

A Penguin Special

The Communist Technique in Britain

BOB DARKE, Hackney Borough Councillor, and for eighteen years a leading Communist until he resigned in May 1951, explains how the British Communist Party can exert an influence vastly out of proportion to its numerical strength. This is not an ex-Communist intellectual's expose but the plain, factual account of a working man who tells us



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INSIDE



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how Union after Union in the East End fell under Communist control. He explains the Communist technique of taking over a Union, organizing strikes, getting rid of non-Communist Union leaders. He reveals that the Peace Campaign sprang directly from Cominform instructions, and he accuses it of deception and forgery. He tells of his role as a Parliamentary agent when the Party tried desperately to win the South Hackney seat in the 1945 General Election.

His story is authentic. As a member of the Party's important National Industrial Policy Committee he knew more of the Party's tactics than the average comrade. But perhaps the most damning thing of all is his account of the corruption of family life and family loyalties, of the Party's imposition of an iron and uncompromising discipline.

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THE COMMUNIST TECHNIQUE
IN BRITAIN

BOB DARKE



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TO MY BROTHER

John Darke

WHO WAS A GREAT FIGHTER

FOR FREEDOM

INTRODUCTION

The more the English workers absorb Communist ideas, the more superfluous becomes their present bitterness. . . .

ENGELS, Condition of the Working-class in England.

IT was a Wednesday, 16 May, 1951.

I am a bus conductor, and we divide up the days arbitrarily. There are those when it rains and those when it doesn't. On 16 May, 1951, it had not rained and I had gone through my work automatically. When it was over I handed in my money and tickets at the depot and went home.

I remember there were children playing on the pavements in the evening half-light. The East End of London was in that vaguely restless mood you can sense on a Spring evening. I noticed that. I noticed a lot that on any other day I might have ignored. I have made that walk over and over again in my mind since then, trying to remember my emotions, but I can remember only what I saw that evening, not what I thought or felt.

Which is odd, perhaps, for I was going home to place on record my resignation from the Communist Party whose loyal and industrious servant I had been for eighteen years.

I was not a rank-and-file Communist but a Cadre Leader who got his orders in confidential form from Harry Pollitt, and I had been a member of the Party's National Industrial Committee for ten years. A man who holds such positions of trust does not drift out of the Party like a bored comrade who decides not to turn up to branch meetings.

Circumstances force him to make a clean break.

Perhaps I was thinking that as I walked home. Whatever I was thinking it was a lonely walk, and in a way this is a lonely book.

I live in Nisbet House, Homerton, a block of council flats in the Borough of Hackney, where washing is always hanging on the lines on the verandas, and there are bicycles and prams in the tiled hallways and sheds. Such a block of flats in the

East End is a world of its own, closer-knit than the luxury flats in the West End where, I imagine, a man can lock his door on his neighbours.

But if, in the East End, you can't keep your own business from the neighbours that also means that your circle of friends is all the wider.

For example: to the old dears at the foot of the steps that evening, gossiping with arms akimbo, I was not Mr Darke, the mystery man of Flat Twelve. I was Bob. Bob Darke, Borough Councillor, Communist. They knew all about me, my wife Ann, and our two daughters. They called to me 'Evening, Bob. How are things?'

How were things? About now they were critical.

As I climbed the steps the block was alive with noise, with children's voices, footsteps on the stones, the inevitable radio. My flat was empty and quiet. Ann was at work and my girls were not yet home from school and work. I sat down, and with an unexpected peace of mind I wrote my letter. There were six pages of it, for I had a lot to say, and when I had finished it I read it again before I sealed it.

I went out and posted it, and as it slipped into the mouth of the letter-box I looked about the street and felt free for the first time in many years. I don't know how a man feels when he comes out of prison, probably not the same, for it wasn't my body that had been liberated suddenly.

Maybe I felt a little fear and shame too. I was now an apostate. That letter-box had not only taken my letter, it had taken my life, or what I had made of it until then.

I knew what lay behind me, but what lay ahead I did not try to guess. For a while I walked about the streets and tried to force some drama into that simple act. It was almost as if I felt that Hackney should now look different, that I should be different.

But the fact is that leaving the Communist Party is not a sudden act of impulse, at least not for a man who has been a member as long as I had. Ironically you might define in terms of Marxist dialectic, the theory of the slow, hidden change culminating in an explosive break with the past, the revolutionary moment. To quote the analogy I have heard Party

lecturers use: at what point does the caterpillar in its chrysalis change into the butterfly?

At what point along those eighteen years did I first begin to doubt? I don't know. I wasn't always in agreement with the Party's tactics, there were times when I didn't feel too highly of myself, but I supported the strategy. This book isn't an attempt to tell you that I knew all the time that it was wrong. I didn't.

This I do know, however. On the afternoon of 16 May, 1951, I wrote a letter to John Betteridge, Borough Secretary of the Hackney Communist Party, and informed him that from thereon he could do without one of the Party's oldest members.

For years the Party had been saying in the East End 'You know Bob Darke, the Borough Councillor? You know what he did for you during the rent troubles, don't you? Well, he's a Communist. You know what he's like, don't you, now will you believe the capitalist lies?'

That sort of propoganda recruited many members. If you could see me you would not see the handsome, idealized picturization of a proletarian hero the Party likes to put on its posters. But I was a good recruiting sergeant for the Party, just the same.

I turned into a phone kiosk. I knew the local newspapermen fairly well, I think they liked me in a grudging sort of way, even when I tried to prime them with Party-line stories. This time, however, I had a story for them that came straight from Bob Darke. I felt the reporter's enthusiasm as he cross-questioned me.

For a moment I had doubts, an uneasy sense of guilt. So strong is the grip of the Party on your conscience that even in leaving the feeling of betrayal will override all others if you allow it. I gave the reporter the story and then went to find a friend, not a Party friend (they are as rare as Catholics in the Kremlin) but someone who was my friend despite my politics.

There was a branch meeting of my union that evening, and when it was over I went across the road for a drink with Charlie Lee. We talked casually and then suddenly

I said, 'I'm through. It's all over with me and the Party.'

I have never seen a glass drop without actually falling. 'Steady, Charlie!' I said, and then told him how it was. I suppose I tried to defend myself, perhaps I explained myself baldly and incompletely, but he understood.

He said 'You'll need a good friend to stick by you now, Bob, count me in.'

I counted him in. He was the first of those who have stood by me since my resignation.

I realized how it was going to be, or I thought I did. Things I had said, things I had shouted at factory gates, or argued in the Council Chamber and across canteen tables, these were the things I would now be denying. The world was not going to meet me halfway. I had the whole distance to go alone.

The local reporter had done his work well. He must have telephoned every paper in Fleet Street, for when I got back to Nisbet House that night there were pressmen everywhere, in my flat, on the stairs, talking to neighbours. Some of my neighbours were at their doors, waiting to shake my hand as I came up the stairs. A returning hero couldn't have asked for a finer welcome, except that I wasn't a returning hero. I had enough sense, however, to realize that these people were paying me a very great compliment.

In the hall of my flat the pressmen turned on me. I do not remember how I answered their questions; certainly when I read their reports of what I had said I was surprised by my own eloquence. I could think only of the fact that I had not told Ann. I kept thinking that all the while the questions came at me.

Why did you leave the Party, Mr Darke?

Korea. Yes, Korea. But that was only the last straw.

How long did it take you to make up your mind?

A year. Two years. I don't know.

Why didn't you tell your wife you were going to resign?

I couldn't answer that question. I asked one instead. What had she said to the pressmen when they told her the news?

She said 'Thank God it's all over.'

There wasn't much more I could add to that. Ann always had the ability to sum things up.

This book is not an attempt at autobiography. My own personal story has its little tragedies and humours. Where they intrude on this narrative they will be there only to show what I did as a result of my Party membership. I was a good Party member as the Party would see it. They received twenty-four hours' service a day from me. Three hundred and sixty-five days a year. For eighteen years I never took a holiday at all, let alone with my wife. My spare time was the Party's, my home, my income, my happiness, and that of my family, was placed in pawn to the Party. And if ever I grew impatient with this, why the Revolution was around the corner, wasn't it?

In the beginning I believed that that was how things should be. Many times I have heard Communists pleading consideration for their family as an excuse for neglecting Party duties. They were told 'If your wife objects, get her into the Party. If your children cry, get them into the Young Communist League. If they won't join and they won't keep quiet, then leave them. We've no time for decadent bourgeois morality, Comrade. A Communist is above self. A Communist has no private life.'

They were right there. A Communist has no private life.

The real story here is the Communist Party of Great Britain as I experienced it, and the purpose of what follows is to explain how this numerically small organization can do what it does and can make its members do what they do.

I shall attempt to explain how it is possible for a few thousand Communists to speak and act on behalf of millions who hate Communism. This book is concerned with my experiences within the Hackney Communist Party, but it should not be read within the context of that borough alone. There are not English Communists, Czech Communists, Russian Communists. There are only *Communists*.

There is no brand of English Communism which, because of British temperament and tradition, would be more acceptable to the people in this country.

There is only *Communism*.

And what has happened in Hackney to-day could happen in the country to-morrow.

I was never a Communist intellectual. I put in my Party work 'on the knocker'. That is a proud and bitter phrase used often enough in the Party to describe the comrades who take the fight out into the streets. It is used to strike a difference between men like myself 'who would never desert the Party', and the Arthur Koestlers, the Douglas Hydes, the Charlotte Haldanes, who were 'always bourgeois at heart and certain to sell out.'

Well, maybe I am bourgeois at heart after all. But I fought on the kerbside, at the factory gate, in strike committees, in a militant march from Stepney to Trafalgar Square. I have walked with an ashplant in my hand confident, even hopeful that the police would be forced to break up our demonstration and give the Party its martyrs. But if this sounds a little cynical to you be assured that much of what I fought for as a Communist I fight for still as a Socialist.

It has taken me eighteen years to realize that I have been carrying the wrong banner in the right fight.

That was the banner of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, and if you wish to know the danger and strength of the Party that follows it, then you must know of its work in a district like Hackney.

Much of what I wish to tell in this book will be unintelligible unless some important questions are first answered.

They are questions that have been put to me since I left the Party, and the answers are those I have made myself wherever I could. Others are answers put to me in the form of questions with which I agree.

The simple question: 'Why do people join the Party?' is perhaps as impossible to answer in general terms as another question: 'Why do people leave the Party?'

In my own case I think the same answer can be given to each question. I joined the Party because I could no longer tolerate a system which I believed to be bad. Party propaganda had told me that that system was doomed anyway and my efforts would hasten its end. I wanted to work for the improvement of society, for freedom, justice, progress, and the full

expression of Man's talent and ability. I still want to work for these things, but I know that I cannot do so inside the Party, that Communism will not bring them.

Given that, then, if many Communists join the Party with such praiseworthy motives what happens to turn them into what they become?

You must accept an analogy to understand the answer here. The Communist Party is at war with the rest of society. Marxism declares there is no compromise in this war, no peace between one side and the other.

The Communist is taught that his enemy (that is anybody but a Communist) is ruthless, merciless, and unprincipled. To defeat him the Communist is justified in being more ruthless, more merciless, and more unprincipled. He is told that the existing society will double-cross and out-smart him and his fellow Communists if it is given the chance.

You can test this for yourself. Question any Communist on the ethics of his behaviour and he will not attempt to defend himself by denying the charge. He will cite cases where, in his opinion, the present system has been just as unethical.

He is at war and a war cannot be won if you permit yourself the indulgence of seeing your enemy's point of view.

He has an end in view, the establishment of a Communist society. That, to him, is a good end and anything that hastens it, however bad in itself, is a good thing.

Tax a Communist with the lack of democracy in a trade union controlled by a Party minority and he will not attempt to explain that the minority is in fact a majority, he will say that the minority is working for the general good, therefore its actions are justifiable.

Has the Communist no conscience then?

He has a conscience, but he places it in pawn to the Party when he joins. The Party takes care of his moral scruples by promising him that by his efforts he will bring the Revolution and universal peace.

Harry Pollitt it was, I think, who said 'Every Communist in a capitalist society is a capitalist at heart.' This wasn't a matter of benevolent tolerance, it was a warning to all comrades to beware of the capitalist fifth column within

themselves. When a Communist is disturbed by the voice of his conscience he remembers the words of Pollitt and drowns it.

Why is the Communist so intolerant?

Once again the war analogy. If you wish to defeat the enemy you do not tolerate him, you hate him. The Communist is taught and readily believes (because he wants to believe) that there is no middle line. Marxism preaches the inevitability of revolutionary change within society. Anyone who denies this is acting against it and thus hindering the coming to power of the Communists. His extermination as a political force is a number one priority.

A middle line would lessen the pace of change and therefore is in itself reactionary, except in the case of the Popular Front against Fascism when the Party believed that the situation demanded a measure of co-operation with non-Communists (only with the belief that the non-Communists were being given enough rope to make a halter for themselves).

The Communist does not respect a free society for tolerating his existence, he despises it. He believes it tolerates him only because it is afraid of him.

Does the Party never do good then?

Yes, it does. But the good it does is relative. The Communist is prepared to do good only in so far as that good strengthens the Party, intensifies the struggle between different classes, brings the moment of revolutionary change the nearer. The coming to power of the working-class is a good thing. If the moment of revolutionary change is hastened by acts that are illegal, unjust and inhuman, the end, to him, makes them right.

A man may be driven into the Party by the social injustice meted out to his parents in the form of poverty, privation, industrial accidents. He joins the Party to build a society where such things are impossible. But once in the Party he is not expected to place his emotions before his loyalty to the Party.

I have known of Communists who joined the Party because they could no longer stomach the sight of their parents

working long hours for small pay, and then seen them turn on those same parents, deride them for being dupes of a capitalist system, for being 'lumpenproletariat'.

Why is it impossible to argue with a Communist?

He will only argue on his own terms. He is right. You are wrong. You are wrong because you have not accepted his belief that the Marxist interpretation of life is the only one. If you have not accepted it you are on the other side. You cannot be speaking the truth.

I have had a vivid experience of this lately. A woman in Coventry asked me to talk to her son whose Communist Party membership troubled her. I talked to the lad and to his friend, a Party official.

My experience of the Party was wider and longer than theirs.

Yet whatever chapter, whatever gospel I quoted I could not convince them. They blandly refused to believe me. Why? I had deserted the Party. I had gone over to the other side. I was now on the side of 'capitalism' and they suspected my motives. So long as I remained in the Party they would have listened to me and believed me. Once I was outside the Party they would not believe a word I said.

Why will a Communist break the law of the country, the rules of his union without hesitation, and yet violently attack an opponent for doing the same thing?

The Communists regard the laws of this country as a product of a capitalist society designed to protect a capitalist class. He believes they bear no relation to him. He has no loyalty to capitalism and breaking its laws is not treachery or treason.

If it is possible to use those laws to weaken his enemy he will do so, but not because he has any respect for their ethical content.

He does not believe in human justice as an eternal value. It is to him only capitalist justice devised to keep the workers in suppression. He will break the law when it suits Party strategy. He will observe it when it is part of Party tactics.

Why has the Communist no respect for family life?

I have known few Communists with a happy home life.

The essence of family relations is tolerance. The essence of Party work is intolerance. The Party likes its members to be free from family trouble. A comrade whose wife or parents oppose his way of life is a potential danger to the Party. He is instructed either to recruit his family into the Party or leave them. There is no compromise. He is taught to believe that those of his family who do not share his beliefs are dupes of the capitalist system. The stronger becomes his family's opposition the stronger becomes a Communist's hatred for his family.

The Communist is a man who lives on hatred. He soon believes that everybody's hand is against him. He trusts no one who is not on the Party line. Even his wife.

The Party takes charge of his conscience and his love. Once he accepts this principle that all who are not with us are against us he will be ready to do anything, say anything.

What reward can he expect for selling himself into slavery like this?

Generally a fanatic expects no reward other than the opportunity to work hard for what he believes. But the Party is not all fanatics. It is a Party of strong vested interests. Many top-line Communists hold good jobs in the unions, salaries up to a thousand a year, a house, sometimes a car. They hold these jobs by virtue of the Party's backing. And in return for these jobs they will be dishonest, treacherous, amoral.

They are generals in the endless war, and no good general ever won a battle by thinking first of the lives he could save.

Still, not all Communists can think the same thing. Why do they never express their doubts publicly?

Of course there are disputes in the Party, violent differences of opinion. But once the vote is taken, all are bound to abide by its result. Anything else would be 'fractionizing', a heresy punishable by expulsion from the Party, hounding from any union office held, a malicious whispering campaign.

Doubts, disputes, disagreements are never made public. The Party must appear as a solid, united front. The enemy must see no weaknesses.

The Communist Party is at war. It is at war with the rest of society, it is at war with non-Communist Socialism, it is at

war with religion. It is at war with tolerance and compromise.

Marxism teaches that man is a product of his environment but that man is capable of changing his environment and thus changing himself.

Anything that hastens that change is justifiable.

Anything.

And if the Communist wants the change badly enough he will do anything.

CHAPTER ONE

What the bourgeoisie produces is above all its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable . . .

The Communist Manifesto.

EMILE BURNS is a coldly severe comrade whose intellectual standing within the British Communist Party is higher than is generally believed on the outside. The general public rarely hears of or from him. He does not appear in Bow Street Magistrates' Court on Monday, charged with disturbing the peace of a Sunday afternoon in Trafalgar Square. But every loyal comrade has his ear tuned to what Burns has to say. He is a Party theoretician. He is not expected to walk the streets with a quire of *Daily Workers*, he is expected to interpret the Party line.

He spoke at a National Congress of the Party some years ago, and although I cannot remember his exact words the sense of them went something like this:

It is said that there can never be Communism in this country. But everywhere there is a Communist, everywhere there is a Communist branch, *there is Communism.*

That challenge to the complacency of our enemies brought the comrade delegates to their feet with a cheer and a prolonged hand-clap. Burns had touched our inner fears and our inner arrogance. For there is fear inside every Communist, fear that the Revolution may not come in his time. Few men can be the selfless enthusiasts most Communists would wish to be. Even the intellectuals, who like to think they understand the whole slow process, must sometimes dream of the day when the barricades will go up, and they will come into power, after someone else has done the fighting.

Burns' appeal to our arrogance was equally adroit. It was also a reminder to those outside our ranks that the influence of the Communist Party should not be judged on its numerical strength alone.

Such occasions of naive enthusiasm are rare inside the

Party, certainly at annual congresses where the cheers, hand-claps and speeches are as individual and spontaneous as the movements of a drill-squad. Whatever the emotions the comrade writers and artists of the cultural groups may put into their work, the rank-and-file comrade is not expected to regard himself as a hero. Not until he's dead, anyway.

Yet I can remember another occasion when the romantic inside the Communist realist came to the surface for a moment. I had marched to Trafalgar Square at the head of a contingent of East End 'working-men and women' (thus the *Daily Worker* described us the following day, although we had recruited every Party member east of Aldgate pump for the march, and drummed up a few intellectuals from Highgate and Hampstead too when the numbers looked thin).

There was a brush with the police and with flying columns of Fascists. Our red banners (stitched by willing or unwilling comrades' wives) were flying against the grey stones. One or two of the marchers were bleeding, a few more had been arrested. But we had been successful, we had made our demonstration of protest, the appearance of our martyrs at Bow Street the following morning would get space in the capitalist press, and the Defence Fund we would organize for them would enlist the support of more non-Communists.

We were in the Square and we were showing our solidarity by cheering at the right moment during those endless speeches. A comrade who had marched all the way beside me turned with shining eyes. 'This is how it will be, Bob, on the day the workers take power!'

It was all right for him to say things like that then. Had he allowed his imagination as much rein on a less theatrical occasion he would have been seriously disciplined for unrealistic thought.

But there was the thought at the back of his mind. The barricades would come in our time. We all believed it in our own fashion and in our own hearts. '*The last fight let us face!*' sings the Internationale, and nobody reminds himself that the song was written over a century ago, and that the man who wrote it believed too that the last fight would be the next one.

On the day that Burns spoke the words I have roughly quoted many comrades turned to me and nodded significantly. I was Comrade Bob Darke from Hackney, and Hackney was Communism. Party branches in Prague, even, had been told to study us as an example.

Hackney could not have been a better arena for the struggle between revolution and reaction. Its true roots go back no further than the last century when the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Victorian imperialism spawned out of its marshes a tightly-packed, teeming borough of 190,000 people, the youngest people in the world, the industrial working-class.

Hackney is overcrowded, politically quarrelsome, but it has a big heart, and its people know what it is to live under capitalism. It is a reservoir of labour, cheap labour very often. Within its wandering boundaries are a score of industries, from the docks to fancy buttons. There are militant trade unions, slums, poverty, Fascism, Jew-baiting, and the strongest, most successful branch of the British Communist Party.

It has a heart, I say, a big heart, and I love it for it. I saw what that heart meant to Hackney when I served with the Fire Service during the war, and I won't hear a word said against the people of the borough now.

There are 880 Communists in Hackney, that's all, just 880. There are also a little over 200 members of the Young Communist League, all between sixteen and eighteen and most of them the dutiful sons and daughters of Party Members. There may be a few more comrades, professional men and women for the most part, who carry no Party card because it would be too dangerous or because the Party would rather have them looked upon as disinterested, right-minded citizens.

Every open member of the Party works hard, every one is strongly disciplined, every one influences to a marked degree the factory or shop in which they work, the block of flats where they live, the club to which they belong, the union of which they are members, the family which accepts and cherishes them despite their irritating habit of talking Communism over the breakfast-table.

They are divided into two equally balanced branches, North and South, and they are controlled by a Borough Secretariat, fourteen strong. At one time or another they have decisively made Party-line weapons out of twenty-eight of the thirty-five union branches in the borough. They have been the whip-haft of the local shop stewards movement. They have had two of their members elected to the Borough Council, and they have been able at times to make the London Trades Council speak with the voice of Communist Policy.

For effort alone, then, you must give them full marks.

As a Hackney Borough Councillor (as much through the Party's wish as my own) and a member of the Trades Council, I was naturally one of the Party's most important members — if only as a window display to show the sort of goods kept inside. I fitted the role as if I had been tailored to it. Working-class in origin, speech and habit, Hackney-born and bred, my name was known throughout the borough. To me Communism was simply a fight against low wages and high rents, against slums, tuberculosis, rotten schools, ignorance, and exploitation. It was only many years after I joined the Party that I began to see that Communism was something more than an attempt to raise the standard of living in Hackney.

It would be dangerous to assume that my resignation crippled the branch, although its prestige has suffered. I am no fool and I do not think I have damaged its striking force. Do you recall that story of the Tsarist armies in World War I, how only the front ranks had rifles and the rest walked behind waiting for Death to give them something to shoot with?

Well, someone picked up my rifle as soon as I dropped out.

The Communist Party can and still does make Hackney speak with the authority of Lenin and Stalin. When it wants to it can control the greater part of the democratic machinery of the borough, although not necessarily in a democratic manner.

This, although only one in every 200 of Hackney's citizens holds a Party card.

One thing, however, the Party has been unable to control

in Hackney —the ballot box at a Parliamentary election, and they have tried hard enough, as I shall tell you. To understand their failure here is to understand both the strength and the weakness of the Party.

The structure of the Hackney branch is not only the same as any other branch in Great Britain, it is the same as any Party branch in the world. It differs only in the degree of its effectiveness.

That is a point worth remembering while you read this book. Other political parties have sprung from the peculiar demands and characteristics of our people. In its infancy the British Communist Party was also a British product until Lenin gently laughed it out of its swaddling clothes. To-day the Party branches in Nicaragua (and there's bound to be one there) or Norwich keep in step with the prototype. And the prototype was manufactured east of the Vistula.

That isn't to say that the Party has never recruited traditional British heroes into its struggle. At various times it has enlisted Gerrard Winstanley, John Lilburne, Bunyan, Milton, Shelley, Blake, even Cromwell with some reservations where Irish members are concerned. I must confess that I always preferred these British revolutionaries to Voroshilov and Budyenny. Maybe other comrades did too, but they never told me, and I never told them.

The British Communist Party is controlled, rigidly and unquestioningly, from its glass-walled headquarters near Covent Garden. It may not admit this, not openly, for that would suggest that all the rank-and-filer had to do was to keep in step. But it is a fact, just the same, although there is a perverse form of democracy on paper.

Consider the Hackney Borough Secretariat, for example.

This is led at the moment by the Secretary, Comrade John Betteridge, an able, agile, and resolute man who models himself diligently on Comrade Malenkov of the Soviet Politburo. Comrade Betteridge's parish may be a little smaller than the Russian comrade's, but he has the same authority within its limits.

The members of his Secretariat are carefully chosen so that all activity in the borough, industrial, social, professional,

and racial, is represented on it. At any given moment someone on the Secretariat could give a detailed picture of the day-to-day problems in any one of those spheres —with the Communist solution to them, of course.

The democratic nature of the branch is written in the scriptures. Theoretically all members of the Secretariat are elected by the body of the branch once a year at an aggregate meeting. They are subject, once more theoretically, to a majority vote, to the approval of the rank and file, and must be re-elected or rejected annually.

You cannot quarrel with that, can you? Then how does it work in practice?

Each year the existing Secretariat draws up its own panel of names for the new Secretariat. It does this after it has consulted with the London District Committee (which is the co-ordinating authority of all branches in the London area). The Secretariat is often so satisfied with its work during the past year that it suggests that it should be re-elected *en bloc*. Of course, the London District may not agree, in which case changes will be made in the list.

The panel is then placed before the aggregate meeting and comrades are invited to vote on it. They have absolute freedom of choice. They may vote Yes or No. Of course No would be a wasted vote, for there is no alternative to the panel.

They are entitled to reject the suggested panel out of hand and suggest an entirely new one. I say that they are at liberty to do this —but I have never known of it being done. It would indicate a lack of faith in the wisdom of the branch and district leadership. It would smack of 'fractionizing', a heresy punishable by expulsion. A panel of names set up in opposition to the resigning Secretariat's suggestions would have no more hope than Sir Waldron Smithers would have of sitting in the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

Basically then, the resigning Secretariat is re-elected every year.

Don't think the rank and file ever regard this method as undemocratic (they have a vote, haven't they?) —or if they do, they never say so. The Communist, taught to regard

himself as the leader of the working-class, is also taught to be an uncritical follower of his own leaders.

Among the ordinary members of the Party there is a fanatical worship of leading Communists, British and Russian. It expresses itself in idealized portraits, in tedious biographies published by headquarters, and although the teaching of Marxist philosophy is against the whole procedure the Party makes no effort to correct it. Its tactical value is enormous. The Party must be able to swing abruptly on the pivot of its leadership, confident that there will be no criticism, no objections from below.

When an abrupt reversal of the Party line has meant that all comrades must deny themselves thrice in the market-place I have never heard one of them suggest, openly, that perhaps the Executive has been guilty of a mistake.

The leading Communist is never guilty of a mistake. It was some other fellow.

If you are moved to smile at this childishness, remember that it is the Party's greatest strength. Any other party, based on the free will and conscience of its members, would break up under such a dictatorship. The more submissive the Communist, the more powerful the Communist Party.

And no Communist would admit that the leading non-Communist statesmen of the world are wiser, more intelligent, more astute than his Borough Secretary — or himself for that matter. He knows all the answers.

There are three full-time paid members of the Hackney Secretariat: the Borough Secretary, an Organizing Secretary, and a Propaganda Secretary. They are not highly paid, and according to the rule a paid member of the Party may not receive more than the average worker in his or her trade. The Borough Secretary of Hackney receives about £7 a week, which is a little more, in my opinion, than he would get working at his own trade.

A Communist branch is expected to support itself financially. The money goes upward in the Communist Party, not downward. If gold does come from Moscow, I never knew of any that reached Hackney. Payment for branch officials must be found by members, and nobody is more

enthusiastic in seeing that it is collected than the officials themselves.

The weekly membership subscription is fourpence, and since a large proportion of this is passed up the line to the District Committee it is obvious that a branch cannot support itself by subscriptions alone.

The money must come from somewhere else. Thus it is that the Communist has a red flag in one hand and a collecting box in the other. The Party frowns on membership levies, which it regards as 'social-democratic measures' (and if there's anything worse than a Tory it's a Social-democrat). It maintains that Communist funds must come from the pockets of non-Communists. In this way the Party prevents itself from being drained to death and compels its members to keep in contact with the large mass of the non-Communist working-class. If you want a workmate at the bench to donate sixpence to this or that fighting fund you've got to keep talking to him. And if he only parts with the sixpence to stop you talking then half of the battle has been won at any rate.

Anyone who gives money to a Communist-sponsored fund is from thereon ear-marked as a 'possible'. A record of his name is kept. He will be asked again for money, and if he gives it he will be recorded as a 'sympathizer'. Such are the first cautious steps towards recruiting new members.

Regularly every Friday, at the gates of factories, in canteens, workshops, at dockyard gates, in council flats and transport depots in Hackney, the good comrade may be seen rattling a box or waving raffle tickets and calling:

'Help the Party, comrades! The Communist Party! The only party that fights for the workers!'

There's always some Party cause to be in need of money. The *Daily Worker* Fighting Fund. The Peace Campaign. The latest martyr's defence fund. The Rent Committee's Defence Fund. The Anglo-Iron-Curtain Society's Fund. The International Brigade... the Strike Committee... the Spanish prisoners. Always a fund.

Always a fund because the branch is always in desperate need of money.

All branch members are sub-divided into groups according

to their professions and trades, or according to their particular strength and peculiar duties. Each of these groups is given a fixed sum which must be collected from non-Communists within that particular grouping. The sum may change as time goes on, but it never changes downward.

Communist busmen, for example, were expected to collect £5 a month from Dalston busmen. I have had to collect that myself, and, like other comrades, no doubt, I had to get the money more from force of personality than from argument. The Secretariat accepted no excuses for returns less than the amount stipulated (indeed they brought disciplinary action if it happened too often), and they rarely praised returns in excess of the amount.

To my knowledge no one ever suggested that non-Communist busmen were reluctant to donate £5 a month to the Party. Comrade busmen brought the money in, and sometimes only their wives knew where it really came from.

In all my years with the Party I can never remember a time when there was not this hysterical demand for money. Church repair funds and flag-day organizers could learn much from the Party. Every month the Hackney Branch had to send a contribution of £20 to the London District Committee, and London District never accepted excuses in lieu.

Of course this business of making the money up out of your own pocket was never officially recognized. You weren't supposed to give your own money, you were supposed to give someone else's. The only Party members who were allowed, indeed expected, to give their own money were professional members, doctors, lawyers, who were largely under cover. The Party drained them of contributions.

'Come on, Comrade, you do nothing else for the Party. We are expecting ten pounds from you this month.'

I know of a number of comrades who gave up the Party after a careful review of their bank accounts.

The Hackney Borough Secretariat meets once a week, not at Branch Headquarters, for there is none. The Party owns no property in the borough and has no fixed meeting place. It meets at this or that comrade's house. Thus does it save

money and thus does it tie each comrade's private life more closely to the Party wheel. No Communist can indulge his fancy for bourgeois tastes when they are likely to come under the scrutiny of his Party associates. I have known Party members to sit in their own living-rooms without protest while other members of the Secretariat ridiculed and censured their choice of furniture, curtains, books, newspapers, even toys for their children.

Once a month there is an aggregate meeting of the full branch, at which times a local hall is hired, and there is a careful examination of Party cards at the door.

Group meetings are held once or twice a week, even daily if there is a fight on. Communist fraction meetings within unions (I shall deal more thoroughly with union activity later) meet as often as affairs warrant.

Secretariat meetings are conducted briskly and efficiently. The wife of the comrade in whose home the meeting takes place may take part if she is a Party member. If not her place is in the kitchen making tea.

The Secretary calls the meeting to order and the members, sitting uncomfortably on the floor (for who in Hackney has fourteen chairs in his living-room?), quickly get down to business.

First of all the representatives of each grouping report on their activities. A docker, for example, may give a thorough outline of the current situation at the docks. He may explain why it is possible or impossible to organize a two-hour political strike there against the Korean war. Or he may concern himself solely to an analysis of the internecine war within his union. He must also report on the number of *Daily Workers* sold among dockers, the number of new Communist Party members made, the number of 'sympathetic' contacts who can be milked of money for the fighting funds or eventually recruited into the Party.

A housewife may report on the success or otherwise (and it had best not be otherwise) of the Peace Petition canvassed in her block of flats. A school teacher has her report to make, largely concerned with the Party activities within parent-teacher organizations. Since she is regarded as an intellectual,

she will be astute enough to show the proper humility before her proletarian comrades.

Through all these reports runs one consistent thread —the Party Line. If the line is Peace, for example, each group representative must show how his group has been exploiting it. He may call upon representatives of other groups for advice and assistance. He may appeal for a glamour-figure from London District —Ted Bramley, Peter Kerrigan, even Harry Pollitt—to come down and lend support.

The reports must be constructive and illuminating. They are not expected to report failure. Invariably they reflect credit on the Party and the comrade who makes them.

This part of the Secretariat's meeting is always long and tedious, but it is conducted with great solemnity. There is no joking, there is no frivolity. Even where Christian names are used they sound cold and inhuman.

When all the reports have been made the Borough Secretary rewards them with praise or criticism. He is listened to with respect, for none there believe they are just listening to Comrade John Betteridge. They are listening to a man who has received *his* instructions from higher up.

The Borough Secretariat is a lever to be lifted or depressed by the London District Committee, according to the Party Line, which is itself evolved by the National Executive of Party. Within all other political parties it is possible for members of the rank and file seriously to influence their party's whole policy. That never happens in the Communist Party.

London District is a body on which sit representatives of all the borough parties, and what Comrade John Betteridge had to tell us about London District's decisions had all the solemnity and authority of the tablets Moses brought down from the mountain.

When the Borough Secretariat hears its instructions from London District there is always a full discussion of them. Do not let such a statement mislead you. The discussion is never critical. It is never in disagreement with the instructions themselves. There is never any suggestion that the instructions indicate a softening of the brain among the Party's leadership.

No. Discussion is concerned solely with how those instructions can be carried out.

When Betteridge placed before us London District's commands that agitation and propaganda against the Americans must be intensified, no one protested, no one questioned the wisdom of it. The discussion went on until past midnight, and it dwelt on means by which we could persuade the Hackney docker or the Hackney housewife to hate America.

You would be surprised by the ease of it. Tell an East Ender whose home has been three times bombed that the Americans want to launch a third world war, and how would you expect him to feel?

Tell a Hackney housewife that the Americans are compelling the British Government to spend money on arms that should be spent on food, and how would you expect her to feel?

The hate-America campaign was one of the easiest which the Communists waged in Hackney. When its poison began to work then the Communist had only to suggest that Russia could send Britain food were it allowed to do so, that Russia was disarming while America armed.

Sometimes there are embarrassing moments, and the extraordinarily efficient if robot-like machinery of Party activity comes to a paralysed halt. This is invariably when the Party Line hiccups.

The halt may last for a few days, but momentum is quickly regained. It is more like marking time than a halt. I often wondered whether the National Executive of the Party was ever aware of the strain it put on its branches when it reversed the Party Line. Perhaps it knew but trusted in the discipline it had forged.

Those few days of uncertainty, however, can mean all or everything to the ordinary Party member. His greatest fear, after all, is that he may unwittingly speak against the Line which has yet to be announced. Such fear stifles him into silence. Thus he had a marked willingness to accept the new Line when it comes, if only to put himself out of his agony.

Consider, for example, the way the Party's attitude to the Marshall Plan hit us at branch level. There were comrades who made the mistake Czechoslovakia made and welcomed the

Plan. There was a time lag between the announcement of the Plan and the Soviet Government's declaration against it. When we in Hackney heard about the Plan we went about for days without mentioning it. Nobody was going to catch us out, least of all London District. If non-Communists quizzed us about it, well — we smiled enigmatically.

According to theory a Communist, if he is a good Marxist, should come to the same decision as Stalin, and at the same moment. But I have never known anyone who succeeded in doing thus.

So when the Marshall Plan was announced we all waited for Comrade Stalin to make up our minds, and none of us waited more anxiously than the *Daily Worker*. We were so relieved when we heard from Moscow, via London District, that we accepted the new line without argument. The Hackney Secretariat that day got down to a discussion on how opposition to the Plan could be organized within the borough. No one got up to say, 'Well, is it a good idea, this Marshall Plan, or isn't it?'

So far as we were concerned it wasn't.

The campaign we launched was simple. It was based on the assumption that few people in Hackney understood the motive or nature of the Marshall Plan. Therefore all we had to do was to make the simplest interpretation of it and leave them to make up their own minds. And our interpretation was that the Marshall Plan meant war. If you agreed with the Marshall Plan then you were agreeing to another war, with the atom bomb.

The topsy-turvy business of Tito also went unexplained for days. There was no meeting of the Hackney Secretariat until the issue was clear; at least there was no meeting at which Tito was discussed. His portrait was the only likeness of a Communist leader that hung on the walls of my home, and during the meetings that were held there in those anxious days no comrade dared let his eyes wander to that smiling face. The whole world was discussing Tito. We were keeping our mouths shut.

Had anyone else in the Party thrown down a challenge to Stalin we should have attacked him immediately. But Tito was different. He was a Communist hero. His portrait hung next to Stalin's in most Communists' homes. The shock of his break

with the Russians stunned the Party, and not a few of us privately believed that it was to be the beginning of a great schism.

But neither I nor anyone else was allowed time for such heresies to develop. I must admire the Party Executive for the smart way they handled a delicate situation. The *Daily Worker* did not, of course, present an objective picture of the struggle between Tito and the Cominform. It began a systematic and sustained barrage of anti-Tito abuse and propaganda. We accepted it readily. We had been living on our nerves for so long that we were in the mood to accept anything.

Only when every Party branch was formulating plans for 'fighting Titoism' did the District Committee start explaining the Cominform's case (Tito's case we could get from the capitalist press). Probably most of us never read it. I don't suppose many Communists to-day could tell you what that case is, but they could most certainly tell you the names Tito should be called.

Yet the Tito split was perhaps the most critical phase the Party passed through. If anything had been likely to split the British and other Communist parties it was the Tito affair.

But you wouldn't have thought it from the attitude of our leaders. I remember one speaker who came down from headquarters to talk to us about Titoism. He was calm, self-assured, like a school teacher patiently lecturing a dull class. As far as I can remember the gist of what he said, our Party's leaders had known all the time of Tito's possible defection. Nothing had been said about it publicly because it had been hoped that he would be persuaded to see the light.

But what could you expect from a man who had been an American agent during the war?

There it was, flung at us casually like that. Tito was an American agent. During those wartime moments when we had all but made a saint of Tito he had been taking money from the Americans. He had betrayed us, let us down. We hated him.

From then on we were all in step with Uncle Joe again.

And the portraits of Tito were taken down from the walls

and quietly burned. Harry Pollitt had once talked proudly of the signed photograph of Marshal Tito which hung on his wall. I wonder what he did with it.

The Hackney Party's discussion of the new anti-Tito line was, I suppose, a comic business, had I been in the mood to appreciate its humour. We were all anxious to talk about the new line, the new villain who out-Trotskyed Trotsky, the new jackal of capitalism. We were all far too busy to look over our shoulders to see if our consciences were showing.

We did well with anti-Titoism in Hackney, probably better than other branches. Just what our campaign did I couldn't tell you. Maybe the congratulations we got from London District were merely an acknowledgement of the power of our lungs.

I don't know what went in the Secretary's fortnightly reports to London District, not in detail anyway. But in substance they informed District of the work done, the number of *Workers* sold, new members made, disciplinary action taken, the number of Party line resolutions carried in union branches, the success of Party activity in Borough Council and Trades Council.

They gave District a full picture of Party activity, and since every branch in the country sent in similar reports you will see that the Executive always had an up-to-date briefing on its members' work everywhere.

From Comrade Betteridge's point of view that fortnightly report is probably the most critical thing he does. Certainly I always noticed a tense and detached expression on his face until approval of his report came through.

And if approval did not come through, if instead the District was decidedly displeased, then the Borough Secretary had to appear before it to explain, as uneasy and apologetic as any rank-and-file member would be when brought before him to explain why, and why, and why.

But the Party's Executive is fortunate in its non-commissioned officers. It is rarely displeased with them. It rarely disciplines them.

There is no reason why it should, for it chooses them itself.

CHAPTER TWO

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions . . .

The Communist Manifesto.

T H E name of Malenkov, Secretary of the Cominform and sometimes regarded as Stalin's successor, has a hysterical effect on Borough Secretaries. To them he might be living round the corner. They talk, act, and work as if at any moment he is likely to drop in and ask them how the class struggle is going in their part of the world.

An indication of his importance and influence is the fact that leading British Communists have lately received presentation portraits of Malenkov. These are to be hung on the walls of their homes if there is room (and if there isn't they are under obligation to take down Voroshilov's or Budyenny's). Less decorative are the copies of Malenkov's speeches which arrive regularly at the homes of the British Party's leaders.

These are carefully read and digested, and a lack of imagination and fire in the current speeches of leading British Communists may be due to Malenkov's arid dialectics.

This fantastic hero-worship is perhaps one of the most significant features of the Communist Party. It has increased since the Party strengthened its working-class membership. What makes a worker in Homerton worship the idealized portrait of a man 2,000 miles away, I don't know. Even if each comrade were not expected to kill himself with Party work he would do it just the same, because Comrade Malenkov or Comrade Mao Tse-tung might get to know that he took time off for a cigarette when he should have been shouting: 'Buy your *Daily Worker* here ...!'

I know that some intellectuals in the Party are amused by all this worship of the god-heads. This is particularly true of the cultural workers in the Party who regard themselves as less doctrinaire, more tolerant. But the intellectuals do not

count (unless it was to die in Spain fifteen years ago); the Party rests on the comrades who work on the knocker. Come the Revolution, what happens to intellectuals anyway?

There are few intellectuals in the Hackney Branch to-day; it is solidly a working-class phalanx, and what intellectuals there are realize that their brains are considered the least justification for their being accepted as Communists.

This was not the case when I joined. At that time there weren't more than 3,000 dues-paying Communists in the whole country. The Party's attack on the Labour Party at the 1931 General Election had isolated it from the six million working-men and women who had voted against Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Nationalists.

Communists fought against both.

I did not know it at the time but I had joined a Party that was almost extinct. Yet one of the first things I read as a Communist was an announcement by Rajani Palme Dutt, a Communist leader with a card-index mind who can be extreme left or extreme right, but never anything in between.

Surveying the ruin of the Labour Party after that election he declared that there was now only one party of the working-class, the Communist Party.

The Communist Party had a new recruit in me. I was twenty-five, the son of a glass-blower, and I was chairman of the local branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. I had joined that organization without realizing that it was Communist-controlled. I became a branch chairman without realizing that I would never have got the position had not the Communists thought I would be easily malleable and that I would eventually be recruited.

Because my brother John was a Communist (he left in disgust long ago) I was half-way toward joining the Party. When I agreed I was introduced to a local gathering of the people Comrade Dutt had said were the only representatives of the working-class.

It was a cell meeting, held in a bare attic, which one of the comrades, had he been decadent enough, would have called his home. I was probably the only working-class man among them. The cell-leader was a man who hated the capitalist

system so much that he refused to pay his debts and moved when they became too heavy.

The rest of the members had no regular work. They had no homes either, so far as I could judge, and if one had had the time it would have been an amusing exercise to work out who was living with whom. Most of them were unshaven, most of them were dirty, and all of them talked. They talked and talked.

But I was hot for the cause. I and my family had felt the rough edge of capitalism. I hated it for its exploitation, its bitter cruelty and its relentless persecution of the unfortunate. In face of this hatred I did not stop to ask myself whether this little society of cafe-revolutionaries had either the wit or ability to change the face of the earth.

I mention this to contrast the present-day character of the Hackney Communist Party. I have seen it grow from a loose-gathering of two dozen intellectual wastrels into a storm-troop of men and women drawn from all branches of working-class life. It is not important now what the Hackney Party was, only what it is and what it will be.

And I suppose it is important to know what I am, if anything I write is to be taken seriously.

Until I joined the Party I was drifting. My father had taught me to trust in trade unionism. My brother John had taught me that a man was not a man until he fought for what he believed was right. Between the two of them they helped me to make up my mind, and my first positive political action was when I was working in a timber mill. It was 1926. I walked out of the works one day and as I passed the foreman I said: 'I support the General Strike!'

I wasn't even a union man then. But I was later, and I always shall be. By 1933 I had seen enough in the East End to convince me that something violent, something drastic was needed. There was mass unemployment. Fascist street-corner meetings were held every night; there were broken heads, Jew-baiting, all the ugly, dirty, mean business of worker fighting worker.

And if the Communists I met when first I joined outraged the working-class morality my mother had drummed into me

then that didn't matter. These people were out to stop the whole dirty business I hated, and I was with them to the hilt.

I fought the Fascists before I joined the Party, and in joining them I was led to believe that anti-Fascism was not just an emotional thing, but a plank in a great political platform. Looking back on it, dirty though it was, it seems a much cleaner fight than the one I was engaged in when finally I broke with the Party.

The Hackney Communist Party to-day should be proud of the work its members did in the past, but I doubt whether it is.

I suppose, in a way, I helped to change the character of the Hackney Party. It is hard to believe that its members to-day have any connexion with the long-haired men and short-haired women, the corduroys and plus fours that made up the Cell I joined.

On demonstrations the Party organized I resented these people; they were a paradox in what was supposed to be a spontaneous outburst of working-class indignation. They seemed as unreal as I would be collecting fares in carpet slippers and pyjamas. There was little or no activity within Hackney's trade unions for the very simple reason that few trade unionists then were Communists. We just talked.

Harry Pollitt is a shrewd psychologist and he was the first among the Party's leaders to urge that the Party should exist on a broad front, that it should go all out to enrol electricians, dockers, factory workers, housewives. The intellectuals should be kept in cages for demonstration purposes.

After a few years the oddities who had initiated me disappeared. They had fire and they had fanaticism. Quite a few died in Spain, up along the Jarama, perhaps a little surprised to find what a political discussion over a coffee-cup could bring them to.

The Party didn't mind them dying in Spain. Some Communists had to go there and get shot, and it was best that they should be the expendable ones.

When I started active work for the Party I began to enlist working men like myself, paintworkers at first, for I was then working for Lewis Bergers. Factory groups of Com-

munists came into being, then cell fractions inside the unions. The Party Congress decided that 'Every factory must be a Communist fortress' and we worked night and day in Hackney to fulfil the order. We blossomed into a broad red flower in the garden of the East End.

The Zinken Cabinet factory had the biggest Party membership. There were soon twenty Communists among the Dalston busmen. Bergers, when I left the factory, had twenty active comrades.

By the time the war broke out we had our fingers in everything. We were a party of working-men and we were a dangerous party, aggressives, militant trade unionists, tried, tough, ruthless.

I don't think the Tory Governments of the inter-war years realized what a good recruiting-sergeant they were for the Communist Party.

To-day every Hackney Communist knows his duty. When the Party finds a valuable worker, such as it considered me, it is the policy to work the man to his death, literally sometimes, to pile obligations on him and abuse him if he weakens.

What are the duties of a Communist? To start with he must be a member of a trade union and he must be active in that union.

He must be an active member of the Communist cell within that union. If he can join a local club and form part of a Communist cell within that, then he is under an obligation to do so.

He must:

Pay his fourpence a week subscription.

Support the *Daily Worker* Fighting Fund.

Collect money for the *Daily Worker* Fighting Fund.

Sell the *Daily Worker*.

Buy as much Party literature as possible.

Sell as much Party literature as possible.

Attend every branch meeting of his union.

Attend every Communist cell meeting within his union.

Turn out for every demonstration in his area.

Turn out for every District demonstration.

Join an Anglo-Iron-Curtain Friendship Society.

Join another Anglo-Iron-Curtain Friendship Society.

Get his wife to join the Party.

Get his father to join.
Get his children to join the Young Communist League.
Do as he's told.
Hate America.
Love Russia.

Every year a Party member must fill in a form and return it to Central Office. It must give a full report of his activities during the past year. On the basis of these returns the Party is able to assess the strength of its membership and its vitality. That form haunts the average comrade from the end of one year to another.

Where the Party has a member who manages to fulfil all the above obligations and still have time to blow his nose, the Party will pile more work on him until he becomes too ill to carry more. That is not an overstatement. It is not a coincidence that so many Communists sicken with tuberculosis. The names of the comrades whom the Party worked to death make a tragic list. Among them is Bill Rust, editor of the *Daily Worker*. When the Party claims, as it always does on the anniversary of his death, that he died for Communism, they are not indulging in polite courtesies.

It is ironic that the anniversary of Bill Rust's death should be used by the Party as an excuse for goading on the eager-beavers within the ranks. Everybody is urged to collect more money, sell more *Daily Workers* in memory of Bill Rust.

The Party never gives its members a moment for reflective thought. Every Sunday morning the Literature Secretary's staff tour the borough, pushing a quota of literature through the comrades' letter-boxes. They are expected to read it and sell it. I doubt, from my own personal experience, whether much of it is really sold. I've burnt quires of it on my little fire —but I've turned in the money to the Literature Secretary just the same, and I'd hate to say what Ann felt about that. There was little enough money in our house at the best of times.

There are some comrades who are excused active work on the streets. Because of my work and position on the Borough Council and Trades Council I was not expected to do door-to-door canvassing, for example. It was a case of 'We can't put

Bob Darke on that, he's got enough to handle in his own sphere.' And I had too. For every hour I put in as a bus conductor, I sometimes put in two for the Party.

Where the Hackney Secretariat met opposition to the burden of work it threw on a comrade's shoulders such opposition invariably came from the professionals in our ranks.

I remember the case of a woman, a gentle, kindly soul; heaven knows what made her join the Party in the first place. Her husband was also a Communist, and that may be the explanation. She was a doctor, and the first idealistic spasm that made her join the Party must have quickly passed, for she rarely attended meetings and would not do the work others did.

Yet she was not expelled. The Party does not expel its professional members, although it is always quick to mistrust them. Her husband, active enough in the Party, got the brunt of its dissatisfaction. 'What's Mary doing for the Party? What's she telling her patients? She must talk to them more about Communism. She must get them to sign the Peace Petition. Take her 200 petition forms to display on her surgery table.'

That woman had my sympathy. She was a fine doctor, with a good heart. I believe she had the opportunity of becoming a leading local medical figure. It may have been that the Party decided that she would be of more value to them in general practice. She had too many patients, her personal reputation was high. The Party considered the number of her patients joyfully, there were so many men and women who could be told about Communism while their temperatures were being taken.

It must have been humiliating for her, but she had spirit and occasionally told the Party to leave her alone. Still they did not expel her, but they changed their tactics. They decided that she could be relieved of obligation to work for the Party in return for a handsome and regular financial contribution. I believe she was giving large sums a month to the Party. They even went to the level of borrowing money from such a member.

That was how the Party operated, and still does operate. It pushes some members to a point where they dig in their heels, and then it takes money from them.

It might reasonably be asked why this woman did not resign. I think as an active member, she did eventually, but it must only have been after a great spiritual struggle. Her husband remained a Party member and God knows what their family life was like after that.

Anybody who steps out of line can feel the weight of the Party's hand. A discreet phone call here and there, a whispering campaign, and irreparable damage is done. I know, I'm feeling it now.

We had a member who was a chemist, a pleasant if dull middle-class shopkeeper who must have been dragooned into the Party before he knew what was happening to him.

When, during the war, Earl Browder proposed the dissolution of the American Communist Party, his action was at first applauded, but finally he was expelled. We all supported his expulsion without a blush for the fact that until recently we had been justifying his dialectical understanding of the situation that made his Party's dissolution essential.

Our chemist rose to his feet during one aggregate meeting to ask why the Party rank-and-file had not been given more information about Browder's expulsion. He wanted to propose a resolution criticizing the Executive before the forthcoming Party Congress.

Here was heresy! He did not get an answer, of course, that is if you do not consider an immediate tirade of abuse an answer. The abuse went on long after the meeting and the unfortunate chemist was harried this way and that until he fell ill, resigned, and moved away from the district.

All he had done was ask why. Nobody does that in the Party and gets away with it.

The Communist Party welcomes school-teachers into its ranks, and we had several in Hackney. So far as my knowledge goes they were never instructed to colour their teaching with open Communist propaganda, although I have known one or two reckless enough to do it.

Their work for the Party must be more subtle. They buy

the *Worker*, of course, and are under obligation to sell it among their colleagues. They must interest non-Communist staff of the schools in the Peace Campaign, in the Party's policy on education, in cultural links with Iron Curtain countries.

They must play as active a part as possible in the National Union of Teachers. But their primary instruction is to be on the best terms possible with their pupils, to take them swimming, to football, to organize clubs and social activities outside the schools.

This is not mere good-heartedness. A child who likes his teacher and knows that he or she is a Communist makes a ready recruit for the Young Communist League.

Parent-Teacher associations form a principal arena for the activity of the Communist school-teacher. Communists are under obligation to make these associations political wherever possible, to use them as a platform for expounding Communist policy on education, on peace, on war. I wonder how many parents have signed the Peace Petition because it was circulated among them by that nice Miss Brown who teaches Form Three?

The obligations of the professional comrade are thus specialized. The lawyer must place his knowledge and services freely at the service of the Party whenever it comes into conflict with the law. The printer must use his ink, paper and machinery to turn out local literature. The doctor and nurse must find a moment when a pleasant talk about the Communist approach to nationalized medicine and all the world's ills will take a patient's mind off his own trivial sickness.

The housewife must organize her neighbours into little afternoon teas. By accident a friend might drop in, and by accident the friend would be a well-known Communist like Bob Darke, and he would be only too happy to answer any questions the good ladies might have on the question of tents, and housing, and why their sons have been conscripted to Korea.

The party work of the Communist factory-worker, depending as it does on union activity, deserves a chapter to itself,

for it is in the unions that the Communists have their greatest power.

The Hackney Communist Party, in common with other branches, has one supreme obligation. It is to sell the *Daily Worker* wherever and whenever possible. Each comrade is geared to this massive circulation drive and the harder he works the harder he has to work.

The Literature Secretary of the Hackney Branch sat on the local Trades Council at one time, which was not merely an accident. Literature is held to be the Party's strongest ammunition, and the wider it can be spread the better. I doubt if there is a political party in the world which spends as much time and money per head of membership on the production and distribution of literature.

The presence of the branch's Literature Secretary on the Trades Council guaranteed a bountiful flow of *Daily Workers*, *Labour Monthlies*, *Challenges*, and all the plethora of party publications, toward that section of life where it was believed they would do most good —the trade unionist.

The selling of the *Daily Worker* is organized like a military campaign, with a tactical appreciation of the strategical situation. On Saturday afternoons and evenings the branch membership turns out *en masse* to sell the special edition of the *Worker* —in Ridley Road, in the Jewish quarter, in markets, outside cinemas and dance-halls. Hackney Communists sell about 20,000 extra copies of the *Daily Worker* every Saturday.

Some Communists work themselves into nervous breakdowns over this business of selling the *Worker*. The Dalston bus garage has a *Worker*-seller outside the doors every Friday morning when union subscriptions are paid. Where Party members have reported that a block of council flats is sympathetic to the Party then it is invaded almost daily by comrades who knock at every door and flourish a copy of the paper under every nose.

If Pollitt, or Palme Dutt, or Burns, or any well-known Party member is to write a special article for the *Worker*, Borough Secretaries are alerted three or four days beforehand.

We in Hackney were masters of the tactics required on

such occasions. A secretariat meeting (generally at midnight) determined the districts where maximum and minimum sales could be expected. Each group decided that it could provide so many five-man squads for wall and pavement chalking. And out those squads would go into the dark. While two comrades kept watch for wandering policemen the others would hurriedly chalk slogans: 'Read Pollitt in the *Worker to-morrow!*'

On the day of publication of the special article no Party member is excused from the operation. A housewife, for example, is told to get up at five in the morning to take a quire of *Workers* to the gates of this factory or that, and sell them before she goes home to see her children off to school. Examples of such self-sacrifice on the part of the woman were always used to goad on other comrades. The fact that the woman concerned might become a nervous wreck, or lose her husband, or ruin her family life, is regarded as irrelevant. Did not Russian women go into the front line with troops during the war, comrade?

In addition to the torrent of literature that flooded down to us from District we had our own output in Hackney which a comrade printer turned off the machine for us.

We selected factories for special types of propaganda. If there was a local strike on we made a point of rushing out a special pamphlet on it.

We studied the habits of workers in different factories, where they ate, whether they sat outside the gates at dinner-time, what their routes homeward were. We waylaid them with literature, with loudspeaker vans, we harried them, we pursued them, we captured them.

We worked, still they work tirelessly. There is no special Party police, nobody detailed to watch you and see that you exert the last ounce of energy. Not one comrade really trusts another, however. And weakness will be exposed by denunciation.

We worked in every section of Hackney life that mattered to the wide political battle, and that means every section there was —even *creches*. We worked, and I repeat the Party still works, in unions, schools, hospitals, factories, garages,

flats, clubs, dance-halls, canteens. We had the run of the kerbstones and the playgrounds. We had our finger on the carotid artery of the borough.

Why did the people of Hackney listen to us when we spoke of things that were so palpably untrue?

Because our prestige was high, our personal prestige that is, not the Party's. People listened to me and trusted me for what I had done for the borough, not because I was a Communist. And every comrade was expected to win this sort of trust. No activity within the borough was too insignificant to warrant our interest and interference.

We regarded the racial problem as the key-plank of our peculiar problems in Hackney. There was a high percentage of Jews in our ranks, but they did not predominate. Indeed I believe Central Office would have frowned on our becoming a predominantly Jewish branch.

Emphasis had been placed on winning Jewish sympathy during the anti-Fascist activities of the inter-war years. That emphasis is still maintained. There are few Jews in the East End who are hostile to the Party, whatever their standing, and that is an important measure of the Party's success in this sphere. East End Jews never turn down requests to buy Party literature or support Party activity. This is not because they are Communists or even potential Communists. It is a recognition of the work the Party puts in against anti-Semitism. Anti-Communist propaganda since the war which has attempted to prove that the Soviet Union has been itself guilty of anti-Semitism has had little success among East End Jews.

Yet I never felt happy with Jewish Communists. They were too sensitive, their feelings were too close to the skin. They were certainly among the hardest-working, most active members of the Party, but they made me uncomfortable. And a great many Gentile comrades felt the same way.

This chapter is largely a survey of the type of non-union work the Hackney Communist does and is expected to do. It is in the main designed to show how we were expected to infiltrate and take over even the smallest of public activities.

The best example I can quote, since I was personally concerned, is the case of the Hackney Cycle Speedway Club.

This was formed after the war and had a membership of some sixty boys and girls in their teens. At the time the Party became interested in it, it was a happy, non-political group without a Communist in it, except perhaps a couple of Young Communist Leaguers who, I suspect, joined it as a relaxation.

One of these Young Communist Leaguers innocently asked me, as a Borough Councillor, to help the club get a cycle track, a bomb-site which they wished to convert into a cinder-way. The Club had three teams and wanted to know whether the L C C would grant them the use of a bomb-site.

I put the situation to the Borough Secretariat and got their approval. To support me I had the local unions swing into line, pass resolutions, make representations. We built up quite a pressure on the subject and eventually the boys and girls got their track.

At the big meeting held to celebrate the success of the campaign and the opening of the track the Party sent the Y C L into action. Many of them had been told to join anyway, while the agitation was going on.

Party literature was on sale during the meeting; copies of *Challenge*, the Y C L paper, contained a special article by me. It was called 'Fighting for youth facilities while money is spent on war.'

More and more young Communists joined the club and the sellers of *Challenge* made a straight target of it. Having secured the club's goodwill by leading the fight for its cinder-track the Party decided that the Y C L should recruit every member of the club into the Party and get every one of them to sign the Peace Petition.

I had already talked to the club about it and about the uselessness of National Service, but when the Party wanted me to keep up my contacts with the club and swing it even closer into the orbit of Party activity, something made me jib. Finally I stayed away from the club altogether and flatly refused the Party's instructions to get every one of those boys to sign the Peace Petition.

I entered the great rent fight more enthusiastically.

As a borough councillor I knew when council rents were to be increased long before the public were warned, and I reported this fact to the Party Secretariat. An immediate meeting was called and the matter was discussed long into the night. The meeting was often held in my home, and all the while Ann waited in our tiny kitchen.

When the Party decided to fight the rent increases it did so because it realized that by securing public support we would raise the prestige of the Party within the borough. The question of fighting rent increases because they were an unnecessary burden did not enter into it. We had one question to answer only: Would the Party benefit by opposing them?

All the Party machinery came into action when we had made our decision. Propaganda leaflets for distribution among the affected tenants, petitions to the council, public demonstrations.

The struggle began innocently enough, without any party tag. Under standing orders of the council I am able to make statements to the local press. I made one, damning the proposed rent increases, advising all tenants to hold a general 'non-political' meeting to express their dissatisfaction and formulate plans to defeat the measure.

Prior to this I had already moved the reference back of the council's plan to raise rents. Everyone in the borough knew that Bob Darke was against rent increases and prepared to fight.

When the council refused to see a tenants' deputation (inspired by Communists living in the affected blocks) it gave Councillor Morris Blaston, the other Communist on the council, the chance to declare that the tenants were not being treated fairly.

His spirited objections were fully reported in the Press. The Press also reported that there was to be a mass meeting of tenants, and that 'indignant tenants who threatened to march into the Town Hall had to be restrained by Councillor Darke'.

There was no doubt in the minds of anybody in Hackney now that the Communist Party was the only party prepared to fight the rent increases.

Although the mass meeting had been advertised as 'non-

political' the Party saw to it that no opportunity was missed. Communist stewards were in control of the crowds. Party literature was on sale on a table at the back of the hall, and with it was a little pile of membership forms.

The *Daily Worker* carried a special news coverage of the coming fight.

The hall was crowded, as you would expect it to be, with people who found it hard enough to pay the rents they did without paying more. There were speeches, contributions from the body of the hall, but from the Party's point of view they meant nothing. I was among the speakers who advised the immediate forming of a Tenants' Committee.

The Party likes these committees. So long as they exist, however dormant, they are a medium for propaganda and Party line activity.

We had no difficulty about forming this committee. The rent increase proposed was twenty-five per cent of existing rents, and I still think it damnable. The people in that hall wanted action, and if the forming of a committee meant action they were ready enough to vote for it.

Now we, as Communists, did not want any sort of a committee. We wanted one that was securely under our thumb. To get it was easy enough. The average Englishman, no matter how badly he feels about a matter, is reluctant to accept office to fight against it; he will vote for the man who seems most willing.

Party members strategically placed about the hall proposed and seconded Party nominees. We elected a malleable non-party chairman and secretary, and I was elected president.

Eight blocks of flats were involved in the rent increase, and the committee we elected consisted of two tenants from each block. Only a minority of them were Communists, but that was all we needed. The others knew nothing about committee work and were prepared to lean heavily on us who did.

The Labour Party helped us by doing nothing. It was never able to fight back against the Communist Party in Hackney. Labour Party members in the body of the hall at that meeting did attempt to raise the Red Bogy, but we easily turned feeling against them. 'This is not a political meeting,' we protested.

'This isn't a Communist meeting. If there are Communists here, so what? They are here to fight for the people.'

Engaging frankness like that brought the house down.

Because, as I have said, the innocents on that Tenants' Committee knew nothing about the work they should be doing, they relied largely on my advice.

I advised an immediate committee meeting, which brought up problem number one. There was no money. Where should it meet?

My home was available. Why not meet there? So there we met. And if a local Communist or two happened to be there on the same evening, why that was a coincidence; their advice was gratefully received.

It was my job to separate the sheep from the goats in this committee. Out of the sixteen, I remember, I concentrated all the Party's propaganda on five.

We did not stop the rent increase but we strengthened the Party's influence and prestige and we secured an open door into eight blocks of council flats. For weeks after that fight we flooded those blocks with literature, with Peace Petition forms, with membership forms for the Party.

The Tenants' Committee was kept in being long after the original need for it had passed. It was given a blood transfusion every so often and we ran it as an effective vehicle for Party propaganda.

It was always useful, geared to the Party machine, when borough or parliamentary elections came along. But to the average comrade it probably meant an extra headache. It added one more to the many obligations he must undertake, more stairs to climb with quires of the *Worker*, more doors at which to knock, more recruits to secure.

Affairs like this rent fight are what the Party means when it talks of the 'day-to-day struggle'. To an innocent that might mean the day-by-day struggle of the working class against capitalism, toward a better life. To the Party it means the daily struggle of the Communist for the extension of Communist influence.

We were all in it. Everyone who came to me for help while I was a councillor was, as far as the Party was concerned,

a potential reader of the *Daily Worker*, a potential member of the Party.

Communist nurses at the hospital were under obligation to let TB patients know of the Party's plan for the consumptive. Old age pensioners' pennies were welcome when given in gratitude for our untiring struggle to raise their pensions. No man was too old to join the Party, and the older he was the better it would look when the *Daily Worker* announced: 'Veteran Pensioner joins Communist Party — "Never too old to fight," he says.'

And what satisfaction does the Party member get out of it? He tells himself, as I told myself many times, that he is bringing the Revolution nearer. If he gets tired, exhausted, then he consoles himself with the thought that there are casualties in all wars. If his spirit dries up within him and he is wise, he tells no one.

Sometimes the carrot is dangled before his nose. The 'Red Star of Lenin', for example, was evolved as a reward for any Communist who could recruit ten new members in three months. When that worthless award was introduced all areas of Britain were given targets. London's whole target was 5,000, and of that Hackney was expected to find 200.

The 'Red Star of Lenin'. You may find it silly, but comrades went mad in their drive to earn it. To become a hero. To have their pictures in the *Daily Worker*.

The 'Red Star of Lenin'.

Poor Lenin.

CHAPTER THREE

Our Party, honest, self-sacrificing, influential, and capable of leading and attracting the backward masses...

LENIN, Left-Wing Communism.

EVERY Communist is under an obligation to belong to a trade union. This firm rule is not without some philosophical foundation. Marxist theory maintains that the beginning of class consciousness in the worker occurs at that moment when he begins to struggle against his employer. If a Communist is around when the struggle starts, all the better.

The Party views the trade union branch as a political weapon, the most important one in the armoury if absolute control of it can be secured. Among themselves this attitude of mind is quite shameless. A few days before I left the Party I had been told to consider the point that it would be a good thing if union branches in Hackney were to organize token strikes against the war in Korea. We had two or three factories ear-marked for this, and had I stayed in the Party there is no doubt I would have joined in the good work.

Would the factories we had ear-marked have come out? They would. Were all the workers Communist, then? They were not.

Then how?

They were factories where Communist influence and control of the trade union machinery was strong. The British worker is in the main a good trade unionist and he is loyal to his union and trusts it. Nobody knows this loyalty better than the Communists, and nobody is more cynical about abusing it.

'We must capture the unions!' shout the Communist Parties everywhere in the world. And they do it so damned easily.

It is not necessary for the Party to have a majority membership of the unions. It is necessary to have a hard core who never miss a union meeting. It is necessary to have at least three of the key positions on union executives held by open or under-cover Communists.

Wherever Communists go all out to swing a union or a union branch into their power they aim at placing Party members into the posts of Secretary, Chairman and Treasurer.

Particularly the Treasurer, for we must remember that the Party wants money, always it wants money. With a Party Treasurer in control of union funds he can be expected to agree to union grants to any Party line organization that asks for them. When Communists in the union jockey through snap resolutions long after union business should be finished, appealing for financial support to this or that Iron-Curtain Friendship Society, then the Party-member Treasurer can always be relied upon to approve of the donation.

He's also there to approve grants to Party candidates at parliamentary elections, to approve of donations to a Party-inspired strike a hundred miles away, to approve of contributions to the defence fund for the Communists who, were arrested in the latest demonstration.

And the *Daily Worker* will give great prominence to such grants, pointing out that they have been made in the name of so many hundred trade unionists (who weren't within two miles of the meeting when the grants were made).

Communist unionists always attend meetings, and because they are always in attendance the donkey-work of union business is willingly handed over to them. They are familiar with union business, union politics and union trickery in a way a casual unionist never is. Nobody knows a point of order better than a Communist, and Heaven knows how many anti-Communists have foundered on a point of order adroitly produced by a Communist.

Branch membership of unions may be large, but attendance at branch meetings is invariably small. This lack of interest on the part of the average unionist is the Communist's big opportunity. He will pack a thinly attended meeting with his own comrades and his sympathizers, he will ease Party members into the chair, on to the committee. He works like a mole and no non-Communist can keep up with him.

Workers do have genuine grievances more often than not, and they are grateful to the Communists for the fierce fight which the Party puts up for them. When election time comes

round many ordinary trade unionists will support Communist candidates to branch office because of a belief that they are under some debt to the Party.

I have listened to good Socialist trade unionists, who hold no brief for the Party's attitude in international affairs, swear that they will always support the Communists in union matters 'because they always fight for the workers'.

Try telling such good-hearted men that the Party is only amused by their naivety. The Party sees the trade union branch purely and simply as a means of furthering the Party line, as a means of waging the international political struggle on an industrial terrain.

Every Communist novice is taught that Party work in the unions comes under these headings:

Propaganda for the Party and for Russia.

Recruiting Party members.

Organizing factory workers in the political struggle.

Building machinery for class action, for strikes, for eventual revolutionary warfare.

To work for these things the Communist will even break union rules. In my own time on the Hackney Trades Council I have eased through Communist-inspired resolutions on peace, on Korea, on Russia, long after the fixed time for union business to end. I have eased through those resolutions knowing that the men who might have opposed them and defeated them have looked at the clock and gone home.

And while I have stood there in the meeting hall proposing the motions I have known that a runner was waiting outside, ready to take the result of the vote to the *Daily Worker*, where a hole in the paper was waiting to be filled with: 'Twenty thousand Hackney workers oppose Marshall Aid!'

Twenty thousand Hackney workers! A solid Communist fraction and a handful of outvoted anti-Communists.

A Communist fraction within a trade union works with the same perseverance and industry as a colony of death-watch beetles — except that you cannot always hear that warning ticking.

The members of the fraction are under an iron discipline; they must place attendance at fraction meetings above all other

calls, even personal affairs like bereavement. It never meets at longer intervals than every fortnight, and often more frequently.

Because one or two of the fraction are branch officers they are fully aware of the agenda of the coming union branch meeting. This is fully discussed and a plan of campaign worked out. 'Comrade A will move this motion, Comrade B will second it.' 'Comrade C will oppose Brother So-and-so's bourgeois motion... Comrade D will support him.'

The Party member who happens to be branch chairman will receive his instructions to admit an emergency motion after 9.30, when union business should officially end. Where strong opposition is expected it will be soberly considered. If it can be defeated on a show of hands or a point of order it will be left to that.

If not, then the Party will move over to a personal attack on the enemy, start a whispering campaign before the branch meeting, canvass for support on the most reprehensible of grounds.

Once the Communist fraction has worked out its campaign for the coming union meeting the Borough Secretariat is fully informed. The Borough Secretariat informs London District Headquarters, which in turn informs the Executive and the *Daily Worker*.

If the News Editor of the *Worker* thinks it worth while he will have a draft story written, set up in type and waiting long before the union meeting is held.

Whenever a Communist fraction walks into a union branch meeting it quickly assesses its chances, studies the clock, picks its own time to swing its pet resolutions and motions just at that moment when it considers opposition will be at a minimum.

The Communist Party, which normally scorns and mistrusts all allies, is in love with one —indifference; the indifference of its enemies.

Communists know that if they keep a meeting going long enough, prolonging tedious discussion on unimportant matters, the resistance of their opponents will be weakened, the anti-Communists will pick up their hats and move off to the pub before it closes. Then is the moment for the fraction to

strike, to swing through its own measures as rapidly as possible.

Such is the bottom level of Party activity within the unions. There is a second level, probably more important, the District Office of the union.

It is an essential part of Communist policy to capture the District Office. It is the mouth of the funnel. It is the brain and tongue. It speaks for the whole of the area. And if one Party member in the District Office likes to say publicly that the war in Korea is wrong then you can be sure that the *Daily Worker* will say that he has spoken for so many thousand ordinary British working-men.

Get a Communist into the District Office and within a few months there will be changes in the clerical staff; typists, clerks, even office boys, will be replaced by Party members. Get a Communist in control of a union's District Office and the rooms can then be used as a convenient centre for Party fraction meetings. Equipment, typewriters, duplicating machines, chairs, tables can be placed at the service of the Party. I know of several union offices in the Hackney area (Party controlled, of course) which lent the whole of their equipment to the Communist candidate in a parliamentary election.

So how do we get Communists into the District Offices?

Whenever the election of union officers is due the local Communist Party meets at all levels for days on end. It decides which of their members should stand for the vacant offices within the union. Fractions are geared to support the chosen few.

It is hard to believe that trade union indifference comes to the aid of the Party even when elections to important union posts are in question. A union branch may have a total membership of 900, but if only 100 of them turn up to a branch meeting this is regarded as a superlatively good attendance. Fifty is nearer the mark.

Only the Communists are keyed up for action. The average unionist looks to his branch officials for leadership, and if those branch officials happen to be Communists, so what? The British working-man has many fine qualities — resolution, courage, self-respect, and integrity — but his tendency to let those he regards as his leaders within his own sphere do his thinking for him is the Party's greatest opportunity.

When the moment for election of District Officers comes the Communist nominees are put forward in the blandest way possible. More often than not they are men who have won the branch's approval and respect for their activities in the factories. The fraction has done its lobbying, its canvassing; the opposition is weak and disunited.

If, however, there is a risk that a Communist nominee may be defeated by a united vote from the other side, then the Party will calmly propose a decoy to split the vote.

The Party calls such tactics 'taking the van of the organized working-class'.

Of course, sometimes the Party overdoes it in its anxiety to capture the offices of a union. I can remember a time when, in the Fire Brigades Union during the war, we had secured the offices of President, General Secretary, and National Officer and Treasurer. Every District Office had a party member as a secretary, and the clerical staffs were heavily laced with Party members.

But when Party headquarters decided to exploit this situation and swing the Fire Brigades Union behind the campaign for a Second Front it met with intense opposition from the rank and file in the stations.

Thus you had a situation where the ordinary trade unionist was so much out of sympathy with the officers he had ostensibly elected that he violently repudiated their decisions.

High-powered Party conferences were held on this issue. Heads rolled in the Party and we were all told to get down there below and put in some hard work among the rank and file.

Having once captured the union branch and the District Office, however, Communists can go to work in the factories with the confident feeling that they will have official union backing for any Party line campaign they like to start.

It is never necessary for the Party to have overwhelming numbers in a factory to swing it into line. I know a factory where some 2,000 workers were employed. Of its twelve shop stewards six were Communists and there was a fraction of thirty Party members among the workers.

Not many Party members, would you say? But that factory

was constantly passing resolutions along the Party line, constantly getting itself into the *Daily Worker* for its 'advanced thinking'.

The secret, of course, lay with the six shop stewards. The Party controlled only one in every sixty of the workers, but it controlled half of the shop stewards.

A Communist shop steward has two duties: first to the Party, and second to his union workmates. He obeys the first always, and the second only when it coincides with the first.

It is his job to handle day-to-day grievances within the shop, to be responsible to the union branch on union matters, to be the mouthpiece of the union and the go-between with the employers. Under union rules he may not negotiate with the employers on matters of policy, wages, hours of employment, etc.

I say he may not do this under union rules, but of course the Communist shop stewards have become policy makers, particularly in the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Because of his influence over the workers, his position of authority and power, it is the easiest thing possible for a Communist shop steward to intimidate the ordinary worker.

I have known cases where obstinate anti-Communists have been gently eased out of a job by Communist shop stewards. They are men of incredible power.

The Communist who finds himself chosen for and elected to union office sits in an uncomfortable position. Where a Communist has personal ambition it is invariably concerned with the holding of union office. Consequently the struggle for such offices is bitter and prolonged. If a Communist holds paid office within a union he knows he will hold it just so long as the Party wishes him to. Thus his first and only allegiance is to the Party. Remember that when you hear a well-known Communist official declaring that he is 'not speaking as a Communist but as a unionist'.

The Party never attempts to out-vote a non-Communist official who is deeply-entrenched in the esteem of the union's rank and file. But go he must if he stands in the way of the Party.

And go he generally does. He is worked to death. More and

more work is piled on him by his Communist colleagues in the District Office until he collapses under it, or fails so miserably to fulfil his duties that a recommendation for his dismissal seems the kindest measure possible.

In the Fire Brigades Union during the war I was part of a conspiracy that removed eight national officers who stood in the way of the Communist march to full control.

Most of them we wiped out of the way by breaking down their health with over-work. We contributed handsomely to the eulogies that marked their retirement from office. Where the rest fought back we turned on a whispering campaign, accusations of immoderate drinking, of gambling and immorality, of a personal or domestic life that reflected 'on his standing as a union officer'.

If his personal life was so blameless that not even the most credulous would believe lies about it, then we rumoured that he was in truck with the bosses, that he was a Tory sympathizer.

And if that were not successful we whispered that he was a secret Communist. That always worked. The British trade unionist will tolerate an open Communist, but never a secret one.

Is it surprising that Communists engaged in this sort of thing rapidly lose sense of moral values and integrity? They are encouraged to believe that conventional fair-play and chivalrous behaviour are merely 'bourgeois decadence'.

I thank God that I have managed to check myself before my sense of values was completely debauched. It is not my business here to dwell on the torture my own conscience went through sometimes. A Communist becomes in time a bitter and implacable man, and he is most bitter and most implacable toward the still small voice within him.

And it is probably a most vivid indication of Communist cynicism that while secretly deriding decency and honesty such as the ordinary man cherishes, the Party makes a point of arrogating such virtues to itself in its propaganda.

It leans heavily on the reputations which the average Communists win for themselves among their fellow workers or unionists. When the Party is attacked for its amorality it

will turn and point to men like me. 'You all know Bob Darke', it will say, 'You know the sort of bloke he is, can the Party be so terrible with men like him in it?'

There is one frank answer to that. Yes it can.

I have already pointed out that the Hackney Communist Party at one time or another controlled twenty-eight out of thirty-five union branches in the borough. Yet at no time has its trade union strength been higher than 150.

Those 150 men and women swung Hackney's unionists behind the banner of Lenin and Stalin on more occasions than I like to remember now. What they did and what they are still doing is miraculous, if the devil can work miracles.

Hackney's Communists have forged a pattern for the Party's seizure of power. Again and again I have sat in little cafes in Gray's Inn Road, in the dusty rooms in the King Street headquarters, and I have heard the Party's leaders say smugly: 'We could take over the country in twenty-four hours ...'

CHAPTER FOUR

In making their livelihood together men enter into certain necessary, definite relations independent of their wills. . .

MARX. Critique of Political Economy.

FROM the end of the war until my resignation I was a member of the Party's National Industrial Policy Committee. It was an honour and I was flattered by it —it's a rare man who doesn't feel his pulse quickened by power.

How many of the ordinary public know of the existence of this committee? I've even met Party members who knew little of its existence or influence. Yet it is the Communist High Command in the Party's unending war in the unions.

The office worker walking home during a bus strike, the housewife cooking on an oil stove during a gas strike or making do with short rations because the dockers are out, straightforward Socialists fuming as their unions vote the Party ticket —all of them can thank or blame the N I P C for their discomfort.

There is always an outcrop of Party committees when the political situation blows up into a storm. But the N I P C is a constant body. It is not a natural product of the British Communist Party or the British political scene, but an instrument of Cominform policy. It is shackled to the World Federation of Trade Unions, a Cominform puppet, which integrates the trade union activity of Communist Parties throughout the world.

A word about the Cominform and Britain. The British Communist Party was never invited to join it (and many comrades still rankle under the implied slight). Its instructions are passed through to Britain from visiting French Cominform members, who are received by the N I P C much the same way as Moses must have been received when he came down from the mountain with his tablets.

Some of the British comrades may not like what the Cominform has to tell the N I P C, but they keep their mouths shut. I remember when the trouble about the Russian war

brides was most intense, several leading British Communists were disturbed by the way Russia was blindly destroying its own prestige in this country.

A French Communist from the Cominform came and harangued us. He told us that the Soviet Union's attitude was consistent with current tactics. Its refusal to allow its citizens to marry foreigners or even release those who had was a natural product of the 'war' situation. I don't think the British comrades were convinced, but they accepted the knout, and the *Daily Worker* never told the public that many of Britain's leading Communists would have been only too happy if Stalin had let the war brides go.

They took their instructions and passed them down the line. To-day you wouldn't find a Communist who doesn't believe that Russia was right in her refusal to give those unfortunate women exit visas.

Thus the N I P C serves a twofold purpose: it is a funnel for Cominform policy going down, and it is a clearing house for information coming up from the eager-beaver Party fractions within the unions.

On the Committee (its membership will vary) sits every well-known Party leader in the unions and a few more who aren't known to be in the Party at all. Most powerfully represented are Communist fractions in the key industries — mining, engineering, foundry workers, transport, building. Professional workers are also represented, but they are more or less a decoration. I never knew a cultural comrade who had the nerve to give a union comrade advice.

Communist strategy to-day is determined by the N I P C. Since the end of the war the most hackneyed Party slogan has been 'Lenin said trade unions decide everything.' More accurately could it be said that the trade unionists in the Party decide everything.

General secretaries, presidents, district officers, and national organizers of some of Britain's most powerful trades unions are members of the N I P C. They attend its meetings and discuss the secrets of their unions with the Executive members of the Party, without any bourgeois scruples as to whether such discussions would be approved by their brother unionists.

Many of them travel from one end of the country to the other to attend the meetings. Not one of them to my knowledge pays his travelling expenses out of his own pocket. Not that the Party pays either. As leading trade union officials they are expected to use the union funds for such jaunts. What are union funds for but to fight for the workers? And who fights strongest for the workers? The Communist Party. The logic is inescapable.

Big men, tough men they are when you see their faces in the Press. Big men who can bully the toughest of miners or engineers and bring them out on strike at the lift of a finger. And yet there they will sit, as I have seen them, trying to outdo each other in passion and emotion as they speak of 'Our beloved Leader and Teacher, Stalin.'

They are men who have accepted the first and only premise of Communist Party membership —loyalty to the Party transcends all other loyalties. The loudest applause at N I P C meetings goes always to the man who can tell how his union has been seduced into backing the Party's current political line. Almost as loud is the applause that goes to the comrade who can tell how his fraction has ousted a non-Communist official and filled the vacancy with a trusted comrade.

When a majority of Communist shop stewards in one union marked the ballot papers themselves during an election for an official to the union's executive nobody, at the following N I P C meeting, questioned the ethics of such tactics. It was hailed as a victory.

To me, small fry among such big fish, there was some satisfaction in watching these men being roundly abused for falling short of their Party duty. If Arthur Deakin ever said one-tenth to these men of what Pollitt and Burns used to say, they would bring their unions out in a raging strike. But they sit still, humbly and patiently, when a member of the Party's Executive charges them with negligence. Men like Arthur Horner, Jim Gardener, Abe Moffat, John Horner, may eat fire in public, but the dish is humble pie at N I P C meetings.

Why? The answer's simple enough. They hold their positions of influence only by the Party's consent. They have a

vested interest in the Party line, and nobody answers the boss back.

When a comrade comes under Party censure at NIPC meetings he does not argue, he does not apologize. The Party regards apologies as reactionary sentimentalism. If the guilty one tries to make any reply he brings the rest of the Committee down on him in full cry. If he's a wise man he takes his medicine, and if his bitterness corrodes his soul, well, that's his fault for having a soul.

The NIPC meetings are generally held in one of those dull, green rooms at the Party's headquarters in King Street, Covent Garden. In a room where a portrait of Marx or a bust of Lenin keeps a cold and watchful eye on the proceedings. There is no laughter, no mutual good feeling, no real tolerant comradeship. Each man is watching for another's weakness. It is on the weakness of others that the Party comrade rises.

I remember that when I attended my first NIPC meeting I felt that I had wandered into an emotional desert. I was without a match for a cigarette, and when I began asking for a light I got the same answer all along the line: 'I don't smoke, comrade.'

I subsequently found that most of them didn't drink either. They were like elders of the kirk in conclave.

At the end of the meetings there was never the pleasant half-an-hour's chat over a pint you naturally expect from a band of working men. Each comrade left the building hurriedly, walking away on his own with barely a good night. We never left the building together but at irregularly spaced intervals. We never looked over our shoulders. We never stopped until we got on a bus.

We were summoned to the meeting in the most casual of ways. Never by telephone. Sometimes by word of mouth, sometimes by a vaguely worded note: 'Some of our friends are gathering on Friday for a talk. We shall expect you.' A three-line whip never had more urgency than that last sentence.

Meetings were conducted with a brisk and soulless efficiency. Generally one of the Party's National Executive was in the chair — Pollitt, Burns, the late George Allison. There was never an element of doubt in our discussions, never a saving

touch of humility. May the Lord help us, we were so right and the rest of the world was always so wrong.

It was this belief that we were so right that gave us our strength.

Business affairs generally centred about the waxing and waning strength of the Party within the unions, and the extent to which the current political line could be exploited on the industrial front. I have heard discussions on using a grievance over the tea in one factory canteen as a means of fermenting a sudden strike that could be used along the political line.

Invariably, when enlisting a union's support, the question would always be: 'Are we strong at the top or at the bottom?'

This is not just an academic question. The answer makes a lot of difference to the action the Party can take. Arthur Horner, for example, is excused for not coming as far into the open as his namesake John Horner of the Firemen's Union because the Party accepts the fact that it is 'weak at the bottom' in the miners' union. In this way Arthur gets the sympathy of the moderates who would not stomach a fire-eating Red.

The Party likes to be in strong control of the union's offices, but if it loses its grip on the rank and file it knows that it can be voted down. The big Ford strike in 1952 was an example. Party shop stewards whipped up feeling among non-Communists and got the strike they wanted, but after the rank and file of the union had had time to think they voted down the shop stewards and went back to work.

The NIPC would debate a defeat like this at great length, send out instructions to Party fractions within the unions to intensify recruitment, distribution of Party literature and undermining of anti-Communist unionists.

The Party is never pleased when the ordinary worker thumbs his nose at the 'vanguard of the people's fight'. There may be some fun in getting between the shafts and pulling the cart, but only a fool would suggest that the horse should take the reins.

Arthur Horner was once roundly abused at an NIPC meeting by Harry Pollitt. He was told that he and others were making the miners' unions top-heavy. There were too few

Party members going down into pits with the lads, said Harry, compared with the number resting in comfortable leather chairs in union offices. Arthur could have said that it was a long time since Pollitt had gone without a leather chair, but he didn't. No, Arthur sat still and let Pollitt abuse him.

Poor Arthur! I liked him. He was probably the one exception to that lack of conviviality I have remarked among the N I P C. Whenever he was missing it was a case of 'Where's Comrade Horner?' 'Oh, he's across the road having a beer.'

Someone would be sent to find him — I went sometimes — and there Arthur would be right enough, sitting in the public bar behind a pint, his hat on the back of his head. The Party never really approved of behaviour like this, but they couldn't change Arthur. They couldn't stop him, for example, from being on good drinking terms with some of Fleet Street's industrial correspondents.

Complaints or criticisms raised at N I P C meetings generally concerned the difficulties facing the exploitation of the Party line.

I remember Jim Gardener, the Foundry Workers' General Secretary, arguing furiously that there should be 'more Marxism in the unions'. What he meant, of course, was that the Communist Party Central Office should take advantage of the fact that Jim and his comrades ran the union and funnel more Party literature through the union's head office.

If you think that would be difficult you should read some of our big trade union journals. Workers will trust their own union papers where they will be sceptical about the rest of the Press. So Communist propaganda, blandly undisguised in many cases, is flooded into union papers. John Horner often writes the editorial for the Firemen's Union journal, and he would be a bigger man than I think he is (and a worse Communist) if he kept his politics out of it.

Communist busmen in London run their own paper, called the *Platform*. It's a non-union paper and at the moment it is violently anti-Deakin. It claims to be non-political (despite the fact that Communists argue that no one can be non-political) but its policy is directed by Comrade Bill Jones of

Dalston Garage, and its 'non-political' publisher is said to be non-party.

Yet I know many London busmen who read the paper because they think they are getting an impartial non-official view of union affairs.

Do not think, however, that the N I P C has it all its own way with the unions. Again and again at its meetings I saw comrades earnestly debating what was to be done with the Transport and General Workers' Union, as if this mammoth were a refractory child. This is one union which the Party has failed to capture although it has carved its niches here and there. But the failure to take over the T G W U has been a long-standing source of irritation to the Party. At one time the feeling was that if the T G W U couldn't be captured it should at least be smashed.

Advocates of this sort of action were many, but they were always talked out of it by George Allison, member of the Communist National Executive, who was a sitting observer at our meetings. He would say, 'One day, comrades, that union will be ours. Just imagine what the Party could do at the Trade Union Congress if we controlled a million and a quarter votes. We could change the policy of the country.'

The thought that one day the control of a million and a quarter Transport Union votes might pass to them always silenced the fanatics. But they haven't got these votes yet, and now that Arthur Deakin has stopped Party members from holding office in the union there seems little likelihood of their getting them — unless they split the union.

The forming of such breakaway unions is a favourite Communist tactic when the Party fails to take over the union by 'democratic' means. At the moment the Party is worried about the busmen's union. Once they fought for and got a closed shop in the union. But now Party members are unable to hold office in it Communist policy has turned full circle. In my opinion, it would like to see a breakaway union. Consistency has no place in Communist tactics.

It believes in expediency, and a very clear example of the Party's cynical interpretation of expediency came my way in Hackney Wick. Over 300 workers in a furniture factory went

on strike against the introduction of new production methods. The workers had a case and there was a great deal of sympathy for them outside the factory.

There was no indication that the workers would not have got what they wanted through normal arbitration, but it is not the Party's wish to have industrial disputes settled amicably. The war they fight admits no armistice. They want a fight, and the harder the opposition the better, for only through a fight can the Party justify its claim to be the vanguard in the workers' struggle. Only through such a fight can it recruit new members, increase the sales of the *Daily Worker*. Only by such fights can it maintain a running ulcer in the nation's economy.

The Party swung into line immediately on the Hackney Wick strike. The secretary of the Strike Committee was a Communist of course, and the Party fraction in the factory had the whole affair well in hand within twelve hours. The Party branch had been alerted and so had the NIPC.

The Strike Secretary was as happy as a sandboy and no doubt convinced that he was a budding Malenkov. Factory gate meetings had shown that the workers were strong behind the fight, and the Party realized that here was a chance to get the whole borough mobilized.

The Strike Committee called a mass meeting for Friday evening. Shop stewards from all over the borough were invited to listen to the strikers' case. I was invited too, as Secretary to the Hackney Trades Council, with the view that I should submit a report to the council.

As a Party member and branch official and a member of the NIPC, I knew all about the strike. I knew what I was supposed to do. My attendance at the meeting was merely a matter of form.

It was held in a local hall, which was packed. There were shop stewards from all over the borough, many rank and file unionists, and a reporter from the *Daily Worker*. There was the usual table laden with copies of the *Worker* and the latest Party pamphlets on the political situation. The Party fraction in the Furniture Trades Union had run off a duplicated pamphlet on the fight. The Furniture Trades Advisory Committee of the

Party had its case for the industry all there in a red-jacketed booklet.

The Strike Committee Secretary outlined the situation, ridiculed the attitude of the union heads, and told the meeting that this was going to be a fight to the finish. Planted Party men in the hall asked pre-arranged questions. If the strike was defeated, he told us in answer to one such question, we could expect worse conditions in all factories in the borough. This was a test strike. The capitalists were watching this strike; if the workers lost then the capitalists would bear down in other industries. It's an old Party line but it always has the same rousing effect.

There was one thing, however, said the Strike Secretary. To stay out was going to cost something like £800 a week. Now, who was going to find it?

'We're all in this, comrades. We ask you to hand up what you can. You shop stewards, get your factories to guarantee so much a week for our lads.'

Those shop stewards who were Party members didn't have to consult their workmates to find out how much they could guarantee. Right off the nail they promised £20, £30, even as much as £40 a week.

When the Strike Secretary had added up the figures and decided that that would do very nicely, I was asked to speak. I pledged the Trades Council's support to the hilt. I could do that safely enough; the Party was running the Trades Council at that time. Nobody, I said, was going to let the lads down.

I had under-estimated my own Party's ability to let anyone and everyone down whenever it pleased them.

The meeting wound up with a unanimous resolution of solidarity, which the waiting runner rushed off to the *Worker*. It just got there in time.

I prepared a full report for the Trades Council meeting on the following Thursday. I had Strike Fund collection sheets printed and sent to all Party shop stewards in the borough. I met the Strike Secretary on Tuesday and satisfied myself that the position had not changed.

But just as I was about to enter the Trades Council meeting on Thursday a Party comrade, member of the Furniture

Trades fraction, rushed up to me breathless. What he had to say took the breath out of me too.

'Mind how you go in there, Bob. The strikers have just gone back. The Strike Committee called off the strike, *on the Party's orders.*'

I got through that council meeting somehow. I didn't know why the Party had called off the strike, and just then I didn't want to know. The best I could do was to propose that the strike (the now non-existent strike) should be discussed at the next meeting of the Trades Council. It was never discussed.

What had happened? The Party's Furniture Trades Advisory Committee had decided that an unofficial strike in the industry would be ill-advised at that moment. They were proposing delicate negotiations with the General Secretary of the union. They believed that this unsuspecting gentleman was out of favour with the T U C leaders, and anyone that much out of favour was regarded as ripe meat for Party recruitment. In this case the Party never got their man, but I got some pretty queer looks from the non-Communist members of the Trades Council for the next two or three months.

The Communist with a job to do in the union is never allowed to sleep. You can take this literally if you wish. If the Party member fulfils every obligation thrust on his shoulders he finds himself limited to something like four hours' or less sleep a day.

I was doing very little sleeping up to the time I resigned. Late-night fraction meetings kept me up well past midnight every night and the strain was telling on me physically. The Press who filled my little flat that night my resignation was made public took many pictures of me —and I appealed to them not to publish them. I had woken up suddenly to the change in my appearance that had taken place over the years.

I had seen the haggard, worn face often enough as I looked in my shaving mirror, and maybe I told myself that it didn't matter, all this was for the Party. But once the Party was past I realized I did not want my face to appear thus in the papers. Not so that my children could claim that this demented lunatic was their father.

This is not just a story of personal vanity. It has a deep meaning: the conscientious Party member will drive himself to the limit and wear the signs of his physical strain as if they were medals.

The greatest physical strain is placed on the Party member when the annual conference of his union takes place. The policy and tactics which the Party fraction must follow at this conference are thrashed out at Party headquarters night after night. The policy is integrated with the current line, the tactics are determined by the peculiar circumstances of union affairs.

Party fractions of all branches of the union are aware of the Party's general stand, and it is their job to see that their branch delegates wittingly or unwittingly support this stand. It is less a stand on union affairs than on the political situation: Down with Fascism, For a People's Peace, A Second Front Now, For Peace in Korea, For a United Germany.

Communist delegates work out their campaign to a blueprint; they know where to filibuster, where to slip motions through on points of order, where to count on support from Party members on the Executive, where it is tactful to ignore it.

The opposition which Party line resolutions can expect is seriously considered and prepared against. Party-controlled branches throughout the union submit their resolutions to the Party's District Office before putting them down on the union's conference agenda.

All this is not undertaken lightly. It means hours of late night discussions, and the good comrades are almost dead beat before they arrive at the conference.

And when they get there not for them the after-hours fun of the average delegate. No strolling the promenade in flannels and open-necked shirts. No little tea-parties with their wives. The Communist's work goes round the clock. I have sat in hotel lounges long after non-Party delegates have gone to bed, and I have seen the dawn come before the Party fraction settled its tactical campaign for the following day's meeting.

Sometimes, if things went badly for us during the morning, there would be a hurried Party conference during the lunch hour in some unobtrusive cafe.

Party delegates at union conferences regard themselves as representatives of the Communist Party, as fighters for the Party line. They may each represent thousands of non-Communist trade unionists, but this fact is regarded purely as armament when the voting comes up.

The Party likes, if it is possible, to have control of the committee that arranges hotel accommodation for the conference. If they have this control Communists are paired off with non-Communists in hotel bedrooms. 'Work on your room-mate,' would be the order. 'Soften him up, see if he's sympathetic to the Party. If he isn't, then see what you can get him to give away.'

I remember the times I've lain in a hotel bedroom late at night, keeping my room-mate awake as I pumped information out of him or Party policy into him.

It is not surprising that I always came home from union conferences feeling that I had been released from a cage. I've been in many towns for many conferences, but I couldn't tell you what they looked like. I never had time to stroll the streets; there was always Party business to be discussed in some narrow hotel room or in the living-room of a local Party member.

Trade Union Congresses were the same, except that Party activity was, if anything, more intense, with one Party delegation chasing another through the hotels of the town like a three-ring circus.

And when it was all over, when you were back home, was there time to take a deep breath and relax? There was not. Within two or three days you got an urgent call to meet at Party headquarters and discuss the success or otherwise of Party fractionizing.

It is easy enough to talk of capturing the offices of a union, and many Party members talk loosely about it, as if it were like buying twenty cigarettes. In practice it requires an iron will and the relentlessness of a tiger.

The Party cannot always rely on swinging the elections to capture the vacant offices. It cannot always rely on forging ballot papers, such as happened at least once in the Transport

and General Workers' Union. Very often the non-Communist holding the office coveted by the Party is too strong in popular favour. He has to go.

And I saw many enough go.

In one case the officer concerned was a London District Secretary of the union, a non-Communist of the highest integrity who had the affairs of his union very much at heart.

Naturally enough, he rejected the Party's opening gambit — an attempt to recruit him into Party membership.

The Party fraction in the District Office of the union then sat down one pleasant summer evening to decide ways and means of getting rid of him. It was easy enough when we had considered all the facts. He was not a well man; he had been working hard, had fallen sick and had been absent from his duties on many occasions. There was the usual grumbling about this among the rank and file, who were unaware of his sickness. Party fractions in the branches encouraged the grumbling by one of those slow, poisonous whispering campaigns.

At the same time more work was piled on the unfortunate man's shoulders. When he was beginning to look his sickest a few chosen members of the Party fraction took him aside over a cup of coffee. It was a nice friendly chat and I don't suppose he felt the edge of the blade as it cut his throat.

He was told that it was obvious that the work was getting too much for him. As things stood there was no chance of the burden being lightened. Would he not be well advised to find employment somewhere else? He could rest assured that the union would give him the best of references, and financial assistance if necessary. He was advised to think it over.

He saw the point. Had he been healthier he might have fought back. But no sick man has ever got the better of the Party, except by walking out of a window like Masaryk. So he resigned. He got his references and his financial honorarium — and the Party got his job by launching an election when it was least expected.

He was a straightforward, honest man — I believe he's the successful manager of a small London factory now — but he hadn't a chance.

We got rid of a National Officer in much the same way. Party personalities were involved in this business. Within the fraction we had a coming lad, out to make his way in the Party, a young man so well indoctrinated with Marxism that he used to talk to himself. He was an ambitious and ruthless man, a chain-smoker and a bundle of nerves. He wanted the National Officer's job and he talked the Party into backing him.

In this case no attempt was made to recruit the National Officer, a sentimental campaign was started immediately. 'Poor old so-and-so, getting too old for the job. Falling down on it. Sick too often. Away from the office too often. Better if he was retired.'

He was retired, and our likely lad moved into the position.

There are probably people naive enough to believe that the men and women who hold high office in a trade union have been members of that union for many years. There may be people who believe that when the Party wishes to take over a union it can do it only with men who have served a long time in the union.

But it is indicative of the Party's cynical attitude that it will move a man into a union with the express intention of getting him on to the executive within a matter of months.

I know. It happened to me. I reached leadership in the Firemen's Union within a year of joining it.

My elevation to that leadership saved me for the Party. I had been going through a period of doubt and unhappiness. Russia was not yet in the war, Molotov was shaking hands with Ribbentrop and the whole picture was disturbing to me who had spent many night-hours chalking 'Fight Fascism Now!' on Hackney's pavements.

Moreover my brother John, who never lived to see this book and my rejection of the Party, had abruptly abandoned the Party after the Russo-German Pact. I never agreed with his decision. I never argued with him about it, but just the same what he had done had unsettled my faith in myself and the Party.

I stayed away from Party meetings —with the excuse that work made attendance difficult. That was never a good excuse for the Party but this time it had some sense. I had answered the Party instructions to join the Fire Service some months before, and duty hours at the station didn't give me the opportunity to attend Party meetings.

I used that as an excuse, but in fact I was thinking about the leaflets I had distributed all over Hackney, the leaflets that claimed Russia to be the only bulwark against Germany, and there were the two of them drinking vodka together.

There were a lot of Party members who felt like me in 1940, and the Party propagandists were hard at work trying to convince us that Russia was merely buying time. We didn't like the price that was being paid, however.

One day in July, 1940, I received a visit from a Party colleague in the Fire Service. 'I want a chat with you, Comrade Darke.'

'You can arrange that through the Hackney Branch.'

'Not in this case, Comrade. At the moment I'm in charge of Party work in the Fire Service. There's a lot to be done to work for a People's Government and a People's Peace. We don't hear a lot from you these days. You know the Party values your services, and there's a big job waiting for you in the union if you want it. Have you some quarrel with the Party?'

It was all said so casually that I found myself telling him that the Hitler-Stalin alliance had upset me.

'Well, you can thrash that out with other Party members, you know. Why not come along for a chat?'

I fell for it. Back into intense Party activity I went. The little chat never took place. And pretty soon I was so busy with union work, so busy telling other people why Russia had found it necessary to buy time that I couldn't hear my own doubts.

Within a few weeks of my going back I received a letter. The form of it was familiar enough. It told me that Firemen Communists were holding a little 'get-together' and I was requested to attend, putting this commitment above all others.

There was a postscript to the letter: 'When arriving show your Party card but state Firemen's Union.'

I was supposed to be on duty on the night in question, but a word to a Party union official, who in turn had a word with the Station Officer ('Fireman Darke would like the time for union business') secured my release.

We met in a hall just off Gray's Inn Road. It was packed with Communist firemen. Its doors were guarded by stewards and even the mice would have had to hold a Party card to get in. As well as firemen there were also members from the Party's cultural groups — artists, writers, lawyers, journalists, doctors. People who were surprised by the cultural activity of London's firemen during the war can thank the Party for it.

There was a great deal of talk, a great deal of quoting from Marx, Lenin and Stalin, and a great deal of nonsense about a People's Peace. Two decisions were finally voted upon and passed unanimously:

1. The Party must set up strong Communist fractions in every Fire Station.
2. The Firemen's Union must be completely captured by the Party.

Every Communist who was not at that moment engaged on Party work in some important sphere, the services, the unions, Government work, would be instructed to go into Civil Defence work.

To get at least one Communist in every fire station was easy enough. John Horner, General Secretary of the union, or some other Party official had only to chat with an unsuspecting station officer and suggest the transfer of this or that (Party) fireman to this or that station ('To facilitate union business').

Once there the Party member had to tap each member of the station, discover the sympathetic ones, distribute *Daily Workers*, hold discussion groups, put a spark into union activity along the Party line ('Peace Now!').

A few weeks after that meeting which decided the political fate of the war-time Firemen's Union I was told to put myself up for election to the Executive Council of the Union. It

was a position which would make me virtual leader of all the firemen in the East End.

I had no difficulty in winning the election. My prestige stood high to begin with, but the Party did not leave the result to this quixotic chance. Every Party fraction went to work and bull-dozed my election. Possible opponents were undermined by smear and slander. Branch meetings were packed with Communists, points of order rigged.

And when I was victorious I was instructed to attend the Party's District Office to get my orders:

I was to build up the Party's strength in every station, organize Marxist classes, fight for the Party which was at that moment 'For a People's Government and a negotiated Peace!' (You can still see some of my old slogans on Hackney's walls, where the people we wanted to negotiate with haven't blown them down.)

I was told that the Party members in the Union's offices would give me every material and financial support — a Party clerk in the head office would supply me with stamps, notepaper, typewriter, telephone, anything I needed.

With all this I was to increase Party membership in the union, help to sew the London Fire Brigade into a neat red-labelled packet.

We worked at that until Russia came into the war and the demand for a 'Negotiated Peace' became a 'This is a Just War' overnight. There were too many bombs falling in Hackney, too many fires to be fought for me to have much time to think about the contradictions involved by that right-about face.

The Party went all out to exploit the situation that had made Russia our ally, and made pro-Soviet propaganda almost official. We were instructed to organize a Firemen's Delegation to fly to Moscow taking fraternal greetings. It had to be an innocent affair.

We hand-picked the innocents and smuggled in an unknown Party member to hold a watching brief. Then the Government forestalled us and sent an official delegation instead. But we made the best use of that setback. 'Well,' we said, over a cup of tea when an All Clear sounded, 'What can you expect?

The capitalist government would naturally prevent British workers from meeting their Russian comrades. They're afraid to let us go.'

When the call came for a Second Front the East End section of the Firemen's Union was given the job of taking in the van. We were told to pass a resolution which would be sent to the union's Executive Council and from there to the War Office.

Our campaign for the Second Front was so successful that the Party ordered me to give lectures to Party leaders from other unions where the opposition to the Second Front campaign was strong.

They told me of their difficulties, but I didn't listen. 'Defeatism!' I shouted at them in best Marxist style. 'Difficulties are made to be overcome, Comrades! If the Party of Stalin demands it you have got to accomplish it. You can fail your brother unionists but you cannot fail Stalin, our Teacher and our Leader.'

I told them that the National Executive of the Party wanted Second Front resolutions coming from every union branch; they wanted them pouring into the union head offices, to the War Office, to Members of Parliament. Walls and railway arches were to be covered with slogans.

'No excuses will be accepted.'

We utilized every opportunity. When we learned that the Government intended to set up an overseas contingent of firemen to assist the ground forces during the second front, I was told to volunteer for it.

Within forty-eight hours of the Government's decision being made public the Press was publishing 'Communist Firemen's Union Leader volunteers for the Second Front.'

I never went, of course. If anybody remembers that headline I doubt whether they remember that Bob Darke wasn't in the Second Front after all. I volunteered on Party instructions and on Party instructions as leader of the Communist block I made way for someone else.

The Party fraction in the Firemen's Union hammered this question of a Second Front so hard that it was a wonder we had time to fight fires. Before one of our annual conferences

the President of the union spent days in the Party's Headquarters in King Street working out his presidential address which was to be a blatant demand for the opening of the front. It ran to thirty pages and every comma of it was checked and double-checked by the Party's theoreticians.

When we held that conference the President delivered his address in front of a blaze of Hammers and Sickles, Stars and Stripes and Union Jacks.

The Scottish Area Committee of the union, Party-dominated, put up the resolution demanding an opening of the Second Front. With that and the presidential address, it wasn't surprising that the papers carried the story 'Firemen demand Second Front Now!'

We nearly pulled off the same thing at the Trade Union Congress that followed our conference, but not quite. However, Party delegates to the Congress made such a row about the Second Front that the question dominated all others.

Why were we doing this? Maybe rank and file Communists thought that the object of it all was to take war-strain off the Red Army. But a far more likely explanation was put to me by one of the National Officers of the Firemen's Union, a barrister.

'You know what will happen, Bob? A Second Front now, with the Red Army so powerful, will enable the Russians to sweep through Europe, and you can well imagine that wherever the Red Army goes it will stay, and the workers will gain power after the war is over.'

The workers? Well, the vanguard of the workers, anyway, the Communist Party.

To keep a Party stranglehold on a union composed of men who sometimes like to make up their own minds is not easy. It is not done solely by capturing a majority of positions in the offices, by swinging a majority of shop stewards into Party membership.

The best way is never give the ordinary man time to make up his own mind. Make it up for him quickly, and shout loud enough to drown the voice of his own free will.

Go down to Dalston bus garage any Friday evening and

you'll see what I mean. In the days before the union banned Communists from office you'd find a comrade there behind a table collecting union subscriptions. On the table would be copies of the *Daily Worker*, copies of Party literature, membership forms. All the time he or somebody else would be shouting:

'Come on, mates, how about something for the Party? How about your *Daily Worker*? How about something for the *Daily Worker* Fighting Fund, the Anglo-Iron Curtain Friendship Society?'

I can remember him sitting there in the garage on Friday evenings collecting his money, while the Treasurer of the Hackney Communist Party hung about behind his shoulder trying to get a word with him.

And when he got the word the conversation, so far as I can remember, would go something like this:

'Look, Party funds are a bit short this week. We have not got enough to pay my salary and the other paid officers. How about the Dalston busmen making a contribution?'

The collector would explode. 'The Dalston boys have already donated £10 to the Party this month. Where do you think the money comes from?'

'I know, but we're a bit short and the Party relies on the Dalston garage.'

'Go away and give me time to think,' would be the reply.

And the Treasurer would turn to me, his face red. 'You know, Bob, he oughtn't to talk to me like that. After all I'm Treasurer of the Hackney Party, he should show me some respect before the lads. I'm going to report him to Central Office.'

But he would wait because he wanted his money. When the union business was over the collector would pull out a handful of notes and peel off ten of them — a 'donation from the Dalston busmen towards the vanguard of the people's fight.'

When the Hackney Peace Committee wanted to send a delegation to a Peace Festival in Paris we found we hadn't the £50 needed to send them. I went along and told the collector. He pulled out his pack of pound notes and counted out fifty right there in the Dalston bus garage.

It went down on the records of the Peace Committee as 'a loan from the Dalston busmen.'

It was never paid back to my knowledge. When the delegation came back I was worried; I could see no way of paying it back.

'So what,' I was told. 'You got a new Party member out of it, didn't you?'

He was right. One of the delegation had returned and joined the Party —and the Party considered that was worth £50 of the Dalston busmen's money any day.

CHAPTER FIVE

Victory is impossible without a long, persistent, desperate life and death struggle, a struggle which requires discipline . . .

LENIN, Left-Wing Communism.

THE Communist Party could not operate without firm discipline or without penalties which will make that discipline effective. Discipline is as much based on the Party member's fear that a slight error of judgement can easily be construed as betrayal, as it is based on the Party's power to do him serious harm if he offends it.

The power to do harm is probably least effective among the intellectuals, the professionals, and the loosely-grouped members. It is, however, most strong among the people I knew best, the trade unionists who have position, power, and income at stake if they offend the Party. Should it so decide the Party is able to take all these things away from a man and drive him into the wilderness.

After I left the Party eighteen months passed before I was able to hold office again in my union. I would be a fool if I did not believe that the Party did its utmost to prevent me from obtaining it.

Communist discipline is not just a simple matter of allegiance to the Party's decisions and loyalty to its policy. It is an inherent feature of a comrade's personal and public life. It is an unquestioning reflex of his behaviour. After a period of time as a Party member, a month, a year, two years according to the degree of his work, a Communist is expected to become 'self-disciplined'.

There's a sad irony in that phrase. One might just as well talk of a ventriloquist's dummy as being self-disciplined. The self-disciplined Communist is one who purges himself of all genuine self-criticism, all honest and refreshing doubt, all tolerance and independence of thought.

Let it be understood that he is ready enough to do this when he joins the Party. This serious step is generally undertaken by a man who believes that the Party has some wonder-

ful answer to his or the world's troubles, some magic formula that explains everything and will solve everything. This mystical feeling is encouraged among recruits. They are reverently introduced to Marxist-Leninist theory, so tortuous a philosophy that few Communists ever follow it beyond a few catch-phrases and a few quotations from Lenin or Stalin. If they are told that such-and-such an action is strictly within the logic and dialectic of Marxism-Leninism they will follow it blindly.

I've often witnessed a disciplinary committee telling an offender that perfectly honest and decent statements made by him are, in terms of Marxist thought, rank heresy, and I have seen him accepting that interpretation because his faith in the Marxism he does not understand is stronger than reason.

Self-discipline in a Communist means, more often than not, going to the comrade with the wider knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and asking him to put you right. But it is as well to make sure that the Marxist expert you go to is not himself in need of self-discipline.

Once a comrade accepts the need for regular harsh criticism from other comrades he is easily convinced that this is genuine 'self-criticism', and the acceptance of it is true 'self-discipline'. This may or may not explain the surprising confessions of weakness and 'wrong thinking' which appear in Iron Curtain countries under the signatures of Party notabilities.

Yet men are men, and the natural instinct of a man in a civilized community like ours is to think for himself and to disagree openly with those whom he believes to be wrong. To deal with this shocking bourgeois muddle-headedness the Party long ago set up disciplinary committees. They may be on a national scale, headed by a national officer like Peter Kerrigan, or they may be committees hastily formed by branch secretariats when faced with a rash of deviationism among branch members.

All work the same way, however, and all have about as much resemblance to a fair trial as my bus has to the Comet. Do not think the accused comrade is allowed either to make a speech in his own defence or call other comrades to support

his point of view. Time and time again I've seen Kerrigan hammering on a table with his big fist and shouting 'Don't you try to get out of this by making a speech. This isn't a bourgeois court of law. You've no legal rights here, you're a Party comrade before a Party court.'

Anything can bring a comrade before such a court —an outright breach of policy (however unwittingly), a public expression of a personal point of view that is in contradiction to the expressed Party line, a long history of minor shortcomings (arriving late at branch meetings), a lack of zeal in Party duties, being behind with subscriptions, too close an intimacy with bourgeois friends. Anything.

The Hackney Party Secretariat once took disciplinary action against a shop steward who was one of the most active of our comrades. He was too active in fact, and became the victim of his own energy. He was a young man of twenty-one and keen to work for the Party. In addition to his Party duties as a shop steward he volunteered to assist me in my work on the Trades Council. I knew he was taking on more than he could manage and I tried to dissuade him, but it was impossible.

Inevitably he fell down on his work as my liaison officer. He was late for meetings, forgot appointments, submitted inaccurate or insufficient reports to the Secretariat.

Branch officials grew impatient with him and finally placed his name on the agenda for the next Secretariat meeting, 'Comrade X —disciplinary action.' The Secretariat elected itself a court to try him.

When he heard what was awaiting him he did a very foolish thing. He wrote a letter of apology to the Borough Secretary. This, of course, exposed him as infected with bourgeois sentimentalism, as lacking in self-discipline, and likely to betray the Party on emotional grounds.

When he came before the disciplinary committee he already had the scales weighed against him. I remember his face as he stood before us, so desperately anxious to please, so desperately anxious to atone for his little sins. The Party had been his life, and if the Party thought he had sinned he was ready to believe that he had too.

We met in the living-room of a house in Amhurst Road, I remember, with this young man standing in the corner, biting his lips and looking from face to face. The Borough Secretary opened the proceedings by reading out a series of charges which, to the ordinary man, would have indicated that the young chap had merely failed through excess of zeal. 'Failure to report to so-and-so ... failure to pursue the Party line with full vigour ... failure to this ... failure to that ...'

On a young man so anxious to be a success the reiteration of that one word 'failure' must have had a deadly effect.

He was not told who accused him, or where the charges originated. He broke in on the Borough Secretary with another attempt at apology. The Secretary leaped to his feet furiously shouting: 'We don't apologize in the Communist Party. *We take our punishment!*'

So he stood there, white and trembling, and, I'm sure, willing to take any punishment if only it would bring him back the favour of the Party to which he had given his young life. I could see by his face that he seriously believed he had done that Party a great wrong, that he had put the Revolution back a couple of aeons.

I had grown to like him while he had been struggling to do his best for me, and I appealed to the committee for leniency, but the Borough Secretary cut short my appeal with the statement that leniency would be cowardice. The Party needed to close its ranks, it was approaching the final struggle with capitalism, and any weakness on the part of any comrade was desertion in the face of the enemy. He suggested a severe reprimand which would be made public among other comrades, and suspension from all Party duties for six months.

Not a terrible sentence, you might say, except that to this young man it meant the end of the one thing he had been striving for —the Party's trust in him. The ventriloquist's dummy had in fact been left alone on the stage.

Why did he accept that court's decision? Why did he not realize that any court which did not allow him one word in his own defence must be a mockery of the 'democratic' Party it represented?

He accepted the court because his initial acceptance of the Party and Party discipline made acceptance of all its decisions automatic. I could see by the working of his face as he stood there that he believed the punishment just, however unpleasant. If they had decided to put a bullet in the back of his neck he would probably have thought them justified too.

As for asking other comrades to appeal for him, I don't suppose it entered his mind. That would have been 'fractionizing', working against the majority decision of the Party. And he had been taught to hate the heresy of fractionizing. Was not Trotsky the arch-fractionizer in all the history of Communism?

Even had he attempted to enlist the support of other comrades in his own defence he would not have got it. Once a Party member comes under suspicion or disfavour no other comrade is foolish enough to be seen in conversation with him. To do that would be to run the risk of summary expulsion. Until that young man's six months in the wilderness were over he lived the life of a sick dog. And when the time was over he was put through a severe cross-questioning in the parrot answers of Marxism to see if he had acquired 'self-discipline' during his exile.

On District Committee level disciplinary courts operate in much the same way. I attended several of them. They were led by Ted Bramley, organizer of London District, a young pale-faced man whom I rarely saw smiling. At heart though I believed he sincerely wished to be kind whenever kindness could be contained within the demands of Marxism-Leninism.

Before us once came a leading shop steward in Smithfield Meat Market who was accused of disobeying the instructions of his Borough Secretary, thus being guilty of deviationism. He was never told who his accuser was, and he was sufficiently well drilled not to ask.

It is possible that he might never have appeared before a disciplinary court had his name not been up for election to the London District, and those in the Party who opposed his election were anxious to spoil his chances by any means possible.

The details of the charge against him are not relevant, but in substance it was this: he had refused to accept the Borough

Secretary's guidance in a problem affecting his union in the market. He had chosen to act on his own initiative and judgement. As it happened his decision was the right one and the problem was solved.

That, however, made no difference to the Party. He had disobeyed instructions and thereby jeopardized Party discipline. Not once during the hour and a half he stood before the court did he or any of us suggest that his success in the union problem excused his behaviour. Nelson's blind eye would have been worthless in the Communist Party.

He said nothing. I had heard that he intended to fight the court, but he must have given in instinctively when he saw our faces. He could not have seen any sympathy in them.

Bramley's statement was surprisingly lenient, but the rest of the Committee, well briefed, I suspect, by the man's enemies, were out for blood.

'Do you believe that a good Marxist must accept the Party's decision as the only decision?'

'Yes, I do, comrade.'

'Do you believe that Party discipline is based on the acceptance of the majority decision within the Party?'

'Yes, I do, comrade.'

'Do you believe that the Borough Secretary is only the instrument of that majority decision?'

'Yes, I do, comrade.'

'Do you believe that self-discipline must begin with a willingness to accept criticism from other comrades?'

'Yes, I do, comrade.'

'Self-criticism will do you good.'

I am convinced that he left that disciplinary court certain that he had been wrong. The success of the course he took on his own initiative was irrelevant; he had acted perversely as a Marxist and as a Communist Party member, and that was his crime. He accepted the belief that to deny the charges laid against him would have betrayed a lack of self-discipline. So he went willingly into the wilderness and served his term of suspension before the Party considered he was docile enough to come back into the fold, where someone else would do his thinking for him.

The Party's disciplinary and expulsion committees were never more active than at the end of the war and the first months of peace. Heads rolled into the dust of the renewed political struggle. Communist Party membership had soared as a result of this country's alliance with the Soviet Union and as a result of the people's genuine admiration for the achievements of the Red Army.

Never before had the non-Communist Press done so much to encourage recruiting for the Communist Party. Thousands of new members took out Party cards. The membership figure by 1945 was, I believe, above 100,000 (it is less than a third of that to-day). We gloated over the situation and looked forward to the post-war situation when, we were confident, the Party would take power.

To strengthen the Party's position the National Executive decided on a tightening of discipline and a purge of membership. It could now afford to cut away what it believed to be dead wood. A great number of our new recruits were fellow-travellers in reverse, members who still had sympathies and affiliations with other political organizations, or who had joined us more because of Stalingrad than Marx.

The Executive decided that as the first step toward parting the sheep from the goats all Party members should declare themselves openly as Communists and cut whatever ties they had with other political organizations. Of course some members were excused from this public exposition. They were men and women who were down on Party files as 'Personal Security'. They held jobs in the Government service, in the professions, in Parliament. But in the main we were told: 'Come out into the open, declare yourselves as Communists.'

The Party knew that many new members —and many old ones for that matter —were not going to like this. Trouble was expected from trade union officials who would be unwilling to risk their position by an open declaration of Communist membership. Part of the Party's new policy was to drive these men (these 'potential deviationist traitors') into the open and expel them. Expulsion committees were set up in every district to deal with them. I was selected to sit on one such committee, and as a result of my experiences I got a very clear idea

of how the Red Trials behind the Iron Curtain must be conducted.

Trade unionists who tried to argue against the policy of open declaration were bluntly expelled forthwith and within a few months found themselves gently eased out of union office and replaced by other Party members. Others accepted the committee's decision, declared themselves as Communists, and were left on their own to cope with their unions' natural indignation.

The central figure in this great wave of disciplinary action was Peter Kerrigan, six feet of tough Scots-Irish, uncontaminated by the kindly emotion of bourgeois decadence. That man lives the Party. He serves it with a singleness of mind that is frightening.

Yet I believe, even if he does not, that what satisfies him most is the feeling of power which his position gives him. He deals with recalcitrant Party members with brutality and unrelenting determination.

Throughout the country Purge Committees which were set up in all branches and trade union fractions, modelled themselves faithfully on the tactics of Peter Kerrigan. He was, I am sure, proud of them.

While they dealt with the weaker-willed, the back-sliders among the rank and file of the Party, he dealt with the high-level deviationists: trade union officers, trades council members, branch secretaries, prospective parliamentary candidates, fellow-travellers inside the Labour Party. I could not say how many he drove out of the Party or how many Labour Party officials at the moment can thank Peter Kerrigan for their Simon-pure Socialism. Maybe they should feel grateful to him, but it could not have been enjoyable while it lasted.

Of course this wave of witch-hunting and disciplinary courts presented a great opportunity to Party members who were fighting each other for office inside the Party of the unions. I remember one case particularly vividly.

Two Party members in one union were jockeying each other for a seat on the Executive. One of them got in his blow first with the Disciplinary Committee, accusing the other of dereliction of Party duties, of defection from the Party line, of

fractionizing to secure office, of placing personal ambition before Party loyalty.

How far the Party recognized this charge for what it was and how far it accepted it as fitting within its own scheme I don't know. Suffice it that the accused was told one day that a few high-ranking Party members in his union wished to discuss a serious matter with him. He had no idea, I think, what it was about and willingly suggested that the meeting should take place in his own home.

Kerrigan accepted the offer. We met in the living-room of the comrade's furnished flat, and I think he must have realized what we were about when he saw us enter. There were six of us on the Disciplinary Committee, chosen from national officers of the union. But I think it was the entrance of Kerrigan which told the comrade that he was facing a disciplinary court.

We grouped ourselves on chairs and hassocks about his living-room. Kerrigan sat in the centre, his arms folded on the table below his open-necked shirt, a big man, a massive man with closely-cropped hair. No smile on his face, his eyes looking down at the papers before him.

The accused was told: 'This is a Disciplinary Committee, comrade. Certain charges have been laid against you.'

Maybe he was surprised, maybe not. He just looked at us and took his stand by the radio in the corner. He stood there for the whole two hours of the meeting chain-smoking. His wife, who was pregnant, stood in the doorway with an expression of blank and uncomprehending astonishment on her face. She was a Party member too, but to her credit she did not desert her husband but kept looking at him with helpless sympathy.

In his clipped emotionless voice Kerrigan read out a fourteen-page document listing the man's crimes. They were not charges at all as the man in the street would understand them, but wild accusations and abuse: 'Unreliable, opportunist, deviationist, provocateur, bourgeois thinking, fractionizing...'

The charges came as news to most of us on the committee, I think, but it was obvious that two of the committee members had been well briefed by the man's enemies, for when Kerri-

gan had read through the charge sheet they added a few of their own.

I said very little on that occasion. In fact, I knew very little about the man and did not know whether the charges were true or not. I was given no opportunity of hearing the other side, for he was not asked to defend himself and would not have been allowed to had he tried. I knew that the Party was determined to purge itself of this man, otherwise it would not have drawn up that fourteen-page indictment of abuse and malice.

For two hours the flood of invective went on, the words dropping in Kerrigan's quiet tones. And when he had spoken each of us had to say our piece, ask our questions. Kerrigan went from one to another of us, nodding his head. We all expressed the same thought, I suppose, the same bitter anger at a comrade's betrayal. Although I knew Kerrigan was determined on expulsion, I suggested that perhaps a probationary period...?

Kerrigan cut me short by nodding his head at the next man on the committee. When we had all spoken Kerrigan looked at the accused. 'Well?'

He straightened himself by the door and started to speak. Apologies. Excuses. An attempt at self-defence.

Kerrigan stood up behind the table, his face red. He banged his fist. 'Enough of that! You're not in a court of law. This is a meeting of Party officers. Don't try to defend yourself as if you had a legal right to; you can't get away with that bloody nonsense here!'

Then somebody — I don't remember who — said they would like some tea, and the wretched man's wife went away and made it. We drank it as if we had a right to it.

Kerrigan sat silently, put down his cup, wiped his mouth with a handkerchief, and said quietly, 'I've made *my* decision. You know what I'm going to do? Expel you!'

I looked at the accused. His face was white. He knew what expulsion would mean. His union office would go, the Party would turn against him and he would be lucky if he held his job.

To our astonishment he began to cry.

I think it was the strain rather than Kerrigan's decision that

brought on the tears, but there he stood with them rolling down his cheeks as if he were not aware of them.

His wife cried out to him from the doorway. 'Time will prove you right!'

I don't know what she meant by this. Kerrigan stood up again and shouted, as much to her as to her crying husband. 'None of that sob-stuff! If I had my way I'd show you both what should be done to saboteurs!'

I made another appeal for a probationary period. I could see that the Committee wasn't with Kerrigan all the way on this. 'Give the comrade a chance,' I suggested. 'He's done fine work for the Party in the past, and he's helped to build up the Firemen's union ...'

'Our job is to build the Party, not the unions,' Kerrigan cut in stubbornly. 'My mind's made up. Expulsion. What's the Committee's opinion?'

I think he was a little surprised when the Committee reached a majority decision for a probationary period. But it made no difference to the poor chap in the long run. As far as the Party was concerned he was finished.

For a month he was harried and spied upon. Communists in his union office submitted weekly reports on his actions to the Party, whom he spoke to, where he went, what he said in unguarded moments, what his wife was doing. All other Party members were informed that he had been before a disciplinary committee on charges of deviationism and betrayal, and the men who coveted his job sharpened their knives. He knew what was happening, he had seen it happening to others. His life must have been hell during that month, and before his probationary period was over he threw up his union job and ran out on us. He never submitted a formal resignation from the Party, but he never saw us again. I never knew what happened to him, except that I learned the Party drove him from pillar to post.

Some weeks after the man ran I met Kerrigan again. 'Remember that meeting,' he said. 'I was right, wasn't I? The man was no good, he hadn't the guts to take punishment. We should have expelled him there and then.'

That was the first time I saw a man cry before a Party disciplinary committee, but it was not the last. Their tears, of course, were an emotional reaction to the strain placed on them, a product of the confusion within their own hearts. Once I asked one of them, more in curiosity than sympathy, 'Why did you cry?'

I put this question after I had left the Party myself, and he answered me without animosity: 'I thought it was a terrible thing to be expelled.'

'Do you think so now?'

'No, it doesn't matter now. But while I was a Party member it seemed as if the whole world was packing up on me. I felt I was betraying myself. I thought those bastards on the disciplinary committee were so right.'

The tears of an accused Party member meant nothing to the Party. 'Don't let all that sentiment fool you, Bob,' an Executive member once told me. 'That's all you can expect from guilty men, trying to win over our sympathy.'

No, there is no sympathy for the transgressor within the Party. As far as it is concerned every Communist is in the front line of the war against capitalism. The waverers can feel thankful that their defection and weaknesses are not punished by a firing squad. The odd thing is that every comrade too believes that he is in the front line, and if the Party turns against him he feels that he has deserted in the face of the enemy.

I have had my own experiences as a drill-sergeant, instilling discipline or 'self-discipline' into the doubters and the waverers.

The years just following the war were critical ones for the personally ambitious within the Party. Leading members were spying on each other, each watching for a false move. The intellectuals were on the way out, it was becoming the day of the cold-blooded, the mass-agitators of the Kerrigan stamp, the commissars from the days of the Spanish Civil War. They weren't afraid of blood.

All leading Party members like myself once received a 'personal letter' from Party Headquarters. It told us of the great responsibilities which were ours, the need for increased

vigilance (increased spying and informing), for increased firmness of purpose (expulsions of the weak), for an iron loyalty to the Party line (to hell with personal feelings, yours or the other man's).

That letter ended on a flourish of trumpets. 'Glory to the Communist Party! Glory to International Communism! Glory to our Leader Stalin!'

Glory be!

But the letter was more than an invigorator. It was a subtle warning that the slightest weakness would now be regarded as betrayal and would be answered by the most severe disciplinary action.

The Party had reason to feel in need of such severity. Events were moving so rapidly on the continent as one country after another went over to Communist rule that the Party was naturally alarmed by the bewilderment and confusion in its own ranks. The *Daily Worker* wasn't large enough to answer all the questions which comrades were privately asking themselves.

Two-day 'explanation schools' were set up in District offices to brief leading Party members in the unions on the changing state of Europe. Ostensibly they were discussion groups, in fact there was about as much discussion as there is between a new recruit and a Regimental Sergeant-major when the problem of keeping step comes up.

I conducted several such classes for union leaders in East London. I recall one particular comrade, a union president receiving a salary of £800 a year (thanks to the Party who made him president) who was sufficiently perturbed by things to get to his feet and speak his mind.

I knew what he was thinking. He was afraid that any defence on his part of the Communist rape of Eastern Europe would not be stomached by the rank and file of his union. He argued that the Party should work for continued and peaceful friendship between Russia and the Western Powers. He wanted a greater measure of compromise on the part of Stalin. He was feeling so badly about this that he referred to Our Beloved Leader as 'Stalin' and not 'Comrade Stalin.'

My reply was straight from stock. It could have been Ker-

rigan himself speaking. Where, I asked him, did he get the audacity to criticize Comrade Stalin's wisdom and profound understanding of Marxism? Thanks to the Communist Party he held a powerful job in his union, and received a salary far larger than the average worker in this country. His criticism of Comrade Stalin was defeatism and opportunism.

'I will leave it to the comrades present to decide whether you are fit to hold the union job you do.'

That was all, but the crack of the whip was quite audible. He knew what was at stake, so he held his tongue. He had only to look about the meeting there to see at least two men who would jump at his union job once the Party abandoned him.

I could, of course, have forgotten his remarks. But someone else would have passed them on to Central Office, and then I would have had to answer for my failure to report this serious breach of Party discipline. So I submitted my report.

He came before a disciplinary committee, but he was lucky. He was merely cautioned.

Some comrades brought thus before the committee would make vain attempts to justify their mistakes, or ask for the name of the Party member who accused them. Their demands were never answered.

'You did say it, comrade, didn't you? You did say it? You did say it! It doesn't matter who told us, *you did say it!*'

It is easy enough to understand why a trade unionist with a job to lose answers to the disciplinary whip. It is not so easy to understand why other men, who have no such position to lose, break before a disciplinary committee and admit to 'crimes' which do not exist.

I have thought a lot about this psychological puzzle and can come to this conclusion only: a Communist hands himself over to the Party when he joins. He abandons all other spiritual supports, all other faiths. He lets the Party take responsibility for his conscience and his actions. He accepts the Party as a guide, as a Father Confessor. It does his thinking and his feeling for him. It promises him the Revolution in return for his blind loyalty. If it turns against him in anger or

disgust he has nothing, and must be like the young child who incurs its mother's anger. He is alone.

He thinks himself the luckiest man on earth if the Party forgives him and gives him a chance of working his passage back. In fact, the luckiest ones are those who are expelled and are thrown upon the necessity of thinking for themselves again. I have never met an expelled Communist who does not believe that the most fortunate day of his life was the day he appeared before a Party disciplinary committee and was summarily expelled.

The passage he has to work back is not to the insanity of Party membership, but the sanity of common sense, of mental and spiritual independence.

To the outsider, perhaps, the Communist Party may appear to be a tightly-knit, well-drilled body, every man in step. In fact it is continually in danger of the odd comrade here and there putting out his left foot when Central Office demands the right.

A little logical thought makes this obvious. Trained not to think for himself, trained to accept the Party line, trained to follow the lead of Big Brother, the comrade is vulnerable when left on his own for a moment and under the necessity of acting on his own initiative. When a Party member is forced to act on his own initiative he is invariably wrong. Consequently disciplinary committees are never short of material.

Rarely, however, does the public see the Party out of step. Only twice have I witnessed a public conflict in the Party. This was at two consecutive Party Congresses. In each case delegates from a local branch put forward a resolution expressing disagreement with and mild criticism of the Party's activity during the previous year.

At any other political party's conference such criticism might have been answered from the floor, discussed soberly, gone on record or been put to the vote. But in this case the reaction of the Communist Party Congress was a small war in itself.

For some minutes other delegates on the floor watched to see which way the cat was going to jump. Then Pollitt, as General Secretary, launched into a violent speech, merci-

lessly attacking the resolution and its proposers as deviationist, provocationist, opportunist, Trotskyist, any term found in the Party abuse book. You would have thought that the little borough resolution was going to wreck the Party.

Having been given their lead from the Executive other delegates leaped to their feet and excelled each other in attacking the harmless resolution. They were well disciplined. Nobody attempted to answer the criticism raised in the resolution, but all abused the comrades who had moved it. *They* were only too happy to crawl out of the conference hall with their resolution unanswered.

Probably the term 'discipline', which I have used again and again, is the wrong word. But I do not know of another. Here in the West we understand discipline to be a conscious emotion, accepted by the individual and applied by him in full understanding of its value and necessity. We are disciplined to use the pavements because we understand the risks of walking in the middle of the road.

With the Communist discipline is something far less conscious withal the Party's talk of 'self-discipline'. It is more of a reflex action. It is the beginning of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the basis of absolute obedience and absolute, unquestioning loyalty. After eighteen years' experience of this discipline I think I can understand how it is that Party leaders on trial in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia behave like puppets in the dock. They have become creatures of Communist discipline, accepting the Party's absolute authority, so that even when the Party places them on trial for their lives they still obey the commands of that discipline.

I know this because even in a mild way I have been subject to it. I have had to answer to Party accusations that I have been derelict in my duties, and even while something inside me told me that the accusations were farcical I accepted the Party's rebuke. I *believed* in the Party. I trusted it. I could not believe it could be wrong. If it said I did these things then it was right, whatever I felt. Whatever I felt was the last flickering of a bourgeois attitude.

It is the remarkable effectiveness of this discipline that

makes the ordinary comrade perform the most fantastic of duties. His greatest fear is letting the Party down.

In Hackney each comrade had to agree to take so much Party literature a week. My particular allotment amounted to three shillings, in addition to which I was given a great deal more literature to sell among my contacts.

It was not left to me, or to anyone else, to secure the literature oneself. Once a week a member of the Literature Secretary's staff called at Nisbet House, consulted his little book of reference, and handed over to me the amount of literature listed there.

Did I distribute all this paper as I was supposed to? Did I sell it? Sometimes. But I suppose I must have burnt something like 10,000 leaflets in my time. Some I burnt because I knew I wouldn't be able to sell them, some because I was in downright disagreement with what they said. I did not voice my disagreement, however: I merely shared it with my boiler fire.

I am convinced that hundreds of comrades did and still do the same thing.

Now it might be argued that Party discipline is not so effective if Communists prefer burning Party pamphlets to selling them. But the comrade's first obligation is to hand over to the Party the money for all the literature given him. If he does that he feels he has done his duty. If he does that he is well-disciplined.

Party discipline also obliges each comrade to buy so many tickets for each new Unity Theatre show. He is not asked how many he would like. He is told how many he will take. The figure of how many he should take is decided after a consideration of the number in his family and the number he should be able to sell among friends.

If a Party leader such as Pollitt, Gallacher, Jackson, or Palme Dutt writes a book, borough secretaries are under obligation to order large numbers of them for distribution among Party members, for purchase, and for sale. I once bought ten copies of Willie Gallacher's book. I was able to sell two of them, but I turned in the purchase price of ten.

Of course, if any Party member is fool enough to voice a

mild protest about this forcible sale of literature, books and theatre tickets, there is a ready answer for him.

'What are you complaining about? You know what Lenin said? Propaganda is the greatest weapon.'

Lenin always said something. I can afford to smile now at the East End busman who once looked me straight in the eye without a flicker of a smile and said, 'Blimey, Bob, did Lenin have an answer for *everything*?

Thus, dutiful servants of Party discipline, we choked ourselves and our bookshelves with Party literature. My heart went out to a comrade who once complained at a branch meeting that he had been unable to get rid of the pamphlets delivered at his door because his wife had been sick.

'Perhaps she's sick of you, comrade,' he was told. 'She'd think more of you if you had more self-discipline. You talk about your wife being sick. Look what Lenin had to do. He had to leave his wife, and you talk about your wife being sick!'

That comrade's sale of Party literature was the highest for months after that crack of the whip, but I bet his kitchen boiler helped.

The Party's insatiable hunger for money means that the disciplinary whip must always be in the hands of its officers. At branch meetings there are frequent snap showings of Party cards. Any comrade whose subscriptions are more than a fortnight behind is held up to general humiliation.

'There you are, comrades. Here's the man who has been letting the Party down. You know him now, don't forget him. No disciplinary action will be taken against him this time, but he can take it as a warning. The Party of Lenin and Stalin has no room for a comrade who cannot pay his dues.'

Since the Party considers finance of the highest political importance it also regards defaulting in this sphere as among the gravest of crimes. Every Party member is issued with a series of collection sheets for the *Daily Worker* Fighting Fund, for the Peace Campaign, for this or that Anglo-Iron-Curtain Friendship Society, and he is expected to fill them up with donations from sympathizers or non-Communists.

He is told how much he is expected to collect and it is rarely that he does not produce the money. Whether it genuinely

comes from sympathizers, whether the names he writes on the collection sheets are real, is another matter. He is self-disciplined and he turns in the money.

If he doesn't then the Party Borough Treasurer will have a little talk with him and he is a lucky comrade if he gets off with just a series of admonitory quotations from Lenin.

There is little opportunity for relaxing in the Party. Each comrade is watched by other comrades, and in his turn he watches them. If he suspects some slight negligence, a weakening of effort, he is under obligation and under disciplinary compulsion to report such to the Borough Secretariat. He does not regard this as informing. It is self-discipline.

If, for example, a comrade fails to attend the meetings of his factory group twice running, then the leader of that group will inform the Borough Secretary. He in his turn sends for the defaulter. If the man's excuses are unsatisfactory he will be handed over to a disciplinary committee within the factory group.

This can exact severe punishment. Through a Party member who is a shop steward or a foreman, the group can get the offender transferred to another department where the work is less congenial, where there is less opportunity for overtime. It can even ease him out of work altogether if the group considers his crime serious enough.

If the Party decides that a member would be of more value in another job, in another factory, he is bluntly told to change. I've known comrades give up positions worth £15 a week and take another at £10 just because the Party wanted them in a factory where Party membership was weak.

The self-disciplined comrade accepts this arbitrary disposal of his body and income either because he is a zealot or because he knows that if he disobeys the Party will see to it that he loses his job altogether.

And if he complains, 'How do I explain this loss of income to my wife?' he gets a very short answer from the Borough Secretary.

'Who do you think you are, comrade, to want a job at £15 a week? Don't you know Harry Pollitt only gets £8?'

Most women, even Communists' wives, like to do their

shopping where they wish. But a Communist's wife gets little opportunity if her husband is well disciplined.

And there is always someone to see where your wife does her shopping. This is how the conversation went with me once:

'I saw your wife going into X's shop the other day, Bob. Why?'

'To buy something, probably.'

'This isn't a funny matter, Comrade Darke. Doesn't she know that man is a Tory? Why doesn't she shop at the Co-op?'

'She probably didn't want to.'

'It's not a question of what she wants. She's *your wife*; get her to join the Co-op. We should build up Party strength in the Co-op guilds, you know that. Let's not see it happening again.'

My self-discipline was good. I accepted the whip. I told Ann. But I wouldn't like to repeat what she said. She didn't have my self-discipline.

Again and again I meekly obeyed Party instructions to buy tickets to this or that Soviet film show, not because I wished to see the film or would have thought it enjoyable, but because I knew that my absence would be marked and become the subject of punitive action.

When these films were shown, generally under the auspices of the British-Soviet Friendship Society, every Party member was expected to buy a ticket for himself, another for his wife, a third for a friend. A comrade appointed by the Borough Secretary would stand at the door of the hall and check the attendance.

Any absentee would be summoned before the Borough Secretary within seventy-two hours.

'Why weren't you at the film show, comrade? You knew it was being held. Where were you? I suppose you went to the dogs instead, or some other form of capitalist entertainment? The Party expects every comrade to support progressive movements, and that doesn't include the dogs.'

After a while you got into the habit of buying these tickets, digging deeper and deeper into your pocket to keep that flow of Party finance at high tide. Only non-Communist wives of

Party members could see the whole thing in its true ridiculous, idiotic light.

Perhaps it is not always easy for the Party member to obey the command that he should be arrested as part of a propaganda stunt. Most well-disciplined, enthusiastic Communists get arrested at some time or another. I'm lucky; I always escaped it. But the arrests are not accidents; they are part of the Party's policy, they fit neatly into its campaign, and they require absolute obedience on the part of the martyrs, a great deal of 'self-discipline'.

When the call-up of Z Reserve men began the London District Committee decided that a protest should be made against it and that that protest should be part of the general Peace Campaign.

It was decided that six men should chain themselves to the railings in Whitehall. The District Committee held a meeting to discuss the proposal and to consider six likely candidates.

They finally decided on six comrades who were ex-servicemen. These were ordered to report to District Headquarters for a briefing on a special detail. They had no idea what it was all about until they arrived and none of them objected when they were told.

They were instructed to wear their campaign medals, pick up their chains and set out for Whitehall at the given time. The whole scheme was carried out perfectly. The men were arrested, they shouted their slogans, there was a scuffle with the police and a passing *Daily Worker* cameraman was lucky enough to get a picture. The full story was published in the *Worker*, and the Editor did not consider it necessary to point out that all the men were Communists and that the campaign had been worked out in detail in a Communist office. No, it was merely 'Six ex-servicemen demand end of call-up.'

The Party members who carry out details like this are always hand-picked and their obedience to Party discipline must be infallible. The Party cannot afford the risk that one man may get cold feet at the crucial moment.

Generally their training is so good that the whole thing goes through without a hitch. The demonstrator who had his face

ground into the dirt of London Airport when he shouted, 'Ridgway, go home!' got his picture in all the papers. The Party got wide publicity for its anti-American campaign, and good discipline paid dividends.

Just as it pays dividends when 'a group of working-class women' (see *Daily Worker*) throw leaflets in the path of a City procession. It pays dividends when the childless Communist carries someone else's baby in a squatters' demonstration. It pays dividends when an agitator in Trafalgar Square is clubbed and dragged off by the police with his face streaming with blood.

If the victim is thinking of anything at that moment it is of the gratitude the Party will feel for his self-discipline.

The comrades who act as the front-line men in Party stunts like this can get nothing more out of it than their own sense of elation and martyrdom. Many of them lose their jobs as a result. A few lucky ones may find a Party shop steward or foreman in their factory who will cover up for them.

But for the rest, if they lose their jobs, 'So what, comrade?' they are told. 'Don't you know that you'll always get the sack under capitalism for being a Communist?'

If his self-discipline is of a high enough order the Communist will accept the sack as something akin to the Order of Lenin.

Self-discipline pays!

CHAPTER SIX

If your wife objects, Comrade, leave her.

DURING all my years as a member of the Party I frequently had the uneasy feeling that my personal life was not all that was expected of a Communist.

And if I was not happy about it neither was the Party. On and off my home and my family came under severe criticism from other Party members. It was only toward the end that I began to question my docile acceptance of their criticism.

The way I was under obligation to live, the way a true Communist is expected to live within the four walls of his home, never appealed to me. I could never explain why, except that perhaps it seemed to me to be a negation of the Party's preaching. But when I resigned the Party remembered its failure to regiment my wife, my children, and my home, and many comrades said: 'Bob Darke was never a true Communist anyway'.

He was never a true Communist. He never made his wife join the Party. He never recruited his daughters into the Young Communist League. He never made his father into a Communist. Or his sister.

Let it be realized that I understood the Party's attitude. I was a Party leader in the East End. The fact that my wife was never a Communist, never stood beside me on a platform, could never be quoted in the *Worker* or in my electioneering propaganda, was a serious disadvantage.

But I was not unique. There are many Communists who suffer their greatest defeats at their own hearthsides, and have the same battle of loyalties that I experienced.

Where a Party member's private life, such as it is, does not fit the Party's pre-ordained pattern, he lives out his personal affairs in the dark. I've known a comrade to leave his wife and yet keep the fact secret from the rest of us for months.

Not that the Party is indifferent to the personal lives of its members. It is astute enough to realize that its greatest weak-

ness lies not in the power of counter-propaganda, but in the spirit and conscience of the Party member himself. It knows that he can be seduced more easily by his wife's tears than by capitalist temptation.

Consequently the Party is always smelling out the evil, always poking, prying, probing into the Party member's private life, directing it where possible, destroying it where necessary.

And whenever the naive comrade, disturbed by his wife's tears and complaints, brings his problem to his Borough Secretariat the answer he gets is always the same. 'Recruit her into the Party. If she won't join, leave her.'

The Party will take a maternal interest in even the dress of those comrades it regards as prestige winners. When I first stood for the local council elections I had my photograph taken for the propaganda sheets and posters. I took a print along to the Borough Secretary for his approval. I have the average East Ender's liking for colour in my clothes and the tie I had been wearing for this photograph was no exception to that taste. The Secretary looked at it and looked at me and then roundly abused me for being photographed in a 'bourgeois tie'.

There seemed no point in telling him what he should know, that any working-class lad from Hackney puts on a coloured tie when he takes his Sunday morning walk down the Lane. I couldn't see that I was betraying my class by conforming to it.

'Communists standing for election,' I was bluntly told, 'must have no bourgeois contamination. Fancy a comrade like you standing as a representative of our Party *wearing a spotted tie*. Get some more pictures taken this afternoon, this time in a dark tie.'

'I can't go to-day. I'm working.'

'Take the day off then. You've got to make sacrifices for the Party.'

The damnable feature of this incident was that although I objected, my objection came more from irritation than indignation. I was even half-way toward being convinced that the Borough Secretary was right. Even if I had thought

he was totally wrong I would still have done the same thing — gone out and changed the tie.

Not only was my wardrobe under constant surveillance, but my bookshelves too. One day the Literature Secretary of the Hackney Branch called in on business. We talked for a while about this, and then suddenly he said: 'Comrade Darke, have you bought a copy of Harry Pollitt's book, *Serving My Time?*'

'Yes. It's in the flat, somewhere.'

'Where is it then? Why can't it be seen? Are you ashamed to show it?' He stood up and peered suspiciously at the books. 'Show it to me.'

It would be useless to remember how many times I was mildly or roughly reprimanded for not hanging the pictures of Marxist heroes on my wall. Most comrades were pretty dutiful about this. Marx, Lenin and Stalin looked down on them uncompromisingly while they ate, slept, and cleaned their teeth. All the moral support my walls gave me was the one portrait I have mentioned of Tito. And I took that down eventually.

My reply to the Party's suggestion that I should put Karl Marx up there above my fireplace went something like this. 'It's Ann's home as well as mine, and she doesn't want the picture.'

I could see that that was not considered a very good reason.

During the 1950 General Election I was told to hang a Party banner outside my windows, overlooking the main road. The rules of the council flats naturally forbid anything like this and I said so. I also said that my wife was not keen on the idea.

The Borough Secretary looked at me for a few seconds before he said: 'Now, Comrade Darke, we didn't expect that sort of nonsense from you. You're a leader of the Party, aren't you? If your wife doesn't like it, aren't you the boss in your own home? And as for the council's by-laws it's your duty to defy them when they are reactionary.'

Still I did not hang out the banner. Had it not been for my position in the Borough and in the Party, had I been an ordinary rank and file member I might probably have faced a disciplinary committee.

The Party was equally indifferent to whatever economic struggle I might have been facing in my personal life. It could be hypercritical of a member who was, to the Party's mind, earning too much money. It was indifferent to his struggles if poor. The Party's cynical attitude in this respect was particularly evident after my resignation. I had incurred, on the Party's behalf, debts I had gradually piled up in my Party duties. The Party made no effort to honour them. They were paid out of my own pocket, time and time again.

That, perhaps, is understandable. Less understandable is the cost to me of one particular celebration of Harry Pollitt's birthday. The Party decided that dear old Harry should receive some sort of presentation, and that I, as a well-known East End Communist, should make the presentation.

It was proposed that there should be a gathering of selected Party members one Sunday evening, at Lime Grove Baths, Shepherds Bush, and that the presentation should be the culmination of all the junketing. It was put to me more as an order than as a request, but I turned it down. I told the organizing committee the truth: I could not afford to take time off from the late shift.

'Don't worry, Comrade,' I was assured, 'the local branch will make up your loss of wages. You'll lose nothing.'

So I went. I lost a day's wages at time and a half, and I walked half-way home to Hackney in thick fog. I didn't hurry the Party but a few weeks later I tactfully suggested that some recompense for my loss of salary would be appreciated.

'What do you think I am,' said the secretary of the Hackney Party, 'Father Christmas?'

My personal feelings about this dishonesty are not unimportant, but I tell the story to illustrate the Party's indifference toward the sacrifices of its members, its unspoken acceptance of a stupid loyalty.

I took it of course, however badly I felt about it. If my conscience became a nuisance, I told it that I had given up a day's wages for the cause.

It was about this time, I remember, that Party work was beginning to tell on me physically, as it does on all comrades

who work their bodies like mules. I had sleepless night after night. I rarely smiled at home, I took little or no interest in domestic affairs and plainly showed my boredom. I sat motionless by my own fireside and found nothing to say either to my wife or my children. Marx says that environment can change human nature, and if he didn't he's certainly got credit for saying it. I do know that membership of the Party can change a man's nature.

All my energies, my enthusiasm, my drive were absorbed by Party tactics, Party scheming. My workmates, my friends, those I had left anyway, told me frequently that I was changing, that I looked ill. And I felt ill, but it was not the sort of illness you could tell a doctor about or expect him to diagnose.

Yet I was not without some defensive respect for my family, and I exercised it when the Party made an adroit and cynical attempt to recruit both Ann and my father.

Both the Borough Secretariat of Hackney and the London District Committee could never understand why Ann was not a Party member. They knew that many ordinary comrades found it difficult to recruit their wives, but few Party leaders were married to non-Communist women. It was a paradox to them. It was more, it was a challenge.

One day, during an intense new membership drive, Ann came to me and silently showed me an envelope she had received. Inside was a Party card, made out in her name and stamped with two months' subscriptions. Together with it was a registration slip on which new members were supposed to list particulars of their age, place of work, union, position in the union and so on.

All this had been filled in for Ann, by somebody at Party Headquarters.

Ann said nothing to me, she just left the card in my hand.

Later in the day my father sent a similar envelope round to me. There was another Party card in it, made out in his name.

I took them both round to the Secretariat, but they got a blow in first.

'Bob, both your wife and your dad are a couple of months behind in their subs. We've stuck the stamps on, but just let us have the money, will you?'

They didn't get the money, and maybe they didn't like the way I was looking for they didn't press the point. Anyway the cards went in the kitchen fire.

I was shaken by this, shaken more, I think, by Ann's unspoken contempt. And it was while I was in this frame of mind that the Party tried another confidence trick. A young member of the local Literature Secretary's staff arrived at my door with 400 leaflets and 400 letters signed with my name. It was the first time I had seen the letters but the Party had a virtual copyright on the use of my name by then. The letter was an appeal to the tenants of the block of flats in which I lived, asking them to join the Party.

'Let every tenant have one of these, will you, Comrade Darke?' said the young follower of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and went on his way cheerfully, confident that he had advanced the revolution by a second or two.

Did I climb the steps of the block and deliver 400 letters signed with my name by someone else?

I did.

I am grateful for one thing, the Party made no frontal attack on my daughters, much as it may have wished to. The girls had enough to put up with as it was, and came home often enough from school and work in tears because of the jeering they had received on my behalf. Ours was never a very happy home, and the credit for the fact that it still hung together goes to my wife. I often looked at those cartoons of happy, virile Communist families which appear by the artist Gabriel in the *Daily Worker*, and I wonder where the devil he gets his inspiration.

There must be many Communist wives like Ann, watching their homes being turned into Party offices, waiting hand and foot on strange men who walk in and out as if they owned the place. Acting as a buffer between father and children.

A Party member is often told that he holds his children in sacred trust for Socialism. It is tacitly understood that their early indoctrination is his responsibility. He is never told how this indoctrination must be conducted either.

Time and time again Party members have come to me,

genuinely worried. 'Bob, how do I start on my kid? I want to tell him something about Russia and Communism, he's old enough now. But how do I go about it?'

Or else it would be, 'Bob, my kid wants to go to Sunday school. I ought to stop him, oughtn't I?'

Or 'My kid's got this idea that he should join the Scouts. What do I do about it?'

As I have said the Party issued no instructions. Every Party member was on his own when it got down to the questions his children ask him. Of course, the intellectuals in the Hackney Branch had their own glib and confident solution.

'Don't drive the kid away, Bob, but if, for example, she comes home from school and says that the King is a good man, then you should say so is Uncle Joe. If she asks who Uncle Joe is, you should tell her that he is a good man who lives in Russia and gives presents to little boys and girls, like Father Christmas.'

Of course, that wouldn't help the Party member who had already started on good Marxist lines by telling his children that there isn't a Father Christmas.

From the Party's point of view I was probably a coward, I ran away from this problem. I left my children to their mother and to their school-teachers. As it turned out they did a better job than I could have done, despite the superior advantage I had with 'dialectical materialism'.

At Christmas every Communist is told to buy his children books from Communist bookshops in Charing Cross Road, or Red Lion Square, or at the annual *Daily Worker* Fair. Every year I spent ten or fifteen shillings this way on books, mostly printed by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow, but only rarely did I give them to my daughters, and they were not much of a success when I did.

Party members were always on dangerous ground when it came to non-Party reading. They could not actively enjoy the literature, classical and modern, that is left to the free choice of the average man. With his bookshelves under open scrutiny from visiting Party members, the Communist is always risking criticism of his deplorable taste in bourgeois authors.

Now and then, however, a Marxist theoretician like T. A. Jackson will write in the *Daily Worker* and give the green light to books by Bunyan, Dickens, Mark Twain, and for a while after such articles Party members will indulge themselves in the official literary taste with the same enjoyment a small child might have when his mother tells him he can help himself to a spoonful of jam from the larder.

As far as the Party was concerned my private life was about as personal and as private as the forecourt of Nisbet House. If Ann bought new curtains I knew they would be carefully studied when next a branch official called. If the rooms were repainted I knew that the amount of money I had spent would be carefully calculated and I would be expected to make a more handsome donation to the British Soviet Friendship Society the next time the hat went round. I would face censure for permitting myself bourgeois luxuries.

If Ann and I went to the local cinema (and God knows we went rarely) a Party member was sure to see me and report me to the branch. If I took a holiday (which I did not) the Party would have worried because I was wasting the Party's time on selfish pleasures.

I was not unique. Every Party member is under the same surveillance, and every Party member becomes, as I became, a remote-controlled robot. I never even permitted myself the relaxation some Party leaders get ... an occasional junketing tour of an Iron Curtain country, and the chance to indulge in good living.

There is a peculiar paradox in all this. Official Marxist lecturers speak smoothly enough of the fact that 'a moral weakness is a political weakness'. If they mean anything at all by moral weakness they mean a failure to accept Party discipline. But Heaven knows how many homes have been broken, how many husbands and wives estranged by the Party's demand for 'moral strength'.

Undoubtedly many Party members take the easier course, they leave their wives, either as a physical act or a spiritual one. If they want physical satisfaction in another woman they find it, and it can be found no doubt, in the Party. Immorality

among the rich is a 'bourgeois vice', among Party member it is probably 'a realistic solution to the problem'.

It was a solution I never considered or chose for myself.

The Party's instruction to the distracted comrade to leave his wife if living with her has become unbearable is not just a taunt. His good sense would be commended if he took the advice. The Party argues that the solution to marriage is that it should consist of two of the same mind and outlook, a Communist outlook. Perhaps where man and wife are equally fanatical Marxists there is such a thing as a happy marriage for Communists. But even then it does not work out. Both J. B. S. Haldane and Charlotte Haldane apparently could not make marriage a success despite their joint allegiance to the Party.

Maybe the Party has an explanation for that, but if so I never heard it voiced.

When I became a Mass Leader of the Party the strain on Ann increased, for a mass leader, responsible for the local campaigns in his industry or district, must turn his home into an office that is open day and night. He is in direct touch with Harry Pollitt, and the big names of Communism walk in and out of his home so often and so fast that there is hardly any point having a doormat. His wife could serve as that quite efficiently.

Certainly my acceptance of the position brought really strained family relationships. Ann grew quickly tired of the fraction meetings that were held in my home almost every night. She and my daughters grew naturally impatient with being moved into the kitchen every time the doorbell rang.

Simple things mattered to Ann. Simple things like a tidy home, cleanliness, and being able to talk to her husband when he came home from work. She had little time for things like that with ten or even fifteen Communists present every evening, hardly saying a word to her, and accepting the tea she made them as if they had just ordered it across a cafe counter.

She cried often enough in the early morning when the flat was quiet again. For a while her tears would upset me, and

then, like a damn fool, I would tell myself that sacrifices had to be made for the Party.

Party membership does something to your sense of values, your sense of family responsibility, twisting them into the ideological struggle, so that after a while you begin to see your wife's perfectly reasonable complaints as mere 'capitalist weaknesses'. Even the emotions which spring naturally in the ordinary man are distrusted by the Communist.

When the strain of the blitz killed my mother I remember standing at her grave, looking across to my brother John on the other side. He was crying without restraint. But I did not cry. I was telling myself that it was selfish to give way to my emotions, that a Marxist was dedicated to the class struggle, to the inevitable revolution. I was a Bolshevik. I was tough. A Bolshevik does not give way to tears. I was ashamed of myself for wanting to cry.

Because of things like this I took even my friendships lightly and could not see the value of them. I ought to have seen that value one night during the blitz, when Ben Jonson Street went up in flames and Paddy the Ping-Pong player looked at me across the hose we were holding.

He looked up towards the sound of the bomber above us. 'Well, Bob, this may be it. Marx ain't around now, is *he*? But outside of the fact that you're a Communist, Bob, it's been grand knowing you. If we all go, we all go together, Marxist and Social-Democratic lackey.'

Now I can see that Paddy's friendship was a tremendous thing. Then I saw him as a 'sympathizer', a man who could be counted on for a donation to the Party if friendship's lever was pressed long enough. I recruited him to the Party.

On another occasion my wife said to me bitterly: 'Other men belong to political parties, but they're not like you. They make something out of their wives and families. Look at you; you're getting older every day and you're never at home with us, you never go out with us. You'll regret it some day. All you think of is the Party, nothing else counts with you, Bob; not your family, not your home, not me.'

At the time I believe I took that as a compliment, thinking it gave a true picture of a self-sacrificing Bolshevik hero.

Party leaders are frequently proud of their 'Bolshevik toughness', and the unhappier their home life the greater the toughness, I imagine.

I married Ann before I became a Party member, and I did not tell her about it until I had made the step. There is probably some significance in this, a ready acceptance of the theory that a good Communist owes a secondary allegiance only to his family.

The first real job the Party gave me was among the unemployed. One of its conditions, more or less, was that I should remain unemployed too; not a very difficult thing to do in the early thirties, but not an easy situation for a wife to put up with.

As Ann became more and more worried with the shortage of money she concluded that I had no intention of finding work, and told me so. She was right of course. The Party had given me a job among the unemployed and, if I was working hard at it, I wasn't getting paid for it.

To have found a job and given up my work with the unemployed movement would have seemed like betrayal to me. So, with no money in my pocket, I turned my back on my wife's complaints.

A sense of moral values was not all I gave up for the Party. I had been a lover of football and boxing. I watched Clapton Orient play as often as I could and frequently visited the East End's boxing arena, Premierland. And in addition Ann and I went regularly to the cinema.

Like any other new Communist I soon found that I could not carry on with these and also fulfil the duties which the Party was piling on my shoulders. So I gave up my pleasures, and after a time I found that I had lost the taste for them. I got into the habit of telling Ann that she could go out alone.

I accepted, without thought, her decision to find work.

Night after night I was out until two or three in the morning, attending meetings, chalking slogans on pavements and walls. Ann would get up at 6.30 a.m. to do her housework before going off to work. If I thought about the injustice of this at all, it was that Communism would bring a new society where such sacrifices would not be necessary.

I got my excitement, the sort of excitement a Communist needs now and then to make the drudgery seem worth while. It came from the great marches of unemployed from the East End to Trafalgar Square. There were inevitable clashes with the police which we more or less provoked.

If our demonstrations were banned by the authorities we would walk on the pavements from the East End. Isolated contingents from each district, under the control of experienced Party members, marched on the Strand. Once there we would form up in the roadway, a piper appearing from somewhere, and we would crash through the police barrier.

We carried banners on stout ash sticks. If necessary the banners could be ripped from the sticks, which would then become sturdy weapons. I remember ordering a couple of dozen of these sticks once, using specifications given me by an experienced Party member.

That was excitement ... to stand in Trafalgar Square with bloody faces about you and sing the 'Red Flag'.

Of course no family can stand this sort of thing for long. It was my father who tried to put his foot down. An honest, self-respecting trade unionist, loyal to the Labour Party and blunt in his manner, he held his tongue long enough. He had virtually taken over my family duties. While I was out with my ash plant, or my piece of chalk, or my bundle of leaflets, he came in to sit with Ann when our baby was ill.

One morning before Ann left for work she said to me, 'Your father wants to see you about the way you're living.'

I went along to him confidently enough, and what he had to say made little difference to me. 'Bob, for God's sake pack in this Communist business! Where is it going to get you? Study Ann a bit, will you, boy? One day you'll come home and find your family's gone.'

There is no Communist text-book to supply the answer to an appeal like that. But the new Party member is so flamingly certain that he is right and everybody else is wrong that I suppose the answer I gave is stock: 'I'm sorry you see it that way, Dad. But what I'm doing is really for Ann and the kid: fight-

ing for a new society, fighting for the only Party which can change things for people like us...'

And so on, and so on.

From an ordinary standpoint there is no moral justification for a Communist's desertion of his family obligations, but it must be realized that he does not see it as desertion. The Party demands sacrifices from him, demands discipline, and in return offers him the exciting feeling of dedication. The greater the hardship the greater the sense of dedication. If the sacrifices his family have to make for him touch his consciousness, they rarely increase his hatred of people who are not called upon to make sacrifices.

Not only must a Party member give up his family; he must give up friendship. Party duties make friendship almost impossible anyway. He must be ready and willing to denounce the man who has given him friendship and destroy him if the Party decides. I can speak with feeling about this, for I can never hear a Communist talking about comradeship and loyalty without thinking of Hugh Lister.

I met him when I was working for Lewis Bergers. When I joined this paint factory it was a non-union house, and largely as a result of the organizing work I put in there the Party fraction inside was able to build up union membership to fifty per cent within a few weeks. For this work I received a T U C diploma and the Tolpuddle Medal, awards which I deeply appreciated.

The Party appreciated them too and shamelessly exploited them. 'Communist wins trade union honour' made good copy for the *Daily Worker*.

A result of this publicity, however, was a letter from the Reverend Hugh Lister, leader of a mission in the East End. It was a friendly letter, inviting me to have a chat or a cup of tea with him. I put the letter before the Party (I would have been a fool not to). We had heard of him, of course, and his work among the people. 'Go and see him, comrade,' I was told. 'See what he's up to.'

I went to see him, and we drank more tea than was good for either of us and we talked about the East End. I was surprised by his knowledge and understanding and by his grasp of trade

union problems. At last I said to him, a little vaingloriously probably, 'I suppose you know I'm a Communist. How do you feel about that?'

He smiled at me tolerantly, a big man sitting behind the teapot in his priest's uniform. 'Bob, I know you're a Communist all right. But in our borough there's far too much social injustice, far too many sweat-shops. What about you and I cleaning it up a bit?'

Our borough, I thought: This is a little outside his province. What could a parson know about social injustice or sweat-shops? What could he teach a Communist about fighting them?

I almost laughed at him. 'Have you ever heard of a Communist and a priest working together?'

'I've read my Marx, Bob. But how about it? Shall we get started?' And then he told me that he was an honorary trade union member. I learnt a lot more about him after that, not only of his kindness and compassion, his work against Fascism and racial prejudice, but his solid work for trade unionism.

I did not give him an answer then. I put his offer before the Party and left it to the vote. For a week or so I lost touch with him, and then I was thrown out of work again. For six weeks I was 'on the stones', and it was not till toward the end that I got to know that Hugh Lister had been calling at my home once a week to bring a parcel of food and a toy for my family.

The Party told me: 'Watch him, comrade. Use him, but don't let him get the leadership of the workers in the borough. That's *our* role.'

That was the beginning of a friendship which I betrayed and which he honoured. I asked him first if he would speak on a trade union platform, and any earlier doubts I may have had about him were dispelled when his fire and sincerity had a tremendous effect on his audience.

Between us we worked out a campaign for organizing some of the non-union factories in the borough. I know why he was doing it. He believed it was his Christian duty to raise the standard of work and living for the people of his parish. And he probably knew why I was doing it too: to raise the membership and influence of the Communist Party.

He was a superb tactician. He could have sat in his mission mouthing comfortable platitudes, but he preferred to come out on the kerb and fight for what he believed.

We went from factory to factory. We worked until the early hours of every morning. One night it would be at his mission, another night at my home. We prepared propaganda sheets, we briefed speakers, we organized help for strikers and for the unemployed. We had two factories on strike at one time, and the way he worked among the strikers was enough to make the oldest union member envious.

Of course he had enemies, a good man always has, and they said he was a Red. I put that to him one day, and he just smiled at me in his gentle, tolerant way. 'Well, Bob, it's probably being said that I'm converting you to the Church, and you know how absurd an allegation that is.'

Whenever I raised Lister's name at Party meetings the reaction was the same. He was a 'sentimental idealist', he was only 'playing with the workers' struggle'; at the first sign of trouble he would back out.

They mistook my efforts to praise him as doubts about his influence. 'Carry on, Comrade Darke. Don't worry about him. We'll watch him and we'll take care of him if it becomes necessary.'

Our joint campaign was a tremendous success. We organized five factories, we instituted collective bargaining machinery where it had never existed before. We secured work and wage conditions which had been strongly opposed by the employers in the beginning. Lister's jubilation over such successes was completely without self-satisfaction.

What is the point of this story? That it is possible for Communism and Christianity to work together?

No. The point comes in the sequel. In my own attitude.

I went along to a Party branch meeting one day. I announced that the Lister-Darke campaign had recruited 3,000 new trade unionists. I reported that there was a move to make Lister honorary chairman of a union branch, and I think I wanted the Party to support him.

'How many Communist recruits did *he* get?' I was asked. 'How many *Daily Workers* did *he* sell?'

And then: 'Don't get the wrong idea, comrade. Encourage Lister to boost up union membership if you like, but don't expect us to lift him into union office.'

The Party decided to capture the chairmanship itself and agreed to oppose Lister with a man whose influence they believed to be just as strong. Myself.

I accepted the nomination (I had no choice, it was a Party order) with some misgivings. But Lister seemed so genuinely pleased that I soon lost my feeling of shame. Of course I did not defeat him; he won the position without much difficulty.

That was the signal for the Party to go into action. At that moment my health broke down. The union's doctor advised me to give up all activity and rest. Rest to an East Ender in those days meant financial hardship, and I didn't escape it. I lay on my back ill while the Party's attack on Lister as a 'careerist' and 'capitalist adventurer', as a 'bourgeois dilettante' and 'middle-class reformist', got into full swing.

He knew what my Party was doing, but it did not alter his feelings for me. While I lay ill he called regularly with parcels of food, with financial help, with toys. He offered to send Ann and our daughter to his mother's home in Cheshire for a holiday, and he was genuinely disappointed when she refused.

Eventually he was stung by the Party's vicious whispering campaign, by its high-pressure tactics at union meetings, and he began to strike back. He began to attack the Party on the platform. Of course that made it easy for the Party to bring its attack into the open. They twisted his attacks on the Party into 'attacks on the working class', they held up his words to prove that he was 'anti-Semitic' and 'Fascist'.

They accused him of being in truck with the employers. They declared he was ready to sell out the union. They kept up the sustained attack for so long that the poison began to work.

What was I doing? I was keeping my mouth shut because I was under Party discipline. I sat through meeting after meeting while comrades abused Hugh Lister, and I said nothing in his defence.

He was my friend. He had been a friend to my family. But I was tough. I was a Bolshevik. Private emotions came second

to Party loyalty in the revolutionary struggle. Or maybe I was a moral coward; it seems a saner explanation.

Before the climax the Party's slander campaign became more vicious.

He's meeting the bosses without the union's permission . . . He's not to be trusted, he's a member of the boss class himself. He'll sell out to them when the pinch comes . . . Look at the way he talks . . . Look at the way he lives . . . You wouldn't say he was one of us, would you?

It was successful of course. The ordinary rank and file unionist, bewildered by a confusion of loyalties, began to stay away from union meetings. Lister's strength weakened, the Party's grew.

He knew what was happening. He wrote to me one day. He did not attack me for what my Party was doing. He merely expressed his anxiety for our friendship and hoped that we would keep it alive whatever happened.

I never replied to his letter.

Yet I'm glad that one of my family was loyal to Hugh Lister. My brother John, staunch trade unionist and indifferent Communist even before he threw up his membership in disgust, became a firm friend of Lister, and the friendship lasted until their deaths.

Cancer took John a few years ago. Lister died as an officer early in the war, fighting the Fascism he had hated and opposed long before anti-Fascism became fashionable among his class. In the meeting room of the 1/149 Transport and General Workers' Union, Hackney Branch, hang two large portraits. One is of the Reverend Hugh Lister, the other is of John Darke.

I go to look at them now and then. It's a penance in a way.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Such a Party, using every avenue of expression, could make an exceptionally valuable parliamentary platform for arousing the great masses of workers to energetic struggle against the capitalist enemy...

WILLIAM GALLACHER, *Revolt on the Clyde.*

No one could have been more pleased with the decision to hold a General Election in 1945 than the British Communist Party. It felt confident that its prestige and that of Russia was high. It believed that the widespread sympathy and admiration for the Soviet Union would be responsible for the return at least of a third of the candidates which the Party proposed to send to the hustings.

The thought of having a Party fraction at Westminster was attractive to all of us. Willie Gallacher had amply demonstrated the tactical and propaganda value of having a voice in the House and, despite its avowed revolutionary nature, the Party had a paradoxical yearning for the political respectability which Westminster would bring. It was also bitterly envious of Continental Parties, particularly the French, who have been able to pack their legislative chambers with Communists. It knew that its failure to put more than one man into Parliament was a matter of contemptuous amusement among other European Communists and merely convinced them that the British Communist Party was ineffectual and weak.

When the National Executive finally published the Party list of candidates it aroused considerable jealousy and bitterness. Many local leaders who had been nursing their own areas for years naturally expected to be chosen, but they were roughly disillusioned. Where some were chosen it was in constituencies where even the Labour candidate had not the ghost of a chance. In those constituencies where the chances seemed good, such as Hackney, the Executive sent down the big guns of the Party — the Harry Pollitts, Bill Rusts, Willie Gallachers, and Phil Piratins.

I'll not deny that I had my own hopes of standing for the

Party in a parliamentary fight, but I was given no chance of dwelling on the ambition. I got my orders early, and they were brief. I was told to act as Parliamentary Agent in Hackney for Bill Rust, Editor of the *Daily Worker*, darling figure of the Party and one of the few top Party leaders for whom I had some affection.

I liked Bill Rust, and I've said before in this book that I believe the Party killed him with overwork. He played the Communist leader role, of course. In the open he was stern, austere, relentless. But during that electoral fight in Hackney he would sometimes come home with me late at night and would sit and chat over a cup of tea, chat not about the Party, Marxism, the class struggle, but about homely simple things that can warm a man's heart.

I considered myself highly honoured to be chosen as his agent. Not only was he a revered figure in the Party but my blood quickened at the thought of a national fight. In it I seemed to see the future crystallizing. Parliamentary elections had always fascinated me, and now I was going to see one from the inside.

I was to get the shock of my life.

To begin with, I abandoned the job I held and took the Party's starvation wage as an agent. I was told to buy a book from a Party bookshop which would outline my duties and responsibilities under law. I found it highly enthralling, and it led me to study electoral law and procedure still further. I began to admire the scrupulous fairness of the law so far as it went. I studied finance and organization. I went back over history and examined tactics and propaganda. I considered myself already well equipped when I was summoned to a meeting of all Communist parliamentary agents.

There we sat, and maybe all the rest were as keen and naive as I. The meeting was conducted by Peter Kerrigan and Phil Piratin. Kerrigan harangued us and glowered at us of course, but we expected that. Then Piratin stood up with his smooth, bland face. In the nearest to a sergeant-major's bellow that his thin voice could manage he told us how this parliamentary fight was going to be run.

'At the end of it all you are going to hate me. You're going

to hate the sight and sound of me before I'm through with you. There's going to be no let-up, no peace, no sleep, no night and no day for you. I'm going to work you until you drop. Remember, comrades, we aren't fighting a bourgeois election, we are fighting capitalism. On this election depends the future of the revolutionary struggle in Britain.'

With that handsome start the meeting went on to cover ground that approximated to nothing I had read so trustingly in my little book. I began to feel that perhaps I had made a mistake and bought the wrong one. From what we were told then I came to these conclusions:

'We may get some candidates in, we may not. In either case winning the election comes second to winning new recruits, new readers for the *Daily Worker*. Each candidate's fight is expected to bring in so many new *Daily Worker* readers in the constituency. In Hackney the Party expects 10,000 new readers as a result of Bill Rust's campaign.

'This election, comrades, is a made-to-measure means of getting our propaganda into thousands of new homes. For the first time we can send Party propaganda through the open post to thousands of servicemen throughout the world. Make certain of the servicemen on your electoral rolls, make certain your campaign literature goes out to them wherever they are. The soldiers, sailors, and airmen in the ranks are going to vote Left in this election, anyway. Give them help and they'll vote Communist wherever they can.

'Remember, if we can win the seats, good. But the Party will take no excuses for not winning Communists.'

No, this wasn't what I had read in the book, so I put it away and did not study it again. It would only have depressed me, anyway.

I went back to organize the campaign. Under law electioneering was limited to three weeks before polling, but such is the normal propaganda machine of the Party that we had a nine-weeks' start on the Tories and Socialists. All we had to do was step up the customary *tempo*. And how we stepped it up!

Every Party member in Hackney was geared to the campaign. Comrades from districts where no Communist candidate was standing were drafted in to help. London District

sent down observers to watch me, to see whether I carried out instructions to the letter, and to submit regular reports to District on my progress.

We set up the usual Election Committee required under law, but ours was not a committee, it was a mass meeting. It met twice a week to begin with in our Central Committee Room, where the walls were draped with red bunting, hung with portraits of Marx, Stalin, Lenin and —oh, of course —our candidate, Bill Rust.

The committee was drawn from Communists active in all organizations throughout the borough — unions, trades councils, housewives' groups, hospitals, local government, and public utilities. This was not just so that the comrades could say afterwards that they had had a hand in putting Bill Rust into Westminster. They were there to receive instructions, to be told how to gear their organizations in the fight.

Every union in the borough that was safely under Party control was ordered to turn over as much equipment to me as it could, desks, tables, chairs, typewriters, duplicators. Many Party-controlled unions passed a 'no business' resolution for the election period, and that made it all the easier for us to make use of their office equipment.

Our committee rooms were full of it, and I never knew, once the fight was over, whether the same furniture and the typewriters went back to the same places they came from. Certainly they were my unwelcome responsibility for as long as the campaign was on. With another comrade I spent most nights on guard in the committee room. I remember late one evening we were visited by a Party sympathizer and his wife. He was a disinfectant manufacturer, well known in London, although not for the fact that he made handsome donations to Party funds. He came in and stood in the doorway and smiled at us.

He had got the election fever too. He gestured toward us and said to his wife: 'There, take a look at these comrades. They're the fellows who are going to run this country some day.' He went away then, feeling content, no doubt, that he had done his bit for us.

My career as a Parliamentary Agent within the law lasted not more than a few days. Then another comrade came down from the Party's London District and told me that I was to take my orders from him. I was still to be known as the Agent, of course, but the Party was going to run this fight from top level. The Central Committee of the Party sent me a message, telling me politely enough that there was no suggestion that I was ill-equipped for the job but it was considered that London District would be able to handle it more efficiently.

From then on I had no control over the campaign. I took orders, and I carried out those orders without considering the financial consideration involved: a Parliamentary agent's biggest nightmare.

'We'll work it all out when the election's over,' I was told. 'Spend what you can and our lawyers will overcome the difficulties.'

I have never known so many Party-line lawyers to appear as did during that election. Every Communist candidate had two or three at his elbow.

Nor have I ever known so much money to be squandered, so much election literature to be scrapped because the London District changed its mind after it was printed. Although the electorate of the constituency was about 28,000, over 100,000 leaflets came down from District one day for distribution in Hackney. They littered the streets for a week.

Getting rid of the literature became a sports event, as comic as an egg and spoon race. Every time we had a committee meeting —and we had them three times a week toward the end —credit went to the comrade who could convince us that he had got rid of the most leaflets, and recruited the most new members.

The *Daily Worker*, of course, made a great deal of Rust's fight. It announced that he was taking up scores of hardship cases of housing and sickness, and solving them even while he was carrying out his normal electioneering programme. Maybe he was, but I only know that I turned away scores of such people from the committee room when they came in

response to the *Worker's* invitation: 'Take your problems to Bill Rust!'

We stunted the whole campaign as much as we could. Just by the central committee room stood an extremely high railway arch. The London District representative took one look at it and gave me the order. I told two comrades to climb the arch after midnight and paint Bill Rust's name across it in red. They did so.

The railway authorities tried to clean it off, but it was lead paint and it resisted their efforts, so they defaced it. The next night I told the lads to go up and paint it again.

'Suppose the police catch us?'

'Do it,' I said, 'and worry about the police afterwards.'

We covered Hackney with posters, red bunting, red slogans, red hammers and sickles. Still London District demanded more, sending down frantic orders for a hammer and sickle on this wall, a slogan on that. Had you seen Hackney in those days you would not have realized that two other men were fighting the election as well. Without a doubt the Party spent more on the fight than either the Tories or Socialists in Hackney.

I felt in my bones that all the people of Hackney were getting out of this was a belly-laugh. But I was not fool enough to tell London District this. I passed their orders down the line.

We were worked to a standstill. Fighting his own constituency Piratin still had time to crack the whip over us. In my committee rooms comrades dropped from fatigue almost hourly. Our loudspeaker vans were out seven days a week. While the other two parties observed a Sunday truce, we gaily ignored it. What do you want to do with your Sunday anyway, comrade? *Go to church?*

As the days went on our campaign propaganda turned away from home affairs and began to concentrate on Russia and the Red Army. An exercise of Marxist reasoning at the Party's headquarters had brought it to the conclusion that this election could be won on the one word Russia. We distributed thousands of copies of speeches by Stalin and

Molotov, brochures about the Red Army. We played Red Army songs over our loudspeakers before speeches. You could not have blamed anyone in Hackney for thinking they were being asked to vote for a candidate for the Supreme Soviet.

Part of this emphasis on Russia was to bring in Bill Rust's Russian wife Tamara.

We presented her as a sort of Russian talisman. She toured the borough, telling Hackney of the wonders and pleasures of woman's lot in the Soviet Union. But I wonder what effect she really had on the women in the borough. I wonder if many of them had the same reaction as my wife who once complained to me bitterly:

'What right has she to come down here and tell British housewives what to do, how to live and what to think? Does she think we haven't got minds of our own?'

The whole of our canvassing tactics were down-to-earth. The day starts early in Hackney for the average man and woman, and Party canvassers were knocking at doors almost before the residents got one foot out of bed. The canvassing went on until late at night. Without a doubt the Party knocked at every door and spoke to every voter in the borough.

We already had most of the blocks of council flats pretty well organized in wartime shelter committees, welfare committees and so on, and these Party-sponsored organizations now began to pay dividends. Party housewives were ordered to organize heart-to-heart kitchen meetings of their neighbours. I dropped in casually to over 200 of these tea-cup meetings, sometimes alone, sometimes with Bill Rust or his wife. While we balanced a cup of tea on our knees we talked disarmingly of Russia, capitalism, war and the danger of American imperialism.

American soldiers were still dying in the Pacific at that time as our allies, but the Party as early as 1945 was feeling the pulse of anti-American feeling in England.

Hackney's trade unions were milked of funds wherever possible. Before some of them shut up business for the election Party treasurers on their committees readily approved

Party-line resolutions suggesting donations to 'Bill Rust's campaign for the workers'.

Our professional members were not allowed to escape the hard graft either. All doctors and nurses who held Party cards were instructed to hand over to my committee a list of their colleagues who were believed to be sympathetic, or who would at least read a leaflet before burning it. Schoolteachers were told to do the same.

The law prohibits electioneering inside a hospital, but Party members among nurses and domestic staffs of Hackney's hospitals were given bundles of leaflets to leave about the wards, in books, behind doors, in washrooms and lavatories.

A special leaflet was drawn up for distribution in professional circles. It went something like this: *'Dear fellow-teacher (or nurse, or doctor), You will of course want to know why a member of your profession is supporting the Communist candidate for this constituency...'*

It was signed 'A Communist Doctor' or 'A Communist Teacher.'

In the factories Party factions held shop-gate meetings, distributed leaflets, pinned posters on notice-boards declaring, under a hammer and sickle, or a Union Jack entwined with the Red Flag 'Fellow-worker, Vote for Peace!'

Every campaign which the Party had conducted during the past ten years was scrutinized. Lists of names long since forgotten were resurrected, names of people on housing lists, names of TB patients who had appealed to the Party for help, all were heavily canvassed. I was given the job of visiting a number of TB patients whom I had helped and getting them to attest to their willingness to vote for Rust, for Communism, for Peace.

On the eve of the poll we held a mammoth meeting with prairie-fire demonstrations all over the borough. We toured Hackney behind a great banner that shouted 'Russia Stands for Peace! For Security! For Progress!'

And the next morning the good people of Hackney went to the polls and put Bill Rust at the bottom.

When it was all over I was in a flat spin. London District suddenly remembered that I was the Parliamentary Agent,

and that the responsibility was all mine. The comrades who had come into the borough went back. The boss from London District went back. And Bill Rust, 'the standard-bearer of Communism in Hackney' went back too, to edit the paper which had given him that title.

And they left me alone in the committee room. With the bill.

At a conservative estimate, with nothing but my memory to rely upon, I should say that Bill Rust's fight in 1945 cost the Party something like £1,000. Under law our election expenses should not have exceeded £480. Two Party lawyers came down to help me sort out the paradox and when they were finished it all looked right and proper on paper.

But as far as the Hackney Communist Party was concerned we faced a deficit and hundreds of hardship cases in housing and sickness who had been invited to put themselves in Bill Rust's hands, and I was left carrying the baby.

Once the election was over the *Daily Worker* announced that the Party had set up a Fighting Fund to pay for the fight. They got their contribution, but the money never seemed to trickle through to Hackney. We were told to pay our own debts. And pay them we did, somehow.

We hounded our well-to-do sympathizers, extorting money from them by threats, jeers and promises. People like our disinfectant manufacturer must have regretted his over-confident satisfaction with the thought that men like me were to inherit the earth.

The Party held a post-mortem on the election. It was, in the jargon of the Party, a 'bashing'.

Candidates and their agents assembled to hear the worst. The worst was really bad. We had put up one hundred candidates and seen ninety-eight go down.

'People are ungrateful for Russia's war effort.'

'They still remember 1940, of course.'

'They can't, the British public's memory is too short.'

We were called to order sharply by the chairman, 'Comrades I What is a parliamentary election? If you have mastered your Marxism you will know that Communism cannot hope to gain power by methods which were expressly designed to

protect a bourgeois society. Our role is one of constant agitation, constant propaganda, of building a party of all classes of workers, of scientists, doctors, writers, and artists. We are an octopus with tentacles that must close about the machinery of the state.'

Listening to further arguments that the power of capitalist propaganda had been too much for us to fight, I could not help thinking of the Communist tornado that had blown through Hackney. There had never been electioneering propaganda like it. And had not the Labour movement triumphed in the elections despite powerful right-wing propaganda?

Then came the bashing. We had not done enough. We had not exploited to the full the Party's influence. We had not recruited enough new members. We had not found enough new readers for the *Worker* (what happened to the 10,000 Rust was to bring in Hackney I never knew). We had failed to drive the Party's policy home to the people. It was obvious that we had failed. Had we succeeded every Party candidate would have been elected.

The logic of that argument seemed inescapable.

But many of the comrades who, like me, had been chosen to be Parliamentary Agents were bewildered and confused. They knew, as I knew, that the Party had overreached itself in the emphasis it had placed on Russia. That the electoral law may have been broken by the Party here and there was unimportant, it had committed a greater crime. It had failed to understand the psychology of the ordinary British working-man.

Some of the comrades who thought this way wanted to place their criticism on record before the Party's Central Committee. They got a very short answer and it closed their mouths: 'The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain KNOWS BEST!'

After the shouting and the wailing and the lamentations died down the Party produced the jam about the pill. 'Your Russian comrades would be proud of you. You have taken masses of propaganda to the people. The Communist Party of Great Britain has, through this election fight, become the mass party of the people.'

Had it? I don't know. Our membership in Hackney showed no sharp leap upwards, and I heard later that recruitment suffered badly as a result of our circus tactics. Certainly the 1945 General Election forced the National Executive to do some hard thinking.

It was finally decided that the Communist electoral campaign had foundered because of the Party's failure to swing the workers in the factories. This failure showed the need for tighter organization of factory groups, for the whole emphasis to be placed on the shop stewards' movement, on capturing the unions, on swinging the Party's policy on the firm hub of the industrial front. It was a wise decision, considered in its context alone. In the years that followed the Party grew stronger and stronger in the unions and the factories.

Rust did not give up hope of representing Hackney after his first resounding defeat. To him and other Party leaders the borough was a red belt about the waist of the East End, a choice prize. He stood again in the Hackney local elections and lost. It nettled his pride, I think, and there was never again any talk of his coming down to Hackney as the standard-bearer of Communism.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It is our policy to achieve, as between workers who are members of the Party and workers who are not, an atmosphere of 'mutual control'. . .

STALIN, Leninism.

WHEN the Party told me that I should stand as a Communist candidate for election to the Hackney Borough Council I was pleased. Party loyalties apart it was my long-cherished ambition to represent my borough on its council. I believed that the Party needed an authoritative voice in local affairs. I also understood the necessity of the local Party branch getting advance knowledge of the local authority's plans. Time and time again the Communist Party is able to jump the gun in local affairs because its councillors have already briefed them on coming events. The fight we were able to put up against rent increases and the enormous value of that fight to the Party in a propaganda sense all stemmed from the fact that I and another Hackney Communist councillor knew what was coming.

I first stood in a local by-election when the Party's credit was very low indeed, and none of us expected a victory. But it was a trial run and the results were interesting. I polled 400 votes against the victor's 781. The Borough Secretariat added up the figures, worked out its analysis and decided that it was worth while nursing Comrade Darke. Next time we would make it.

Until next time, however, I had to live. Looking back on those days I wonder where my strength came from. My obligations were enormous. I was a member of the Hackney Trades Council and the paper work involved there was tremendous. For every meeting of the Council I had to attend one of the Party fraction to decide our course of action. I was also a member of the Party's local Housing Committee which meant that homeless men and women were on my doorstep day and night.

I could not neglect them. Beyond my natural wish to find

them homes if I could, I was expected to recruit as many of them as possible into the Party, and you don't recruit a Communist just by saying 'Sign here'.

I say I had to live. I got a job with the Borough Council, but I had not held that long before another Council seat fell vacant and I had to throw up my local government job to contest it. We lost that fight too, and I was bitterly disappointed, but I half-believed the Party when it hailed the fight as 'a great Communist victory'. I found out later why they thought it was; they had recruited more members and more *Worker* readers than they had expected.

'We're holding our own,' said the Borough Secretary to me jubilantly. 'Next time we'll get you into the chamber.'

But once more until next time I had to live. I could not go back and work for the council because I would have to throw up the job once the elections came up. Eventually I found work as a bus conductor, a choice which the Party considered eminently suitable. Communism is strong in the East End busmen's union. Five Party members sat on its Executive at that time, and we dominated the Central Bus Committee.

Within a week of taking out my union cards I received the inevitable Party summons to attend the Busmen's Communist Advisory Committee, the co-ordinating centre of all Party work in the public transport world. The meetings were held in the Garibaldi Restaurant in Grays Inn Road.

In procedure and purpose these meetings differed in no great way from those I had attended in the Firemen's Union during the war. We discussed union policy and tactics with our toes neatly on the Party line. We analysed union elections, and since we more or less controlled the whole thing, we decided who should and who should not run union affairs.

We were in close touch with the Party's National Transport Advisory Council which I later joined. The comrade who came to give us direction and advice from the Party headquarters was a farmer. His knowledge of transport could not have extended further than a Fordson tractor, but he was the voice of the Central Committee and we listened to him dutifully.

I was thus up to my neck in union and Party business. The Borough Secretary, soft-footing from comrade to comrade, became my nightmare. I could expect his knock at my door at any time. Since I was Secretary to the Hackney Trades Council the Party was using every moment I had. A Trades Council such as Hackney's, with its affiliated membership of 10,000, is a useful medium for Party activity when it is Communist-controlled. It can be persuaded to hold meetings, to pass Party resolutions, to accept Party-inspired appeals, and to make protests under the cloak of impartiality and 'in the name of thousands of affiliated trade unionists'.

But the hiring of halls for Trades Council demonstrations costs money and the purse of the Council was never bottomless. It often worried me, but when I pointed out that Communist activity was running the Council into bigger debts than it could afford I was told, 'So what? It isn't your money and it isn't the Party's. This is a political matter. If you get the members of the Council to raise the money somehow, they'll believe in what they're fighting for.'

A Party-dominated Trades Council like Hackney's is a ready arena for any Party performance that can be devised. Party-line resolutions under the name of the Trades Council can expect publication in the trade and local press. I have sat in my living-room often enough at night with other members of the Secretariat preparing 'emergency resolutions' which would be hustled through at the Council meeting next day. The *Daily Worker* would always be informed that these Party-line resolutions were to be raised and passed, and it always kept a few column-inches open for them.

Yet despite this donkey-work for the Party it was still possible for me to do a lot of work on the Council that I really enjoyed. Even though the Communist Party has to-day taken over many Trades Councils and is running them like branch offices, the need for their existence within the framework of the trade union movement is strong, and there is much good they can do.

When the new Borough Elections came into view the Party determined to make them a test of its power and influence. Compared to the three-ring circus we offered for Hackney's

entertainment during the 1945 General Election the Party's behaviour during these local elections was mild, but the same principles and tactics held good.

It was 1946. The temperature of the cold war had yet to reach freezing point. There was still a back-log of sympathy for Russia and the Communist Party, and we were determined to capitalize it. The Party put up the greatest number of candidates in its history. Its literary output was certainly the highest on record, flowing in a great red tide under the front doors of Hackney's homes:

'Russia is off the ration ... Soviet production for peace is going up ... Prosperity in the new people's democracies ... Red Army demobilization greater than the Western Powers' ... Messages from *Your Fellow Trade Unionists* who have just visited eastern Europe ... Communism brings prosperity and equality to Rumania ...

'Britain's homeless on the increase ... Rationing increases in Britain ... The Labour Party betrays the people ... Fascism is active again ... The Communist Party offers the only alternative to exploitation and war ...'

The most significant feature of this propaganda was the Party's recognition of the fact that a resurgence of Fascism was honestly feared in the East End. Party propaganda in the Jewish quarters at the time I stood for election reached the highest peak since pre-war days. I myself led a Party-organized deputation of housewives to the Mayor of Hackney's office to place on record a protest against the return of Mosley's men.

We organized the first post-war anti-Fascist demonstration. There were banners, wall slogans, fights with Fascists, broken heads, arrests and the inevitable defence funds. Wherever possible we challenged police restrictions, using the resulting disturbances to strengthen our arguments that Right-wing Labour would do nothing to stop Fascism. There was a hollow nostalgic echo of the days before the war.

All other political parties were indifferent to the rise of Mosley's new party. They were perhaps correct in assessing it at no more than its nuisance value. But they were fools not to realize that, whatever its strength and potential influence,

fighting it was to become of great propaganda value to the Communist Party in the East End.

When Hackney went to the polls in the local elections the stewards chosen to represent the Party at the polling booths were Jews wherever possible. They ignored the rule against electioneering within range of the polls and whispered discreetly every time a Jew turned up to vote: 'Don't forget, vote for the only anti-Fascist Party.'

The Party faced the count with confidence. It was an ill-founded confidence, for Communism hit the bottom of the polls so hard throughout the country that the resulting vibrations must have shuddered the comfortable chairs of the National Executive in King Street.

When the trembling stopped sufficiently for the Party to lick its wounds it had one cause for satisfaction. Communism had triumphed in Hackney. Bob Darke was in.

The significance of the Party's anti-Fascist stand was not forgotten. It was argued that our victory was largely due to this, and anti-Fascist demonstrations in the East End were carried on until they were dropped in favour of anti-American propaganda.

For a moment I could consider where I stood. I was now a Borough Councillor. I was also a member of the busmen's union, of my branch's Communist fraction, of the Busmen's Communist Group, of the Communist National Advisory Committee on Transport. I was Secretary of the Hackney Trades Council and a member of the Party fraction within that council, and I was a token member of half a dozen Anglo-Iron-Curtain Friendship societies.

There are only seven days a week, and when I had finished with them there was little time left to consider the fact that I was also a husband and a father.

As if all these commitments were not enough, a Party rigged vote also hoisted me on to the Executive Committee of the London Trades Council as a representative of all the East London Trades Councils. This body, claiming to represent the interests of some 600,000 London workers, had a Communist Secretary in control of its Party-dominated office staff. It also had an Executive which was under a Party majority.

The London Trades Council's activities get considerable play in the Press, and the Party recognizes it as one of its most effective propaganda mediums. Whenever the Party wishes to put its policy and case before a public body, such as the Fares Tribunal, for example, and is unable to do it openly, it can always rely on the London Trades Council to speak with its Master's voice.

The L T C also sends fraternal delegations to Iron-Curtain countries and organizes mass meetings for them when they come back. Such delegations are always hand-picked by Party members inside the Trades Council. If they are not Communists, then just the same they can be relied upon to come back with the same excited enthusiasm for the state of affairs they were privileged to examine in their seven days' stay in Rumania, or Poland, or Czechoslovakia.

On its home ground the London Trades Council goes through the motions required by its constitution. It meets regularly at Beaver Hall and works through an imposing agenda. Tucked away among the humdrum resolutions on trade union affairs there is always a protest against Franco, against the Greek Government, against British and American forces in Korea, against rearmament, and so on.

The important thing from the Party's point of view is that these resolutions should get full publicity as being 'in the name of 600,000 London trade unionists'. It is by such resolutions that the Party endeavours to prove that, although its actual membership is microscopic, it can speak in the name of many hundreds of thousands of non-Communists.

As a member of the London Trades Council and as Secretary to the Hackney Trades Council I was readily welcomed at union branch meetings, at welfare and industrial organizations. I was generally invited by such groups on a recommendation made by the Party fractions within them. I went along and lent my 'experience and independent opinion' to the problems facing them. The Party leans heavily on the individual prestige gained by its leaders in such ways.

In my work on the Borough Council I entered quite a different sphere. Prestige was to mean everything here. On the Council there was no Party fraction, no under-cover trickery

to swing votes or resolutions. I was there to make the best propaganda use of that one word 'Councillor'.

I was given instructions to get myself on every Council committee which could be used as a sounding-board for Party propaganda, particularly the Housing Committee. This was important, for through my membership the Party was able to get advance information of rent increases or housing schemes and make the best use of the knowledge in agitation.

I was told to get my name in the local press as often as possible, either by what I said in the chamber or by using the papers' correspondence columns.

I was under constant direction from London District in what I said and how I voted in the chamber. Before each Council meeting I was given my instructions and told what to say. Two observers from the local Borough Committee sat in the public gallery to record what I said and submit a report to the London District Organizer.

In my work as a Borough Councillor and a Trades Councillor the Party never missed a trick. When the Hackney Trades Council presented me with a watch for four years' service the Party saw to it that the celebration dance should not be lacking political line and guidance. The cabaret was provided by the Communist-controlled Unity Theatre Group, whose jolly little songs were threaded with Party line barbs.

The Party made me use that magic word 'Councillor' wherever it went deepest. And it went deepest among the parents of children attending council schools. I have already pointed out that Party teachers do most of their propaganda work in the Parent-Teachers' Associations, and I was often instructed to go along and lecture to these groups, telling them the Council's attitude toward education and then pointing out the Communist solution to the problems of education and re-
armament.

It was always done with disarming frankness.

'I'm not here under false pretences. You know me; I am Bob Darke, your Communist Councillor. I'm not ashamed of my Party. I'm proud of it. But I'm not taking Moscow gold for what I have to say to you to-night ...'

I never really resented the Party's instructions to take up the

work that came the way of any member of the Borough Council's Housing Committee. The Party's attitude was clear enough. Anybody who was found a home by a Communist councillor was ripe for recruitment. But I did the job willingly less for this reason than for the fact that it gave me a deep and lasting satisfaction to find homes for the homeless.

Just the same I had to make a return to the Party of all names of people I had helped. Either I or some other comrade was then put on the scent. Generally it was another comrade, and his tactics were plain and open: 'You know Bob Darke, don't you? He got you this flat, didn't he? Well, he's a Communist; don't you think his Party's worth your support ...?'

All this work took long hours and determined application. It also meant considerable personal expense. Out of my wages of £6 5s a week I was expected to pay the postage and cost of writing hundreds of letters a month on the Party's instructions. I once asked for a branch ruling on this expense and was abused for being selfish.

By the time I resigned there were two Communist councillors in Hackney, Blaston and myself. A personal letter from Harry Pollitt made our duty clear. It said nothing about serving the people of the borough, nothing about winning respect for the Party by diligent and self-sacrificing work, by maintaining the highest integrity in local government work.

It frankly stated that our duty was to attack rearmament whenever and wherever possible. We were to oppose and hamper Civil Defence plans within the borough, to move reference back of such motions, to hinder the Council's proposals for Civil Defence as far as was possible.

We were expected to be an irritant inside the Council Chamber and prestige-winners outside it. The Press notices we received give an idea of our tactics:

'Because it was ruled that they could not move the reference back of an item concerning Civil Defence Statistics, Hackney's two Communist members walked out of Wednesday's meeting of the Borough Council. Councillor Darke's parting shot was, "If this is what you call democracy, I'm going." '

'Councillor Darke (Comm.) said: "It has been reported to

me recently that council tenants have been given notice to quit. I am very concerned about it and ask the Council to explore every avenue before putting these people to this terrifying experience." '

'Councillor Blaston (Comm.) accused the Conservatives of trying to force the Council to raise rents.'

'A lively scene in Hackney Council chamber last week, when he thrice disobeyed the Mayor's ruling, led to the Communist Councillor Maurice Blaston being "named" by the Council.'

When you remember, as I have pointed out, that what a Communist borough councillor says in chamber is never without the approval of his Party, the incidents quoted above lose something of their spontaneous charm.

We could always rely on support from the public gallery of the chamber if the debate below promised to be a hot one. When the Council debated the rise of Fascism in the East End one of the non-Communist councillors, a Jew, came under fire from the gallery. A Jewess in the gallery, a member of the Party, screamed at him as a provocateur, and another Party member, also a Jew, shouted that he was a 'renegade and a traitor' to his people. Neither of these demonstrations was spontaneous or unplanned. We knew they were to happen before the meeting started.

On another occasion when I was speaking in the chamber against the rents increase I could have told you to the exact second just when a comrade in the public gallery was to leap to his feet and shout: 'Spend less on war expenditure and more on housing!'

Until the Hackney Trades Council went through a wonderful metamorphosis a year or so back, sloughing off its Communist skin by 62—38 votes in favour of a new Trades Council which would be free of Party domination, we made it dance to our own tune.

When the Minister of National Insurance — reluctantly no doubt — appointed 'Councillor C. H. Darke of Hackney as the trade union representative on the National Insurance Advisory Committee for the Shoreditch area' he did not make the choice of his own free will.

My nomination had been decided by the Party branch, submitted to the Trades Council on a Party inspired motion, and recommended to the Minister when approved.

No one, I suppose, who has got this far in this book will suspect the Party of having either a sense of proportion or logic. But the ease with which we could eat our own words and suffer no indigestion is plain enough in this story.

The minutes secretary of the Hackney Trades Council was once heavily censured for having discussed the Council's business with the local press. The paper concerned rapped our knuckles for censuring the man, whereupon I climbed up into the saddle of the high horse supplied me by the Party. I told the newspaper that the Council took a serious view of its business becoming the gossip of outsiders.

This, although the Communist fraction of the Council discussed its agenda, framed its resolutions with the local Party branch long before Council meetings!

The explanation of course was that the minutes secretary was notoriously Right Wing and the Party wanted to black-guard him.

During the serious housing shortage of the mid-forties the Party worked the most sensational confidence trick in its history —the Squatters' Movement. So pathetic were the hardship cases exploited in this deception that for a while even Fleet Street was convinced that it was normal, a spontaneous demonstration on the part of the homeless. But when the almost military-like precision of the campaign became obvious there should have been no doubt in anybody's mind that the Party was at the back of it.

The Party never openly admitted that it ran the squatting in West End blocks of flats, or the rash of small-house squatting that spread across London. The *Daily Worker* covered the campaign with the same poker-face inscrutability it wears when Party members paint anti-American slogans on cars in Grosvenor Square or demonstrate against American bomber stations. If you only read the *Daily Worker* it always sounds as if the Party has been taken as much by surprise as everybody else.

The London Squatter Movement was conducted by Ted Bramley, from the offices of the London District Committee. Bramley actually appeared in person to run the taking-over of blocks of flats in Kensington, and members of his staff occupied rooms in one of the blocks to conduct the campaign the more efficiently.

In Hackney the Party was instructed to ear-mark vacant houses, to collect homeless families (there were names enough on my lists) and move them in on the word go. Of course Councillor C. H. Darke was on his feet in the Council Chamber soon enough to support the people's action and to call for resolute and sympathetic action from the Chamber.

Let it be understood that I was angry as anybody else to see these flats vacant at a time when the housing situation was so desperate. And for a time I believed the Party had found the right solution to the problem, the arbitrary seizing of property.

But I soon realized that the Party's real attitude was no less cynical than usual. It regarded the various 'Squatters' Committees' we had formed as no more than propaganda vehicles. The Party's leaders knew that the authorities would not allow the situation to develop and would suppress it forcibly. It knew, in short, that the squatters' campaign would be defeated.

But win or lose the Party was going to benefit on two scores:

1. It would get the kudos for making the only forthright effort to grapple with the housing shortage and the anomalies that existed.
2. It could use the opposition to the Squatters' Movement as proof that the Government was refusing to live up to its Socialism.

Conclusion? 'Only the Communist Party fights for the workers!'

And that was how it worked out. Heaven only knows how many wretched pram-pushing families were moved into flats and rooms found for them by our eager-beaver comrades, only to be moved out again by the police.

The siege of the West End flats, the blockade running of

food and water by Communist flying squads, got full play in the Party press with a full use of epithets like 'fascist technique', 'Labour's Tory tactics'.

For weeks after the defeat of the Squatters' Movement the Party in Hackney was capitalizing on the misery of the debacle. Homeless couples with families, coming back to the now defunct Party Squatters' Committee, were told 'Go and see Councillor Bob Darke. He'll raise your case in the Council. And don't forget, the Communist Party has been the only political party to help you.'

Thank God I was able to get some of them housed in a decent lasting fashion.

For a while the Party believed that it had raised its prestige as a result of its organization of the squatters. The use of similar hit and run tactics in other fields, the arbitrary defiance of the law, were being discussed seriously.

Then came the London County Council Elections and the Party realized that the public's intelligence was not as myopic as was believed.

I was put up to fight for the L C C. I never got a seat, of course, and the Party suffered its biggest defeat on record. The campaign had nearly killed me. There had not been a night when Councillor Bob Darke had not been addressing meetings urging people to make him County Councillor Bob Darke from now on. So intense was that campaign that even I thought the Party had a big chance. Maybe I was drunk with my own Party's arrogance.

We were at the bottom of the poll where we got our usual worm's-eye view of politics, and I attended the post-mortem, expecting a drubbing. Instead I found smug and satisfied smiles.

'Well, Comrade Darke, it turned out better than we thought it would. We've made so many new Party members and so many new readers of the *Daily Worker*. London District is proud of the work you've put in.'

'But we lost the election.'

'Don't worry about that. The real fight we've got to win is in the unions and on the industrial front. The rest is all window-dressing. Bourgeois elections are not the Party's

main aim, you know, they are merely valuable propaganda.'

Later on I discovered it had not been jam all the way and the Party Executive was really bitter. Jewish voters in the East End had turned their backs on the Party at last. Even the whispered exhortations at polling-booth doors, the '*Vote for the only anti-Fascist party*', had not brought in the one vote the Party always thought it could count on: the vote of the Jew.

CHAPTER NINE

Peace is indivisible

MAXIM LITVINOV.

THE war in Korea had not begun. Within the Party we knew that something was moving somewhere. Talk of a Communist-inspired revolutionary outbreak in Italy, which many British Communist leaders believed in as a certainty, died away suddenly as if someone upstairs hammered on the floor. On most top levels in the Party our eyes had been on the Far East long before the military commentators of the popular press. We didn't know how it was coming, but we knew something was coming. The dialectic that brought us to this conclusion was obvious enough. The young Communist Republic of China was triumphant, therefore American intervention could be expected daily. To forestall that intervention there would be an abrupt and uncompromising move.

Meanwhile, the call for Peace, which had been more or less dormant on the Party's cluttered platform, suddenly bounded into life. The one word Peace has a magical fascination for a speaker after he has spoken it more than half a dozen times. It keeps pulling his voice back to its penetrating monosyllable. It began to appear more and more in Party propaganda. The *Daily Worker* began to print it with a capital P. It was top priority in all propaganda.

Quietly at first, National Fraction meetings of trade unionists in the Party began to discuss a Peace Campaign. At first it might have seemed that the importance of such a campaign sprang naturally from the world situation. But if I thought that for long I was soon disillusioned.

Leading Party trade unionists had already been briefed on their duties in the general scheme of the campaign. They were to slow down production where it directly or indirectly assisted rearmament (and that could be anywhere). They were also to lend union support to 'non-political' Party peace movements.

We were already at work on this when we were summoned to what was, in my experience, the most secret meeting the Party has ever held. I received a short message in the post: *Comrade Darke, you will find it to your personal interest to attend at —, at — o'clock. Please come precisely at the stated time, for definite reasons.*

I knew from experience that the simpler the whip the more serious the business on hand. Every comrade attending that meeting went through a thorough check at the door. The Party card had to be up to date. We had each to sign our names in the presence of two comrades who were familiar with our signatures. No names were mentioned or asked for after this. During the discussion which followed we were instructed by the chairman not to announce our names when we spoke, but to introduce ourselves as 'I am an engineer' or 'I am a miner', and so on.

Sitting on the platform was a stranger to me, and I thought I knew the face of every leading Communist in Britain. He was introduced to us as a leading French Communist trade union official, a member of the Cominform and of the World Federation of Trade Unions.

He stood up, an angry, bitter man. He told us that while the Cominform had taken note of the British Communist Party's efforts to inaugurate a Peace Campaign it was far from satisfied with the result. There was a lack of fire, of spirit, of volition.

Arms were leaving Britain daily for Malaya. What were we doing to stop them? Did we know that French dockers had thrown guns and ammunition into the sea rather than have them shipped to Indo-China? What had we thrown into the sea?

There had been strikes in Britain admittedly. But where had we organized a strike against war? Where had we had a strike in favour of banning the atom bomb?

'French workers, and the workers of the peace-loving democracies, are becoming impatient with their British Comrades!'

I looked at the faces about me. They were red and embarrassed. I knew what they were thinking. What right had this

Frenchman to teach them how to suck eggs? With what authority could he criticize the tactics and strategy of the British trade union movement? The answer to the second question was easy enough. He had the right of a man whose party belonged to the Cominform talking to men whose party did not.

So we sat there and took the lecture. We were Communists first and trade unionists second.

When the little man had finished the chairman got hurriedly to his feet, asked for questions. Those he got were innocuous and uncritical. Then the chairman dismissed us hurriedly. 'Leave the building one at a time, comrades, a couple of minutes after each other.'

Travelling home that night on the top of a London bus, looking at my city drenched in moonlight, I was conscious of perplexing and disturbing doubts. Throw arms into the sea! Sabotage factories! Stop the munitions reaching British soldiers! There was something unreal about it.

Yet such is the contagious enthusiasm of a Communist Party branch meeting that once I was back among it my doubts wilted.

'The real call to action has come, comrades,' I reported. 'Those not prepared to carry it out had better get out now. Unswerving loyalty to the Party is now demanded. To the Party and to the revolution. Our actions must now be decisive. There must be no more arms for Malaya. There must be a stop to the war preparations in the West.'

The Party gave me the dubious honour of organizing the first Peace Meeting. It was to be the starting gun for the nation-wide Peace Campaign.

It is not difficult to get people to agree that they want Peace. The last war had given Hackney 11,000 homeless and thousands of casualties. With the assistance of the Party and as 'Councillor Bob Darke', I called a mass public meeting in the Town Hall. Its key-note was a resolution calling for peace and friendship with the Soviet Union and a demand that the British Government take resolute steps to 'Stop the drift to war'.

The whole purpose of such meetings and such resolutions

was to set the public mood, to persuade the people that if war came it was against the wishes of the Soviet Union, to give cover to the Party's strike strategy on the industrial front.

At that meeting in the Town Hall I arranged for a Party building worker to move the resolution. He moved it, telling us how many houses a war can destroy, how many houses could be built with the money spent on rearmament. The seconder was a Party engineer. He told us how engineers throughout the country were longing to produce 'machines for peace and not for war'.

The chairman of the meeting — a Communist of course — had been carefully briefed by me beforehand. I gave him the names of men who should be permitted to speak from the body of the hall and the names of those who should be tactfully ignored if possible.

The meeting was a resounding success. The resolution was passed unanimously and those who wanted to move an amendment were lost in the rush. It got full play in the Party press and an honourable mention in others.

The Communist Peace Campaign was under way with a good following wind.

Out of the great confusion, the fear and the bewilderment of the post-war world, the Party picked the blackest and most terrifying spectacle of all — the Atom Bomb.

At all peace activities, all meetings, all demonstrations, we were instructed to display large posters declaring 'Ban the Atom Bomb!'

That slogan has pupped since then. It now has a family: 'Ban the Atom Bomb! Ban the Napalm Bomb! Ban Germ Warfare!'

Communists in positions of power in trades councils and union offices all received a pamphlet prepared by the Atomic Committee of the Association of Scientific Workers, a Party line group if ever there was one.

This pamphlet's subject-material consisted of contributions from scientists, many of them Communists, outlining the effects of atomic warfare: the blinding, maiming and killing. The conclusion reached by each of these eminent experts fitted neatly into the Party's propaganda:

Every comrade got his propaganda briefing direct from his Borough Secretariat, from the group leader of his fraction, or from a none-too-difficult reading of the *Daily Worker's* editorials. 'The world is drifting into war. Russia is working for peace, but she has the atom bomb too. Can you imagine what London would look like after the atom bomb has fallen?'

The non-Party press helped us unwittingly by publishing large maps showing the extent of damage which would occur if an atom bomb fell in the centre of London. There was great jubilation in the Party when we discussed the propaganda value of these maps to our Peace Campaign.

Of course no-one in his right mind could disagree with the superficial justice of the campaign, the urgent desire for peace, the banning of the most terrible weapon man has produced. But it did not take much intelligence to see that the Party's propaganda was directed one way. A man who had listened to the French comrade's violent words, as I had, knew that the Peace Campaign sprang less from a people's spontaneous and natural desire than from the direct decision of the Soviet-controlled Cominform.

Every Communist fellow-traveller, every man who had once lent the weight of his name to Party propaganda and was still gullible, was dragged into the fight; clergymen, artists, actors — all were now canvassed. I sat on several platforms behind the venerable Dean of Canterbury, watching him walking up and down as he spoke, his long white hands fluttering in the air as if he were drawing fallen hairs from somebody's coat shoulders.

We were instructed to infiltrate innocent peace movements and swing them into line behind us.

Trades Councils like my own, which danced on the Party line, were quick off the mark, passing resolutions like clockwork. In two weeks we called for a ban on the atom bomb and the withdrawal of troops from Malaya, the expulsion of American bombers from Britain, and for support for Vishinsky's United Nations' battle in the cause of peace.

Of course it was a gigantic fraud; yet the Communist is human and his hatred of war, apart from Party tactics, is as natural as anyone else's. Most of us entered the Party's cam-

paign with a will. We hated war, yet we knew, if we had studied history, that Communism has come to power always in the aftermath of a war. We knew that Communism would only come to Britain after a great defeat. We knew that the defeat of Britain in a war against Russia would bring the Red Army and Communism.

Then why were we appealing for peace?

You answer the question.

My own feelings were in a state of flux. I was a sick man physically and I was very, very tired. Those doubts that had come to me on that moonlit ride home from the French comrade's talk were deeper rooted than I had suspected. What I had done for the Party, what I was doing, began to leave a sour taste in my mouth. But I was being carried forward by the impetus of the Party's work and I did not know that subconsciously I was looking for a moment when I could leap off the express.

Apart from one final peace meeting which I organized in Stoke Newington Hall, my efforts were all half-hearted now.

It was the culmination of the Hackney Peace Committee's efforts on behalf of the delegation it had sent to the Paris Peace Congress. I had received instructions to hand-pick this delegation, to make certain that no Party members were on it, but to make doubly certain that the Party could trust the delegation we did send.

I went through the non-Party members of the committee and discovered that the feet of most of them were becoming rapidly colder. Finally we selected a young mother, a member of the Peace Pledge Union. We sent her off to Paris with money hastily borrowed from the Dalston busmen.

We made plans for her return. We arranged the report-back meeting at Stoke Newington and a lecture tour of every trade union branch and every housewives' group in the borough. It sounded innocuous enough: 'Mrs So-and-so, member of the Peace Pledge Union and Hackney's delegate to the Paris Peace Congress.'

She came back walking on air, thoroughly impressed by the Congress, deeply moved by the Soviet citizens she had met there, and in a tremendous hurry to put her signature at the

bottom of a membership form for the British Communist Party.

She was taken from district to district and allowed to talk until she dropped.

The Hackney Communist Party took all its irons out of the fire for its Peace Campaign. As Trades Council Secretary I received letter after letter 'from an ordinary trade unionist' appealing to the Council to fight for peace. I read the letters out at Council meetings of course. You could always tell when they came from a Party member; they were signed 'Yours fraternally'.

I was constantly badgered by Betteridge, the Borough Secretary of the Party, to admit 'non-party peace deputations' to the Borough Council. When the deputations arrived the non-party leaders always greeted me cheerily with 'Hello, comrade!'

And then the Peace Petition was inaugurated and the whole campaign became vintage Barnum and Bailey, complete with clowns, wild animals, and fearless maidens shot from cannons.

Carefully worded to confuse the issue, broad enough in outline to include both the Party line and the Ten Commandments, the Petition forms flooded off the press into the home of every Communist. I received a quota of 2,000. As a Borough Councillor, I was told, my circle should be wide, and 2,000 signatures were hardly enough. What of the cycling club you helped? What of the TB patients? What of the housing cases? What of your wife's friends? What of the parents of your children's friends?

In the early days of the Petition it was easy enough to obtain signatures, but later on, as the non-Communist press began to hit at it, things became less easy. It was then, I think, that the rank-and-file Communist began to forge signatures.

The Party claimed 27,000 signatures to the Petition from Hackney alone. I do not believe it. My most generous estimate would put the genuine number at a third of that figure. Certainly my own name was never on the Petition. So hysterical was the campaign that the Party never checked to see whether Communists themselves signed it. No Peace Petition carries the name of Bob Darke. If it does it is a forgery.

I do not make this charge of forgery lightly, for I have experienced it on other occasions. The *Daily Worker* once published the terms of a message to Vishinsky congratulating him on his struggle for peace before the United Nations. It was signed, said the *Worker*, 'by five leading Hackney Trade Unionists.' Among them was my name.

I neither saw that message nor had I signed it.

With the slogan 'Not a gun, not a man for an Imperialist war!' Party activity on the industrial front was performing some extraordinary gyrations. Although some of the Party dockers' fraction declared that they could stop every armament shipment to-morrow, they never got beyond a series of minor stoppages. But these short-range victories satisfied the Party, if only because they embarrassed the Labour Government. Leading Party unionists were told in a series of tedious messages from the Central Committee that 'every extra ton of coal, every hour of increased productivity, helps the proposed war against the Soviet Union.' Yet, despite the memory of a Cominform representative's bitter derision, our unionists dared not force a strike on the simple issue of fear of the atom bomb. Instead they ferreted out minor grievances, blew them up into major problems, and forced flare-up strikes wherever possible.

Into cold storage went the Marxist theory (applicable enough behind the Iron Curtain, we were told) that an increased standard of living went hand-in-hand with increased productivity. In Britain increased productivity on all fronts was 'productivity for war!'

To smash the T U C wages restraint policy the Party girded the loins of every union and every trades council it could comfortably dominate. When the policy was baulked the Party openly took credit and broadcast the victory, a little oddly, as a 'blow struck for Peace'. By that time every comrade was so punch-drunk with the word that he would willingly have called blowing his nose a trumpet call for Peace.

My instructions were repetitive, but every time they came down the line from London District the note of urgency was more tense. I was to swing the Trades Council behind a resolution of solidarity for every strike in the borough. I appealed

to the Borough Secretariat that this reckless activity was endangering the security of the Trades Council itself.

'One atom bomb and you won't have a Trades Council at all,' I was told. 'To hell with the Trades Council's security! Get it in line with the Party's Peace Campaign.'

'You raise a Party motion whenever you're told. Who put you in the Council Chamber, anyhow? You'll raise the motion ten times during the meeting if you have to. Who do you think the war-mongers are?'

By this time my health was giving me serious cause for worry. I was overtaken by bouts of dizziness, by almost unbearable weariness. Day and night, however, I was badgered to undertake more activity in the Peace Campaign. My name was being used on all sorts of occasions (such as the Vishinsky resolution), with or without my permission, and I was too tired and too dispirited to protest. In any case, perhaps I had long ago accepted the fact that my name, my reputation, and my position in civil and union affairs were the Party's to do with as it wished.

I was told to get together all those men who had served in the Fire Service when the bells went down during the war. I was to get them to sign a manifesto, drawn up by the Borough Secretariat, declaring that on no account would they give their services again to Civil Defence. I was to win their signatures purely on the strength of my personality, and when once signed the manifesto was to be published in the *Worker*.

I agreed to do it, or, rather, I accepted the instruction without comment. But I made no effort at all. The pace of the campaign by this time was so great that the matter was forgotten.

By this time I was beginning to realize I was refusing Party duties time and time again. It occurred to me in a confused sort of way that there was some subconscious purpose behind my reluctance; it was not merely forgetfulness or weariness.

When I was chosen to go as a Hackney delegate to the International Peace Congress in Liverpool in 1950 it was an unspoken admission by the Party that the Peace Campaign was beginning to miss a stroke here and there. Up to then it had been the policy to push non-Communist dupes to the fore-

front, so that some credence could be given to the claim that the campaign was 'non-political and non-party'.

I was asked to go to Liverpool because no non-Communist of any weight in Hackney was willing to go. So I agreed. The choice of Liverpool for the Congress was not circumstantial. It had been at Liverpool that the Party had had its face soundly slapped when the Labour Party finally turned down our affiliation overtures. The Party wanted to return that slap by organizing a great Merseyside rally which could be proclaimed as a victory over the 'war-mongers in the Labour Party.'

As it worked out, the Congress was never held in Liverpool, but in Warsaw. I put my foot down about that. I was in no mood, physical or mental, for a hole and corner race to Poland. Who went I do not know, nor did I care by then. That Congress, despite the hysterical screaming of the Party press, spluttered like a damp squib anyway.

But I was told to get the Hackney Trades Council to arrange a report-back meeting for the delegates who returned from Warsaw. Contributions from the Trades Council had helped to finance the trip in the first place, so there was barely enough money left to hire a hall for a spurious 'welcome home' junket. I put this before the Borough Secretariat and was ordered to go ahead and arrange the meeting and worry about the money afterwards. I did a lot of 'worrying about the money afterwards', it seemed to me.

It was suggested, without the flicker of a knowing smile, that I should get John Platts-Mills, barrister, ex-Labour M P and fellow-traveller, to speak at this meeting.

The meeting was an anti-climax. Was it true that the Communist-inspired Peace Campaign had played itself out in Hackney, or was it only I who was finished? I was conscious throughout the whole of that meeting of a flat and dispirited feeling. It seemed to emanate from the body of the hall.

Meanwhile Korea hit the world.

Party leaders were called together to discuss the situation. We knew, almost without telling each other, that here was something different, here was something that was going to stick in the world's throat. We could almost see the boomerang

of the Peace Campaign speeding back towards us and we barely had time to duck.

But duck we did. We came out with the bland and confident statement, primed from far off, that North Korea had been invaded by the South. The situation was confused enough in the early days for the Party's propagandists to hand-pick their quotable authorities and prove chapter and verse in support of the line.

It went down with most of the comrades who were frightened anyway that they were going to be asked to argue that North Korea's invasion was a 'tactical necessity', like Russia's invasion of Finland. So they happily accepted the Party's assurance that it had happened the other way round.

Unexpectedly the Peace Campaign got a new fillip as British soldiers went East to fight for the United Nations. 'Hands off Korea!' came the slogan, evoking bitter memories in those who remembered the Hands-off-this-and-that campaigns of the pre-war days.

Party meetings in the early days of the Korean war were unhappy ones for me. Some comrades courageously expressed their doubts in open meeting, questioning the wisdom of forcing a military struggle. They were reluctant to drop the old Marxist theory that a Communist victory must come only as the result of a nation's internal upheaval.

Anybody, and I was one, foolish enough to raise such objections did not receive a sympathetic answer. We got didactic slogans. Revolution is a serious business. When Communism becomes a world Power like Russia, it is under obligation to go to the help of struggling peoples everywhere. Communists cannot wait for opportunities, they must make them.

We were told to purge our doubts and remember the words of our French comrade from the W F T U .

'We must match our actions with those of his countrymen. The North Koreans are spilling blood to bring Communism in Britain nearer.

'Into battle, comrades!'

But here was one comrade who could go into battle *no* more. His feet were willing, his mind faltered. I went through

the movements of the Party line falteringly. I helped move a trades council resolution demanding the withdrawal of British forces from Korea. I mouthed the words 'American intervention' on several platforms. And then I knew I was finished.

The stand of the Gloucesters affected me deeply. My comrades were calling these young lads 'imperialist mercenaries' and 'capitalist lackeys'. I found myself incapable of feeling anything but pride.

I was ill. That was immediately obvious. I was ill in my mind and I did not know what to do about it. I could not go along to the Party doctor we were expected to visit when the strain of Party work became too much for us. I knew that in order to explain my sickness to him I would have to tell him my doubts, and it would be too much to expect him to keep such confidences to himself.

I tried to carry on with aspirins and a tonic from the chemist's. But I was not only fighting bodily fatigue, I was fighting a mind that had given up at last.

When I read of shiploads of ammunition exploding, of factory disasters and strikes, my thoughts went back to the French Comrade's theatrical exhortations: 'The arms must never get there! This is the period of Communist heroism!'

I never felt less like a Communist hero; I never felt less like a hero at all. And then when I was instructed once more to canvass my old friends in the Fire Service, I gave up.

I stuck to my house when I was not at work. My doubts, my defection and hesitation soon aroused the local Party suspicion. The Secretariat ordered reports on my recent behaviour. My speeches in the Borough Council had been half-hearted, on one or two occasions I had spoken against the Party line. I had not resolutely carried out my duties in the Peace Campaign. Something was wrong with Bob Darke.

In view of my past record the Party did not abruptly discipline me. I was visited by a member of the London District Committee. He gently informed me that the Party was aware that I was no longer myself. Perhaps I had been

working too hard? The Party had arranged a Marxist school for a week at the seaside. Would I like to attend?

'We feel that a refresher course of Marxism and a healthy week by the sea will soon put you right.'

I knew these refresher courses, and I knew what it meant when the Party recommended attendance at one. The comrade was under grave suspicion.

My ticket and my lodging, I was told, would be arranged for me by the Party. There would be no expense to me. I asked for time, and time was grudgingly granted. I found that the thought of attending such a school was only repulsive. When my decision was asked for I sent a blunt refusal.

Then I burnt the last boat. The editor of the local paper challenged me in an editorial to declare which side I would be on in the event of a war between Britain and Russia. Such questions had been put publicly to other leading Communists before this, and their answers had been masterpieces of discreet evasion. Generally they denied the possibility of Russia ever being an aggressor.

My reply did not follow the set pattern. I said, in all honesty, that if Russia were responsible for the war then I would fight for my own country, Britain.

Within a few hours of the publication of my reply there was a knock at the door. My wife refused to leave me alone. She had never before interfered with my political activities, but now, I think, she saw there was a chance of my escaping from the confusion I had brought upon myself. She was afraid to leave me alone in case I did not take it. At last I persuaded her to leave me with the London District representative. He stood there in my living-room, his face red and angry, as he shouted at me.

'Look here, comrade, what's happening to you? It is the Korean war, isn't it? You've been a Party member long enough to know that if you have any doubts about the Party's policy you are free to discuss them openly at a special branch meeting where you'll get a fair hearing.'

(This to me who had seen that sort of fair hearing often enough!)

'You ought to know that British and American soldiers are

fighting against your comrades in Korea, white imperialists doing the work of their capitalist masters. Are you going soft over a few British lives? Look how many Russians had to be killed in the Revolution.

'The Party's in a desperate mood. There's no room for sentiment. A man's either with us or against us. And you know what happened in Eastern Europe to good Communists who let their emotions take charge.'

While he was talking I could see that I was being granted a rare and privileged honour. The Party was appealing to me. I suppose I must have argued with him. I suppose I must have raised the picture of the Gloucester battalion and listened to his scornful dismissal of their heroism. I suppose he gave up in the end for he left me more angry than he had been when he came. I remember his last words.

'I'll leave you with the express instructions to attend a special meeting at Party headquarters. There you will be expected to give a full report of your recent activities and a full explanation of your present deviation.'

He went, and with him went my allegiance to the Communist Party.

CONCLUSION

All roads lead to Communism!

HARRY POLLITT.

Comrades, the future is ours!

ARTHUR HORNER.

So what can be done about it?

A book like this, to be neat and tidy, should submit a solution to the grave problems it raises. I do not pretend that I have one. I know that. Communism is the product of the society in which we live, and the society in which we live is under constant change. It may outgrow Communism, it may grow with it.

We cannot escape Communism. It is active in the body of the non-Soviet world and it is triumphant behind the Iron Curtain. We cannot talk it out of existence and we cannot legislate against all of its activities without legislating against some of those features which are the greatest heritage of a democracy.

But I hope this book may teach something; that it will be some sort of signpost to my fellow trade unionists. Wherever a Communist Party exists it never sleeps. It is able and ready to take advantage of the slightest weakness on the part of any non-Communist, be he Socialist or Tory. It is a party constantly at war. Its members are the victims of a war-neurosis, a war-fever and a war-hysteria.

Where a Communist Party gives ground it retreats not through moderation but through guile. It is not invincible, but it is controllable. Where its influence and power have been achieved as a result of the gullibility or apathy of those who oppose it, there can we seek a remedy. By those who oppose it I do not mean the reactionary organizations of capitalism. I mean the ordinary working man, the Socialist trade unionist who must surely be sickened by the spectacle of his union corrupted by the political opportunism of Communism.

If that ordinary trade unionist is honest he must accept

some blame for the spectacle. Wherever the Communist Party of Great Britain has obtained domination within a trade union it has done so by exploiting the apathy of the ordinary rank and file. Wherever it has lost that power, as it has done in some unions during the past two years, it has been because the rank and file has at last stood up and fought back, has attended meetings, has recognized and rejected the stacked votes and the stacked resolutions of Party fractions.

The non-Communist trade unionist must recognize that the Communist Party, however willing it seems to undertake his fight, however successful it seems to be on his behalf, is none the less ready enough to abandon him to-morrow. The Party's fight is only his fight when it fits into the general pattern of world Communist domination.

He must realize that his fellow trade unionist who is an avowed Communist has a cynical regard for the integrity of the union, that his ultimate allegiance is not to that union, not to the Trade Union Congress, but to the World Federation of Trade Unions and to the Cominform that dominates it.

We are in danger of seeing a Communist menace in terms of the Alan Nunn Mays, the Klaus Fuchs and Pontecorvos only. These men, valuable though they may be to Soviet power politics, are of minor importance in the role of a native Communist Party.

The Communist Party can only be fought in the unions. Bans and witch-hunts are of small value. The Communist Party, long experienced in turning victimization into political propaganda, is hit hardest when the workers vote against it.

I have not written this book because I wish to raise the pile of ex-Communist literature by another inch or two. I have written it in an attempt to get home to my fellow trade unionists the extent to which their interests and their rights are being shamelessly betrayed by the Communist Party.

No country in the world has a greater right to be proud of its working class and trade union history than has Britain. We have built up a movement which is based on man's right to be heard and represented in whatever way he chooses,

a movement which is based on man's fundamental belief in the decency of his neighbour.

Communism will replace this with a society based on man's fundamental fear of his neighbour.

Freedom of conscience and will is an inheritance we take too lightly, even after the Nazi war. We are in danger of having it taken away from us as much by the extreme anti-Communist as by the Communists themselves.

I have not arrived at these conclusions without much stumbling over words and much hesitation. For eighteen years I refused to believe that such freedoms were of any value in man's struggle against economic exploitation. Too readily I accepted the Party's declaration that my conscience was a vestige of capitalist society.

In the past months since my resignation I have realized that in fact such freedoms are of great strength. They do not fill my belly. They do not immediately raise my salary above £7 a week. They do not make the steps on my Number Sixty bus any shorter or the tempers of my fares the more moderate. But they do liberate my soul and allow me to look my fellow-men in the face without shame.

We face a conspiracy against such intangible values. There are people, apart from the most cynical Communists, who believe that a Durham miner, a Lancashire cotton worker or a London busman, can get along without freedom of speech and mind so long as he fights for economic liberty. I have not lived among working folk all my life to believe that the man in Hackney cherishes freedom of mind less passionately than a student in Oxford.

I say we face a conspiracy against such values. I do not believe it will be defeated in Westminster. It will not be defeated by Fleet Street or by disapproval in the middle-class suburbs.

It *can* be defeated in the trade unions, for it is in the unions that the Party is determined to fight its one-party battle. If it is defeated there its power will weaken.

If not, the Communists who have taken over Hackney to-day can take over the country to-morrow.



Picture Post

Councillor C. H. 'Bob' Darke of Hackney is an East Ender who has spent the whole of his life in the political struggles of his borough. For eighteen years, until May 1951, he was a member of the British Communist Party. He served on its influential Industrial Policy Committee and its National Transport Advisory Council. He was a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service during the war and sat on the Executive of the Fire Brigades Union. He left the Fire Service to act as Parliamentary Agent to the Communist Candidate for South Hackney during the 1945 General Election. Later he became a bus conductor. He held office in the Hackney Trades Council and the London Trades Council. Well known and well liked in the East End, he is married, with two daughters. He lives with his family in a block of council flats in Homerton.

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