeply affected by the way in which he felt treated by Brockway and Aplin, especially the fact that Brockway had not waited the twenty-four hours he had requested. John McNair attributed Maxton's subsequent collapse in health to the affair.[116] Whilst McGovern recalls Maxton breaking down in tears and crying 'like a child' at the NAC meeting and Campbell Stephen's reaction to this, accusing Brockway and his

daughter of being 'a lot of bloody hounds'.[117] John McGovern in his autobiography suggested that the events persuaded him that there was no future for the ILP outside the Labour Party. Other leading figures within the Party felt strongly that Maxton's speech was not only correct in line and temper but was a fine piece of propaganda stating the Party case. McNair, who witnessed it, later described Maxton's speech as 'probably his greatest speech during this period' and at the time he was no less convinced, as he wrote in that weekend's issue of the *New Leader*:

> When James Maxton sat down the vast majority of the House realised that "common folk" had been heard, and in no uncertain manner. A journalist sitting near to me said: "At last the people have spoken." As a member of the ILP, I felt immeasurably strengthened and inspired by a clear, courageous and unequivocal exposition of the Socialist message across the bleak wastes of Capitalist rivalries.[118]

A significant amount of space in the Party's discussion journal *Left* was given over to fierce debates with forthright contributions from both sides.[119] Clearly, feelings against the Parliamentary Group were as fervent. Much of this appeared motivated by the betrayal of the Parliamentary Group, as Ernie Patterson argued the Parliamentary Group were not 'revolutionary Socialists but social reformers,' who had become socialised into Commons culture:

> Gone were the days of Keir Hardie when he shocked the House of Commons by his burning hatred. Now the struggle in the House was conducted on the hail-fellow-well-met principle.[120]

At the 1939 conference the Parliamentary Group faced motions for its expulsion from Croydon and Southend branches and calls for it to be brought under strict Party discipline from Greenwich, Clapham, and Birmingham City branches. They were accused by a range of influential members from CA Smith, the new ILP Chairman, to the Birmingham Quaker Joseph Southall of not understanding the Party's analysis of capitalism. Maxton responded by expressing his hurt at the actions of Brockway and Aplin, but finished by tactfully distancing himself from much of the controversy insisting that 'if he had thought that five words of his speech would have caused so much controversy then he would not have used them.' McGovern, on the

other hand, responded in typically angry fashion, first asking 'if the Party didn't want a Capitalist war or a Capitalist Peace what the hell did it want'. The question did little to meet the main point of the objectors who had suggested that Revolutionary Socialism provided the alternative. He then went on to restate the point which Maxton carefully avoided emphasising when he reiterated the statement that he 'genuinely believe Neville Chamberlain had secured peace'. Having aggressively argued his point he then moved on to attacking Aplin and Brockway at a personal level, suggesting that they had acted in a 'scurrilous manner' and accusing Brockway of being a 'double crosser' before writing off the London Division as 'fireside theoreticians and middle class dilettantes with no contact with the working class'.

Brockway, perhaps motivated in part by the guilt he felt at having ignored Maxton's requests to delay his public statement, responded in part with a detailed personal defence. More politically he suggested that there were three alternative policies: firstly, appeasement, secondly, lining up behind the democratic powers and finally the option he supported, opposition to both a bad war and a bad peace. However, questions put to the vote surrounded the conduct of the Parliamentary Group and not the correct policy of the Party with respect to the Munich settlement. All the critical resolutions were defeated, the move to expel the Group was defeated by a large majority and the repudiation of the MPs was also defeated. However, the referencing back of the Parliamentary Group report was only narrowly defeated 65 to 43 and the Bradford amendment which would have congratulated the MPs was defeated. The conference was prepared to back its MPs, but it was a very uneasy vote of confidence after a very public spat.

Pacifism

Throughout the 1930s the Party stressed its historical, and ongoing opposition to war. As the 1936 conference declared:

> The ILP has in the past a sound record in its opposition to war and we need have no doubts that confronted with any war the ILP will again play an honourable and courageous part. It is distressing to find at this stage that we are almost as solitary as we were at the time of the Boer War in 1900 and the World War in 1914.[121]

There was significant pacifist sentiment within the ILP and leading members argued it was the closest of the then existing left-wing parties in Britain to the pacifist position.[122] The Party opposed the Second World War from its outbreak and was involved in organising resistance to war preparations. It was at the forefront of the formation of the No Conscription Fellowship in January 1939. There were two ILP members on the provisional committee of the Fellowship, with William Ballantine acting as Chairman.[123] The *New Leader* gave prominence to a strongly worded statement against conscription in May 1939.[124] At the national convention of the No Conscription Fellowship, held in Bermondsey Town Hall in June 1939, with Ballantine in the chair, the Party had a strong presence, with 91 ILP organisations represented.[125] There was also a significant ILP dimension to many of the Trade Union delegations to the convention including those from the NUR, Building Trades, NUDAW, Life Assurance Agents, Chemical Workers and the Litho Workers.[126] In this situation the ILP was able to significantly influence the course of debate and one of the two Party amendments, which called for the conference to support those who became conscripted unwillingly or without realising its implications, was passed after being moved by the ILP team of Jack Hammond and Walter Padley.

Nevertheless, the ILP was not a pacifist party. This much was apparent even at that National Convention of the No Conscription Fellowship. The second ILP motion, which was defeated 198–178, suggested that, whilst it would not be acceptable to fight for capitalism, it might be necessary to fight for socialism.[127] According to the official Party position pacifism had to be rejected and replaced by a revolutionary socialist outlook. As Brockway wrote on leading pacifist Dick Sheppard's death:

> The Pacifist Movement of which he was the leader has both its advantages and disadvantages. It is dangerous when it encourages non-resistance to War, Fascism and Capitalism; but the thinking Pacifist rarely remains in that position– he is driven on to opposition to Capitalism to a recognition of the reality of the class struggle, and finally to the revolutionary Socialist view.[128]

In 1939, the Party argued that in practical terms there was every reason, from a revolutionary socialist point of view, to oppose the

war. By the outbreak of war there was an uneasy compromise within the Party, and indeed within many individuals' own thoughts, between revolutionary socialism and opposition to all wars.

The Party line was that capitalism was the cause of both war and fascism. War, they argued, was 'due to the fight between the capitalist classes of the Imperialist Powers for raw materials and markets'.[129] Whilst Fascism was also seen as an 'inevitable development of Capitalism in crisis'.[130] The Party suggested that the capitalist class in Britain would never be able to defeat Nazism as they 'have more sympathy with Nazism than with real democracy'. Thus, they suggested only the working class and the establishment of socialism could really defeat Nazism. According to the ILP this could best be achieved by the British workers seeking to oppose British capitalism, both in terms of wealth distribution within Britain and crucially in opposing British Imperialism. Thus, ILP policy at the outbreak of war proposed an anti-imperialist and revolutionary socialist alternative to war and there was nowhere within such a position for support for an anti-fascist war conducted by Britain and her allies. In other words, there was an agreement between many pacifists and the ILP about what should be done. As this practical consensus unravelled as the war progressed so this tentative resolution fell apart. This was most dramatically illustrated during 1940 as the new Party Chairman CA Smith began attacking the Party line. Initially the conflict with the Party was over the Soviet invasion of Finland, stating that he would have been prepared to go and fight against 'Stalin's latest crime' on the proviso that he was not under control of 'British Imperialism'. These concerns developed into a much more expansive criticism of the ILP's anti-war position based on a firm opposition to both Nazism and Stalinism. Smith argued his case without obvious support from others, under the pseudonym Philo in the columns of the *New Leader* and using his own name in the internal discussion bulletin *Between Ourselves*. They led to his eventual resignation from the Party, although his concerns about the nature of the war were shared by some other leading figures including Jennie Lee, John Aplin and even Fenner Brockway. These disputes which disrupted the Party during the war graphically demonstrated that disputes between 'pacifist' and 'revolutionary socialist' sentiment had only partially been resolved.

Conclusion

In 1936 Brockway claimed that the ILP had developed a unity of purpose and understanding based on its new revolutionary policy. His assessment could not be applied to International affairs. Having apparently sorted out its International affiliations in the fierce internal battles during the immediate period after disaffiliation, from 1935 to the outbreak of war the Party stumbled from one argument to the next on questions relating to war. The difficulties faced by the ILP stemmed from pacifist sentiment within the Party, and an apparently growing incompatibility of this position with a developing revolutionary socialist policy. These conflicts were dramatically played out when the Parliamentary Group refused to support the workers' sanctions line during the Abyssinia crisis, largely because of the implication that it may lead to the support of war. The short-term solution was a compromise; to accept the need for revolutionary violence under certain conditions, but to deny those conditions obtained. However, the resolution of that dispute, although giving way to a near pacifist attitude on the immediate issue saw the acceptance of the principle that the Party should take sides in certain types of dispute. With the Spanish Civil War following so closely on the back of these decisions the pacifists had little choice but to accept the results of their recent 'victory'. However, the ILP's first foray into supporting war was scarcely a conspicuous success. The Spanish Civil War saw the Party increasingly ostracised within the British 'Left' and unable to effectively pursue its aims of supporting revolutionary elements within the Republican forces.

At the outbreak of the Second World War support from capitalist governments in the struggle against fascism prevented the ILP from applying the logic that had led to their support for the Spanish Civil War. It was difficult to conceive of such a war as an immediately revolutionary struggle. As the war continued tensions between the pacifists and others within the ILP grew and there were a number of very public disagreements between leading figures, centred on the position of the then Party Chairman CA Smith. Such continuing difficulties indicate the strains and unresolved tensions inherent in the ILP's new revolutionary policy. They also show the enduring importance of support for the Soviet Union, internationalism and pacifism to the ILP in the 1930s. International events, even more

than domestic politics, demonstrate the continuing political tensions and difficulties for the ILP in the 1930s.

10

Conclusion

The preceding pages have had the perhaps inseparable aims of describing and explaining the trajectory of the ILP in the 1930s. The Party has been described by looking at the ways in which it responded to, and was affected by events. Each part of the thematic discussion has stressed the contested nature of these decisions and the complexity of impacts. The resulting explanation has been conceived in terms of a combination of factors, some internal to the Party and some external, beyond its immediate control. Internally the account has highlighted three central elements: individuals, institutions and ideas. Externally, it has been structured around the domestic and international political environment.

Individual activity has been examined by looking at both leadership and grass roots membership. In terms of membership, the most striking feature is of course the well-worn picture of decline. Yet looking behind this surface impression, a number of striking features are evident. First the picture of decline is not universal, there were periods of growth, some brief, some sustained, for the disaffiliated Party. The ILP in the 1930s was only partly a party decimated and destroyed by events, crises and decisions. Other sections were growing not only in relative, but also in absolute terms. Absolute growth was largely restricted to specific periods; it was more likely in the middle and end of the decade than in the period immediately after disaffiliation. However, even more patterns of growth and decline were highly geographically differentiated. The Party as a whole saw a greater proportion of members leave in both 1933–4 and 1934–5 than had left over disaffiliation, with London and Lancashire particularly badly affected. In the same period the North East, East Anglian and South Western Divisions were all growing significantly. In order to understand the ILP in the 1930s, it needs to be understood as a living organisation which recruited members, and which was remade and transformed by its own activity. Although

substantial numbers of older members remained, it was not simply the dying remnants of a once significant party.

There was a great diversity of activity undertaken by ILP members in the 1930s. Some of this continued the electoral work at parliamentary and local level, which had previously provided a major motivation for the Party's existence. However, other forms of political campaigning and protest were increasingly important. In the early 1930s, this centred on protesting about the treatment of the unemployed. In the later years of the decade, the focus of activity moved toward anti-fascist activity. Within the Party, social activity also played a important role. In some cases, for example the Party's social club in Norwich, this was absolutely central to the Party's vibrancy and growth. In part, with whist drives and jumble sales, there was little to separate this from the kinds of activity undertaken by all political parties in this period. However, in the tradition of ethical socialism there was no clear differentiation between social and political activity. In this vein the Party continued with a raft of more distinctive social activity. This included the Glasgow ILP's trips out to the highland to visit delinquent boys sent out to crofters by the council and the *New Leader* cycling corps that would travel out to villages around Glasgow each weekend to distribute the paper. During the decade the Party also refocused its attention on the industrial side where they had traditionally been rather weak. In the years surrounding disaffiliation the Party had no systematic knowledge of their position with respect to industrial activity and indeed there may have been little to have knowledge of. From 1935 onwards, the Party began to organise in this respect and certainly increased the number of members on Trades Councils and Union executive committees. Although their influence in this regard remained slight in comparison to the Communist Party it was, by the end of the decade, certainly growing.

In terms of leadership, at national level James Maxton undoubtedly had the highest profile. For many, both within and outside the Party, he was an iconic figure who could do little wrong. His personal standing, his electoral base, his oratory, his unquestioned dedication to the cause, his ability to attract coverage from the national media, all of these raised the profile of the Party as a whole. Fenner Brockway too had a significant personal reputation, particularly when it came to international events. His widely respected opposition to imperialism especially with respect to India, enabled connections with

groups working internationally. For many on the left of the Labour Party, looking for a lead on issues such as the Abyssinian Crisis, the ILP benefited from its association with the lead he gave. Internally the role of Brockway and Maxton was also of great significance. Between them they held he leading positions within the Party for almost the entire 1930s. They had a close personal relationship. Where they pulled in the same direction their combined personal influence could be a considerable influence on the Party as a whole. Apart from Maxton and Brockway there were a number of other figures with a national profile. Alongside Maxton the other MPs, particularly John McGovern, had significant profiles. McGovern was an extremely combative figure who did significant work in the early 1930s within the unemployed workers movement, and then during the later years of the decade was active on behalf of the Spanish Republic in Glasgow and beyond. Fred Jowett's connections to the early days and the founding of both the ILP and the Labour Party were seen by many as a justificatory link back to the historic purpose of the socialist movement in Britain. In complete contrast, Jennie Lee, famous for her by-election win in North Lanark in 1929, offered an influential focus for the hopes of a new generation. Generally, the ILP's national leaders profile was built upon a significant local following, most obviously Maxton's in Glasgow and Jowett's in Bradford, Lee's in the Lanarkshire coalfield. However, in a small number of cases a national profile was not dependent on the usual political resources. John Middleton Murry, whose attempts to move the ILP towards an ethical version of Marxism in the period around disaffiliation, wielded influence through his connections into literary circles, his editorial control and patronage of young writers.

Others within the ILP also offered leadership and direction to the Party during the 1930s although more restricted to the local level. Some of these individuals provided internal leadership, altering local directions sometimes against national trends, most notably Elijah Sandham in Lancashire and in a very different political direction Carl Cullen and Jack Gaster in London. In many cases the ILP's influence and electoral success depended to a greater or lesser extent on such individuals; Tom Markland in Derby, George Johnson in Norwich, Claude Stanfield in Merthyr provide obvious examples. At this local level, individuals could also provide a bridge between different otherwise distinct organisational spheres, perhaps most notably with Tom Stephenson and the Cumberland Miners' Association.

Leadership could then have a significant influence on the trajectory of the ILP. Powerful individuals, particularly when working together could adjust policy. Individuals of local significance could offer new, innovative and sometimes effective approaches to the work of the Party at grassroots level. The pull of well-known speakers could provide a spur to recruitment and provide an all-important boost to the morale of long-standing Party members. Yet in rather obvious ways the ILP had problems of leadership in the 1930s. At local level whilst most members were maintained through disaffiliation, the leadership in many areas were councillors who were for obvious reasons much more likely to remain with the Labour Party in 1932. The leadership which did remain was far from universally effective in working for the Party as a whole. The loss of the majority of the Lancashire Division in 1934 and the departure of the RPC in 1935 were for some attributable to the attitudes of Sandham, and the work of Cullen and Gaster respectively. Even for those who remained loyal to the Party the issue of leadership was far from unproblematic. At local level, as in Glasgow, different parts of the Party machine could spend inordinate amounts of time and effort attacking each other even where little of political significance appeared to be at stake. Even more notably where the Party's national figures disagreed, as Maxton and Brockway did in very public ways about first Abyssinia and then the Munich Crisis, it caused considerable disruption to the Party as a whole and left significant scars on personal relationships. Leadership was important to the direction of the ILP in the 1930s, but it was not always a party that was well led.

Institutions and networks also played an important role in influencing the direction of the Party in the 1930s. In 1934 and 1935, the Party was substantially restructured. Two new bodies were created, the Executive Committee, elected from the NAC and an Inner Executive chosen by the Executive from amongst its members. These changes in part accepted the principle of democratic centralism in accordance with which the NAC was also given enhanced powers to control and structure debates at annual conferences. The simultaneous creation of an Industrial Committee and the establishment of Party groups within certain industries was undoubtedly related to the rise in the Party's industrial profile in the later 1930s. These refined formal structures were important in dictating the direction of the Party in the 1930s. Despite claims about their limited role when the new structures were established, the

Executive and Inner Executive quickly accumulated a wide range of powers dealing with everything from discipline, finance and internal organisation to the redirection of Party policy. The new powers of the NAC to direct discussion at conferences were used, not always successfully, to focus debates in the later half of the 1930s on issues of agreement rather than disagreement, which could sometimes create an atmosphere of consensus about central questions of purpose. Yet these changes to the organisational structure of the Party were deeply controversial. Not only were they closely linked to a deeply contested acceptance of democratic centralism, they also made it much easier for particular groupings, most obviously the Parliamentary Group, to bypass the usual mechanisms for debate and discussion in the creation of Party policy.

Indeed, it is an inescapable conclusion for the ILP of this period that the internal impact of groupings and organisations, not formally endorsed by the Party, can be at least as great as any formal organisational arrangements. Most obviously, in the period immediately surrounding disaffiliation, debates within the Party were dominated by the presence of different factions. Perhaps the most influential of these was the Revolutionary Policy Committee, established by leftward moving ILPers and desiring affiliation to the Comintern and unity with the Communist Party. The RPC leader, Dr Cullen, certainly met officials from the Comintern in the period before disaffiliation and took direction from them but appears to have had little in the way of direct contact with the leadership of the CPGB, which in turn took a dim view of RPC's potential. The RPC obtained significant influence within the machinery of the ILP, particularly within the London Division, but also on the NAC. The faction influenced ILP organisation, being to a large degree behind the creation of democratic centralist structures. It also influenced policy, moving the ILP towards a more explicitly Marxist outlook and creating pressure which resulted in the Party agreeing to aim for unity with the Communist Party of Great Britain. The RPC was opposed by the Unity Group, which sought to return the ILP towards a more traditional focus on ethical socialism. Although it was seen within the ILP at the time and by commentators since as synonymous with the Lancashire Divisional organisation the Unity Group received support from outside that Division, most notably from John Middleton Murry and his supporters in East Anglia and London. The factional mix of the Party was further complicated by the presence of a

substantial group of Trotskyists within the Party who attempted to move the Party towards support for the Fourth International.

Alongside these self-defined factions and groups, there was a range of informal networks of individuals which were extremely influential and indeed controversial in the ILP of the 1930s. Most notably the few individuals around Maxton in the Parliamentary Group acted within the wider party in many ways similar to an organised faction. The Parliamentary Group like each of the other factions had a policy outlook which at least on international affairs was both fiercely held and controversial. Unlike the other factions the centrality of Maxton, McGovern and Stephen to the machinery of the Party gave them the possibility of presenting their views as official Party policy. In the Abyssinian Crisis, they did this using the machinery of the Inner Executive in particular, which led to the abolition of that institution. Similar controversial utterances from the group surrounding the Munich Crisis showed that their influence was not solely dependent on this body.

Each of these groupings had a substantial influence on the Party's activity. They helped provide a clearer structure to the policy debates of the early 1930s and at times they worked hard to draw members into the ILP. Members associated with the factions brought with them a range of skills and contacts which were extremely useful to the ILP. However, the internal divisions associated with the factions were undoubtedly disruptive, most members disliked the intense factional manoeuvring and the policies which the factions tended to promote were unacceptable to a wide-span of opinion within the organisation. When the RPC and particularly the Unity Group left the ILP, large numbers of the organisation left with them. Probably greater numbers left in the meantime convinced of the futility of attempting to work within such a factionally divided organisation. The negative impact of the machinations of the Parliamentary Group was if anything even greater. Formal institutions, informal groupings and networks are central to understanding the trajectory of the ILP in the 1930s.

Ideas also played a significant role in explaining the direction of the Party. Whilst all accepted a commitment to a 'revolutionary policy' in name, for some this implied an endorsement and elaboration of the Party's 'ethical socialist' past, for others it entailed a rejection of the ILP's 'reformist' legacy. The disaffiliation decision was made in the light of the continuing disputes between the Labour

Party and the ILP in parliament and the developing arguments for a revolutionary policy within the smaller organisation. These differing reasons for disaffiliation led to contrasting assessments of the ILP's past and conflicting expectations for the Party's political trajectory. From these diverse components, the ILP attempted to forge its 'new revolutionary policy'. This policy saw a reduced emphasis on parliament and the electoral struggle with a central role given to the development of workers' councils. Its definition of socialism was framed in Marxist terms and it set the long-term aim of unity with the Communist Party. The Party held out great hope for this policy. It was expected to distinguish it from the Labour Party, to act as a rallying point for the working class, and to provide the Party with an effective guide to action. The creation of this policy in 1933 was followed by a long process of 'clarification' which also saw substantial hidden change to the policy itself. By 1935 the relationship with the Communist Party had been refined with the 'clarification' removing unity with the CPGB from the Party's aims and a more flexible attitude towards Communist dominated organisations such as the NUWM adopted. In the later 1930s, with the rise of fascism increasingly dominating the Party's agenda, policy underwent further change. The ILP gave up the assumption that it could replace the Labour Party, instead, retaining its commitment to class based politics, it then sought to establish unity of all working class forces in a loose federation probably under the larger organisations banner. With this Workers' Front policy by the later 1930s the ILP claim that it had built a consensus around a well defined 'revolutionary policy'. However, the costs of reaching this agreement had been very substantial and in many respects this consensus was more imagined than real, with the relationship between revolutionary violence, pacifism and anti-fascist action left largely unresolved.

The disaffiliated ILP had to deal with a complex and changing political environment. Domestically, the central questions for the ILP in this respect related to the Labour and Communist Parties, which has formed the main thrust of previous explanations of the ILP failure in the 1930s. According to this view the ILP was naturally squeezed between these two organisations, and without the political space in which to operate was doomed to failure regardless of its own, or others, actions or decisions. Of course there is some merit to this explanation. In many respects the Labour Party had to do little to destroy the ILP. In political competition with the Labour Party the

'ILP flea' could be crushed as a by-product of Labour's regular activity. Nevertheless, this study has stressed that Labour's attitude towards the ILP was rather more aggressive than this picture would suggest. A conscious decision was taken to actively oppose the ILP, to prevent small-scale local alliances emerging and to provide extra funding and support for those areas, particularly in Scotland, where the ILP posed a significant threat. Nevertheless, despite the Labour Party's overall hostility there was a difference between their perception of the ILP and of other political parties. Thus, they were prepared to allow ILP reaffiliation in the late 1930s, whilst refusing to respond to approaches from the CPGB and others. Despite this active opposition, the ILP was, in certain very restricted areas, able to compete effectively with the Labour Party for the popular vote. The ILP was not just naturally crushed by the Labour Party, for it was also an active relationship in which both parties acted consciously.

This picture of an active relationship is even more apposite in the case of the Communist Party. At the time of disaffiliation the CPGB reserved some of its most vitriolic attacks for the 'social fascist' ILP. This abruptly changed in 1933; with the advent of the Communist's United Front line the ILP became a major focus of attention for the Communists. Until 1935 both parties were, at least formally, committed to sustained joint activity and eventually to the merging of the two organisations. This formal unity between the two organisations did not prevent the Communists from trying to infiltrate and subvert the ILP. Groups such as the Comintern Affiliation Committee, and most obviously the significant YCL faction within the Guild of Youth, were led by covert members of the CPGB. From 1935, with the development of the Popular Front line, Communist attention turned away from the ILP and towards the Labour Party and other anti-fascist organisations and individuals. With the changes in Soviet foreign policy, the Moscow Trials and particularly the opposition between POUM and the Communists in the Spanish Civil War, so relations between the ILP and the CPGB soured. From 1933–35 the CPGB and the ILP worked together openly if not unproblematically. From 1935 onwards, with the brief and never convincing interlude of the Unity Campaign, there was a rapidly deteriorating relationship between the two organisations.

These changes in the domestic political environment, substantial as they may have been, were nothing compared to the changing international political environment of the 1930s. The Party had

secured contacts with a range of similar organisation across Europe and beyond in what became known as the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity. Its responses particularly to the changing international situation were coloured by its relationship with these parties. At the same time, the relationship with the Second and particularly the Communist International remained a major issue for the Party in the first half of the decade as groups within the ILP wrangled about the most appropriate form of International connection. The changing international situation was the primary justification for the continual rethinking of the Party's policy. The ILP's disaffiliation decision in 1932 was framed as a response to an anticipated global collapse of capitalism. The reversal of attitude towards the Labour Party and the closer relationship with the CPGB emerged as a response to the rise to power of Hitler in Germany. Nevertheless, the Party remained fundamentally divided on the question of how to oppose fascism. Substantial sections of the Party remained committed to pacifist ideas. Others were prepared to endorse the use of force providing it did not operate through the instruments of capitalist government. Such disputes flared up dramatically over the Abyssinian Crisis and again over the Parliamentary Group's endorsement of the Munich Agreement. It was clear that the ILP had no uncontroversial answer to the difficult questions which the rise of fascism presented for the left.

The explanation presented here of the trajectory of the Party has discussed both internal and external factors. Internally individuals, institutions and ideas all had a role to play. Externally it has suggested the primary importance of the domestic and international political environment in this understanding. However, whilst suggesting that each of these factors is significant, it has not been argued that their significance is equal in all respects. Certainly a substantial part of the loss of membership can be more or less directly attributed to the factional fighting, organisational difficulties and the changing Party policy. However, the role of these factors in attracting new members and particularly in reaching out to a wider audience has been questioned. For example, large sections of the membership, especially in Scotland, were ambivalent towards the new policy of the Party. In electoral struggles, the new policy was never a major feature of the ILP's Scottish campaigns. The wider voting public appeared even less enthusiastic but when other factors are considered there is no real evidence that the focus placed on the 'new revolutionary policy'

during election campaigns had any influence on the Party's electoral results. Rather the Party's electoral achievements, limited as they were, depended to a very large degree on sustaining remnants of past strength built in very different circumstances inside the Labour Party. Judged in electoral terms, or against the Party's goals at the time of disaffiliation, the ILP's failure in the 1930s may then be perceived as inevitable. The lessons drawn from this has been remarkably consistent:

> From 1932 onwards the Left *had* to be in the Labour Party, if it was to avoid total annihilation, and if it was to have any influence at all.[1]

In terms of the Party's failure to recruit and have a wider impact then the external factors provide a more compelling part of the explanation. As the ILP of the later 1930s accepted, there is no evidence that the Party's goal of supplanting the Labour Party was realisable in the situation it found itself in. However, this is not the only, or indeed the most appropriate, metric for historical assessment the Party.

Rather, the analysis of the disaffiliated ILP provides a significant study into the nature of the British left in the 1930s. Contrary to most historians of the Labour and the Communist parties, it has been argued that the ILP was an important component of this left. The Party was significant in its own right and was an important factor in both Labour and Communist strategic calculations. It was important for the Labour Party, particularly in Scotland. It was of even greater signifcance for the Communist Party, which was for a time committed to unity with the ILP, whilst at the same time having to deal with Comintern interventions which could seem to challenge the position of the CPGB. Whilst pointing to the importance of the ILP in this context, the discussion has also challenged the conventional picture of the British 'left' in the 1930s by stressing its fragmented and contested nature. The limits of controversy on the left remained sharply disputed so 'funds of ideas' could not simply be 'drawn upon', and there was no straightforwad acceptance of a 'common field of action'.[2] Organisationally, ideologically and conceptually the British left was a more complex arena than is generally recognised. The disaffiliated ILP further provides a study in the limits of 'Labour' identity and in particular the competing pull of different loyalties. The

importance of institutional factors in delimiting this identity are particularly evident in the Scottish case where ideologically there was often very little to choose between Labour and the ILP, yet loyalties to the smaller party were often at their strongest. The difficulties which the ILP had in denouncing the Soviet Union and the Communist Party also indicate the considerable sway which the Bolshevik revolution had had on the wider left, independent of direct dictates of the Comintern. In respect of ideology, strategy and activity the study of the ILP in the 1930s considerably modifies the picture of the left in the 1930s.

However, the central theme of this study remains understanding and explaining 'decline'. This theme has of course also been central to conventional understandings of the Party after disaffiliation. Others have pointed to the very clear ways in which the ILP was in decline in the 1930s pointing to its falling aggregate membership, its reduced influence and its repeated issuing of apparently confused and contradictory policy pronouncements. Some aspects of this decline have been emphatically re-emphasised by this study. For example, it has pointed to the overnight decimation of the ILP's presence in key areas such as Leicester and Edinburgh and the widespread decline in membership well in excess of the aggregate membership fall of one-third. It has stressed both the very substantial impact which disaffiliation had on the Party's local electoral presence and some of the grave difficulties the Party had in rebuilding any level of representation at this level. The study also examined the controversial and sometimes contradictory policy statements, including for example, the string of pronouncements by John McGovern whose main purpose often appears to have been to shock and confront rather than enlighten. Thus, it is no part of the argument that previous popular assumptions of universal decline are without a substantial basis.

Yet a more careful study shows that in certain respects, and in particular areas the Party was performing well. In comparison with other parties of the radical left before and since the Party's position in 1933 was relatively strong. The remnants of the Party's past provided considerable strength in terms of electoral representation, a high circulation journal and a national membership and presence, although they also generated sets of unrealistic expectations and strategies. In certain respects, the Party in the 1930s was able to grow in terms of activism, influence and even intellectual clarity. For example

membership of the East Anglian Division in 1947 was over double the 1932 level. The Party's local electoral presence grew after disaffiliation not only in established centres such as Glasgow, but also in more marginal places such as Great Yarmouth where the ILP had seven councillors in 1945 and none prior to disaffiliation. By 1938 the ILP could plausibly, if not completely accurately, claim to have a consensus agreement on its basic philosophy, which would have appeared an extremely unlikely characterisation of the divided and factionalised Party of the early 1930s. The difficulties of socialist activity outside the dominant party of the working class are substantial but different strategies and circumstances would permit different outcomes. A party better organised, less factionalised and less divided over policy would have seen a less dramatic decline in membership, and would have been more attractive to potential recruits. In these more modest terms it may be that the trajectory of the Party in the 1930s was not inevitable. The scale of potential improvement may not be comparable with the Party's grander dreams but nevertheless significant in terms of the history of the left outside the Labour Party. To this extent, but no further, the ILP was the architect of its own decline.

Notes

1. Introduction

1. Fenner Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow: The autobiography of Fenner Brockway* (Hart-Davis MacGibbon: London, 1977), 107; Ralph Milliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A study in the politics of Labour* (Merlin Press: London,1972), 195.
2. See for example David Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism* (Cambridge University Press: London, 1975), 179–85.
3. RJ Morris, 'The ILP 1918–1932: introduction' in Alan McKinlay and RJ Morris (eds) *The ILP on Clydeside 1893–1932: From foundation to disintegration* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1991), 1–3.
4. This view is perhaps most influentially expressed in Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (GP Putnam's Sons: London and New York, 1929), 12.
5. Keith Middlemass, *The Clydesiders: A left wing struggle for parliamentary power* (Hutchinson & Co: London, 1965), 276; cf Keith Laybourn, '"Suicide in a Fit of Insanity" or The Defence of Socialism?: The secession of the Independent Labour Party at the special conference in Bradford, July 1932', *Bradford Antiquary*, 3 (1990), 53.
6. For example see Middlemass, *Clydesiders*, 287.
7. For example see Robert Dowse, *Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893–1940* (Longmans: London, 1966), 193; George Orwell, *Road to Wigan Pier* (Penguin: London, 1975), 143, 153.
8. For examples see AJP Taylor, *English History 1914–1945* (Pelican Books: Harmandsworth, 1965), 558–9; Emanuel Shinwell, *I've Lived Through it All* (Gollancz: London, 1973), 144.
9. Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, ix, 204–5.
10. A more explicit attempt to compare the ILP and the Socialist League can be found in Stephen Hornby's 1966 MA Thesis *Left Wing Pressure Groups in the British Labour Movement 1930–1940. Some Aspects of the Relations Between Labour Left and the Official Leadership, with special reference to the experiences of the ILP and the Socialist League.* Whilst both the comparison and Hornby's conclusion, which attempts to fit the Labour Party into Michels Iron 'Law of Oligarchy', are interesting, the thesis is hampered by the narrowness of the sources used and a number of basic factual errors which make it difficult to accept his conclusions.
11. Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and continuities in British Communist politics 1935–41* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1989), 8–9.

12. See for example Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927–41* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1985), 235–45.
13. Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Two Steps Back, Communists and the Wider Labour Movement 1935–1945: A study in the relations between vanguard and class* (Socialist Platform: London, 1982).
14. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream: A history of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain 1924–38* (Socialist Platform: London, 1986), 127–187; Bornstein and Richardson, *War and the International: A history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain 1937–1949* (Socialist Platform: London, 1986), 5–6.
15. Leon Trotsky (edited by R Chappell and Alan Clinton), *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain: Volume 3* (New Park Publications: London, 1974), 45–153; cf GNR Littlejohns, 'The Decline of the Independent Labour Party' (University of Nottingham unpublished MPhil), 278.
16. See for example David Howell, 'When Was the "Forward March of Labour"?', *Llaffur*, 5:3 (1990), 57–70.
17. See the contributions to David James, Tony Jowett and Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Ryburn: Halifax, 1992); cf Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1983); Howell, 'Beyond the Stereotypes: The Independent Labour Party 1922–32', *Scottish Labour History Society Journal*, 29 (1994), 17–49.
18. Howell, *MacDonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis 1922–1931* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002).
19. Richard Stevens, '"Rapid Demise or Slow Death?" The Independent Labour Party in Derby 1932–1945', *Midland History*, 22 (1997), 113–130.
20. Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997), 74–8; Buchanan, 'The Death of Bob Smillie, The Spanish Civil War, and the Eclipse of the Independent Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, 40:2 (1997), 435–61; Paul Corthorn, 'Labour, The Left, and the Stalinist Purges of the Late 1930s', *Historical Journal*, 48:1 (2005), 179–207.
21. Howell, *British Workers*, 129–32, 277–82.
22. Compare for example differing accounts of disaffiliation in Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty years of platform, press, prison and parliament* (Allen & Unwin: London, 1941), 237 and Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 107 or Jennie Lee, *Tomorrow is a New Day*, (Cresset Press: London, 1939), 174–5 and Lee, *My Life With Nye* (Jonathan Cape: 1980), 96–7.
23. Gilbert McAllister, *James Maxton: The portrait of a rebel* (John Murray: London, 1935); John McNair, *James Maxton: The beloved rebel* (Allen & Unwin: London, 1955); Gordon Brown, *Maxton* (Mainstream: Edinburgh, 1986); William Knox, *James Maxton* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1987).
24. The most famous accusations of corruption within the post-disaffiliation ILP surrounded T Dan Smith in his role as North East Divisional Organiser in 1942. For a brief, overly sympathetic, account see Raymond Challinor, 'T Dan Smith – The Youthful Revolutionary', *North East Labour History Bulletin*, 28 (1994), 17.
25. Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden* (Barrie and Rockliff: London, 1966), 174.

26. Martin Gilbert, *Plough My Own Furrow: The story of Lord Allen of Hurtwood as told through his writing and correspondence* (Longman: London, 1965), 175.
27. See Howell, *A Lost Left: Three studies in socialism and nationalism* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1986), 258–9.
28. Gilbert, *Plough*, 180.
29. David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1977), 277.
30. Gilbert, *Plough*, 191.
31. McNair, *Maxton*, 153–4.
32. Howell, 'Beyond the Stereotypes', 16–49; cf Marquand, *MacDonald*, 451–5.
33. The dynamics of that decision are outlined in Marquand, *MacDonald*, 455–7.
34. John Paton, *Left Turn! The autobiography of John Paton* (Secker and Warburg: London, 1936), 304; Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 45; Brown, *Maxton*, 211; Wertheimer, *Portrait*, 165. An unconvincing dissenting voice is found in McNair, *Maxton*, 174–5. However Arthur Marwick, 'The Independent Labour Party in the Nineteen-Twenties', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 35:91 (1962), 69 gives reasonable, financial, grounds for something of a reassessment.
35. Paton, *Left Turn*, 299–305.
36. Brown, *Maxton*, 210.
37. McNair, *Maxton*, 173.

2. THE SPLIT

1. For example Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 107; Lee, *My Life*, 80; cf Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 241 and Lee, *Tomorrow*, 175–184; Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A life* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1997), 68–91.
2. Middlemass, *Clydesiders*, 259–71; Laybourn, 'Suicide', 41–53.
3. *New Leader Conference Supplement*, 5 August 1932.
4. *New Leader Conference Supplement*, 5 August 1932.
5. Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 181.
6. For example, see Sir Stafford Cripps, *Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Methods?* (Socialist League: London, nd), 1.
7. Of the 37 ILP sponsored MPs 17 came from Scottish seats. Out of 287 Labour MPs 160 thus carried ILP cards and were entitled to have a voice in the meetings of the ILP Parliamentary Group.
8. 'Note of Discussion at Special Meeting of the ILP Parliamentary Group 6 December 1928 resumed on 13 December 1928', Mitchell Library, Glasgow (MLG) TD956/20/3.
9. 'ILP Parliamentary Group meeting minutes 21 and 28 October 1929', MLG TD956/20/1; Paton, *Left Turn*, 318–9.
10. ILP Conference Report 1930.
11. The 18 were James Maxton (Chairman), John Beckett, Fenner Brockway, WJ Brown, Robert Forgan, W Hirst, JF Horrabin, FW Jowett, David Kirkwood, Jennie Lee, Jack Lees, John McGovern, Elijah Sandham, Campbell Stephen, John Strachey, RC Wallhead, EF Wise, J Kinley (Secretary). Three of the eighteen, Robert Forgan, John Beckett and WJ Brown joined Mosley's New Party.

12. For example, Milliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, 194–5.
13. Brockway, *Socialism Over Sixty Years: The life of Jowett of Bradford* (Allen & Unwin: London, 1946), 300.
14. Fred Jowett, *The ILP say No the Standing Orders of the Labour Party* (ILP: London, 1932), 3–4.
15. Jowett, *The ILP*, 13–14.
16. Jowett, *The ILP*, 16.
17. Brockway, *Socialism*, 299.
18. ILP conference report 1931; Labour Party NEC report 25 June 1930, 19 November 1930, 17 December 1930, 28 January 1931.
19. Maxton (Glasgow, Bridgeton), McGovern (Glasgow, Shettleston), Wallhead (Merthyr) all stood with ILP endorsement and were elected. David Kirkwood (Dumbarton Burghs), nominated by the AEU and George Buchanan (Glasgow, Gorbals) nominated by the Patternmakers Association, of which he was president, were also elected and refused to sign the PLP Standing Orders.
20. ILP conference report 1932.
21. *Forward*, 14 March 1930; Labour Party NEC report 3–4 October 1930; Labour Party NEC report 21 April 1931; Labour Party NEC report 23 June 1931; Labour Party Organisation Sub-Committee minutes 17 February 1932.
22. *New Leader*, 29 January 1932; 5 February 1932.
23. Interview with Jack Gaster (British Library, National Sound Archive C609/06/01-02).
24. The disaffiliation vote in the London Division was 41–28. *New Leader*, 29 January 1932.
25. ILP Conference Report 1931.
26. *New Leader*, 22 January 1932; Rawlings joined the ILP in 1928 and became interested in the RPC soon after its formation. His papers, including letters relating his involvement in the RPC, are stored in the BLPES Coll Misc 496/1.
27. Division Five minute book 10 January 1932BLPES Coll Misc 496,.
28. Division Five minutes, minutes of special conference, 15 October 1933; John Middleton Murry, *The Necessity of Communism* (Jonathan Cape: London and Toronto, 1932); Division Five minutes, 10 January 1932. For further details see Gidon Cohen, '"Happy hunting Ground of the Crank"? The Independent Labour Party and Local Labour Politics in Glasgow and Norwich' in Matthew Worley (ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918–45*, 65–70.
29. Labour Party NEC minutes 3 May 1930; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 238; Paton, *Left Turn*, 387.
30. Labour Party Report of Joint Committee on Party Discipline April 1931.
31. Labour Party Joint Committee on Party Discipline 18 March 1932.
32. ILP Conference Report 1932.
33. *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
34. *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
35. Paton, *Left Turn*, 387; *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
36. ILP conference report, 1932.
37. Paton, *Left Turn*, 387.

38. *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
39. Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 239.

3. PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND ORGANISATION

1. Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1977), 101.
2. NAC minutes 13 August 1932.
3. Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A historical profile* (Adam and Charles Black: London, 1975), 77(fn); cf Brockway, 'A Survey of the Party Position', November 1937.
4. Francis Johnson's cited membership figures appear to be calculated according to the formula 13.33*(National Affiliation Fees). Although Johnson provided Pelling with no figure after 1935 the same formula has been applied to affiliation fees to give figures for the remainder of the 1930s. Johnson's formula assumes a constant affiliation payment (true throughout the decade) and a consistent portion of unemployed/ineligible/non-paying members. This assumption was particularly problematic in the early 1930s due to high levels of unemployed members (paying at a lesser rate) and during the war years as many members were moving about the country and affiliation fee payment became less regular.
5. 'The State Of the Party' NAC document (nd but December 1932).
6. *New Leader*, 19 August 1932.
7. 'Notes on No. 9' LHASC/CP/IND/MISC/17/09; *New Leader*, 17 February 1933.
8. *New Leader*, 9 September 1932.
9. The State of the Party, NAC document (nd).
10. *Labour's Northern Voice*, May 1934.
11. EC Report June 29–30 1935.
12. Welsh Division Affiliation Fees 1934–40, Francis Johnson Papers, July 1940.
13. Welsh Division Affiliation Fees 1934–40, Francis Johnson Papers, July 1940.
14. George Lindgren to GR Shepard 1 September 1932; 10 September 1932 LHASC/LP/National Agents unsorted material. The Welwyn Garden City branch maintained an active initially electoral and subsequently educational and electoral role until a series of internal disputes coupled with ill-health of the branches leading members in 1937. See London Organisers Report 28 June–4 July 1937; *Welwyn Times*, 11 February 1937; 1 April 1937; 8 April 1937; 26 August 1937; 10 March 1938; *New Leader*, 26 August 1938.
15. EC report 29–30 June 1935; *Forward*, 11 November 1933; NAC report to conference, 1934.
16. *New Leader*, 14 April 1933.
17. *New Leader*, 24 March 1933 cf Report of Yorkshire Divisional Conference, *New Leader*, 10 February 1933.
18. EC report, 29–30 June 1935.
19. EC report, 29–30 June 1935.

20. Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party 1938–1950' (London School of Economics unpublished PhD thesis), 27; Division Five minute book.
21. *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934.
22. EC report, 2 August 1935; NAC minutes 30 July 1938.
23. *New Leader*, 11 January 1935.
24. *New Leader*, 19 January 1934.
25. *New Leader*, 31 May 1935.
26. NAC report to conference, 1935; *New Leader*, 12 July 1935.
27. For some examples in Ayrshire see *New Leader*, 5 November 1937; 11 February 1938; 16 December 1938.
28. Independent Labour Party, *They Did NOT Pass*, London 1937; NAC minutes 7 November 1936; *New Leader*, 9 October 1936; 8 October 1937.
29. For some examples see *Manchester Guardian*, 19 August 1936; *Scots New Leader*, 4 September 1936.
30. *Revolt*, Issue 1, March 1933.
31. *New Leader*, June 22 1934.
32. *Scots New Leader*, 28 August 1936; *New Leader*, 28 May 1937.
33. *Forward*, 27 February 1937.
34. *New Leader*, 1 April 1938.
35. *New Leader*, 2 February 1934.
36. EP Thompson, 'Homage to Tom Maguire' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds) *Essays in Labour History* (MacMillan: London, 1960), 315; Howell, *British Workers*, 327.
37. ISP General Council, 'What is Socialism?' 1935. For a further account of the practical attempts to realise these ideals see Middleton Murry, *The Necessity of Pacifism* (Jonathan Cape: London and Toronto, 1937), 68–88.
38. See for example *New Leader*, 26 August 1932.
39. *New Leader*, 18 August 1933.
40. See Stuart Ball, Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley, 'Elections, Leaflets and Whist Drives: Constituency party members in Britain between the wars' in Worley (ed.) *Labour's Grass Roots*.
41. CB Hawkins, *Norwich: A Social Survey*, 302 cited in Thwaites, 'The ILP', 220.
42. Robson to Francis Johnson, 1 February 1937, BLPES/ILP/Francis Johnson Correspondence 1937.
43. *Nelson Leader*, February 2 1934; August 3 1934; March 22 1934.
44. For an account of the Clarion House to 1987 see Stan Iveson and Roger Brown, *ILP Clarion House: A monument to a movement* (Independent Labour Publications: Leeds, 1987).
45. *New Leader*, 25 June 1937 The Glasgow Party also attempted to organise cyclist in defence of their rights on the roads. *New Leader*, 28 January 1938.
46. For examples see *New Leader*, 9 September 1932; 10 May 1935.
47. *New Leader*, 15 July 1932.
48. John Lochore in Ian MacDougall, *Voices from the Hunger Marches: Volume II* (Polygon: Edinburgh, 1991), 316; Attendance on the Sludge boat trips varied during the 1930s. Normally, over 100 members went, with 151 going on 4 July

1938. Once, in 1937 however, ticket sales only reached 36. See, Bridgeton Branch Social Committee Cash Book. MLG G329.9 SR 281TOC.

49. May Edwards to Bob Edwards, 10 February (1937) LHASC/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 5 for regular theatre trips see regular notes on Branch activity in the *New Leader*; Bridgeton Branch Social Committee Cash Book. MLG G329.9 SR 281TOC.
50. See, for example, *New Leader*, 26 August 1932.
51. The flag days were not permitted by the magistrates in the mid-1930s, a decision which was reversed in September 1936. *Guardian*, 19 August 1936; *Scots New Leader*, 4 September 1936.
52. *New Leader*, 7 May 1937.
53. John Lochore, in MacDougall, *Voices*, 316.
54. 'ILP Conference Spark', 31 March 1934.
55. For an account of the development of the NAC's wide-ranging role in the early period see Howell, *British Workers*, 301–26.
56. Thoughts of changing the number and geographical coverage of Divisions to better reflect membership patterns were frequently expressed through the 1930s. However, action was never taken and there remained the same nine Divisions through the decade: 1. Scotland (and Ireland) 2. North East (Cleveland, Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland) 3. Yorkshire (and North-East Derbyshire) 4. Midlands (Lincs, Notts, S. Derbyshire, S. Staffs, Warwickshire, Northants, Rutland, Leicestershire) 5. East Anglia (Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and part of Essex) 6. London and South (London, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Bucks, Berks., Oxon, Beds, Herts, Huntingdonshire, S Essex and part of Wiltshire) 7. South-West (Gloucestershire, Hereford, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and part of Wiltshire) 8. Wales (South Wales and Monmouth) 9. Lancashire (Lancs, Cheshire, N Staffs, N Derbyshire, Westmorland).
57. ILP conference report 1930.
58. EC report 2 August 1935; NAC minutes 14 April 1936.
59. 'Meeting of NAC fraction' 19 April 1934. RGASPI 495/100/972.
60. *RPC Monthly Bulletin*, 8 (March–April 1933).
61. EC minutes 8 June 1934.
62. For the NAC as oligarch see Howell, *British Workers*, 301–27.
63. For example Allen Skinner of the Unity Group gave up his position as London's NAC representative to Jack Gaster in 1933 without a contest.
64. Women's National Advisory Committee minutes, 17 September 1932. Brynmor-Jones Library M/I 1187.
65. Women's National Advisory Committee minutes, 4 February 1933. BLPES Coll Misc 702/2.
66. ILP National Organisation Committee minutes, 9 September 1933. BLPES Coll Misc 702/5.
67. NAC minutes, 23–4 September 1933.
68. ILP conference report, 1934.
69. For some of the huge number of complaints against Payne see Shettleston ILP minutes 25 June 1936; 26 November 1936; 4 February 1937.

70. Carmichael to Murry, 12 February 1936 MLG/TD956/21/6; Shettleston ILP minutes 5 March 1936; 16 April 1936.
71. Correspondence between James Carmichael and Thomas Murry, 12 February to 30 June 1936 MLG/TD956/21/6.
72. Report of Glasgow Party enquiry committee, submitted to NAC meeting 11 December 1937; EC report 22 October 1937; NAC minutes 13 November 1937.
73. *New Leader*, 24 September 1937; NAC minutes 11 December 1937.
74. Francis Johnson to Fred Jowett, 2 February 1936 (RP Reel 3); *New Leader*, 10 January 1936; *New Leader*, 18 June 1937; 21 April 1939; NAC minutes 2 August 1937; 22 October 1937; 15 December 1940; ILP Budget Committee minutes 27 November 1937; ILP Budget Committee report to NAC 11 December 1937.
75. LHASC/ILP Material 1930s (uncatalogued material).
76. NAC minutes 15 February 1936; 10 April 1936; 30 April 1937; NAC minutes 15 December 1940.
77. *New Leader*, 26 November 1937; *New Leader*, 20 November 1936; NAC report to conference, 1937; NAC report to conference, 1938; NAC report to conference, 1939.
78. NAC minutes May 13 1933; NAC minutes June 24 1933.
79. Special National Conference Report, July 1932.
80. The file of ILP correspondence in the TUC archive contains a large number of letters on the question of the ILP's status with regard to the circular including the case of Gorton, where Ernest Beesley, Secretary of Gorton ILP, was T&GWU delegate to the Trades Council was readmitted after clarification from the TUC. MRC MSS 292/756.1/1 TUC ILP correspondence; *New Leader*, 29 March 1935; NAC minutes, 22–23 April 1935; 19 June 1935; Exclusions from joint councils as a result of the circular include John Steen representative of AEU no 2 branch in Paisley and WE Rowlands representative of the Unemployed Miners' Lodge in Merthyr. *New Leader*, 3 May 1935.
81. NAC minutes, 2–3 March 1935.
82. NAC minutes, 23–24 April; IE Minutes, 19 June 1935.
83. NAC report to conference, 1936; ILP conference report, 1936.
84. Industrial Committee minutes, 2 May 1936.
85. NAC minutes 1 August 1936; 7 November 1936.
86. Industrial Committee minutes, 23 June 1937; The following nine Unions were named as having organised ILP groups (with organising secretaries where named): Railways (David Gibson, Glasgow), NUC, Building Trades, Engineering (Jim Davies, Llanelly), Distributive (Ernest Fernyhough, Norwich), Printing and Allied Trades (L Knapp), Mining (Tom Stephenson), Textiles, Post Office Workers (ER Cyples, London and Jennie Duncan, Lochgelly).
87. Industrial Committee minutes, 21 September 1936.
88. *New Leader*, 16 September 1938.
89. *New Leader*, 3 May 1935.
90. Angela Tuckett, *The Scottish Trade Union congress: The first 80 years 1897–1977* (Mainstream: Edinburgh, 1986), 259–62; *New Leader*, 1 May 1936.
91. *New Leader*, 6 May 1938.

92. William Richardson, *A Union of Many Trades: The history of USDAW* (USDAW: Manchester, nd); Martin Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945* (Allen & Unwin: London, 1960), 152–3.
93. *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1933.
94. EC report, 23 May 1935; *New Leader*, 5 May 1935; 2 February 1936.
95. Industrial Committee minutes, 21 December 1936; Industrial Committee minutes, January 1937; *New Leader*, 6 May 1938.
96. *New Leader*, 16 April 1937.
97. Philip Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: The history of the National Union of Railwaymen* (Allen & Unwin, 1963), 499–570; Howell, *Respectable Radicals: Studies in the politics of railway trade unionism* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 1999).
98. Industrial Committee minutes, 6 January 1937.
99. Industrial Committee minutes, 21 December 1936.
100. ILP Industrial Committee, *Rail-Workers Unite! One Programme for all railwaymen* (ILP: London 1938); NAC minutes 2 August 1937; 22 October 1937; NAC report to conference, 1939.
101. *New Leader*, 27 January 1939; *New Leader*, 2 February 1940.
102. *New Leader*, 31 May 1935; *New Leader*, 8 August 1935; On the tension between the South Wales Miners' Federation and the Unemployed Miners' lodges see Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: A history of the South Wales miners in the twentieth century* (Lawrence and Wishart, London 1980), 186–9.
103. Industrial Committee minutes, 2 May 1936; *New Leader*, 27 May 1938.
104. NAC minutes 30 March–1 April 1934; *New Leader*, 6 April 1934; 27 December 1935.
105. The voting was Tom Stephenson 2,616 Sam McFarland 1,185. *New Leader*, 7 May 1937; For further details on Stephenson see Keith Gildart and Cohen, 'Tom Stephenson (1895–1962): Cumberland Miners' Leader' in Gildart, Howell and Neville Kirk (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography. Volume XI*, 266–274.
106. *New Leader*, 25 May 1934.
107. *New Leader*, 14 June 1935.
108. Industrial Committee letter to members, 16 July 1936; January 1937.
109. *New Leader*, 15 June 1934.
110. Alan Clinton, *Post Office Workers: A trade union and social history* (Allen & Unwin: London, 1984), 328, 391–4.
111. *New Leader*, 24 May 1935; 15 May 15 1936; Clinton, *Post Office Workers*, 340, 413, 429–31.
112. On the UPA see JDM Bell, 'Trade Unions' in Allan Flanders and HA Clegg, *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain: Its history, law and institutions* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1953), 137.
113. *New Leader*, 24 August 1934.
114. Labour Party Organisation Committee minutes, 14 February 1934; Glasgow BLP minutes 13 December 1932; Glasgow Trades Council minutes August 1933, 19 December 1933, 23 October 1934; Labour Party NEC minutes 27 March 1935; July 24 1935; *New Leader*, 7 June 1935.
115. *New Leader*, 18 October 1935.
116. See for example *New Leader*, 8 January 1937.

117. The two biographers of Gossip do not make any mention of his association with the ILP in the period after disaffiliation. Discussion of Gossip's ILP membership here clarifies the question, raised by Saville, of whether Gossip was actually ever an individual member of the Labour Party. Stanley Harrison, *Alex Gossip* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1962) and John Saville, 'Gossip, Alexander (Alex) (1862–1952) Trade Unionist and Socialist', in William Knox (ed), *Scottish Labour Leaders 1918–1939* (Mainstream: Edinburgh, 1984), 121–6.
118. '"Labour Monthly" Conference on Revolutionary Policy', *Labour Monthly*, April 1933; *New Leader*, 15 February 1935.
119. *New Leader*, 30 June 1939; NAC minutes 26 March 1940.
120. NAC minutes, October 8–9 1932; Minutes of meeting of sub-committee appointed to deal with special difficulties arising in Trade Unions and Co-operative relationships from the Bradford Decision, 9 December 1932.
121. NAC minutes, 29–30 June 1935.
122. *New Leader*, 12 July 1935.
123. The ILPers acting as representative at G&MWU conference were Hywel James (Merthyr) and Dan Carradice (Nelson). Industrial Committee minutes, 2 May 1936; *New Leader*, 22 May 1936 Industrial Committee minutes, 5 June 1936; *New Leader*, 12 June 1936; *New Leader*, 26 June 1936.
124. *Nelson Leader*, 24 March 1933; 22 September 1933; 13 October 1933; 10 November 1933; 9 February 1934; 23 February 1934; 9 March 1934; 13 April 1934; 11 May 1934; 15 June 1934; 24 August 1934; 25 January 1935; 10 May 1935; 28 June 1935; 10 August 1935; 11 October 1935; 18 October 1935; 25 October 1935; 8 November 1935; Evelyn O'Connor, 'Fighting for Peace, Waiting for War Left Wing Attitudes in Nelson to Europe and Rearmament 1935–39', *North West Labour History*, 22 (1997/8), 48–59.
125. NAC report to conference, 1939.
126. The ILP's Glasgow councillors took highly visible positions in support of the bus workers, especially Joe Taylor and Myer Galpern, with Joe Taylor leading the Busmen to their final mass meeting. *New Leader*, 4 December 1936.
127. *New Leader*, 23 March 1937; NAC minutes 2 August 1937.
128. Cohen, 'Happy Hunting Ground'.
129. *New Leader*, 2 April 1937; *New Leader*, 9 April 1937; 16 April 1937; Shettleston ILP minutes 23 November 1939; On the context and consequences of this apprentices' strike see Croucher, 1982, 47–53; 98–9; On ILP involvement in the war time militant engineering movement see Richard Croucher, *Engineers at War 1939–1945* (Merlin: London, 1982), 176–8.

4. ELECTORAL SPACE

1. Fred Jowett, 'Why I Disagree with the ILP New Policy', *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933 (emphasis in original).
2. 'Can Socialism come the Parliamentary Way? Sandham says "Yes"', *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1933.
3. London and Southern Counties Divisional Conference Final Agenda, ILP Archive 1933/3.

4. *Forward*, 7 October 1933; *New Leader*, 13 October 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, 2 November 1933; *Forward*, 28 October 1933; Labour Party NEC report 25 October 1933.
5. *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, 2 November 1933.
6. *New Leader*, 13 October 1933, 11 November 1933.
7. *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, 20 July 1933; 3 August 1933; 7 September 1933; 28 September 1933; 26 October 1933; 2 November 1933; *New Leader*, 27 October 1933; Labour Party NEC minutes 25 October 1933.
8. *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, 24 August 1933; 19 October 1933; 26 October 1933.
9. Labour Party NEC report 15 November 1933; 5 January 1934.
10. *Forward*, 25 November 1933.
11. Labour Party NEC report 22 November 1933.
12. Labour Party NEC report 31 May 1933; *New Leader*, 8 December 1933.
13. When Jennie Lee declined to allow her name to go forward Claude Stanfield, a local councillor from Merthyr, was suggested, it was he who suggested extending the invitation to Campbell Stephen. IE minutes, 8 May 1934.
14. Campbell Stephen, Election Address, June 1934.
15. Robert Griffiths, *SO Davies: A socialist faith* (Gomer: Dyfd, 1983), 95; *New Leader*, 6 June 1934.
16. Labour Party NEC report 27 June 1934; *New Leader*, 1 June 1934.
17. Fenner Brockway, 'Election Address to the Electors of the Upton Division of West Ham'.
18. *New Leader*, 11 May 1934.
19. *New Leader*, 4 May 1934.
20. *Forward*, 19 May 1934; *New Leader*, 5 May 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice* May 1934.
21. The Party had produced a list of seats which it believed it would be impossible to contest because of finance: Derby, Chorley, Merthyr, Whitehaven, Camborne and North Aberdeen. Of these the money was found to contest all except Derby.
22. *Telegraph and Argus*, 11 November 1935.
23. For further information on Stephen see Knox and John Saville 'Stephen, Campbell (1884–1947) Labour MP and Christian Socialist' in Knox (ed), *Scottish Labour Leaders*, 253–5.
24. For further information on Jowett see Brockway, *Socialism*.
25. *Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1935; 11 November 1935; There is very little information on the 1935 election in Lee's autobiographies, there is little more in the recent biography of her Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A life* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1997), 66–7.
26. *Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1935; *Govan Press*, 8 November 1935.
27. *Merthyr Express*, 2 November 1935; 9 November 1935; *Merthyr Express*, 1 April 1976.
28. *Whitehaven News*, 25 July 1935; 5 September 1935; 26 September 1935; 10 October 1935; 31 October 1935; 7 November 1935; *New Leader*, 1 November 1935; 14 November 1935.

29. *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 7 November 1935; 13 November 1935; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 7 November 1935; 14 November 1935; *Scottish Co-operator*, 4 May 1935; *Scots New Leader*, 2 October 1935; *New Leader*, 1 November 1935.
30. *Cornish Post and Mining News*, 2 November 1935; 16 November 1935.
31. The ILP's Chorley campaign was late in starting and described as rather lacklustre throughout *Chorley Guardian*, 12 October 1935.
32. *New Leader*, 1 November 1935 *Carluke and Lanark Gazette*, 21 June 1935; 13 September 1935.
33. *New Leader*, 11 October 1935.
34. *Norwich Mercury*, 2 November 1935.
35. Griffiths, *SO Davies*, 107–9; *Merthyr Express*, 9 November 1935; *Govan Press*, 8 November 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1935; *Whitehaven News*, 31 October 1935; 7 November 1935; *Kilmarnock Standard*, 2 November 1935.
36. *Glasgow Herald*, 8 November 1935; 9 November 1935; *Telegraph and Argus*, 5 November 1935; Brockway, *Socialism*, 316–7.
37. Minutes of the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party 20 March 1933; 16 November 1933; 11 March 1935, 21 October 1935; Labour Party National Agents Scottish Tour report, 27 March 1935; Labour Party NEC minutes 22 October 1935.
38. *Govan Press*, 8 November 1935.
39. *Glasgow Herald*, 7 November 1935.
40. *Glasgow Evening Standard*, 2 November 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, 5 November 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, 12 November 1935.
41. *Glasgow Evening Standard*, 2 November 1935.
42. *Bradford Pioneer*, January 1934; 4 May 1934; 8 February 1934; 4 May 1934; 25 May 1934; 15 June 1934; 9 November 1934.
43. Lee, *Tomorrow*, 193–4; Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, 66.
44. *Norwich Mercury*, 9 November 1935.
45. Glasgow BLP minutes December 13 1932; Glasgow Trades Council minutes August 1933, 19 December 1933, 23 October 1934; Labour Party NEC minutes 27 March 1935.
46. *New Leader*, 18 October 1935; Labour Party NEC minutes 22 October 1935; Labour Party Scottish Executive minutes 21 October 1935.
47. *Glasgow Herald*, 16 November 1935.
48. *New Leader*, 15 November 1935; Labour Party NEC minutes 22 January 1936; *Telegraph and Argus*, 12 November 1935.
49. *Telegraph and Argus*, 15 November 1935.
50. *Kilmarnock Standard*, 19 October 1935; 2 November 1935.
51. *Kilmarnock Standard*, 16 November 1935.
52. *Glasgow Herald*, 8 November 1935.
53. *Carluke and Lanark Gazette*, 13 September 1935; 8 November 1935.
54. *Merthyr Express*, 9 November 1935; 16 November 1935.
55. See for example *New Leader*, 25 October 1935.
56. For tensions surrounding this pact see *New Leader*, 9 November 1934.
57. For example in 1934 in both Partick East and Whitevale the combined ILP/Labour vote was greater than the victorious Moderate total.

58. *Bradford Pioneer*, 4 May 1934.
59. *Bradford Pioneer*, 8 February 1934; 4 May 1934; 25 May 1934; 15 June 1934; 9 November 1934.
60. The increase in representation came in 1937 when the existing ILP councillors, Arthur Tetley and James Cariss, were re-elected, in the Tong and East Bowling wards respectively and H Fotherby also secured election in the Tong Ward. Despite Labour's lack of formal agreement with the ILP, all three of the ILPers were elected without opposition from the Labour Party. Then, following the election Arthur Tetley was elected an alderman and a further ILPer, AL Brown was elected against a Liberal who had represented the ward for thirty years, in his place. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 February 1937; *New Leader*, 9 September 1937; 12 December 1937; *New Leader*, 19 November 1937.
61. The ILP's proposals were rejected by the casting vote of the Chairman of the Labour Party. *New Leader*, 28 October 1938.
62. *New Leader*, 4 November 1938.
63. The ILP's initial group was Tom Markland, Goodwin England and John Gill. Their victories had been enabled by an unofficial pact with the Labour Party, which had left the ILP candidates as the sole working class representatives in those wards until 1934. As a result of the renewed confidence of the Labour Party and the closer connections between the ILP and the Communists the larger party challenged and defeated Goodwin England, who had been the youngest member of the council, in the local elections in 1934. Then the following year they intervened against John Gill, which allowed the Conservatives to win the seat. Stevens, 'Rapid Demise', 115–117.
64. Stevens, 'Rapid Demise', 115–117; *New Leader*, 22 June 1934; 9 November 1934.
65. PA Cunningham, 'Unemployment in Norwich in the Nineteen Thirties', (University of East Anglia unpublished PhD thesis, 1990), 133–6.
66. *Eastern Evening News*, 1 November 1933.
67. The two victorious ILP candidates in Norwich in 1933 were Dorothy Jewson and George Johnson, the following year AE Nicholls defeated his Conservative opponent 1028–591. In 1935 Arthur South, later a leading member of the Norwich Labour Party and Chairman of Norwich City Football Club, was elected for the ILP The Party lost one of its four seats after Dorothy Jewson married and left Norwich in 1937. The Labour Party stood aside to allow the ILP Candidate, Miss Utting, a free run and it was widely expected that she would win comfortably but in the event was beaten by 88 votes on a 29 per cent poll. The result, which the Party blamed on a combination of Yarmouth races, a football match and a Co-op outing, lead to considerable frustration with the working class attitude to politics as the branch put it 'when are the workers going to put their real interests before 'circuses'?' However, ILP strength on the council was returned to four in March 1939 when George Johnson was elevated to the Aldermanic Bench and the subsequent vacancy in the Catton Ward was filled, unopposed, by W Channell. See Cohen, 'Happy Hunting Ground'.

68. The by-election was caused by the death of Labour Alderman Enoch Morrell who had represented the ward for thirty years. The ILP put up BM Davies against RJ Jones of the Labour Party and a Fred Ford, a Communist who had been the ILP candidate in the ward in November 1933 but who had gone over to the CPGB during the 1934 by-election. Despite a heavy campaign by the Labour Party, including support for Jones from the new Merthyr MP SO Davies, the ILP won the election with 1,551 votes to the Labour Party's 1,074. Ford had polled 1,369 as the ILP candidate nine months earlier, but as Communist candidate he could only muster 237 votes. *New Leader*, 3 August 1934.
69. The ILP obtained 3,500 votes in its 1933 contests in Merthyr. *New Leader* 8 December 1933.
70. A similar dynamic could be observed in other places where battlelines were drawn solely between the ILP and the Labour Party. For example in Blaydon 1934 UDC elections the ILP candidates, Jim Stephenson and Andy Davidson beat two Labour Candidates including 'big noise' Kelly in a campaign marked by violence and the support for the Labour men of MFGB President Peter Lee. *New Leader*, 6 April 1934; Similarly in March 1934 in Cumberland local ILP personalities Tom Stephenson and J Bell, prominent figures in the Union at Moresby Park pit, beat off a Labour challenge to take the two seats on the RDC. NAC minutes 30 March–1 April 1934; *New Leader*, 6 April 1934.
71. For example see *Yarmouth Mercury*, 9 November 1935.
72. The ILP maintained a group of five on the Council until the ILP decided to oppose McGovern and Carmichael in the General Election of 1950, which caused three of the group to rejoin the Labour Party. The remaining two LF Bunnewell and E Burgess remained as an ILP group on the council until 1968 when Burgess lost his seat to a Conservative. Bunnewell maintained his seat even after the council was reformed in 1973, until the ILP rejoined the Labour Party. Thwaites, *ILP*, 223; Bunnewell Papers, Imperial War Museum Archives.

5. DIVIDED WE FALL

1. Brockway, *Towards Tomorrow*, 109.
2. CKC, 'Memorandum on the present political and economic situation and the ILP', 6.
3. Letter CK Cullen to Bellamy 5 August 1932 LHASC CPGB/IND/MISC/16/2; *New Leader*, 2 September 1932.
4. Summary of discussion at meeting of Divisional representatives with NAC 25 March 1932.
5. London & South Agenda 20 September 1932 CP/IND/MISC/16/1; Kevin Morgan, Interview with Reg and Hettie Bower 1999; *New Leader*, 17 February 1933.
6. *RPC Bulletin*, May 1933; *Labour's Northern Voice*, May 1934; The RPC conference in 1934 was held in Wigan, under the leadership of Robert Rawlinson and J Horne. *New Leader*, 4 May 1934; Letter from Francis Johnson to GE Humphries (no date).

7. Pollitt to Shields, 5 August 1932. RGASPI 495/100/833/90.
8. Branson, '"Revolt" Shows the way to Successful Street Papers', *The Party Organiser*, CPGB October–November 1932, 12–17; Noreen Branson, 'Clive Ali Chimmo Branson (1907–1944)' in John Saville and Joyce Bellamy (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume II* (Macmillan: London, 1974); Interview with Dudley Edwards, 1978 in Littlejohns, 'Decline of the ILP', 307–323.
9. Gidon Cohen, Interview with Jack Gaster.
10. Bellamy to Pollitt, 23 July 1932 RGAPSI 495/100/802.
11. Pollitt to Shields, 5 August 1932 RGAPSI 495/100/833/90.
12. Pollitt to Gerhardt and Shields 11 August 1932. RGASPI 495/100/833/107.
13. I am grateful to Kevin Morgan for this suggestion.
14. Letter from CK Cullen to Bellamy, 5 August 1932 LHASC CPGB/IND/MISC/16/2.
15. Harry Pollitt and Fenner Brockway, *Which Way For the Workers? Report of debate 18 April* (CPGB: London, 1932), 9; cf Pollitt, 'The Bradford ILP Conference and After', *Labour Monthly*, August 1932, 487.
16. ILP conference report, 1933.
17. *RPC Bulletin*, 7 (Jan–Feb 1933), 1.
18. ILP conference report, 1933.
19. ILP conference report 1933.
20. ILP conference report, 1933.
21. *New Leader*, 4 August 1933.
22. "Labour Monthly" Conference on Revolutionary Policy', *Labour Monthly*, April 1933.
23. William Rust, 'Towards a United Revolutionary Party', *Labour Monthly*, July 1933, 429.
24. 'Editorial Statement and 'Labour Monthly' Conference Announcement', *Labour Monthly*, March 1933.
25. John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1993), 143.
26. Bob Edwards, 'The ILP and the Comintern', *Labour Monthly*, August 1933, 495.
27. Eric Whalley, 'Towards the ILP Easter Conference', *Labour Monthly*, February 1934, 92 (emphasis in original).
28. *RPC Bulletin*, March 1934.
29. *New Leader*, 6 April 1934.
30. Interview with Jack Gaster (NSA C609/06/01–02); NAC minutes, 11–12 February 1934; NAC minutes, June 9–10 1934.
31. NAC minutes, 9–10 June 1934; Bob Edwards to Don Bateman, November 25 1974 LHASC/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 6/ILP.
32. Edwards and Whalley, *Revolutionary Unity*, 18.
33. EC report, 11–12 August 1934; EC minutes, 10 August 1934; IE (non-quorate), 22 September 1934; NAC minutes, 16–17 November 1934.
34. J Hanson,' The ILP and International Socialist Unity', *Labour Monthly*, September 1935.
35. IE minutes, 15 April 1935.
36. NAC minutes, 19 April 1935.
37. NAC minutes, 22 April 1935.

38. *New Leader*, 26 March 1935; 3 May 1935.
39. EC report, 29–30 June 1935.
40. NAC minutes, 29 June 1935.
41. EC report, 2–3 August 1935.
42. NAC minutes, 10–12 August 1935; Extract from NAC circular letter (Hull DJH 5/8).
43. 'The Guild, The Party and the RPC', *RPC Bulletin*, 31 July 1935.
44. Jack Gaster and Hilda Vernon, 'The War Situation – And The League', *RPC Bulletin*, October 1935.
45. Jack Gaster and the London Emergency Committee, 'Abyssinia – Where Does the ILP Stand', *Controversy*, October 1935.
46. CKC, 'The War Crisis', *RPC Bulletin*, October 1935.
47. 'Foreword – Crisis in the RPC?', *RPC Bulletin*, October 1935.
48. IE minutes, 24 October 1935.
49. *New Leader*, 4 October 1935; M Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 103–4.
50. *New Leader*, 1 November 1935.
51. Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 104; *RPC Bulletin*, November 1935.
52. *RPC Bulletin*, November 1935; Cohen interview with Jack Gaster.
53. Cohen interview with Jack Gaster.
54. Phil Piratin, *Our Flag Stay Red* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1978[1948]), 86.
55. *New Leader*, 15 November 1935.
56. NAC minutes 30 November – 1 December 1935.
57. NAC minutes 30 November – 1 December 1935.
58. Meeting of Divisional Representatives with the NAC 25 March 1932.
59. *New Leader*, 5 August 1932.
60. NAC minutes 7–8 October 1932.
61. For example in his speech to the ILP summer school in 1932 *New Leader*, 19 August 1932; cf *New Leader*, 30 September 1932; ILP conference report, 1933.
62. *New Leader*, 5 May 1933.
63. *New Leader*, 5 May 1933.
64. *New Leader*, 29 September 1933.
65. *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1933.
66. *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1933; August 1933.
67. *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1933.
68. *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1933.
69. *Labour's Northern Voice*, December 1933; NAC minutes 6–7 January 1934.
70. NAC minutes 24–25 June 1933.
71. NAC minutes 5–7 August 1933.
72. The circular was maintained by a vote of 10 to 5. NAC minutes 23–24 September 1933; *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933.
73. NAC minutes 23–24 September 1933.
74. *Labour's Northern Voice*, December 1933; August 1934.
75. *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934.
76. *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934.
77. *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934.
78. *Labour's Northern Voice* October 1933, February 1934.

79. ILP conference report, 1934.
80. *New Leader*, 6 April 1934 cf ILP conference report, 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, April 1934.
81. *New Leader*, 4 May 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934; Minutes of Special Divisional Conference 26 May 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1934.
82. The delay in resignation was too much for the NAC, which refused to send out the letter it had written thanking Sandham for his years of service in the ILP. NAC minutes 9–10 June 1934.
83. *New Leader*, 18 May 1934.
84. *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934.
85. *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934.
86. See for example *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1935.
87. *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1934; cf *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1934.
88. *New Leader*, 7 September 1934; For further details on the ISP see Gidon Cohen, 'Special Note: The Independent Socialist Party' in Gildart, Howell and Kirk (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography volume XI*, 231–238.
89. EC report for NAC meeting 11–12 August 1934.
90. NAC minutes 23–24 September 1933.
91. Paton, *Left Turn*, 416–23; 'An Interview with CA Smith' *New Leader*, 13 October 1933.
92. Paton, *Left Turn*, 420.
93. Leon Trotsky, 'Trotsky to the ILP', *Controversy*, November 1933.
94. Some leading members of the International Left Opposition had suggested that one or two individuals should remain outside the ILP to maintain the group's press. Trotsky, 'How to influence the ILP' cited in Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 141–2.
95. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 131; Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 58, 65.
96. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 139.
97. *For Discussion: Internal Bulletin of the Communist League*, 14–15 (24 October 1933) (MRC MSS 115 File 2); Resolution to be submitted to members meeting 17 December 1933 (DDH/1932–8); Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 140, 150.
98. *The Red Flag*, September 1933.
99. International Secretariat to British Section of the International Communist League, (DDH/1932–8); Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 147.
100. *New Leader*, 16 February 1934.
101. CF Mottram, 'Criticising Trotsky', *Controversy* December 1933.
102. *New Leader*, 16 February 1934; NAC minutes 10–11 February 1934.
103. Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 89; undated letter to International Secretariat signed by 7 ILP members (DJH 5/2).
104. Former members of the British Section of the International Communist League, 'Declaration on Joining the ILP', *Controversy*, June 1934.
105. Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 89.
106. Letter to the International Secretariat signed by 7 ILP members (DJH 5/2) The letter was signed by AB Doncaster, E Grant, R Porteous, S Hirst and WG

Bryce of the ILP and DD Harber and Stuart Kirby both of whom had left the Marxist League and the ILP for the Labour Party by the time the letter was sent.

107. Letter to the International Secretariat.
108. Letter to the International Secretariat.
109. Don James to London Marxist Group, July 1936 Reports 1, 2 and 3 (Documents in possession of John McIllroy).
110. MRC/MSS151/File 1.
111. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 171.
112. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 170.
113. Letter to the International Secretariat signed by 7 ILP members DJH 5/2.
114. September 10 1935, DJH 5/9.
115. Signed by Harry Kilminster (Secretary of Keighley ILP), CA Lockwood (Sheffield ILP, Secretary ILP Research Bureau) Evelyn M Hurp (National Organiser Guild of Youth, Chairman Bradford Guild of Youth), John Goffe (Chairman of Yorkshire Division Guild of Youth, Joint Secretary Sheffield ILP), F Warwick (Huddersfield ILP), WH Wilson (Keighley ILP), PJ Barclay (Lancashire Divisional Council, East Liverpool ILP) DJH 5/10.
116. NAC minutes 15 February 1936.
117. Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 107–126; Resolution Passed by London Marxist Group, BJL/DJH5/4; *New Leader*, 12 December 1936; cf Bornstein and Richardson, 'Against the Stream', 186 who appear to have mistaken the departure of Bert and May Matlow in May 1936 and the claims that surrounded their leaving for the disbanding of the Marxist Group.
118. *New Leader*, 4 December 1936.
119. NAC report to conference, 1937.
120. *New Leader*, 3 September 1937
121. Militant Group National Conference 1–2 August 1937, MRC/MSS151/File 1; The prominent Liverpool ILPer referred to in this document is a 'Comrade C', probably Harry Cund.
122. On the importance of ideological regulation in containing factional activity in the Labour Party see Eric Shaw, *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1988), 127–9.

6. TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY POLICY

1. 'The ILP Conference', *New Leader*, 21 April 1933.
2. 'The Policy of the ILP', *New Leader*, 11 August 1933.
3. Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 185–202.
4. CA Smith, 'Workers' Councils – the workers' way out', *Revolt*, 1 (March 1933), 7.
5. NAC minutes June 24–25 1932.
6. *New Leader*, 12 February 1932.
7. *New Leader*, 7 July 1933.
8. NAC minutes 5–7 August 1933.
9. *New Leader*, 29 April 1932.

10. ILP conference report, 1933.
11. *New Leader*, 4 August 1933.
12. 'The Policy of the ILP', *New Leader*, 11 August 1933.
13. *New Leader*, 11 August 1933.
14. *New Leader*, 11 August 1933.
15. Minutes of special conference, Norwich October 15 1933 Division Five Minute Book BLPES Coll Misc 497.
16. *RPC Bulletin*, June 1934
17. See Gildart and Cohen, 'Tom Stephenson'.
18. NAC minutes, 24–25 June 1933; 5–7 August 1933; *New Leader*, 17 August 1935; 12 July 1935.
19. Labour's Northern Voice, September 1933.
20. Labour's Northern Voice, September 1933 cf. New Leader, 16 June 1933.
21. See particularly Brockway 'Reflection After the ILP Annual Conference', New Leader, 3 May 1935.
22. Conference Supplement, New Leader, 22 April 1938.
23. Conference, Supplement, New Leader, 22 April 1938.
24. ILP conference report, 1937; Brockway, Workers' Front, (Secker & Warburg: London, 1938), 208–54.
25. Leon Trotsky (edited by R Chappell and Alan Clinton), Collected Writing and Speeches on Britain. Volume 3, (New Park: London 1974), 130, 99–115.

7. INFILTRATION AND CO-OPERATION: COMMUNISM AND THE ILP

1. Harry Pollitt, in Pollitt and Brockway, *Which Way for the Workers?*
2. 'Resolutions of the CPGB Central Committee', *Communist Review*, January 1932, 57.
3. Harry Pollitt, 'The Bradford ILP Conference and After', *Labour Monthly*, August 1932, 487.
4. Tom Mann, cited in R Palme Dutt, 'For A United Communist Party: an appeal to ILPers and all revolutionary workers', 1935.
5. Jack Gaster, 'The Present Position of the ILP', *Labour Monthly*, January 1933, 34.
6. George Johnson, 'Where Not to Lead', *Controversy*, July / August 1934, 1.
7. Paton, *Left Turn*, 394.
8. Paton, *Left Turn*, 394.
9. Pollitt and Brockway, *Which Way for the Workers*. The pamphlet of the debate had to be withdrawn the following year as the Communist Party's attitude towards the ILP changed.
10. *New Leader*, 18 November 1932.
11. For an account of the Norwich Contingent of the 1932 Hunger March see Cunningham, 'Unemployment', Appendix 1.
12. Harry McShane and Joan Smith, *Harry McShane: No mean fighter* (Pluto: London, 1978), 192; Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919–1936* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1977 [1936]), 252–3. McGovern's autobiography only

obliquely refers to these events John McGovern, *Neither Fear Nor Favour* (Blandford: London, 1960), 85.
13. NAC report to conference, 1933.
14. Paton, *Left Turn*, 400–401.
15. NAC report to conference, 1933.
16. Call to members of the ILP (Brockway (Chairman) & Paton(Secretary)) 24 March 1933.
17. Call to members of the ILP 24 March 1933; *New Leader*, 7 April 1933.
18. *New Leader*, 21 April 1933.
19. *New Leader*, 21 April 1933.
20. *New Leader*, 11 August 1933.
21. See for example Dutt, 'United Communist Party'.
22. ILP conference report, 1933; *New Leader* 21 April 1933.
23. ILP conference report, 1933; *New Leader* 21 April 1933.
24. For an account of these TUC unemployed associations see Richard Croucher, '"Divisions in the Movement": The National Unemployed Workers' Movement and its rivals in comparative perspective' in Geoff Andrews, Morgan and Nina Fishman (eds) *Opening the Books: Essays on the social and cultural history of the British Communist Party* (Pluto: London, 1995), 25–43. On ambiguities in the ILP's attitudes towards NUWM see IE minutes, 15 May 1934; Cunningham, 'Unemployment', 229–30.
25. *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1932; *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933; *New Leader*, 19 April 1935; Berryden (sic) ILP annual report 1935–6 ILP archive 1936/1.
26. McShane in MacDougall, *Voices*, 22.
27. National Congress and March Council Bulletin No. 1 LHASC/CP/IND/HANN/06/16.
28. The signatories were: Aneurin Bevan, James Carmichael (ILP), JB Figgins, Alex Gossip (ILP), Wal Hannington, Ted Hill, John Jagger, James Lee, WJ Brown, WC Loeber, Tom Mann, James Maxton (ILP), John McGovern (ILP), Harry Pollitt, Frank Rowlands, Ellen Wilkinson, Dorothy Woodman, John Aplin (ILP) and Maud Brown. *The Workers' United Front: A Challenge to the Ruling Class*, 1934, 1.
29. Bob Edwards to May Edwards, Southall Labour Club Uxbridge (nd but 1934); enclosure with letter Bob Edwards to Leslie Jones 24 February 1982 LHASC/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 4.
30. Francis and Smith, *Fed*, 252; *Merthyr Express*, 1 April 1976.
31. The resultant march was quite pacifistic, dubbing the rather more aggressive and militant Tyneside Contingent they met up with along the route 'the vulgarians'. Cunningham, 'Unemployment', 251.
32. McShane and Smith, *Harry McShane*, 200, 208.
33. McShane and Smith, *Harry McShane*, 207; McGovern, *Fear*, 80–5.
34. *New Leader*, 17 August 1934.
35. NAC minutes 10 February 1934.
36. Brockway, 'Review of United Front activity between the CP and the ILP', February 1935 MLG/TD956/7/25.

37. IE minutes 10 April 1935.
38. *New Leader*, 21 June 1935.
39. Pollitt, 'Draft Review of experiences in carrying out United Front activity between the Communist Party and the ILP', February 1935 MLG/TD956/7/25; Brockway, 'Review of United Front activity between the ILP and CP', March 1935 MLG/TD956/7/26; Pollitt, 'Reply to Brockway' MLG/TD956/7/27.
40. *New Leader*, 29 May 1936.
41. Harry Pollitt, 'Speech as Fraternal Delegate to the ILP Conference', CP/IND/POLL/14/10; *New Leader*, 26 April 1935.
42. *Daily Worker*, 24 April 1935; *New Leader*, 3 May 1935.
43. NAC report to conference, 1936.
44. NAC report to conference, 1936.
45. *New Leader*, 6 March 1936; 17 April 1936; ILP conference report, 1936.
46. The three ILPers were John Aplin, Jennie Lee and Alex Gossip. Further Gossip's relationship with the ILP was increasingly strained. PRO/MEPO2/3053/17–28.
47. *New Leader*, 6 November 1936; *Controversy*, January 1937.
48. *New Leader*, 20 November 1936.
49. *Controversy*, December 1936.
50. The other three other committee members singled out by the police were John Mahon (CP) Pat Devine (NUWM) and H Beakon (Bethnal Green Trades Council) PRO/MEPO2/3091/150 1936 Hunger March.
51. Welsh Marchers Newsletter 3 November 1936 (LHASC CP/HANN/06/14); *New Leader*, 2 October 1936; *New Leader*, 6 November 1936; 13 November 1936.
52. NAC minutes 7 November 1936, *New Leader*, 20 November 1936.
53. The meeting was addressed by Jennie Lee (ILP), William Mellor (SL), Harry Pollitt (CPGB) and Aneurin Bevan (LP) as well as marchers representatives including Trevor Williams (Welsh ILP). NAC minutes 7 November 1936.
54. NAC minutes 7 November 1936.
55. *New Leader*, 27 November 1936.
56. *New Leader*, 20 November 1936.
57. See for example *New Leader*, 23 September 1932.
58. Brockway to NAC 12 April 1935 LHASC/LP/SL/35/1.
59. JT Murphy to J Middleton 2 August 1935 LHASC/LP/SL/35/11.
60. Brockway, 'A New United Front', *Controversy*, December 1936; *New Leader*, 5 June 1936.
61. *New Leader*, 5 June 1936.
62. NAC minutes 1 August 1936; *New Leader*, 7 August 1936; NAC report to conference, 1937.
63. The ILP was represented by Maxton, Stephen, Aplin and Brockway.
64. Brockway, 'A New United Front'; NAC minutes 7 November 1936; NAC report to conference, 1937; EC report 24 November 1936.
65. *New Leader*, 15 January 1937.
66. *New Leader*, 15 January 1937

67. Brockway to Cripps, 3 December 1937 LHASC/CP/IND/POLL/14/15; 'The Unity Campaign Negotiations: Decisions of the ILP Executive Committee', 24 November 1936 LHASC/CP/IND/POLL/14/14.
68. McNair, *Maxton*, 263 (cited); cf Brown, *Maxton*, 281–4; John Mahon, *Harry Pollitt* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1976), 232–4; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 1993), 91–2; Chris Bryant, *Stafford Cripps: The first modern chancellor* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1997), 138–9.
69. Maxton, 'The Unity Campaign', *Controversy*, February 1937.
70. Ernie Patterson (Clapham) and Harry Cund (Kirkdale) led opposition to the Unity Campaign. One of the three amendments they proposed to strengthen opposition to the Popular Front, included an attack on the Unity Campaign which they complained was inconsistent with an anti-Popular Front policy.
71. *Tribune*, 2 May 1937.
72. *Tribune*, 2 May 1937.
73. Patrick Seyd, 'Factionalism within the Labour Party: The Socialist League 1932–37' in Saville and Asa Briggs (eds) *Essays in Labour History 1918–39* (Croon Helm: London, 1977), 219–21.
74. *New Leader*, 21 May 1937; The dissolution of the Socialist League also led to the opening up of a number of property disputes which had been held over from disaffiliation. For example in Gateshead the Socialist League and the ILP had in 1932 agreed to divide rights between them. NAC minutes 12 June 1937.
75. 'A Call to the Socialist Left' LHASC/LP/SL/35/60.
76. *New Leader*, 2 April 1937.
77. *New Leader*, 11 June 1937.
78. NAC minutes 12 June 1937.
79. Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 268.
80. Undated circular letter included on industrial Committee microfilms; For a more general analysis of the ILP and the Spanish Civil War see below pages 176–191.
81. *New Leader*, 21 May 1937; 28 May 1937; 4 June 1937.
82. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 July 1937.
83. *New Leader*, 28 May 1937.
84. *New Leader*, 6 June 1937.
85. Kenneth Lee, 'Independent Working Class Action', *Controversy*, November 1937; *New Leader*, 13 August 1937.
86. *New Leader*, 27 August 1937.
87. *New Leader*, 19 July 1937.
88. Paul Corthorn, 'Labour', 201; In the context of the wider left perspective this article provides an overview of the ILP's position on the trials.
89. NAC report to conference, 1938.
90. *New Leader*, 22 April 1938.
91. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 March 1938; 17 March 1938; *New Leader*, 11 March 1938.
92. *New Leader*, 18 February 1938.
93. *New Leader*, 25 February 1938.

94. *New Leader*, 23 September 1938.
95. *New Leader*, 30 June 1939.
96. *New Leader*, 30 June 1939.
97. Guild of Youth annual report 1932; Guild of Youth annual report 1933 LHASC/CP/YCL/18/3.
98. *New Leader*, 6 October 1933.
99. *New Leader*, 6 October 1933.
100. NAC report to conference, 1934.
101. ILP conference report, 1934; *New Leader*, 6 April 1934.
102. 'The Next Tasks for the League and How the Party Can Help', RGASPI 533/10/258/121–7.
103. Bill to Alex, 17 March 1934, RGASPI 533/10/266/64–72.
104. Alex to Mick, 7 June 1934, RGASPI 533/10/266/119–122.
105. Note on circular letter 15 January 1935, RGASPI 533/10/290.
106. Alex Massie, 'Guild Norwich Conference', LHASC/CP/YCL/18/1; *New Leader*, 25 May 1934; *Controversy*, June 1934.
107. NAC minutes, 9–10 June 1934.
108. EC report, 11–12 August 1934; NAC minutes, 11–12 August 1934.
109. LHASC/CP/YCL/18/1.
110. EC report, 16–17 November 1934.
111. *New Leader*, 23 November 1934; ILP conference report, 1935; *New Leader*, 8 March 1935; 24 April 1935.
112. *New Leader*, 26 April 1935.
113. *New Leader*, 5 May 1935; NAC minutes, 22 April 1935; Povey was thrown off the NAC after indicating he would not withdraw documents critical of the ILP. NAC report, 22 April 1935; NAC minutes, 23–24 April 1935.
114. *New Leader*, 14 June 1935.
115. IE minutes, 19 June 1935; NAC minutes, 29–30 June 1935.
116. *New Leader*, 14 February 1936.
117. NAC minutes 14 April 1936.
118. NAC minutes 12 June 1937; NAC minutes 7 November 1936; 'The Guild of Youth Decisions by the NAC' distributed with Industrial Committee Minutes (71).
119. NAC minutes 12 June 1937; *New Leader*, 4 June 1937.
120. NAC minutes 2 August 1937.
121. *New Leader*, 20 August 1937; 17 December 1937; June 17 1938; 1 April 1938.
122. NAC minutes 30 July 1938; *New Leader*, 24 February 1939.

8. AGAINST THE MACHINE

1. CA Smith, 'Men versus the Machine', *New Leader*, 7 October 1932, 4.
2. *New Leader*, 5 August 1932.
3. *New Leader*, 5 August 1932.
4. Hugh Dalton to Jim Middleton 8 February 1935; Stafford Cripps to Jim Middleton 8 February 1935. LHASC/LP/JSM/Box 6/ILP.
5. Labour Party NEC minutes, 15 November 1933.

6. For further details see Gidon Cohen, 'The Independent Socialist Party', 235
7. Labour Party NEC minutes 27 March 1935; 26 March 1936.
8. Shepard stated that ILP could be readmitted on the same basis as existed when they left. *Labour Party Conference Report 1935*, 139–40.
9. Labour Party NEC minutes, 5 September 1936.
10. *New Leader*, 4 December 1936.
11. ILP conference report, 1936.
12. *New Leader*, 5 June 1936.
13. Brockway, 'A Survey of the Party Position', 13 November 1937.
14. For example the proportion of local government representatives in the Party was much smaller in 1938–9.
15. *New Leader*, 2 September 1938.
16. Mabel Forbes, 'Revolutionary Hermits', *Controversy*, April 1938.
17. For Jowett's position see Brockway, *Socialism*, 325–6; for examples of similar concerns from other individuals see Wilfred Sharples, Letter to *Controversy*, January 1938.
18. James Stirling, 'Can the ILP Affiliate', *Controversy*, April 1938.
19. James Carmichael, 'The Question of Re-Affiliation', *Controversy*, August 1937.
20. *Manchester Guardian* 26 May 1938; *New Leader*, 27 May 1938.
21. LHASC/JSM/ILP/27; Labour Party NEC minutes 25 May 1938; For the refusal to meet with the ISP see Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee 22 April 1937.
22. McNair, *Maxton*, 268.
23. Knox, *Maxton*, 134–6.
24. For example Dowse presents McNair's statements that Maxton would not join the Labour Party except on very stringent, probably unrealisable, conditions as his sole evidence that Maxton supported reaffiliation. Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 198–9.
25. *New Leader*, 18 February 1938.
26. See for example CA Smith, 'Rejoinder by CA Smith', *Between Ourselves*, April 1940.
27. Notes on an interview between representatives of the Labour Party and Representatives of the ILP held on 14 June 1938. LHASC/JSM/ILP/31.
28. *New Leader*, 15 July 1938; NAC minutes 3 July 1938; *New Leader*, 5 August 1938; Brockway to Middleton 24 November 1938. LHASC/JSM/ILP/33; *Manchester Guardian*, 28 November 1938.
29. NAC report to conference, 1939.
30. ILP Final Agenda of Resolutions and Amendments, 47th Annual Conference; *New Leader*, 14 April 1937.
31. Labour Party NEC minutes 26 April 1939; 28 June 1939; *New Leader*, 28 April 1939.
32. Brockway to Middleton 24 April 1939. LHASC/JSM/ILP/34; *New Leader*, 28 April 1939.
33. Middleton to Brockway 3 July 1939. LHASC/JSM/ILP/37.
34. NAC report to conference, 1940.

9. PACIFISM, WARS AND INTERNATIONALS

1. Taylor, *English History*, 558–9.
2. Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 201–2.
3. Littlejohns, 'Decline', 149–176.
4. Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 201–2.
5. Paton, *Left Turn*, 362 cf 330.
6. Paton, *Left Turn*, 363.
7. The RPC resolution was carried by 83–79. ILP conference report, 1933.
8. For example attendance at the Communist International's Copenhagen conference was made conditional on the executives of the other left socialist parties being invited to attend. NAC minutes 13–14 May 1933.
9. NAC minutes 17–18 December 1932, the actual action of resignation was not taken until after the Derby Conference, NAC minutes 13–14 May 1933; NAC minutes 24–25 June 1933.
10. 'ILP and the Communist International (Full Text of the Correspondence)' was published by the ILP prior to the York Conference in 1934; NAC minutes 30 March–1 April 1934.
11. *New Leader*, 6 April 1934.
12. ILP conference report, 1934.
13. *New Leader*, 22 March 1935.
14. *New Leader*, 26 April 1935.
15. Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 183.
16. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties (ILP archive series II 1932/68).
17. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties.
18. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties; *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*, 3 (March 1936).
19. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties.
20. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties.
21. *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*, 3 (March 1936); Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties.
22. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties.
23. NAC report to conference, 1939; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 323–37.
24. *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*, 3 (March 1936).
25. *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*, 3 (March 1936).
26. NAC minutes 30 November– 1 December 1 1935.
27. *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*, January 1936; *New Leader*, 31 January 1936; NAC report to conference, 1940.
28. *New Leader*, 6 November 1936.
29. Bob Edwards, 'The Revolutionary Socialist Congress', *Controversy*, December 1936; *New Leader*, 13 November 1936.
30. NAC minutes, 12–13 June 1937; NAC report to conference, 1938; *New Leader*, 18 February 1938.
31. *New Leader*, 4 March 1938.
32. NAC report to conference, 1938; NAC minutes 2 August 1937.
33. NAC report to conference, 1938.

34. NAC report to conference, 1939.
35. NAC report to conference, 1940; NAC report to conference, 1941.
36. *New Leader*, 15 February 1935.
37. *New Leader*, 13 September 1935.
38. *New Leader*, 18 October 1935.
39. *New Leader*, 9 September 1935, 13 September 1935, 20 September 1935, 27 September 1935, 11 October 1935.
40. *Controversy*, October 1935.
41. *New Leader*, 4 October 1935.
42. *Forward*, 21 September 1935.
43. *New Leader*, 13 September 1935.
44. CKC, 'The War Crisis', *RPC Bulletin*, October 1935.
45. Jack Gaster and the London Emergency Committee, 'Abyssinia – Where does the ILP stand', *Controversy*, October 1935.
46. 'Foreword – Crisis in the RPC?', *RPC Bulletin*, October 1935.
47. IE minutes, 24 October 1935.
48. *New Leader*, 4 October 1935; Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 103–4.
49. New Leader, 1 November 1935.
50. Upham, 'British Trotskyism', 104; *RPC Bulletin*, November 1935.
51. Prior to the ILP's 1936 Keighley conference, 48,000 leaflets to this effect signed by Chairman and Secretary were distributed to branches and the general public. NAC report to conference, 1936.
52. ILP conference report, 1936.
53. EC minutes, 23 May 1936.
54. ILP, *United Policy against War: Important NAC Decision Following Plebiscite*, (London, nd).; NAC report to conference, 1937.
55. ILP, *Through the Class Struggle to Socialism* (ILP: London, 1937).
56. ILP, *Through the Class Struggle to Socialism* (ILP: London, 1937).
57. Buchanan, *Britain*, 184.
58. *Forward*, 2 January 1937.
59. McGovern, *Fear*, 171.
60. McGovern, *Why Bishops Back Franco*, 11; NAC minutes 7–8 November 1936.
61. *Forward*, 12 June 1937; *New Leader*, 11 June 1937.
62. John McNair, *In Spain Now!* (ILP: London, 1936).
63. ILP, *Through the Class Struggle to Socialism* (ILP: London, 1937), 1.
64. *New Leader*, 28 August 1936.
65. The committee included Diessel and Wolfe of the German SAP, Balduli of the Italian Socialist Party, Max Petel of the French Revolutionary Left, Julien Gorkin of the POUM, and Hans Petersen and Bob Smillie of the Revolutionary Youth Bureau. *New Leader*, 4 December 1936.
66. NAC minutes 7–8 November 1936; *New Leader*, 23 October 1936; *New Leader*, 12 February 1937.
67. Fenner Brockway in McNair, *In Spain Now!*
68. After his arrival at the front Martin found himself in command of an artillery section comprising sixty men including thirty-five POUM and fifteen syndicalists. *New Leader*, 2 October 1936; 13 November 1936; 1 January 1937.

69. *New Leader*, 28 August 1936.
70. *New Leader*, 7 May 1937; NAC minutes 2 August 1937.
71. *New Leader*, 16 October 1936.
72. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1937; 12 January 1937; 13 January 1937; *New Leader*, 1 January 1937; 15 January 1937.
73. Peter Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party Contingent in the Spanish Civil War', *Imperial War Museum Review*, 1987, 60; *New Leader*, 30 April 1937.
74. Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia and Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War* (Penguin: Harmandsworth, 1966 [1938]), 23, 39; Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (Secker & Warburg: London, 1980), 215.
75. *New Leader*, 22 January 1937.
76. Orwell, *Homage*, 11.
77. *New Leader*, 22 January 1937.
78. *New Leader*, 1 January 1937.
79. *New Leader*, 12 February 1937.
80. *New Leader*, 19 February 1937.
81. Orwell, *Homage*, 71.
82. Orwell, *Homage*, 84–99; *New Leader*, 30 April 1937.
83. *New Leader*, 26 February 1937; 26 March 1937; 16 April 1937; 30 April 1937; 9 July 1937; Orwell, *Homage*, 71, 81, 93, 179–82.
84. *New Leader*, 21 May 1937; Orwell, *Homage*, 117–172.
85. *New Leader*, 21 May 1937.
86. *Daily Worker*, 11 May 1937; 22 May 1937; 31 May 1937; *New Leader*, 9 July 1937; *New Leader*, 16 July 1937.
87. *Daily Worker*, 14 September; 16 September 1937; *New Leader*, 17 September 1937; 24 September 1937
88. Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 317.
89. Crick, *Orwell*, 439 fn63; Frankford was also interviewed by Thwaites in 1986 for his article on the ILP contingent. No quotations are given but Thwaites writes that the interview repudiated the allegations in 'almost all their detail' 'He says that his interview with Sam Lesser which was originally picked up by the *Daily Worker* in London and then edited until it became the version which was published and caused the controversy was aimed at discrediting the ILP He is philosophical about the distortion of his words saying that that is the kind of thing that happens in politics.' (Thwaites, 'ILP Contingent', 58, 61fn144).
90. *New Leader*, 4 June 1937; 26 November 1937.
91. In June the NAC decided to allocate £150 of the remaining £180 in the Spanish fund to repatriate the Spanish contingent. NAC minutes 11–12 June 1937.
92. Christopher Hall, *'Disciplina Comaradas' Four English Volunteers in Spain 1936–39* (Gosling Press: Pontefract, 1997 [1994]), 108–9; Orwell, *Homage*, 203–21.
93. NAC report to conference, 1938; *New Leader*, 6 August 1937; December 2 1938; February 10 1939.
94. *New Leader*, 18 June 1937; Buchanan, 'Bob Smillie', 445.
95. David Murray was a freelance journalist and businessman who had gone to Spain for a combination of business and holiday. He later stood unsuccessfully

for parliament an Independent Liberal, Liberal and Independent Home Rule candidate. Buchanan, 'Bob Smillie', 461; Murry's papers are deposited in the National Library of Scotland (NLS/Acc 7914–5) Acc 7915 contains much material on his work as a journalist and businessman and his political activity after leaving the ILP Acc 7914 contains much material on the Spanish Civil War and also detailed material on the ILP at local level in Scotland.

96. Buchanan, 'Bob Smillie', 461.
97. Tom Buchanan, 'The Death of Bob Smillie: A Reply', *Historical Journal*, 43:4 (2000), 1109–11.
98. Bob Edwards, August 1974. LHASC/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 6/ILP.
99. Maxton, 'Forward', *We Carry On: Our Tribute to Bob Smillie.*
100. *New Leader*, 25 June 1937; 9 July 1937; 27 August 1937.
101. *New Leader*, 22 January 1937; 12 February 1937.
102. NAC minutes 17 July 1937.
103. *New Leader*, 13 August 1937; *New Leader*, 3 September 1937; For Brockway's similar attitude see his diary of his visit to Spain MRC 15/3/8/245 and for his public condemnation of the Communists see the *Manchester Guardian*, 14 July 1937.
104. See for examples *New Leader*, 9 July 1937; 5 November 1937.
105. NAC minutes 17 July 1937; 22 October 1937; *New Leader*, 1 July 1938.
106. *New Leader*, 4 June 1937.
107. NAC minutes, 17 July 1937; 13 November 1937; *New Leader*, 2 June 1937.
108. *New Leader*, 2 April 1937.
109. NAC report to conference, 1938; *New Leader*, 22 April 1938; cf Jack Huntz, *Spotlight on Spain* (ILP London Divisional Council: London, 1937).
110. Manifesto issued by the NAC during the September Crisis, Appendix 1 to the NAC report to conference, 1939.
111. A full verbatim report of the speech is printed in McNair, *Maxton*, 273–6.
112. *New Leader*, 14 October 1938.
113. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 October 1938.
114. Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 332.
115. *New Leader*, 14 October 1938.
116. McNair, *Maxton*, 277.
117. McGovern, *Fear*, 129
118. McNair was not alone in his defence of Maxton, George Johnson for example declared that his speech was a 'fine socialist utterance' whilst the Bradford branch passed a motion congratulating Maxton. *New Leader*, 7 October 1938; 14 April 1939.
119. 'The Revolutionary Attitude to Imperialist Peace', *Left*, April 1939.
120. *New Leader*, 14 April 1939.
121. *New Leader*, 17 April 1936.
122. Brockway, *Pacifism and the Left Wing*, London, 1938.
123. The provisional committee consisted of William Ballantine (Chairman), James Hudson (Secretary of Parliamentary Pacifist group, Secretary), Rose Simpson (Secretary of Women's Co-operative Guild, Treasurer), Fenner Brockway,

Donald Fraser (Fabian Society Executive), David Freeman (NCCL Executive). *New Leader*, 13 January 1939.

124. *New Leader*, 5 May 1939.
125. At the Convention representative were present from: 95 Co-operative organisations, 84 Trades Councils and Trades Unions, 78 Labour Party organisations, 91 ILP organisations, 83 Pacifist organisations, 84 NCL Councils and branches and 59 Individuals and other organisations.
126. *New Leader*, 2 June 1939.
127. *No Conscription*, June 1939.
128. *New Leader*, 5 November 1937.
129. Brockway and McNair, *Socialism can defeat Nazism*, 3.
130. *Socialist Policy for 1938, Resolutions adopted by the Annual Conference of the ILP April 16th to 18th 1938*, 10.

10. CONCLUSION

1. Coates, *The Labour Party*, 185.
2. Cf Jupp, *Radical Left*, 184.

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