

# The Revolutionary Odyssey of John Lawrence (Part 1)

**John McIlroy**

AT 7.24 ON the morning of Thursday 1st May 1958 John Lawrence became famous. As leader of the Labour Council which had declared May Day a paid holiday across the borough, he hoisted the Red Flag over St Pancras Town Hall. In the heart of the remembered political tranquillity of the 1950s, the flying of the flag and the violence at the subsequent rally which led to Lawrence's arrest captured the popular imagination. This vivid assertion of class politics made hostile headlines in every national newspaper from the *Mirror* to the *Telegraph*. Lawrence was, forever after, "the Man with the Red Flag". British Movietone News reported that their newsreel film had aroused more interest in cinemas than the FA Cup Final. Appearing at the London Palladium that week, the comedian Tommy Trinder cracked: "They're having great trouble with the trains at St Pancras. No one dares wave the Red Flag."<sup>1</sup>

Readers of *What Next?* will be familiar with Lawrence's struggle to provide socialist leadership in local government in St Pancras decades before the municipal socialism of the 1980s from the series of articles by Bob Pitt in earlier issues of this journal.<sup>2</sup> The present article commemorates Lawrence, who died in London aged 87 on 14 November 2002, by depicting a sequence of other episodes in what was a long, crowded and adventurous life on the revolutionary left. These recollections remember Lawrence before he experienced his brief five minutes of fame and trace what happened to him thereafter. They provide a portrait of the political progress of an ordinary, rank-and-file revolutionary. Lawrence never achieved high office in the labour movement and he is rarely remembered in its histories. But when we reconstruct his life it turns out, like that of so many others, to have been not only rich and unique, but politically extraordinary.

1. The Young Revolutionary: From Stalinism to Trotskyism, 1915-1944

John Gordon Michael Lawrence was born at Sandhurst, Berkshire, on 29 September 1915, the son of Gordon Lawrence, a sergeant training soldiers at the military academy to fight in France, and his wife Grace, a domestic servant who died when he was very young.<sup>3</sup> In 1926, when he was ten, his father,

who had left the army and worked in a second-hand furniture business in Brighton where the family lived, died of cancer. Lawrence was separated from his sister Phyllis and sent to live with his grandmother in East Dulwich, London. The arrangement did not work and he was eventually placed in a military orphanage in Dover. It was "a grim Victorian institution",<sup>4</sup> a miniature society cut off from the world, based on browbeating, bullying and violence, where he was intensely unhappy. At the age of 14 he became a boy soldier in the King's Regiment stationed in Liverpool. Entering the world, he experienced the hard discipline of the professional army and witnessed at first hand the urban ravages of the inter-war depression which seemed to incarnate the terminal decline of capitalism. He was a bugle boy and a prominent athlete. But he was unusual: his proficiency in music and talent as a trombonist led to training at the military school of music at Kneller Hall and later to an army scholarship at the Royal College of Music in London.

In the late 1930s Lawrence used his gifts to make a living as a jobbing musician. He played in orchestras in theatres and opera houses, although he was often unemployed. Music was refuge and self-realisation; it was not enough. Like so many of his generation, he was marked by the emergence of Fascism and the imminence of war. He was meeting political radicals in his work and encountering privilege and inequity at first hand. Unsurprisingly, he became interested in socialist ideas. His harsh upbringing, his experience in the orphanage and in the army, "gave him personal reasons for hating the bourgeoisie".<sup>5</sup> So did the society he lived in. He later recalled:

"Factories, pits, shipyards – all owned by private enterprise, all idle, shut-down. Many of them deliberately destroyed. Millions of workers rotting in the dole queues. Statistics piling up of malnutrition (starvation) among men and women who cried desperately for work. That was capitalism in the thirties – purgatory for the working class.... An experience we shall never forget, an experience which has eaten into our hearts and made socialism the hope of millions."<sup>6</sup>

The fervency of expression suggests a passionate antagonism to social injustice rooted in troubled

experience. Perhaps because he grew up in coercive institutions, perhaps because he did not come from a conventional working-class background, Lawrence identified strongly with the workers both politically and culturally. A victim of oppression reared outside the mainstream of the working class, he sensed and shared its discontents. This endured through life. His son remembered:

“His instinct was always to side with the oppressed against the oppressor. In this sense, I think, his core beliefs never really changed.... He believed that it was fundamentally wrong that anyone should grow rich and powerful through the exploitation and misery of others. And he believed that the great successes of the human race are due to our ability to co-operate.”<sup>7</sup>

These beliefs led Lawrence to become involved with the exploited in the unemployed workers' movement. Here in 1937 he encountered the Communist Party (CP). It was a natural political home for young people finding their way into politics who wanted to go beyond reformism, who wanted a more dedicated instrument to seriously fight capitalism, Fascism and war. He soon joined the party. But opposition to war was central to his thinking. And he became disillusioned by the CP's waverings over the looming conflict as it followed the twists and turns of Russian foreign policy, and increasingly impressed by the arguments of its critics. The Hitler-Stalin pact proved a step too far. In 1939 he resigned from the CP and joined a tiny Trotskyist group, the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL).<sup>8</sup> Trotskyism, he was convinced, provided a superior path to revolution and workers' power. Around this time he married Lily, whom he had met while he was studying music. She came from an Anglo-Jewish family in business in Burma, where she had been brought up, and she further broadened his horizons.

The RWL produced a range of anti-war literature, such as the pamphlet *How To Fight Hitler* and Trotsky's article “Stalin's Capitulation” which as early as March 1939 foresaw Russia's alliance with Germany. The group had its origins in a breakaway from the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), the British Section of Trotsky's Fourth International. Its leading lights were Cliff Stanton, Bill Duncan and Hilda Lane. The reasons for the breakaway remained obscure – although rumours were rife that the split had been stimulated by an *agent provocateur* from another dissident Trotskyist group, the Workers International League (WIL). But the RWL had been augmented by a small exodus from the CP in North London in opposition to its popular front policies and its line over Spain, led by the former Scottish International Brigader Bob Armstrong. It may have been this which led Lawrence to the RWL, although the group had a visible presence in North London, with a bookshop in Upper Street, Islington, while more than one recruit was gained from its advertisements in *Reynolds' News*. Even a penniless refugee from Poland and the Fourth International, Isaac Deutscher, discovered the RWL and briefly worked with it.<sup>9</sup>

Deutscher would later influence Lawrence. But his more immediate guides were Hilda Lane, who had worked full-time for the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in the West of England before encountering Trotskyism in the early 1930s, and, particularly, Bill Duncan, another veteran of the ILP and the Trotskyist Marxist Group within it. Lane (1891-1961) was an austere, unbending and humourless Trotskyist. She would be Lawrence's faithful political companion through each successive phase in his chequered career until her death. Duncan (1905-1961?), a soft-spoken insomniac Scot and an inveterate gambler, was steeped in Jesuitical Marxism, although branded abstract, academic and inactive by his political antagonists. Lawrence became “one of a small group of youngsters who sat at Bill Duncan's feet. He was training us in Marxist ideas, to stand up and argue for the Fourth International”.<sup>10</sup> Harry Shindler, then a young engineering worker in South London and for the next dozen years Lawrence's boon companion and personal link with the factory working class, recalls discussions far into the night at Duncan's home and then walking the streets of London until dawn with his new friend, avidly discussing Marxism.<sup>11</sup> Eve Brown (Finch) who came from a Trotskyist family and attended Duncan's “lectures” in 1939 remembered: “John Lawrence was his greatest find.”<sup>12</sup> Apart from this induction into Trotskyist ideas, Lawrence's youthful activity appears to have been limited to speaking at Hyde Park and intervening in CP meetings.<sup>13</sup>

The RWL emphasised its loyalty to the Fourth International, despite its refusal to join it. It criticised the official section, the RSL, for its passivity and its self-burial inside the Labour Party. It admired the WIL's activism but somewhat ironically took strong issue with its refusal to enter the International. It perceived its own unique, catalytic role as clarifying issues and drawing the competing groups together in a new British section. But it overreached itself through the publication of expensive pamphlets and a beautifully produced paper, *Workers Fight*. When, in May 1940, the Fourth International again called for unity between the disputatious British groups, the RWL dissolved. The established account states that some of the group around Hilda Lane joined the RSL while younger members enrolled in the WIL.<sup>14</sup> However, it seems more probable that the entire group joined the WIL rather than the official section of the International and that it was only after an acrimonious sojourn there that some of them led by Hilda Lane moved on to the RSL.

The WIL's *Workers International News* for June 1940 was sub-headed “Incorporating *Workers Fight*” and announced the fusion of the two groups; this is affirmed by RSL minutes of the time.<sup>15</sup> Former WIL activist Jim Hinchcliffe remembered Hilda Lane joining the group, although his old comrade Sam Bornstein was adamant that she had never been a member.<sup>16</sup> However, the minutes of the WIL Central Committee (CC) for July 1941, more than a year after the RWL dissolved, state:

“Local 5 ... one comrade raised the question of no confidence in JL who was carrying out no activity for the group although he was doing factory work. Furthermore *he was collaborating with Duncan, Lane and the other members recently expelled from the group for disloyalty and inactivity*” (our emphasis).<sup>17</sup>

This would seem to establish that Lawrence (JL) was a member of the WIL for around 12 months. It would seem to confirm that Duncan and Lane had also joined the WIL on the liquidation of the RWL. This is corroborated by the former RWL member, Harry Shindler, who resigned from the WIL in December 1940, citing a number of reasons, including the WIL’s continued “refusal to join the official section”.<sup>18</sup> In his letter of resignation, Shindler claimed, testifying to the problems that already afflicted the Trotskyist groups, that Duncan and Lane were branded “police spies” by the leaders of the WIL and that “the mover of the resolution [that the RWL should fuse with the WIL] was not an RWL member but a member of the WIL acting as an unprincipled spy inside the RWL”.<sup>19</sup>

The WIL minutes for July 1941 continue: “He [JL] thereupon stated that he did not consider himself a loyal member, he criticised the group for lack of discussion, for splitting from the Militant Labour League [RSL] on a personal basis, for not joining the official section, etc. He resigned from the group. His expulsion was ratified by the CC.”<sup>20</sup>

It seems clear that the RWL members around Duncan and Lane, including Lawrence, joined the WIL on a semi-factional basis in order to further unity; meeting with no success, they quickly decamped to the RSL. When Lawrence followed them in the late summer of 1941, he encountered an organisation which was increasingly depleted in membership and increasingly factionalised between the leadership around Denzil Deane Harber and the Left Fraction led by John Robinson. Harber (1909-1966) was well-read with a sharp mind and a sharp tongue. But he lacked leadership skills and the RSL’s political differences, centred on the meaning of “revolutionary defeatism” and their attitude to the war, were compounded by increasingly intense personal rivalries.<sup>21</sup> Lawrence quickly added to the all-encompassing intrigue by utilising his insider knowledge of the WIL to demonstrate his new found loyalty to the RSL. On 6 October 1941, he handed over to the executive of the group written charges that an RSL member Charlie Orwell had discussed internal issues with members of the WIL. Orwell was promptly expelled. Turning to the path so recently traversed by his accuser, he announced he would immediately join the WIL “to win it over to the Fourth”.<sup>22</sup>

Lawrence’s rise in the RSL was meteoric. Within weeks of joining the group and despite his inexperience, he was appointed its paid industrial organiser in succession to Starkey Jackson who had been called up to the navy. Almost immediately he began to proselytise for the Proletarian Military Policy – which for many distinguished the WIL from

the RSL – arguing for workers’ control of production and the armed forces as against the RSL leadership’s abstentionist, one-sided application of the slogan “the enemy is at home”. He was soon advocating “immediate fusion with the WIL”.<sup>23</sup> This was a little surprising coming from a man who had left the WIL in disgust some five months earlier.

If we take away the question of the International, Lawrence had, in a matter of months, politically reinvented himself and was now in full accord with the positions of the WIL. He vigorously criticised the RSL leadership for their all-pervasive emphasis on activity in an inactive Labour Party and their neglect of the obvious arena for wartime intervention, the industrial struggle in the mines and engineering. He deplored what he saw as their passive, propagandist inertia in refusing to raise the demands of Trotsky’s 1938 *Transitional Programme* which they felt had to wait greater radicalisation among the workers. And he argued for proletarianisation of the war against what he saw as their purist and ineffectual version of “revolutionary defeatism”. Lawrence and Lane produced a document, “On The Military Policy”, for the RSL’s September 1941 conference although it was defeated by the combined votes of the Harber leadership and the Left Fraction.

By early 1942, Lawrence was the acknowledged leader of a faction in the RSL known as “the Right”, “the Trotskyist Opposition” or, tellingly, “the WIL faction”. For Lawrence was now in receipt of payment from the WIL for his activities on their behalf inside the RSL, such as travelling to Leeds to suborn the local branch. His protestations of innocence when his duplicity was revealed and his insistence that he was remunerated by the WIL only for “technical work” on their paper *Socialist Appeal* were incongruous and unconvincing.<sup>24</sup> The WIL leader Jock Haston later confirmed that Lawrence was a paid agent of his group and explained:

“We won Lawrence over to us when he was still a member of the RSL and we kept him in the RSL with the object of trying to win other people over to our point of view, it’s as simple as that. It’s a typical old entrust tactic.... The fact that we did it with other organisations didn’t prevent us doing it with some other Trotskyist faction.”<sup>25</sup>

Haston (1912-1986), one of the most talented of British Trotskyists, had a strong if fleeting influence on Lawrence who later admitted that he was wrong to act as “a freelance”. But he felt that he was justified, at least to some extent, by the failure of the RSL to adopt “a serious attitude towards the question of fusion”.<sup>26</sup> This meant that “the organisation was being doomed to permanent sterility” by Harber whom he regarded as “an unprincipled manoeuvrer” and “a petit bourgeois gossip”.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, he paid the price for his own intrigues and those of Harber when he was suspended after the RSL’s 1942 conference and subsequently expelled from the group.

The simplest explanation for Lawrence’s erraticism and precocious resort to conspiracy after only a handful of years in the movement is that he

was in over his head, politically plastic and pushed into leadership too soon in a sectarian environment. Rather than thinking for himself, he thus eagerly absorbed the ideas and methods of Duncan, Lane, Haston and Harber. But few young Trotskyists were quite as volatile in their politics. Harber put it more uncharitably: "Lawrence is a notorious weathercock incapable of maintaining a consistent political opinion for two days in succession."<sup>28</sup> A more conspiratorial conjecture is that he was a WIL agent from the beginning and his expulsion from the WIL was a "put up job" to ease his passage into the RSL. This seems unlikely. It was implicitly denied by Haston and depends on Lawrence's advocacy of the WIL's politics almost from the moment he joined the RSL. The WIL veteran Sam Levy certainly thought it possible. But his judgement may have been coloured by his estimation of the later career of Lawrence whom he recalled "had been involved in more intrigues and manoeuvres than anyone else I have known".<sup>29</sup>

And, to the chagrin of the WIL leadership, Lawrence's political shifts were far from finished, for he again transferred his allegiance. In May 1942 that arch conspirator, Gerry Healy, was boasting about developments inside the RSL: "Our section is headed by Lawrence who was once in our group.... This intrigue was pulled by me."<sup>30</sup> Whether or not Healy (1913-1989) was Lawrence's controller is unclear but by July 1942 he was bitterly lamenting: "We made a very bad mistake with Lawrence. There is a tendency to build these people up before they have proved themselves."<sup>31</sup> The plot thickened when Sam Gordon (1910-1982), a close confederate of James Cannon (1890-1974), the leader of the American Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), who was permanently embittered by the WIL's refusal to join the Fourth International in 1938, arrived in Britain in the summer of 1942. Gordon contacted Lawrence and soon set him on a new course. To the consternation of the WIL, Lawrence changed horses and became the British representative of the SWP and the New York-based leadership of the Fourth International. He quietly but decisively dropped the idea of splitting the RSL and taking what support he could muster into the WIL. He determined instead to get back into the RSL, reconstitute it and arrange a proper fusion under the auspices of Cannon.<sup>32</sup>

By the end of 1943, such a fusion was on the cards and Lawrence was aligned with the group around Gerry Healy in the WIL which was also being developed by the SWP to further its influence in a new, unified organisation. But there was no doubt that at this stage Lawrence remained the Americans' favourite son. Harber bitterly remarked that in "every letter that arrives from the States, like some King Charles' head, the name of Lawrence appears as a subject of praise. This method of ballyhoo and advertisement or – as it is termed in the States – 'a build up' or the 'key man' principle is certainly not the organisational method of Bolshevism".<sup>33</sup> But metamorphosis was still on the cards and the

apparently inexhaustible Lawrence still had one final wartime *volte-face* to execute. On the formation of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) in March 1944 from the fusion of the RSL and the WIL, he peremptorily deserted his supporters. He now unveiled himself as a loyal member of the RCP leadership around Jock Haston. It was left to Healy to don the apparel and accent of the American ambassador and begin to build a minority faction loyal to the SWP in the new party.

## 2. Building the Party: Organising in Wales, 1944-1946

For most of the war, Lawrence had eked out a precarious living as a full-time revolutionary, helped by small subventions from Lily's family. His call-up, deferred because of a heart murmur and low blood pressure, never materialised. Spells of full-time political work were interspersed with work in a leather factory and engineering factories in London and Sheffield, as well as a spell as a night telephonist. He had travelled some distance from the young musician whose political instincts had been confirmed by the Glynebourne glitterati clinking glasses and exchanging narcissistic banter as the world hurtled towards war in the summer of 1939.<sup>34</sup> He was more convinced than ever of the emancipatory mission of Trotskyism. But his formation had been, on the whole, factional, sectarian and one-dimensional. He had developed politically inside a group with a culture of intense disputation but scarcely any implantation inside the working class and very limited contact with it. This changed, albeit in circumscribed fashion. Now he became a member of the Central Committee (CC) of the RCP and in April 1944 he was appointed South Wales organiser of the new party.

Haston saw great opportunities in both the influence the CP exercised within the Welsh valleys, specifically in the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF), and the cracks which he thought were beginning to appear in it. The strike wave of early 1944 over the failure of the Porter Award to adequately increase miners' wages certainly produced tensions within the CP and disgruntlement with the policies of Arthur Horner, Stalinist leader of the SWMF who was second to none in his support for the war effort. In Scotland, the Trotskyists around the *Militant Miner* had been able to mobilise opposition to the collaborative, productionist policies of the CP miners' leaders. In Wales opposition was emerging around Trevor James, a miners' agent in the Swansea Valley. Dissidence inside the CP was signalled by the defection of SWMF executive member Dai Llewellyn and disciplinary measures against those who failed to strenuously oppose strikes. The RCP sought to take advantage of this. But on Lawrence's arrival in Neath it had just two members in the entire principality.<sup>35</sup>

The publicity over the arrest and prosecution of Haston and other RCP leaders under the 1927 Trade Disputes Act provided Lawrence with an opening.

He was successful in securing the support of three well-known South Wales Labour MPs, Aneurin Bevan, W.G. Cove and S.O. Davies, for the Anti-Labour Laws Victims' Defence Committee. Despite opposition from the SWMF, whose executive discussed the role of the RCP in spreading "disunity" as early as July 1944, he obtained affiliation to the committee from three lodges, Dowlais, Merthyr Vale and Penallta, as well as branches of the AEU, ASLEF, GMWU and NUPE, and Merthyr Trades Council.<sup>36</sup> But difficulties were also apparent. The local press was soon condemning "Trotskyist Activity in South Wales". The CPGB issued a circular on the Porter Award claiming that the miners' "grievances gave the Trotskyists their chance to exploit the strike for their own ends, and to slander the elected leadership of the miners, especially Arthur Horner, the President".<sup>37</sup>

By the end of 1944, Lawrence had established a small RCP group in Merthyr and recruited a sprinkling of members in Llanelli and Swansea. The *Socialist Appeal* was selling 800 copies of each issue. There were mass sales at several pits while 60 copies were sold by a member in the Royal Ordnance Factory in Llanelli and a similar figure by a sympathiser in the Richard Thomas and Baldwin Steelworks at Ebbw Vale. The Merthyr Anti-Labour Laws Committee was probably the most representative in Britain, while in the Ammon Valley five miners' lodges affiliated.<sup>38</sup> Lawrence wrote in the *Socialist Appeal* about the study circles he began in September 1944 at the Miners' Hall in Merthyr and the Institute at Gorseinon; the fining of miners for breach of contract for "failing to work with due diligence" at Abercynon and Penrhiwceiber; and the arrest of Ebbw Vale steelworkers for using company materials to make toys as Christmas presents for their children.<sup>39</sup> He wrote about silicosis and the impact of "Horner's wartime speed-up" on miners' health. He continually criticised the policies of the SWMF leaders. He warned against the problems of lack of democracy in the projected National Union of Mineworkers as well as the need for the projected nationalisation of the mines to embody workers' control.<sup>40</sup>

Towards the end of 1944 he made a small breakthrough when he brought Johnny "Crown" Jones into the RCP. Lawrence had noted "our chief fault in the area is lack of knowledge – intimate knowledge, that is, of miners' lives and conditions of work. This puts us at a disadvantage making our general policy clear to miners".<sup>41</sup> Jones was an autodidact, deeply disillusioned with Stalinism who worked in the anthracite pits of Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, numbered among the best organised and most militant in South Wales. Well-read, good with his pen and an excellent speaker, he soon brought his three brothers into the RCP. His influence promised the Trotskyists the intimate knowledge and inside voice that had hitherto handicapped them.<sup>42</sup>

Haston's candidature in the Neath by-election occasioned by the death of the Labour MP Sir William

Jenkins in late 1944 was intended to further improve the RCP's position in West Wales and beyond. The CP's adherence to the wartime electoral truce meant that the Trotskyists would have a platform from which to both criticise reformism and bring to the attention of the Welsh workers, who in the eyes of the RCP possessed what Lawrence termed a "communist culture", the fact that there were now two communist parties abroad in the land. Lawrence was involved in discussions with Trevor James as to the possibility of his standing as an ILP candidate with RCP support. They came to nothing and the RCP resolved to raise its own flag. The story of the ensuing election, in which Lawrence played a leading role as Haston's election agent, has been often told.<sup>43</sup> The RCP's long campaign was launched in February 1945 in a series of letters by Lawrence in the *Neath Guardian*. He stressed the commitment of both Labour and His Majesty's Communist Party to Churchill's coalition and the CP's desertion of defence of the workers in favour of increased production and enhanced exploitation.<sup>44</sup> But delays in issuing the writ meant that the contest was postponed until May. By that time, the European war was over, the coalition was on its last legs and a general election loomed, so that conditions for the RCP were considerably less favourable. Nonetheless, a determined Lawrence threw himself wholeheartedly into the campaign. A post-mortem concluded: "Comrade Lawrence presented our mining policy in all the chief mining areas making a thorough criticism of the reformist and Stalinist scheme of nationalisation."<sup>45</sup>

Haston, who had not set his sights too high, received 1,781 votes, compared with 30,847 for the able Labour candidate, the former miner, D.J. Williams, and 6,290 for Wynn Samuels, the Welsh Nationalist. The vote fell below the performance of the ILP in recent by-elections. Despite the RCP throwing all its resources into the fight, it suggested the indispensability of a strong presence in the local labour movement. It might have been perceived as demonstrating the intractable difficulties a second communist party would encounter, confronted with the dominance of Labourism and subordinate attachments to Stalinism. But it could be viewed as a beginning and Lawrence took the positive position that votes had been won on an open, resolute, revolutionary programme which had emphasised solidarity with German and Japanese workers and savaged the reformism of the CP. But he was certainly over-optimistic in his belief that: "There can be no doubt that the Stalinists have been largely discredited as a result of their battle with the Trotskyists in Neath."<sup>46</sup> He was just as wide of the mark, as he would soon admit, in his verdict that: "The campaign also revealed a deep-seated disgust with Labour's rotten record existing among the workers."<sup>47</sup>

Many were willing to read the *Appeal*: over 7,500 copies were sold and it set them thinking. But recruitment to the RCP suggested that it impelled only a handful to fundamentally rethink their political allegiance. A branch of six members was

formed in Neath. The Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen branch which had grown to six members by early 1945 made an additional four recruits from the campaign. There were four members in Merthyr and Tredegar and a further five members scattered across South Wales.<sup>48</sup> If some 25 members, excluding Lawrence and Heaton Lee who was assisting him, represented progress on the two members at the party's foundation, it represented the zenith of the RCP's growth.

Through 1945 and into 1946, Lawrence continued to vigorously prosecute what was increasingly an uphill struggle. He intervened in CP meetings to criticise the party's organiser, Alun Thomas, offering £5 to the CP if Thomas could document his allegations that Trotsky supported Fascism, a challenge which was refused.<sup>49</sup> In the *Socialist Appeal* he wrote proudly of his three proletarian branches comprised almost entirely of miners and steelworkers.<sup>50</sup> There were, in fact, at that time 11 miners in the RCP, although apart from Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, the only other miners' lodge with members was Penallta; 4 steelworkers; 1 railwayman; 1 joiner; 1 engineer; 1 shop assistant; and a cinema operator.<sup>51</sup> The Neath branch, Lawrence reported, was "pushing ahead in all spheres of activity"; it aimed to double its membership by 1946. There were open-air meetings every Saturday outside the Co-op and street sales of *Socialist Appeal* in Neath, Aberdare and Port Talbot, averaging 150-200 copies of each issue. Lawrence delivered regular lectures each Sunday night in the new party office previously used by the CP in Alfred Street, Neath.<sup>52</sup> The Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen branch in turn was active in the pits and in Ammanford, and Johnny Jones fought a seat on Pontardawe Rural District Council.<sup>53</sup> Lawrence made contacts among the shop stewards at the Morris Motors plant in Llanelli and put them in touch with their counterparts in the Oxford factory. Drawing on his musical past, he even organised a concert party with Emrys Davies, "the popular baritone" and soloists from the Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen pit band, as well as campaigning against attempts by the churches to restrict Sunday night meetings.<sup>54</sup>

For Lawrence, far more than for the RCP, this was a fruitful period. For the first time he was intensely active in a proletarian community, propagandising and organising, with however limited success, among trade unionists. After the internal factionalism of the war years, he discovered that he had a talent for it. He continued to report the post-war discontents of Welsh workers in *Socialist Appeal* and he was developing into an effective agitational journalist. In one issue he told the story of a 74-year-old general labourer still working a 12-hour day, 6.30am to 6.30pm, as he had done since 1885:

"Behind him there is 65 years of thankless, back-breaking toil. In front of him, What? ... If your blood boils when you read of this brutal exploitation, if you are determined to put an end to this system which compels men and women of our class to labour twelve hours a day when they should long ago have retired on a comfortable pension ... if you are determined to end once and for all the capitalist system then the

future can be bright."<sup>55</sup>

Lawrence certainly remained optimistic about the prospect. In the autumn of 1945 he was reporting: "We are becoming popular now.... There is really a profound discontent with the Labour government. We get lots of workers coming into the shop and criticising them and agreeing with our line.... We sold right out of the last issue of *Socialist Appeal*. In the streets of Ammanford alone we sold 400 last Saturday and it was raining at the time."<sup>56</sup>

There were to be many more rainy days. Through 1946 the membership of the RCP declined nationally. There was growing financial pressure and by the Spring the need for retrenchment and curtailment of wartime ambition was apparent. Five professionals, including Lawrence, were taken off the pay-roll.<sup>57</sup> Lawrence returned to London and a year later the membership in Wales had declined to 13.<sup>58</sup> It was a decline which would continue. For more than two years, Lawrence had been a loyal and at times outspoken member of the RCP majority faction. In the 1945 conference discussion, for example, he had trenchantly urged that in relation to industrial struggle, "... the position of the minority is divorced from reality and entirely false".<sup>59</sup> He had steered well clear of the minority faction headed by Healy and staffed by many of his old comrades from the RSL's Trotskyist Opposition, indeed a delegate who described Lawrence's contribution on industrial work as "masterly" incurred the infamous wrath of Healy who years later attributed many of the problems of the minority to Lawrence's agreement with Haston.<sup>60</sup>

John Goffe believed that Lawrence had genuinely deserted the perspective of entrism in the Labour Party and "had gone overboard" for the open party embodied by the RCP.<sup>61</sup> But the relentlessly restless Lawrence now executed yet another about turn in a seemingly endless repertoire, declared his support for the perspective of impending economic crisis and the need for Labour Party entry, and enrolled in the ranks of the minority. Perhaps after his recent experience, the words of Welsh workers, "Haston should be the candidate of the Labour Party",<sup>62</sup> came back to haunt him. Perhaps he now concluded that the only way to sustain the mass work he had found so briefly exhilarating was through the framework of the Labour Party. Perhaps deprived of organisational responsibilities, he set to rethinking his politics. Perhaps, as the more cynical of the RCP leadership suggested, his latest conversion was bound up with his loss of gainful employment.<sup>63</sup> Ted Grant concluded that while Lawrence at the time possessed "a certain capacity and flair", he "lacked real stamina and endurance and was infected by the moods of pessimism that now began to affect certain layers".<sup>64</sup> Perhaps. But there was still a long way to go.

3. Building the Labour Left: The Editor of *Socialist Outlook*, 1947-1953

In 1953 Lawrence looked back on his own brief life as

a miner: "Gather up your shovel, your pick or mandril, your 7lb lamp, your food box and bottle of water, (no nice cups of coffee underground) perhaps an axe and start walking.... For a while you walk upright, then as the roof gets lower, you bend your neck then your back. Probably you end up crawling on your hands and knees over rocks and under rocks to get to the coal face. All this might take up to three-quarters of an hour – and sweating and full of dust though you are, you have not yet started work.... Then you go to the face and there you slog with pick and shovel ... shots are fired to loosen the coal. You crouch out of danger. A piece of the roof falls in. You repair it under conditions which can spell death (and often do) ... all around, just outside the little circle of light from your lamp, the world is dark, dark like you never know.... And then there is the dust that chokes the lungs ...."<sup>65</sup>

Lawrence worked in the mines at Cannock Chase, Staffordshire. Most of the pits were unmodernised, output was low, the coal was hewed manually: "they were ageing pits worked by ageing men."<sup>66</sup> Harry Finch, a member of the RCP, had been sent to Cannock as a Bevin boy and in 1944 another minority supporter Bob Condon, a former Welsh miner, CP activist and International Brigader in Spain, had been appointed the agent (full-time official) of the Cannock miners. In late 1946 Lawrence discussed with Healy and the RCP leadership the possibility of his finding work in the Welsh mines. It was dropped as a bad idea in the face of the CP's influence in the union and Lawrence's relative notoriety. Condon's position in Cannock, however, facilitated such a project.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, from the point of view of the Healy group, the miners' role in the local Labour Party – the union controlled 34 out of 84 votes on the management committee – was attractive. In terms of building the left, the staunchly Labour constituency had returned Jennie Lee to Parliament in 1945.<sup>68</sup>

With characteristic optimism, the group saw only this side of things. They glossed over the fact that these isolated mining communities were quintessentially moderate Labour, instinctively loyal to Attlee's government, strongly "... inward-looking, clannish, conservative, distrustful of fancy notions, suspicious of change".<sup>69</sup> They soon encountered "fancy notions" aplenty as a group of half a dozen members of RCP led by Lawrence descended on Cannock in the Spring of 1947. Lawrence and his comrades started work in the mines and commenced activity in the local Labour Party. Harry Ratner remembered how the expedition initially excited curiosity which, however, swiftly turned into suspicion. The Trotskyists in their turn were startled by the "petit bourgeois" politics and culture of many of the miners, as well as by the harsh nature of their work in conditions little changed since the turn of the century.<sup>70</sup> It was quickly brought home to the colonists that on the whole "Cannock men, traditionally 'moderates', acquiesced in their fate. They did not seek to make it or escape it".<sup>71</sup> Moreover, difficulties in both work and politics produced

problems within the group, not least with Condon who had an established position in the community in Cannock. He was already under pressure in the union for his revolutionary views and increasingly embarrassed by the Trotskyist diaspora. He resigned from the RCP, then rejoined and then resigned again. By the summer, his relationship with Harry Finch had broken down as his letters demonstrate: "I only had contempt and dislike for you but you pretended friendship while all the time your real feelings were quite different. Of course this Stalinist Asiatic subtlety of yours has never fooled me and I was always perfectly aware of your venom and cunning."<sup>72</sup> Chauvinism verging on anti-semitism was not completely absent from revolutionary circles in the 1940s.

Once more the Trotskyists were in the wrong place at the wrong time. By the autumn of 1947, the group had decided to cut its losses. The caravan returned to London and more fertile pastures, sadder but wiser for the experience. From June 1946, Lawrence had taken a full part in the direction of the RCP minority and had been involved in the production of its main documents. These crystallised the faction on the basis of inevitable economic crisis, the turn of advanced workers to the Labour Party and thus the need for complete entry and an international perspective which asserted a debilitated Stalinism and the enduring capitalist nature of Stalin's European conquests.<sup>73</sup> The minority faction were completely dependent for their ideas on the new, Paris-based leadership of the Fourth International around Michael Pablo and Ernest Mandel, and Cannon in New York. Pablo (1911-1996) had become a Trotskyist in Greece in the 1930s and headed the European secretariat during the war, emerging as secretary of the International in 1945. He moved from cautious interpretation of the transformed world – in the immediate post-war years he held the *glacis*, the buffer zone of East European states, to be capitalist – to wholesale revision of Trotskyist politics after 1948. Mandel (1923-1995), a young Belgian still in his twenties, had his own ideas, but was already susceptible to the search for substitutes for the working class and for Trotskyism which would define much of his later career. For the next decade he played second fiddle to Pablo, supporting the Greek's new thinking and organisational manoeuvres.

Lawrence quickly demonstrated his new found orthodoxy and loyalty, as well as his rediscovered factionalism, by writing to his old mentor, Sam Gordon, about his concern when Haston opened up discussion on the nature of Russia and its satellites. This despite his advocacy of such debate only a few weeks earlier when he supported the majority.<sup>74</sup> Consequent discussions on the CC, of which he was now reduced to an alternate member, affirmed that when it came to theory he remained very much the epigone, an eager enthusiast for whatever came out of Paris.<sup>75</sup> In February 1946, as a partisan supporter of the majority, he demanded the withdrawal of

Soviet Troops from occupied Eastern Europe. A few months later, as a leading member of the minority, he opposed the demand in the belief that this was the position of the International. He reverted with alacrity to his original position on discovering he was mistaken. Despite criticism, he refused to admit or analyse his mistake.<sup>76</sup>

However, the insistent central demand which drove antagonisms within the RCP, and between its majority faction and the Fourth International, was the question of the Labour Party. With the decision to split the RCP in autumn 1947 to facilitate entrism on the part of the minority, the Labour Party took precedence over all else for the Healy faction, now known as the Club. In pursuit of the masses, Lawrence followed Hilda Lane into the Holborn and St Pancras South Labour Party in 1947 and he spent most of 1948 making links with the Labour left in London. He formed a particularly fruitful association with Tom Braddock. The 61-year-old Braddock (1887-1976), an architect from Bolton, was MP for Mitcham, a seat he would lose in the 1950 general election. A supporter of the Soviet Union, he was dissatisfied with both the course of the Attlee government and the response of its critics, the largely ineffectual "Keep Left" group around Jennie Lee and Michael Foot and the crypto-Communists such as John Platt-Mills and D.N. Pritt. Braddock was interested in a new oppositional paper, given the limitations on this score of *Tribune*, which even received a Labour Party subsidy in 1949-50. He was persuaded to put money into a new paper and eventually a printshop. The founder of the Constructional Engineering Union and its general secretary since 1939, Jack Stanley, also lent his support. Stanley (1885-1957) too had a long history of enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. With this indispensable sponsorship, *Socialist Outlook* was launched as broad left paper in December 1948.<sup>77</sup>

The Club's developing influence in St Pancras was suggested by the albeit short-lived presence on the paper's management committee of Daphne Barnes, the constituency secretary, and a young North London revolutionary, later the popular historian, Jasper Ridley, who, in a glimpse of the future, soon defected to the CP. *Socialist Outlook* was owned by the Labour Publishing Company in which supporters could buy shares. For almost all its existence, the paper, which started as a monthly and graduated to a weekly, was edited by Lawrence, who headed an editorial board made up of Healy, Braddock and Stanley. A wide range of left MPs contributed, from those who had traditionally worked with the CP such as Konni Zilliacus and S.O. Davies, through the former CPer but rightward moving Bessie Braddock, to more "mainstream" Labour lefts such as John Parker, Fenner Brockway and Harold Davies, as well as relatively prominent trade unionists traditionally in the CP orbit such as Jim Figgins of the railway workers and Dickie Barrett of the Stevedores and Dockers. The project was facilitated when in May 1949, Ellis Smith, MP, suggested in *Reynolds' News* the need for a broad ginger group to push the government

further along the road to socialism. Lawrence and Healy fell upon the idea with alacrity. At Labour's conference that October, Lawrence, Braddock and Smith addressed 160 delegates and announced the creation of the Socialist Fellowship. It was launched in November 1949 and local groups were formed across the constituencies. The Fellowship stood for extended nationalisation, workers' control, ending gross inequalities of income, a socialist Europe and freedom for the colonies. Lawrence, Lane and Fred Emmett from the Club were all on its national committee.<sup>78</sup>

These initiatives demonstrated the nature of the project in which Lawrence played a central part and the contradictions between its theory and practice. Deep entry was predicated on the emergence of a centrist current in the labour movement in reaction to capitalist slump. But there was no slump and no centrist current of any significance. So the Club had to bend all its efforts to create in the Labour Party the very conditions which had motivated its entry in the first place. The Trotskyists thus donned the multi-coloured vestments of centrism: to all intents and purposes they became centrists themselves, seeking to organise what was essentially a small, left reformist current, arguing that Labour had betrayed its socialist past but, suitably recharged and revitalised, could still legislate socialism through Parliament. Moreover, the practice of entry which Lawrence espoused was even more profound than that prescribed by the Paris leadership. There was, in violation of Pablo's prescriptions, no open Trotskyist centre and no open revolutionary journal. When the Club began to belatedly produce *Labour Review* in 1952, it was largely another instrument in the adaptation to left reformism, an adaptation symbolically affirmed by the fact that, in the context of an overworked group of perhaps 80-90 members scattered across the country, both the main leaders, Healy and Lawrence, sought to become MPs. Questions such as the duration of entry were not seriously considered. The Club possessed no intellectuals and its approach was characterised by catastrophism and hyperactivity. There was little discussion of fundamentals in an internal life in which the demand for orthodoxy was strengthened by the rash of defections and expulsions triggered by the liquidation of the RCP and the entry of its former members into the Club in 1949.<sup>79</sup>

What was perhaps more remarkable than the turn to reformism was Lawrence's adaptation to Stalinism as a potential vehicle for socialist advance. Its provenance again lay in Paris and the International Secretariat (IS). John Goffe, the Club's representative in Paris from 1947-1950, noted that: "We supported the position of the IS virtually 100 per cent."<sup>80</sup> That position determined that on the outbreak of hostilities between Stalin and Tito, Yugoslavia suddenly ceased to be capitalist: miraculously, it mutated into a deformed workers' state. Overnight, the Yugoslavian CP developed the potential to become "a revolutionary party". The



Cominform Theses of Zhadanov defining the global struggle in terms of a millenarian contest between blocs rather than classes, between two camps, capitalist and Stalinist, was just as swiftly adopted, with the Trotskyists located firmly if critically in the latter camp. By 1949, Pablo was adumbrating as against socialist revolution the possibility of centuries of transitional formations, a foreseeable future of deformed workers' states.<sup>81</sup> The 1950 conference of the Club repeated his prediction of "war-revolution", the belief that an imminent world war between imperialism and Stalinism would turn into an international civil war and revolutionary struggles.<sup>82</sup> The Third World Congress of the Fourth International in August 1951 added to this automatist concoction the central role of Stalinist parties in such revolutionary struggles. Fully supported by the Club and its delegates, Healy, Lawrence and Bill Hunter, the Congress concluded that national Communist parties with a mass base could, as their Chinese and Yugoslav counterparts had, "project a revolutionary orientation". Where, as in France and Italy, such parties had such a mass base, Trotskyists should enter them.<sup>83</sup>

These ideas fundamentally revised the essentials of pre-war Trotskyism. They replaced the working class as the active agency of revolution with an inexorable and optimistic historical determinism which recast Mao and Tito and a long line which would lead through Messali Hadj to Castro and Gorbachev as precursors of an inevitable socialism. For a few they would provide a bridge along which they would pass from Trotskyism to Stalinism. They did not go uncontested at the time. They were challenged in a variety of ways by Max Shachtman and Tony Cliff, by Grandizo Munis and Natalia Trotsky, all of whom criticised this new orientation towards Stalinism. But they were accepted enthusiastically by Lawrence and by *Socialist Outlook*. As one revolutionary critic put it, "the comrades who are in charge of the paper have unquestioningly followed the lead of the IS".<sup>84</sup> The paper's coverage of China, Yugoslavia and Russia was largely uncritical. Indeed, letters from Tito's Trotskyist critics were refused publication by Lawrence.<sup>85</sup> The supplement on the Korean War, it was claimed, "could have been written in King Street".<sup>86</sup> Defending it, Lawrence developed no critique of the North Korean police state, suggesting simply that it represented a disembodied but irresistible and emancipatory colonial revolution, "as great in its implications for the future of mankind as was the Russian revolution".<sup>87</sup>

His criticisms of the Russians were diplomatic, muted and evasive: "We are far from suggesting that the Russian government at all times and under all conditions supports progressive movements."<sup>88</sup> He gave one example, Stalin's attitude to Indian independence 1941-45, before proceeding to insist that only supporters of the North Koreans and Russians had the right to take them to task. If this was questionable in itself, little subsequent criticism

appeared in the paper. In this, *Socialist Outlook* might be unfavourably contrasted with earlier Trotskyist journals. And, of course, there was no need for it. As far as the Labour leadership was concerned, Lawrence had complete license to criticise Stalinism. None of this was in any sense required by the needs of entrism in a Labour Party where there were, of course, fellow travellers but where many on the left were sharp critics of Stalinism. One of these put matters rather more explicitly than Lawrence: "The Stalinist trend of the *Socialist Outlook* becomes more pronounced with each issue.... Let us make no mistake, the workers have no illusions in the USSR. Years of counter-revolutionary activity, Spain, France, etc, have destroyed the high esteem in which the old Bolsheviks were held."<sup>89</sup> Another worker who had flirted with the Club in Nottingham was also prepared to call a spade a spade:

"*Socialist Outlook* appears to me to be deliberately overlooking the Imperialist character of Russian policy and the ruthlessly undemocratic nature of communist regimes ... Today Russia exacts tribute from her colonies in Eastern Europe on an ever increasing scale. She is not concerned with the well-being of the workers and peasants in every part of the world but seeking to use the legitimate grievances of such people for her own ends."<sup>90</sup>

These uncomfortable facts were precisely those that went substantially unpublicised in a paper in which, in accordance with the Club's organic politics rather than calculated adaptation to entrism, it was the progressive role of Stalinism which predominated. This is clear from Lawrence's reply to the above critic: "We are a socialist paper and we take sides. Consequently, we have always to defend the socialist movement and its achievement against its main enemy, capitalism.... Russia is part of the socialist movement by virtue of the fact that the Russian workers long ago in 1917 overthrew Czarism and Capitalism and by establishing a planned economy laid the essential basis for the development of the socialist society.... It is this great conquest of the Russian working class which world capitalism and especially American capitalism wishes to destroy."<sup>91</sup>

After more of this identification of Russia with socialism came the characteristic, muted minor key: "... such an attitude does not in the slightest degree commit us to defending all the actions of the Russian government nor does it involve us in whitewashing the undemocratic regime".<sup>92</sup> But the weight and balance was always on defending "the great conquest", on asserting that the barbarous Stalinist dictatorship was part of "the socialist movement", rather than insisting on the need for socialists to remove it. The undemocratic regime was never addressed in any serious, sustained Trotskyist fashion. The need for a political revolution in Russia was scarcely highlighted in the perception of many of its readers. The "social gains" of 1917 were inadequately distinguished from the regime of those who profited from them. In practice, defending "the

great conquest” entailed defending actually existing Stalinism. The strategic subordination of critique to defence, with critique erupting only episodically as over the Slansky trial, meant that substantially, overall, on the whole, what was involved was indeed “whitewashing”.<sup>93</sup>

Lawrence assimilated the next steps to socialist progress in Britain to Russian statification: “We too are striving to nationalise our economy as a first and essential step towards planning our production for need. That is why we cannot possibly hate the Russians for their planned economy.”<sup>94</sup> He happily published idealisations of Russia – where car ownership was apparently more widespread than in Britain – and China which could have been reprinted, as critics remarked at the time, from the *Daily Worker* or *Russia Today*.<sup>95</sup> On several occasions he explained his position through the analogy between the Soviet Union and a trade union. Drawn from Trotsky, it missed the point that the Old Man had not perceived the Stalinist regime as enduring, like the trade union bureaucracy under capitalism, but as inherently unstable and transient:

“Is our attitude really so difficult to understand? After all, socialist trade unionists recognise that the British Trade Unions are a conquest of the working class – despite the existence within these unions of bureaucrats and bureaucratic practices. If these unions are attacked by the Tories or the Fascists, workers will defend the unions without thereby becoming partisans of Mr Arthur Deakin or his policies. In the same way it is possible to defend the Soviet Union from imperialist attack without thereby becoming partisans of the present Russian government.”<sup>96</sup>

Deakin, of course, had not succeeded in completely abolishing democracy in the TGWU or securing power of life and death over his members in the manner of the Russian bureaucracy. As events demonstrated, he could be defied and defeated. Moreover, he was subject to fierce criticism by the Club in a way the Russian bureaucracy was not. The analogy was unsustainable and unhelpful by the early 1950s. Its normalising suggestion was that the Russian regime was, like union officialdom, susceptible to pressure which could deliver concessions and reforms. It connected with the ideas which Pablo was deriving from the former Trotskyist Isaac Deutscher which suggested that a waning, disorientated bureaucracy could be pushed into self-reform by an increasingly powerful proletariat strengthened by economic development in the USSR, thus, at the least, diluting the idea of political revolution. It was central to Lawrence’s thinking. But it did not placate some supporters of the *Socialist Outlook* who still maintained: “our paper should take a more positive anti-Stalinist position. If ever a workers’ movement with a revolutionary policy approaches power in this country we may be sure that the Stalinists would make a determined attempt to gain control or to disrupt it. Either would be a disaster. Now is not too soon to point out why.”<sup>97</sup>

But, for Lawrence, Stalinism was changing and declining. It was being eroded and undermined by a reified, fated, irreversible world revolutionary process which drove remorselessly forward, regardless of the marginality and feebleness of actually existing revolutionaries and the resilient power of capital. The death of Stalin was seen as a key moment, symbolic in human terms of the weakening of the Soviet bureaucracy and its imperatives of peaceful co-existence and counter-revolution. Events in China and Yugoslavia and the purges in Eastern Europe were “all signs of a crisis, a loosening of Moscow’s grip on the world labour movement. This is something entirely new in the history of Stalinism. The cause is the further development of the world revolution upon which Lenin and Trotsky based their belief in the ultimate regeneration and flowering of Soviet democracy”.<sup>98</sup> By early 1953, capitalism and Stalinism were being “encircled by the revolution”. The Russian working class was being impelled by objective historical forces to reconquer democracy. The colonial revolution, “this irresistible movement of national and socialist liberation”, was consuming Asia like a prairie fire and engulfing South America and South Africa.<sup>99</sup>

There is no reason to think that this represented anything other than genuine and thorough-going conversion to Pablo’s new thinking on Lawrence’s part. Charlie Van Gelderen who worked on the paper for a time remembered the general approbation in the Club for the paper’s coverage of Stalinism. When Van Gelderen (1913-2001) became concerned, Lawrence described him as his only consistent opponent. But he did not take his criticisms seriously: “One day Lawrence showed me a letter from somebody up in Edinburgh, ‘I think the *Socialist Outlook* is a very good paper’, he wrote, ‘but we shouldn’t have Trotskyists like Van Gelderen writing for it.’ Lawrence was laughing, so I said, ‘John, this is not a joke, this is supposed to be a Trotskyist paper, it is no joke’.”<sup>100</sup> Lawrence sometimes made excuses. In a conversation with Millie Haston, he asserted that it was not possible to give a more vigorously critical account of Stalinism as Braddock and Stanley would walk away. He claimed that he had to spend three hours in discussion with Braddock after he lost his seat in the 1950 election dissuading him from joining the CP.<sup>101</sup> This smacks of inventive self-justification, for whatever Braddock was, he was a Labour loyalist whose illusions in Stalinism, events would demonstrate, were less deep seated than those of Lawrence.<sup>102</sup>

Nonetheless, the incident illustrated the drift of things. Lawrence had entered the Labour Party to clarify the left and then argued to those like Haston who had opposed this tactic that he had to encourage illusions in Stalinism for fear of alienating lefts. However, at this stage he remained firmly opposed to any organisational orientation to the weak British CP and to entrism in that party. Britain was not France and Italy. What was necessary was “not some artificial alliance with the CP but a vigorous leftwing

in the Labour Party itself".<sup>103</sup> On the home front, Lawrence filled the paper to overflowing with cautionary tales of coming cataclysm. The moderate Churchill government was portrayed as the harbinger of slump-war. As a revitalised capitalism moved into the long boom, *Socialist Outlook* headlined: "It's Like 1931 Again." Lawrence proclaimed the advent of mass unemployment and a return to the inter-war depression. After the first year of Tory rule, he observed: "The free health service has gone and education has been cut to the bone." Nonetheless, if this was "a demolition government" which would dismantle the welfare state, events would soon see the Tories "finished off for good".<sup>104</sup>

In the early 1950s, as the capitalists reinvented capitalism and the first shoots of affluence appeared, Lawrence assembled most of the ingredients which would later constitute high Healyism. In early 1952, he not only predicted economic crisis but raised the possibility of British Hitlers or Mussolinis taking the stage as a consequence, of rabid reaction "rallying millions of enraged, stupid little people into the ranks of a Fascist movement.... Please don't tell us that we exaggerate or that it can't happen here. People said those kinds of things in Germany and Italy. They later had time *inside the concentration camps* to reflect upon their stupidity" (emphasis in original).<sup>105</sup> By September 1952, as the *Outlook* stoked millenarianism with headlines like "Slump Spreads", Lawrence was insisting that the final battles were approaching, that there was no way out for capitalism: "In reality there is no solution at all. At least not on the basis of capitalism – regulated or otherwise. The labour movement must be mobilised to remove the government."<sup>106</sup>

In August 1951, when he attended the Third World Congress, Lawrence was almost 36. He was reaching what was then seen as the prime of life. He was editing a paper of increasing influence, he was becoming a well-known figure on the left. He was confident in his politics and in his ability to expound them. If he contrasted the tiny band of Trotskyists with the swollen ranks of the Labour Party and the unions, or even the reach of *Socialist Outlook*, it did not dent his confidence. The immutable laws of history, he was sure, were working for him: the advent of revolution was inevitable, the eventual abolition of its deformities assured. He was, he firmly believed, changing with the times. In reality, Lawrence had little idea of the way the world was going. Imprisoned in the dogmas of predestination, how could he? Hindsight is, for the historian, a tool to be used cautiously. But there were, even in 1951, revolutionaries who, unlike the members of the Club, sought to analyse and explain what was happening in the world. And having done so, accept its uncomfortable consequences in terms of the need to revise the theory of revolution rather than reinterpret reality in accordance with the dictates of dogma.

Lawrence's marriage to Lily had broken down in some acrimony around the end of the war. There was

a daughter, Sally. He had settled down with Janet Alexander, the wife of John Goffe. Initially from Bradford and a member of the Club, she had been involved with Trotskyism since her days in the ILP in the 1930s. There was a son from the marriage, Ian, who was born in 1950. Lawrence was popular and respected in the Club and increasingly in the wider movement. He was viewed as "full of energy and ideas ... a good journalist able to popularise Marxist ideas", while he had developed into "an outstandingly good speaker". Some of his comrades were struck by his attempt to use ordinary language, straightforward English rather than Marxist jargon.<sup>107</sup> Others felt that he indulged too much in demagoguery. One comrade complained about his speech at a Socialist Fellowship meeting in 1950: "He said and repeated ad nauseam that the capitalist system had to be overthrown – not a concrete idea in his head."<sup>108</sup>

1951 was an important year. It saw not only the proscription of the Socialist Fellowship by the party's apparatus but the beginning of Bevanism and, with Labour out of government, the development of a more propitious climate for entrism. Deserted by many left supporters because of *Socialist Outlook's* position on the Korean War, the Fellowship was by now verging on a Club front and its liquidation by the party leadership was not seriously challenged. The Club's perspective, taken from Pablo, was that under the impetus of Bevanism, Labour could be transformed into a centrist party, although on any sober assessment the Bevanites represented a left reformist rather than a left centrist current. Nonetheless, *Socialist Outlook's* critical support for Bevanism and its attempt to take the issues into the unions had a more compelling logic than its adaptation to Stalinism. However, once again there was criticism; but it was often muffled and subordinate.

As Bevanism burgeoned, Lawrence announced that "the working class is absolutely capable of transforming the Labour Party into an instrument of socialist change. That is what is happening right now".<sup>109</sup> In an extended review of Bevan's book, *In Place Of Fear*, which appeared under Healy's name but which Charlie Van Gelderen attributed to Lawrence, the importance of extra-parliamentary activity in socialist change was stressed. But the formulations were vague and dilute: "It is somewhat idle to debate whether or not Parliament will be the only road to Socialism because the question will not be decided by Aneurin Bevan. It is destined to be determined in the course of the struggles ahead." Parliamentary action combined with "the active vigilance of the mobilised masses ... this is the best means of ensuring a rapid and peaceful transfer of power".<sup>110</sup>

The next two years demonstrated the limits of the opportunities which Bevanism provided for the Club. The success of the left at the 1952 party conference and the achievements of the Club in winning delegacies were not transformed into concrete gains. Roots were put down in the briefly

revived League of Youth while in a handful of constituency parties such as St Pancras, where David Goldhill and Hilda Lane became secretary and chair and Lawrence a councillor and the party's most charismatic activist, the Club could wield considerable influence. But the problem was one of politics and specific weight with cadres dispersed over 600 constituencies, articulate, sometimes vociferous activists but lacking an in-depth following: recruitment, a basic purpose of the exercise, was limited – hyperactivity often left little time for sustained discussion and conversion – and the organisation never seems to have reached 100 members. Moreover, the limits of entrism drawn by Labour's leaders over the Socialist Fellowship were now affirmed by Lawrence's parliamentary fortunes.

In April 1953, he was selected as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate by the Woodford, Essex, constituency to stand against Winston Churchill in the next general election. This was a small, well-executed coup which would have guaranteed Lawrence a national platform and substantial publicity. Labour's national executive reacted with dispatch. He was summoned to an inquisition on his adherence to party policy. In view of "the unsatisfactory nature of his replies",<sup>111</sup> he was refused the necessary endorsement. Lawrence stuck to official channels. There was no autonomous rank-and-file campaign but Holborn and St Pancras CLP and Woodford CLP protested to the executive which in July affirmed its decision. A further appeal to the party conference was heard in secret session, with Harold Davies, MP, presenting Lawrence's case. However, the delegates confirmed the executive's decision on the grounds that Lawrence was "out of step with official party policy" and that he was "not a suitable standard bearer" in a general election.<sup>112</sup>

The issue was taken up by *Tribune*, newly radicalised and now critical of the leadership in consequence of its support for Bevan. The paper argued editorially that the Labour Party was creating second-class citizens: if Lawrence was acceptable as a councillor he should be suitable as a candidate for parliament. "Has not a Labour candidate or a Labour MP the same right to argue as a Labour councillor or ordinary party member?" it inquired, observing, and this was noted by future entrists, that if Lawrence had been more diplomatic about his views and not been the editor of *Socialist Outlook*, he might have slipped through. "Altogether", it concluded, the new doctrine would enforce "a charter for sheep".<sup>113</sup>

Through 1952 and into 1953, Lawrence worked assiduously in the *Outlook* office, assisted by his old comrade from RSL and RCP days, the engineering activist, Fred Emmett, and the teenage Audrey Brown, later Audrey Wise, MP, the daughter of the veteran Trotskyist, George Brown, and a Club activist since her days as a schoolgirl in Newcastle. He claimed that circulation was approaching 6,000 and despite renewed competition from *Tribune*, the paper had achieved its aim of weekly publication. Lawrence had

trained himself in all aspects of journalism and public speaking. There seems no reason to question Healy's later claim that the running of the paper and liaison with the supporters' group was left to Lawrence whom he saw as a good team worker.<sup>114</sup> Given Lawrence's prominence both as editor of *Socialist Outlook* and on the public platform, the two were often seen as co-leaders and Lawrence was responsible for significant initiatives. The ballyhoo with which he surrounded Fellowship meetings may have influenced Healy's later partiality for showmanship. "The Great Socialist Demonstration" sponsored by the Fellowship and the *Outlook* which he organised in 1950 had not only Lawrence and six MPs as star speakers, but a jazz band and a choir singing socialist songs. Years later, the charismatic dockers' leader Harry Constable recalled how it was Lawrence who first brought him into the orbit of the Club, paving the way via Constable's links with Birkenhead dockers for the construction of the group's only substantial trade union base.<sup>115</sup> He was also responsible for establishing the influence of the *Outlook* at the Briggs and Fords factories at Dagenham where the engineering union convenor, Jack Mitchell, became his close friend and ally.

Compared with the old days on the outside left in the RCP and its predecessors, the Labour Party provided a sustaining framework for activity, an arena in which, in their own small way, Lawrence and Healy were men of substance and position. There can be little doubt that as a new, turbulent wind blew across the Atlantic, Lawrence shared Healy's apprehensions: "Some very serious work is being done in the mass movement.... Everyone wants to get on with the job and the nearness of war adds to their determination."<sup>116</sup> But British Trotskyism would soon be plunged into yet another bitter faction fight and yet another sterile split.

#### 4. A Faction Fight: The Supporter of Pablo, 1953-1954

Until 1953 the Club was, to all intents and purposes, united on the basis of Pablo's politics; differences among its leaders were few. Perhaps, however, they were there and were slowly maturing beneath the surface. Lawrence was an enthusiast in politics, even if the politics he was enthusiastic about often shifted. For Healy, the specifics of politics were secondary to organisation. If Lawrence only fully came out in the forcing house of factional dispute during 1953-54, we can reasonably conclude that in tandem with Pablo, he was, from 1949, looking far more positively at Stalinism. He was at the very least beginning to conceive that, suitably stiffened and restructured, Stalinism could do the job of overturning capitalism. He accepted that Russia, its East European satellites and Mao's new regime in China were in the throes of what would be a long, tortuous transition to socialism. In a dirty world, there were no pure politics, no pure revolutions, no pure transitions. It is plausible to assume from what we know that in Lawrence's mind the distinctions – always inherently

artificial – between Stalinist regimes and “the social gains of October”, centrally state control of the means of production, became blurred. The conception of man-made political revolution was collapsing into revolution as pre-destined objective process. The precise conception of defence of the specific gains of 1917 was collapsing into a broader, less discerning defence of the “workers’ states” and new illusions in the progressive, anti-capitalist role which their rulers and their armies could play. Human agency still had some role to play: Trotskyists were still required by history. But increasingly to exert secondary pressure rather than exercise primary leadership.

Still, Healy’s retrospective comments, in a 1953 factional document, concerning Lawrence’s growing attachment to Stalinism, while not improbable, have to be viewed in the novel context of conflict. Moreover, they fail to disclose differences of substance. For example, Healy claimed that in 1950 he clashed with Lawrence over the CP’s “bourgeois pacifist” Sheffield Peace Congress: Lawrence, in this version, wanted to give it critical support while Healy saw this as conciliating Stalinism and popular frontism. The matter was, on Healy’s account, resolved through alterations in the paper’s coverage of the event. In May 1951, Healy went on, some Club members objected to a review in the *Outlook* which appeared to deny the role of forced labour in the Soviet Union. Further, in November 1951, the secretariat withdrew “a report from a fellow traveller” which claimed that the East German police force was democratic. The problem with these accusations is that taken together they do not add up to very much. Particularly in context, for it is possible to point to many other examples of conciliation of Stalinism in the paper which had somehow escaped Healy’s attention and which he presumably endorsed.<sup>117</sup>

Finally, Healy raised the issue of the disciplinary action taken against delegates to the CP-sponsored Vienna Peace Congress in 1952 by the London Labour Party. What happened was that in both the Norwood and the Holborn and St Pancras CLPs where Healy in the first and Lawrence in the second possessed strong personal influence, the Club failed to challenge the consequent expulsions. Quite the contrary. In Norwood, Club member Tom Mercer, a lieutenant of Healy, moved the expulsion of Margaret Dufton; in St Pancras, the secretary, Club member David Goldhill, who was close to Lawrence, processed the expulsion of Alf Taylor. Healy fervently believed disciplinary action would be taken by the Labour Party apparatus against those who failed to support these expulsions; he was perhaps confusing his own practices with those of Labour. However, he demanded that Club members vote for discipline, insisting the Labour leadership was laying a trap for the Trotskyists. His deep entrism zeal was questioned by the apostle of deep entrism, Pablo himself, who thought this unprincipled position unnecessary.<sup>118</sup> While this tells us much about the practice of the Club, it tells us nothing significant about differences between

Lawrence and Healy or Pablo and Healy before 1953. Healy characteristically covered himself by asserting that in order to maintain Lawrence’s reputation, he had restricted discussion of these problems to the secretariat, in itself a comment on the attitude of the Club to debate on fundamentals.<sup>119</sup>

The real flavour of things is suggested by the recollections of the leader of the Chinese section, exiled in Paris, Peng Shu Tse. Although he was at the time critical of Healy, Peng’s account of Healy’s attitude to Pablo is plausible: “Pablo is my intimate friend. He is a genius politically and organisationally. Pablo should think of himself as the successor of Trotsky.”<sup>120</sup> Hitherto, Lawrence and Healy had raised not the slightest objection to Pablo’s new thinking of “war-revolution” and the revolutionary role of Stalinism. They had endorsed it as delegates at the Third Congress and they had endorsed its practice, *entrism sui generis* – in countries with mass Communist parties deep entrism was required – in relation to Pablo’s disruption of the French section in 1952 for opposing such an approach. In this context, the IS draft resolution for the Fourth World Congress scheduled for 1954 which was circulated in early 1953 raised few eyebrows; it said and required little new. Here again was the promise of “the disintegration of Stalinism” in the face of relentless objective processes: “The Revolutionary wave is spreading from country to country, from continent to continent. It has recently reached the Soviet Union itself and the buffer zone.”<sup>121</sup> The revolutionary upsurge which had allegedly commenced in 1943 was reflected in “liberalisation” by a Russian bureaucracy threatened by “the revival and revolutionary rise of the Soviet proletariat”.<sup>122</sup> The victory of the Russian workers was assured. It would facilitate global revolution: “the laws of history reveal themselves stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus.”<sup>123</sup> Revolutionary ideas were steadily penetrating the Kremlin and the mass Communist Parties. It was affirmed that:

“In countries where the CPs are a majority of the working class they can, in certain exceptional conditions (advanced disintegration of the possessing classes) and under the pressure of very powerful revolutionary uprisings of the masses, be led to project a revolutionary orientation counter to the Kremlin’s objectives without abandoning the political and theoretical baggage inherited from Stalinism.”<sup>124</sup>

In simple language, “Stalinism can do”: the French and Italian CPs could and would make revolutions on the Chinese and Yugoslavian models. Such deformed workers’ states were all that could be hoped for and the task of the Trotskyists in this situation was not to construct independent parties but to get inside powerful Stalinist parties, to create strong tendencies within “disintegrating Stalinism”:

“Since both the Chinese CP and, to a certain extent also the Yugoslav CP, are in reality bureaucratic centrist parties which however still find themselves under the pressure of the revolution in their countries, we do not call for the proletariat of these

countries to constitute new revolutionary parties or to prepare a political revolution.... We are working toward the constitution of a left tendency within the JCP and within the Chinese CP.”<sup>125</sup>

Stripped of the inveterate verbiage and redundant qualifications of Pablo and Mandel, the Stalinist parties were revolutionary parties which in view of the imminence of the Third World war could not be replaced. The Trotskyists were at best back where they had started in 1929 as a faction of Stalinism. The Fourth International had been a historical *cul de sac*. The independent interests of the working class opposed to both capitalism and Stalinism, disintegrating or otherwise, were at best subordinated to, and crystallised into, the need for ginger groups influencing Stalinism. That this was discernible at the time can be seen from the sober verdict of the CC of the LSSP, the section of the Fourth International in Ceylon: “the single governing conception ... not only leads to a fundamental revision of the positions of Trotskyism in regards to Stalinism but also denies to the Trotskyist movement all justification for its continued independent existence.”<sup>126</sup>

This was far from the initial view of the leaders of the SWP and the Club. What ignited the 1953-4 split in the Fourth International was not Pabloism – by 1953 Pabloism meant in practice orthodox Trotskyism – but Cannon’s concerns over the organisational integrity of the SWP. It was only when, in the Spring of 1953, he became convinced that Pablo was supporting the opposition faction in the SWP led by George Clarke and Bert Cochrane, that *The Rise and Decline of Stalinism* and the Pabloism which Cannon had so recently refused to support the French section in denouncing, moved centre stage. Certainly Lawrence did not bat an eyelid over “Pabloism”. As we have seen, he was sorely afflicted by the rogue, recessive gene in the mutation of the deformed workers’ state. Once progress became identified with state ownership of the means of production, once it was accepted that the Stalinist parties and the Russian army could overturn capitalism and create workers’ states, whatever their degree of infirmity, the road lay open – although it was by no means determined that all advocates of his analysis would follow it – to subordination of workers’ revolution and workers’ power and their consigning to the tender mercy of the future march of history.

The events and the atmosphere of the times played their part: the real threat of war between the blocs, the rhetoric of Malenkov, Stalin’s successor, on “liberalisation”, the left turn of the CPs. The inflation and over-optimism of a variety of analysts who painted Stalinism as historically necessary, progressive and evolving remorseless towards socialist democracy and a renewal of revolution, such as Bettelheim and the intellectuals around *Revue Internationale*, and most notably Deutscher (1907-1967), had a strong impact on both Pablo and Lawrence. It was Deutscher, whom Lawrence must have encountered at Hilda Lane’s

house when he was in the RWL and whose articles he must have read in *Workers Fight*, who put most powerfully and most eloquently the Faustian case for revolution from above. Deutscher was convinced that Stalin had been the custodian not the gravedigger of the revolution. He raised the possibility that, in the face of economic and social change, the rulers of Russia, in collaboration with a new and stronger working class, would restore workers’ power in the USSR, adopt a radically new international orientation and resume the march of world revolution thwarted in the 1920s. This reading of Deutscher marked Lawrence’s revisionism. But as we have seen, others who perceived the need to revise and develop the tenets of Trotskyism did so in more fruitful fashion.<sup>127</sup>

The first recorded mention of Lawrence in the dispute is in a letter from Healy to Cannon in February 1953. Healy defended the Third Congress decisions and stressed the need to avoid a split and take a conciliatory line on what he saw as differences of emphasis between Cannon and Pablo, noting: “John expressed himself in agreement with the general line I take.”<sup>128</sup> Differences only emerged at the International Executive Committee in May 1953 when Healy reported a clash with Pablo but emphasised it was over the presentation rather than the contents of the resolution. He noted that afterwards Lawrence spent more than two hours closeted with Pablo. In consequence, on his return to London, Healy secured the replacement of Lawrence by himself as the British representative to the IS.<sup>129</sup> Pablo saw this for what it was, a precautionary manoeuvre. It is clear that it was from this time that Lawrence became aware of political tensions between Healy and the IS, discussed them with supporters such as Hilda Lane and Fred Emmett, and, with new awareness of Healy’s dependence on the Americans, established his own direct line to Pablo in Paris. Lawrence was also influenced by Clarke (1913-1964), the SWP’s representative in Europe who was now coming out as “more Pabloist than Pablo”.<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, on the surface, the problems remained restricted and muted. On 26 May, the leadership of the Club unanimously agreed a letter to the SWP urging moderation and taking no sides in the dispute in America.<sup>131</sup> In discussions in Paris over the resolution, Healy still registered no disagreement with *The Rise and Decline*. It was only in July in conjunction with developments in America that matters took a turn for the worse.

The Clarke-Cochrane group were now developing or elucidating the positions in the resolution and Lawrence was becoming more supportive of their position and more critical of Cannon. He rejected the inclusion of an article in *Labour Review* written by Cannon’s supporter Sam Gordon, in favour of an article by Clarke which left the choice of political revolution or self reform by a Russian bureaucracy under pressure from the working class, to the discretion of its readers. The piece had incurred fierce disapproval from the SWP leadership which was

now in rapid recoil from its post-war practice and forcefully asserting more traditional Trotskyist positions. At Pablo's request, Lawrence travelled to Paris for consultation. On his return, supported by Lane, Emmett and Wise, he proposed to the August meeting of the Club executive that he, rather than Healy, should present the latest draft of the *Rise and Decline* to the next National Committee (NC). Healy acquiesced but reserved the right to comment critically. Lawrence, who, according to Sam Gordon, seemed charged with new energy and determination, vigorously pressed home the point that Healy must observe the discipline of the International and its committees. At successive meetings in Paris, most recently in July, Lawrence stressed, Healy had voted for the draft. He had not even registered reservations, something he had unfortunately omitted to tell the Americans. Lawrence argued that Healy must therefore, in accordance with democratic centralism, stick to his guns, and Pablo's position, at the National Committee.

This was a decisive moment. Hitherto a strong advocate of international democratic centralism, Healy was temporarily caught in the vice of his own attempt to steer a path between Pablo and the SWP. He now beheld himself hurtling towards the nightmarish prospect of a challenge to his dominance as he sat uncharacteristically silent while Lawrence energetically and eloquently defended the International's position before the members of the Club as Pablo's most favoured son. He realised that he could no longer seriously maintain that he was supporting both New York and Paris. However, Lawrence's advantage was short-lived. When Pablo delivered the same unpalatable message to him in France on 2 September, Healy went on the offensive.<sup>132</sup>

At the September NC, using as a pretext an article by Lawrence which referred to the power of "Communist" ideas as a weapon in the coming war between the blocs – yesterday seen as unexceptional, today perceived as conciliating Stalinism – Healy tabled a series of amendments to *The Rise and Decline* which he had by this time received from the Americans and replaced Emmett with Bill Hunter on the editorial board and in the office.<sup>133</sup> As delegates from the SWP, the French, British and Swiss sections met in October 1953, events moved towards a split in the International. In November, after a further visit to Paris, Lawrence announced the formation of a new British section backed by the IS and the suspension from membership of Healy and Hunter. The split had occurred with a minimum of political discussion, let alone clarification, among the leadership, still less among the members. At best, arguments centred around national democratic centralism taking precedence over international democratic centralism, or vice versa. The rupture was formalised by Lawrence at the foundation conference of the new British section in London in December.<sup>134</sup>

In his invitation to the conference of the new section on 20 December 1953, Lawrence pointed out that Healy had never declared any significant

political differences with the International before he had moved against it. He appealed to the members of the Club to remain loyal on the grounds of internationalism, democratic centralism and the absence of "a single discussion among the ranks in Britain" before organisational measures were taken. But he singularly failed to even sketch the political differences which had belatedly emerged, still less begin to elaborate a political balance sheet of the last six years. Instead he appealed simplistically to a distinction between those who wished to transcend isolation through a drive to mass work, which, he claimed, *The Rise and Decline* facilitated, and those who suffered from a sectarian aversion to mass work and were influenced by "petty despots".<sup>135</sup>

Not surprisingly, therefore, the membership divided largely on the basis of personal and international loyalties. Lawrence's assertion that 58 per cent of the members went with him was challenged by Healy who counter-claimed, with some justification, that only 35 members had joined the new group.<sup>136</sup> At this distance it is impossible to be precise. Lawrence's support was strongest in London where it included veterans such as Shindler, John Goffe, Emmett, Lane, Norman Dinning, Arnold Feldman, David Goldhill and the old Left Fraction activist Roddy Hood – as well as younger members such as Audrey and Johnny Wise and the dissident CPer Joe Jacobs. It was far weaker in the provinces where it embraced only a handful of activists such as the veteran George Brown in Ipswich, Sam Goldberg in Birmingham, George Gifford in Leeds and Alex Acheson in Leicester. Acheson (1912-1996) recollected that he supported Lawrence because he had known him since the 1930s, was suspicious of Healy, and, in the absence of a convincing, conclusive criticism of the International and what he saw as hair splitting, rather than a capitulation to Stalinism, over *The Rise and Decline*, he felt he should stay with the official section and the International.<sup>137</sup> Goffe remembered, with some partiality, that the differences often lay between those who were now making their way deep into the mass movement and those who clung to the womb of traditional organisation.<sup>138</sup>

In the continued absence of serious discussion and clarification, the dispute went forward on the basis of a fight for control of the paper. This was indirectly reflected in the sometimes artificial conflicts which now appeared in its pages. As Harry Ratner has observed, few could have predicted the storm that greeted Lawrence's idea of "a monster petition" to generate mass activity against the Tories. It could be seen as either a useful or a questionable gimmick if integrated into attempts to develop more direct action.<sup>139</sup> However it attracted a flood of letters from Healy's supporters condemning "stunts" and emphasising that the Tories could not be petitioned out of power; to suggest otherwise was to sow illusions in short cuts and substitutes for struggle. Harry Finch rebuked Lawrence for allegedly deserting his previous support for mass industrial action. It was left to Mickie Shaw to initiate the public campaign to

identify Lawrence with the CP, assimilating the petition to the Stalinist conception that peace could be secured by moral and cross-class pressure.<sup>140</sup>

Lawrence's supporters responded by pointing out that these attacks illegitimately assumed that the petition was being proposed as the only or central form of action, rather than a first step forward. Goldhill pointed to widespread backing in St Pancras and Dinning to support in Tottenham CLP where a resolution had been carried with only one dissident, the Healy supporter Jack Dipple. Hilda Lane remembered that in the very recent past, in a pamphlet entitled *Plain Speaking On War and Peace*, a certain G. Healy had called for a referendum before any war was declared.<sup>141</sup> Audrey Wise reported widespread support from tenants' groups while Roddy Hood was moved to compose a poem in honour of the petition and Lawrence pressed the Trotskyist pioneer Reg Groves into service to contribute an article, "That we, your petitioners ...", on the Great Charter.<sup>142</sup> From Healy's side, Jim Dicks acidly retorted that he was not one who "begged entreated or humbly requested", while Jim Allen claimed in the best traditions of the Club that a general strike was on the cards and that the petition was arresting the demand for "full scale industrial action to remove the government".<sup>143</sup> It was left to the veteran Arthur Cooper to counsel "Let's cut this silly wrangle".<sup>144</sup>

A similarly artificial dispute was conducted over how best to oppose the Tories' Housing Repairs and Rents Bill. Lawrence supporters, such as Goffe, who was a councillor in Camberwell, argued again that while mass action was central it could be supplemented and stimulated by councillors and Advice Bureaux using the law against landlords. Healy supporters, such as Dave Finch, a councillor in South London, sometimes somewhat synthetically distinguished themselves by their singular emphasis on direct action by tenants.<sup>145</sup> This was symptomatic of the split in the group and its consequences. The Healyites were now reverting to earlier, pre-Pablo Trotskyist orthodoxy. The Lawrence group saw themselves as seeking to break from what they saw as purism and sectarianism and to penetrate wider circles by the use of "broader more imaginative methods".

This was clear from the differences which speedily surfaced over German re-armament. Lawrence opposed the proposals in a fashion which for many recalled the demagogic rhetoric and cross-class politics of the Communist parties: "The proposal to re-create a German army led by Nazi Generals supplied by the already regenerated Ruhr industrialists and backed to the hilt by American capital sends a shudder down the spine of all Europe."<sup>146</sup> He urged the left to utilise the Russian foreign minister, Molotov's proposals for a four power mutual security pact to develop a programme for peace focused on a united socialist Europe. This should be fought for "unitedly" by all European socialist and Communist parties. Healy's supporters

somewhat distorted his position to imply endorsement of the Molotov proposals.<sup>147</sup> In response, Lawrence affirmed that he was in favour of a united front with the CPs, which provided an excellent opportunity to take up but not endorse the Russian initiative, despite the Stalinists' chauvinism over Germany. But he made real concessions to popular frontism, although in this he could be said to be relating to the Bevanites rather than the CP.<sup>148</sup> He praised the attendance of three MPs. Jennie Lee, Hugh Delargy and William Warbey, at a conference in France to oppose German re-armament in March 1954. He saw this as "a big step forward in the fight against war".<sup>149</sup>

However, as Healy was quick to point out, the conference was not, as Lawrence had alleged, dominated by socialists and Communists, but by De Gaullists and other right-wing politicians concerned with the best way forward for capital not the working class.<sup>150</sup> Lawrence maintained his position. The MPs, he claimed, had been correct to intervene in the conference, for it was important to take advantage of splits in the camp of the enemy rather than to adhere to "some idiotic code of 'socialist' principles". Anti-Communism was the real danger facing both the Soviet Union and international socialists. Defence of the Soviet Union must take precedence over the problems of pacifism and popular frontism, as dogmatically employed by Healy in relation to France and Spain in the 1930s.<sup>151</sup>

The inner logic of the "two camps, workers' state" position was now driving Lawrence's development, although he made a telling point when he asserted that Healy's recent approach represented a retreat from past attitudes to building a mass movement and "a definite break with the traditional policy and method of the *Socialist Outlook*".<sup>152</sup> However, both sides were moving beyond the common ground they had shared and Lawrence was pushing further into the orbit of Stalinism. The Ceylonese Trotskyist Doric da Souza sharply criticised Lawrence's enthusiasm for Isaac Deutscher and his estimation that "by restoring to the world the true picture of Leon Trotsky", Deutscher had "performed a service of inestimable value to the cause of truth and of socialism". Rather, he asserted, Deutscher was an apologist for Stalinism.<sup>153</sup> Michael Kidron, of the *Socialist Review* group, noted that Lawrence had even gone beyond Deutscher by depicting Mao Tse Tung as an unconscious disciple of Trotsky in his realisation of what Lawrence erroneously termed "the socialist revolution" in China, a revolution which was imprisoning Trotskyists.<sup>154</sup>

Meanwhile, the fight for control of the paper intensified. Over the printshop they arrived at a financial accommodation which handed the operation over to Healy, perhaps because of Braddock's eagerness to cash in his investment in a situation he was far from happy with.<sup>155</sup> The management committee of the Labour Publishing Company initially supported Lawrence 6 to 5, but in April Stanley went over to the Healyites. It has been



hinted that he was working in some way for the CP inside *Socialist Outlook*. He was certainly a sponsor of Stalinist front initiatives such as the Vienna Peace Congress and the 1952 Moscow Economic Conference, and he received honourable mention in the CP press.<sup>156</sup> But the CP were in fact suspicious of Stanley's softness on Trotskyism. If it was otherwise, it is difficult to see why he backed Healy instead of Lawrence who at this stage was seen by the CP as distinctly less Trotskyist, unless this was in the interests of securing the paper's proscription and removing a barrier to CP penetration of Bevanism. The disputes in its pages brought *Socialist Outlook* renewed attention from the Labour Party apparatus. This was facilitated by a detailed exposure of the paper's Trotskyist background in the CP's *World News and Views* which named names. It prompted a final united front of Braddock, Healy, Lawrence and Stanley, all of whom signed a statement to the paper denouncing Stalinist McCarthyism.<sup>157</sup> Nonetheless, armed with this new majority, Healy was able to move towards closure. He set the decisive meeting of the Labour Publishing Society shareholders for 15 May 1954.

Lawrence's initial majority on the editorial board – himself, Braddock and Stanley against Healy – was also eroded and the situation further deteriorated when Braddock resigned on 5 April. This followed the defeat of a vote of confidence in Lawrence moved by Sam Goldberg at the management committee. In his resignation letter, Braddock fulsomely endorsed Lawrence's editorship and forthrightly condemned the Healyites. This was an obvious tactical ploy aimed at influencing the shareholder's meeting on which Lawrence's fortunes now hung.<sup>158</sup>

As Harry Ratner observed, matters were not resolved by politics but by the greater organisational acumen and energy of Healy and his supporters.<sup>159</sup> Recruiting 28 new members, achieving a more effective voice in the readers' groups and organising a campaign to buy shares and gain proxy votes, the Healyites gained the upper hand. The campaign was punctuated by reports of a physical attack by Lawrence on Healy and knife and poker assaults on Lawrence in the printshop and at a Club meeting.<sup>160</sup> CP reports depicted the final meeting as a heated and clamorous confrontation. Lawrence's supporters were persistently heckled by "lumpen elements", presumably a reference to the youth around Bob Pennington and Ted Knight. Sam Goldberg "was unable to get a word through the mike because of the screams of 'We want Healy' ...".<sup>161</sup> Goffe moved the crucial resolution that the AGM endorse existing editorial policy and repudiate Healy's attacks on the line of the paper. It was defeated by 287 votes to 213. Lawrence then declined nomination to the new management committee, as did his supporters. He formally resigned as editor, concluding: "... those whose political ideas were endorsed by the majority of the shareholders should now take full responsibility for running of the paper."<sup>162</sup> It was a sad ending to five and a half years of selfless, sustained endeavour.

5. From Pabloism to Stalinism: The Politics Behind the St Pancras Story, 1954-1958  
Immediately after the shareholders' meeting, Lawrence met with some fifty of his supporters, John Baird, MP for Wolverhampton North-East – who seems to have had a close but shadowy relationship with *SO* almost from its inception – and a representative from *Tribune*. The general view was that consigned to the tender mercies of Healy, *SO* "would rapidly go down the drain".<sup>163</sup> The Lawrence group had been offered space in *Tribune* which they could utilise to turn its centre of gravity to the parliamentary left to the unions and to workers' struggles. Lawrence now prepared himself for the coming Congress of the Fourth International, organised by Pablo in the absence of the American, British and French majorities. Lawrence was a passionate man. Under a calm exterior, he felt things strongly. The sharpness of the faction fight and the surrender of years of work and the intense hopes he had cherished since 1947 had undoubtedly shaken him. While he presented a cheerful countenance to the world, he was not the first or the last to be permanently bruised in confrontation with Healy. He later stated that he had already experienced "a long period of growing doubt and misgivings as to the true nature of [the Trotskyist] movement",<sup>164</sup> and differences with Pablo now became apparent. The latter obviously had organisational imperatives to consider, such as securing the continued adherence to the International of the Ceylonese who had roundly condemned the Cannon-Healy split, probing differences among the splitters and restoring an element of unity. Lawrence, in contrast, wanted to draw a line and to put the past and its treacheries behind him. He objected to Pablo and Mandel's reversal of position in accepting the amendments to *The Rise and Decline* demanded by the Ceylonese and strongly opposed their appeal to the constituents of the new, breakaway International Committee to attend the Congress and argue out their differences. He wrote to Pablo:

"As you know I am completely opposed to your method in this question. I do not think that our task is 'the reconstruction of the unity of the movement'. The splitters have done what they have done because they are sectarians – a dying cult with absolutely no future. We should leave them to die while we concentrate on the really urgent task of educating a solid cadre of Bolsheviks capable of understanding and facing up to the present reality and our place in it."<sup>165</sup>

Relationships deteriorated further at the Congress itself. As the delegates gathered in France, it was clear that Pablo was pulling back while Lawrence was pushing forward. As his new understanding of Stalinism and the needs of the mass movement unfolded, he was no longer convinced of the need for a democratic centralist organisation, for a Fourth International or for a British section. He was tired of working clandestinely, deeply disillusioned with his fifteen years in the Trotskyist movement and bitter

about his recent experience. He had little taste for the tasks and tensions of sustained leadership and his brief essay at them had confirmed his instincts. He felt he would now be better off serving more directly in the struggle. He was disenchanted with subterfuge and internal struggle hidden from the workers. Moving towards the view that Trotskyism was more of a barrier than an aid in leading workers' struggles, he had no stomach for Pablo's proposal to him that he should publish a new, open Trotskyist journal and he was appalled by his suggestion that he should take up the political argument with "the splitters" and seek to bring Healy to salvation.<sup>166</sup>

Lawrence's instincts that in the fight in the British labour movement "explicit Trotskyist material of a public kind was undesirable"<sup>167</sup> and that Healy was irredeemable were strengthened by the influence of Clarke whose group had now formed the Socialist Union of America. The Americans stated explicitly and emphatically that Trotskyism had failed: it was a magnificent but irrelevant tradition forged outside workers' struggles and of no interest to the working class. The coming revolution would flow through the established organisations to which the mass of workers gave their allegiance and develop from the politics of those who had already made revolutions. The revolutionary parties of tomorrow would not be Trotskyist and there was little point in maintaining sectarian, isolated Trotskyist parties today.<sup>168</sup>

When Lawrence walked out of the World Congress, together with Clarke, Michele Mestre, the leader of Pablo's French group, and Murray Dowson, leader of the Canadian minority, he had finally arrived at this view of things. He later recalled:

"In June 1954 I attended the so-called World Congress of the Fourth International where I was attacked for my 'Stalinist' views and, in particular, for my opposition to German rearmament. There were clearly no real political differences between Healy and the FI. Both of them remained anti-Soviet, anti-Communist and so I walked out of the 'World Congress' after a couple of days, declaring that I wanted nothing more to do with it. The American minority, a small group of Canadians and an even smaller group of French walked out with me. It was a nasty experience and very bitter."<sup>169</sup>

The break was based on impulse and practical calculations rather than theoretical exploration. It was clear now that, like many activists, Lawrence was far from a profound thinker. He took his ideas from others and from his experience. He read. But he was no great student of Marxist theory. Like so many activists, he was incorrigibly optimistic and, of course, he longed for socialist change. If, as he felt, the Fourth International was ineffectual and fragmented at the first challenge, it was, after all, only a pressure group on what the Trotskyists had designated as the primary agency of revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracies and the national CPs. Unlike Cannon, Healy or Pablo in their differing ways, Lawrence was not interested in organisational or political autonomy or past traditions but in getting the job done. Thus

he moved irrevocably away from the Trotskyists. Whatever the specifics of the arguments which he had with Pablo over Stalinism and German rearmament, there can be little doubt that, as Cannon put it, Lawrence, like Clarke, was now "a Pabloite with the mask off", hell bent on taking Pablo's position "to its logical conclusion".<sup>170</sup>

Nonetheless, Lawrence did not, as several accounts conclude, "immediately join the Communist Party" or "join the Communist Party within months of the damaging split".<sup>171</sup> However, it must be said that his writings of the time, if a little more impenetrable, are not radically different from the CP line in their fulsome support for the Russian, Chinese and colonial revolutions.<sup>172</sup> What did occur, as the logical consequence of the World Congress, was the final gathering and peremptory liquidation of the official British section of the Fourth International on 2 October 1954. With Emmett, Dinning, Hood and Clarke on the platform, as well as Peggy Duff representing *Tribune*, Lawrence declared that Trotskyism was "as dead as a door-nail".<sup>173</sup> In the face of the upsurge of the left in the Labour Party, an upsurge which, Lawrence insisted, must be taken into the unions forthwith, it was an irrelevant tradition, particularly as, he claimed, "In the past Trotskyists had often found themselves on the wrong side against the working class and side by side with the most rabid, anti-Soviet forces".<sup>174</sup>

Asked whether members should remain in the Labour Party or join the CP, he replied that while "the main force" should remain inside the Labour Party, the final choice was up to individuals. Nonetheless, he warned that entry into the CPs in France and Italy had produced no change in these parties, simply loyal members. The situation in the Labour Party was historic: he believed that it was heading towards a split which would produce a new grouping similar to Nenni's Socialist Party in Italy. The new party would work with the CP and eventually merge with it to form a united workers' party. Finally, Lawrence reported on a meeting with Jennie Lee and Michael Foot, where he had made proposals "to transform the *Tribune*, make it less arty and more interesting to the industrial working class - to launch an expansion fund with the prospect of a Daily paper in 1956 and to include a section on the Marxist interpretation of events, open to all on the left including the CP... Bevan to call private TU meetings up and down the country to 'Bevanise' the trade unions".<sup>175</sup>

The meeting decided to break with the Fourth International, remain in the Labour Party and fight for its transformation, co-operate with the CP and further "friendship with the Soviet Union while dissolving their own organisation".<sup>176</sup> However, there were at least some doubters. Alex Acheson remembered:

"Now was it after the Fifth [Fourth] World Congress, Lawrence came back and with Goldberg and Fred Emmett, people whom I respected, had worked with over the years, people I had known, said,

'It's useless carrying on. Here we have been struggling over the years and have not built a real International. The only thing we can do, our own group is tiny, is to liquidate the group and go into the mass movement. We have got the right line, the right programme, we know what to do and we can carry on doing that'. I completely opposed that. Unfortunately, I didn't put it in writing. Myself and another young comrade whom I only remember as Andy opposed this. We had this meeting at the Mazzini Club in Roseberry Avenue near the bottom end of Theobald's Road. That was where it was liquidated and I found that so shattering."<sup>177</sup>

But the die was cast. The British section of the Fourth International now became "the Lawrence group", a flexible network of activists with no formal machinery or detailed programme, determined to "integrate themselves into the mass movement". The London members met every six weeks or so at what a CP informant termed the Garibaldi restaurant and there were national meetings every few months at the Three Nuns Hotel next to Aldgate station. With funds from Braddock, Lawrence established Labour Today Publications. The intention was to eventually produce a paper – as things turned out only one pamphlet ever appeared. They also formed Labour Industrial Services. It published an Industrial News Bulletin which attracted some 500 subscribers, largely union branches and shop stewards' committees.<sup>178</sup> The group was active in the AEU through Dinning, a member since 1922 and a regular delegate to conferences, Emmett who had been a convenor at Vickers and the leader of the RCP's engineering group, and Mitchell who later became a full-time officer in the union. Goldberg was prominent in the ETU in Birmingham and Goffe was on the London District Committee of USDAW. This work was facilitated when in 1955 Lawrence was appointed the full-time secretary of the shop stewards' committee at the Briggs Car Bodies plant in Dagenham. The committee was at the cutting edge of trade union development in the car industry. He had his own office in Dagenham and produced minutes, leaflets and propaganda materials as well as carrying out administrative and organisation work in what was a potentially influential position.<sup>179</sup>

While they wanted to work with Communists, the group still acknowledged the centrality of activity in the Labour Party. Here their main bases remained St Pancras, where Lawrence was elected chair of the Holborn and St Pancras South constituency in 1955 and leader of the council in 1956 and where there was a group of around 40 supporters, including the now veteran entrists such as Lane and Goldhill as well as the relatively new recruits such as Phil and Kath Sheridan – Peggy Duff's daughter – and the TGWU activist and Covent Garden shop steward, Bernie Holland. In St Pancras the central issue on which the group mobilised was housing. Lawrence and his supporters sought to reduce council housing rents and opposed the Tory legislation of 1955-57 which required councils to restore

requisitioned housing to the private sector and removed controls on rents. He also challenged legally required expenditure on civil defence in favour of using the funds to house the homeless.<sup>180</sup> The group was also strong in Peckham and Camberwell CLP where Goffe and Hood were at the heart of a group of around 30 activists, including 14 councillors, leading agitation over rent rises and other community issues.<sup>181</sup> All in all, the Lawrence group perceived itself as representing: "A loose trend including varying leftward opinions and need to argue on any idea put forward."<sup>182</sup> But even diffuse organisation needs leadership. Many who knew Lawrence at the time doubted his ability and mission in this sphere, particularly given his crowded life as an activist: "John was a shopfloor agitator/organiser and superb in the council chamber, he wouldn't have been any good at running a national organisation."<sup>183</sup>

It was possible for contemporary observers to see the group as still surreptitiously working for Pablo and their unpublicised liquidation as his section as simply another manoeuvre to facilitate their advance into Stalinist and Labourist circles. The CP at times characterised the Lawrencites as a third tendency within Trotskyism. They were distinguished from Pablo only by their refusal to publish an open journal, and adumbrate and advocate the Trotskyist programme, a position which had in substance characterised *Socialist Outlook*.<sup>184</sup> The reality was that while Lawrence continued to have contact with the Socialist Union and distributed their *American Socialist*, his breach with the Fourth International was conclusive.<sup>185</sup> After one last and unsuccessful attempt to win Lawrence over, Pablo commenced moves in early 1955 towards mustering a new section around Sam Bornstein and John Fairhead. For Lawrence, it was no longer a matter of working with Healy or producing a Trotskyist journal: he had decisively and finally turned his back on Trotskyism. He later recalled: "The secretary of the FI did make one visit to Britain to try to persuade us to come back, but after a few minutes with Emmett and myself, he denounced us as 'Stalinists' and declared us to be beyond salvation."<sup>186</sup>

#### Notes

1. *Daily Cinema*, 7 May 1958; *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1958.
2. Bob Pitt, 'Red Flag Over St Pancras', *What Next?* Nos. 7, 8, 10, 14.
3. Previous accounts of Lawrence's early life have been confused. The *News Chronicle*, 29 March 1958, stated that he was born in Liverpool. Peggy Duff, *Left, Left, Left. A Personal Account of Six Protest Campaigns, 1945-1965* (Allison and Busby) 1971, p.84, claims that he was born in Staffordshire. David Mathieson, 'Holborn and St Pancras South Labour Party, 1947-1963, an analysis of one CLP and the post-war consensus', PhD Huddersfield Polytechnic, 1989, p.59, gets the place right but states that Lawrence was born in 1918. The information here comes from Ian Lawrence's oration at his father's funeral and another

- document he wrote, *From Sandhurst to Sydenham: The Life Story of John Lawrence*. See also 'The Amazing Mr Lawrence' and 'More Facts About The Amazing Mr Lawrence', *The Indicator*, 9, 17 June 1957.
4. Ian Lawrence, *From Sandhurst to Sydenham*.
  5. John Archer to author, 19 July 1996.
  6. John Lawrence, 'Face The Facts', *Socialist Outlook (SO)*, 19 September 1952.
  7. Ian Lawrence, Funeral Oration.
  8. John Lawrence to John Mahon, 17 October 1958. Lawrence claims in this letter that he joined the Trotskyists in 1939. However, the notes of the CP executive meeting 8-9 November 1958 state that Lawrence was in the CP for only six months and joined the Revolutionary Socialist League, from which the RWL split away, in 1938.
  9. For the RWL, see Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *War and the International: A History of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain, 1937-1949* (Socialist Platform), 1986, pp.35-9. Alex Acheson interview with Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, 12 June 1986. The suggestion, *ibid.*, was that the *agent provocateur* was a comrade called Alex Fischer whose efforts were directed by Gerry Healy.
  10. Eve Brown interview with Sam Bornstein, 21 January 1984.
  11. Harry Shindler, correspondence with author, 5 August 1996-1 March 1997.
  12. Brown interview.
  13. Shindler to author, 4 October 1996.
  14. Bornstein and Richardson, p.39.
  15. *Workers International News*, 3, 6, June 1940; RSL Executive Minutes, 6 July 1940.
  16. Jim Hinchcliffe interview with Sam Bornstein, 31 December 1977.
  17. WIL CC Minutes, 12 July 1941.
  18. Shindler to CC WIL, 8 December 1940.
  19. Shindler to CC WIL.
  20. WIL CC Minutes, 12 July 1941.
  21. For background, see Bornstein and Richardson, pp.40-45.
  22. RSL Executive Minutes, 6 October 1941, 13 October 1941.
  23. RSL Executive Minutes, 26 November 1941. For the Proletarian Military Policy, see Bornstein and Richardson, pp.13-15, 40-41.
  24. JL, letter to RSL Membership, 18 December 1943; Account of interview between SG and DDH (Militant Group) and JL ("TO") on 4 December 1943.
  25. Jock Haston interview with Al Richardson, 30 April 1978.
  26. JL, Letter to RSL Membership.
  27. *Ibid.*
  28. DDH, Reply to Comrade Lou Cooper, 11 September 1943.
  29. Sam Levy, 'A Footnote For Historians: The Open Party Faction 1948-9', *Revolutionary History*, vol.6, nos.2/3, Summer 1996, p.187; Levy in conversation with author, 1994.
  30. Gerry Healy to Jimmy Deane, 19 May 1942.
  31. Healy to Deane, 30 July 1942.
  32. Bornstein and Richardson, pp.100-101.
  33. DDH, Reply to Lou Cooper.
  34. Ian Lawrence, *From Sandhurst to Sydenham*.
  35. For background, see John Lawrence, 'South Wales Organiser's Report', 18 November 1944 (RCP); Jon E. Lewis (ed.), *Raising The Flag: Trotskyism and the 1945 Neath By-election* (Antidoto Press), 1990.
  36. *Socialist Appeal (SA)*, mid-August 1944; Lawrence, 'South Wales Organiser's Report', 18 November 1944.
  37. Quoted in J. McHugh and B. Ripley, 'The Neath By-election, 1945 - Trotskyists in West Wales', *Llafur, Journal of Welsh Labour History*, vol.3, no.2, Spring 1981, p.70.
  38. Lawrence, 'Organiser's Report', 18 November 1944.
  39. *SA*, September, November, December 1944.
  40. *SA*, November, mid-October 1944.
  41. Lawrence, 'Organiser's Report', 18 November 1944.
  42. For Jones, who was a regular contributor to *SA* and the RCP's trade union debate, see Ted Grant, *History of British Trotskyism* (Well Red Publications) 2002, p.121.
  43. See Bornstein and Richardson, pp.136-40; McHugh and Ripley, 'Neath By-election'; Lewis, *Raising The Flag*; Grant, *History*, pp.116-24.
  44. John Lawrence, 'Letters', *Neath Guardian*, 2, 9 February 1945.
  45. RCP, 'Report on the Neath Campaign', 13 June 1945.
  46. John Lawrence, 'Report on the Neath Campaign', 13 June 1945.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. *Ibid.*; John Lawrence, 'South Wales Report to the General Secretary', 15 June 1945.
  49. *SA*, mid-July 1945
  50. *SA*, mid-August 1945.
  51. Lawrence, 'South Wales Report', 15 June 1945.
  52. *SA*, mid-September 1945.
  53. *SA*, mid-October 1945.
  54. *SA*, December 1945.
  55. *SA*, mid-June 1945
  56. *SA*, October 1945.
  57. 'Party Organiser' (RCP), September 1946.
  58. RCP, 'Membership Figures', n.d., 1947.
  59. John Lawrence, 'Industrial Tasks in the Struggle Against Unemployment', 1945 Conference Discussion, RCP, 25 July 1945.
  60. History of the British Trotskyist Movement, delivered by GH on 6 August 1964 at SLL Camp; RCP, Report of 1945 Conference.
  61. John Goffe interview with Al Richardson, 18 May 1978.
  62. Quoted in Grant, *History*, p.122.
  63. Harold Atkinson to Jimmy Deane, 8 June 1946.
  64. Grant, *History*, p.161.
  65. John Lawrence, 'Miners Much More Useful Than Queens', *SO*, 24 July 1953. A number of people told me that Lawrence had been a Bevin Boy during the war but there seems to be no evidence of this and it may have been confused with his stint at Cannock.
  66. Patricia Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A Life* (Oxford University Press), 1997, p.134.

67. Lawrence and Shindler to Millie Lee, 14 January 1947; Lee to Lawrence and Shindler, 18 January 1947; Harry Ratner, *Reluctant Revolutionary: Memoirs of a Trotskyist, 1936-1960* (Socialist Platform), 1994, p.148.
68. Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, pp.134-5.
69. Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, p.134.
70. Ratner, *Reluctant Revolutionary*, p.148. Ratner to author, 8 September 1996.
71. Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, p.135.
72. RCP Internal Bulletin, July 1947. Condon was soon passing information on the Trotskyists to the CP: Information on Trotskyists given by Bob Condon in interviews with E. Hayes in July 1950, CP memo.
73. See, for example, J. Goffe, G. Healy, J. Lawrence, 'Revisionism and the USSR', July 1946; H. Finch, J. Goffe, G. Healy, J. Lawrence, 'The Turn to Mass Work', 17 July 1946; J. Goffe, G. Healy and J. Lawrence, 'Statement on the Withdrawal of the Red Army', 24 August 1945.
74. RCP, Minutes of the CC, 7 July 1946, On the Soviet Union.
75. *Ibid.*
76. RCP Politbureau, An Appeal For Revolutionary Integrity in Discussion, n.d., 1946?
77. For accounts of the period, see Ratner, *Reluctant Revolutionary*; Bill Hunter, *Lifelong Apprenticeship: The Life and Times of a Revolutionary* (Index Books) 1997, pp.255-79; Mark Jenkins, *Bevanism: Labour's High Tide* (Spokesman), 1979; Bob Pitt, 'The Rise and Fall of Gerry Healy', *Workers News*, July, September, October, December 1990.
78. See, for example, Hunter, *Lifelong Apprenticeship*; Pitt, *Workers News*, July 1990.
79. Bornstein and Richardson, pp.230-33. Whereas, for example, Cannon's SWP could tolerate state capitalist minorities first led by C.L.R. James, subsequently around Art Fox, as well as a variety of other factions, no such diversity was tolerated inside the Club.
80. Goffe interview.
81. SWP, *International Secretariat (IS) Documents 1951-1954*, vol.1, 1974; Duncan Hallas, 'Building the Leadership', *International Socialism*, 40, October 1969.
82. The Club, 'British Perspectives', n. d., 1950.
83. *IS Documents*, vol.1.
84. Percy Downing and Ken Tarbuck, 'A Critical View of the Paper', Club document, n.d., 1950.
85. Jock Haston, 'Dear Comrades', 10 June 1950.
86. JS, JH, TM, 'To the Members of the BSFI', n.d., 1950.
87. Lawrence, 'Editorial', *SO*, August 1950.
88. *Ibid.*
89. N. Willis, 'Readers' Forum', *SO*, February 1951.
90. A.R. Griffin, 'Readers' Forum', *SO*, 22 August 1952.
91. Lawrence, 'The Editor Replies', *SO*, 22 August 1952.
92. *Ibid.*
93. Lawrence, 'Save These Workers From The Firing Squad', *SO*, 3 July 1953.
94. *Ibid.*
95. Jack Stanley, 'What Are The Russian People Like?', *SO*, June 1952; Jack Stanley, 'How The Revolution Came To A Chinese Village', *SO*, 6 February 1953.
96. Lawrence, 'The Editor Replies', *SO*, 22 August 1952; 'A Reply By The Editor', *SO*, 2 January 1952.
97. P. Newton, 'Readers' Forum', *SO*, 3 October 1952.
98. Lawrence, 'The End of an Era – Stalin's Place in History', *SO*, 13 March 1953.
99. 'Editorial', *SO*, 1 May 1953.
100. Charlie Van Gelderen, interview with Al Richardson, 4 October 1979.
101. Millie Lee to Jimmy Deane, 9 May 1950.
102. In contrast with Lawrence, Braddock continued to campaign for a seat against the opposition of the Labour Party apparatus until the end of the 1950s and was active in the party until the 1960s.
103. Lawrence, 'Some Comments On The Prague Trial', *SO*, 2 January 1952.
104. 'Editorial', *SO*, January 1951; *SO*, 2 January 1953.
105. 'Editorial', *SO*, November 1951.
106. Lawrence, 'Face The Facts', *SO*, 19 September 1952.
107. Alex Acheson interview; Laurens Otter to author, 11 July 1996; Harry Ratner to Bruce Robinson, 1 June 1996. At least one quarrel between Lily and Lawrence which led to police involvement was allegedly discussed by the RCP Control Commission: Progress Report, 11 June 1944, CP. Jim Higgins compared Lawrence with Brian Behan – high praise indeed – as a stump orator: Jim Higgins, *More Years for the Locust* (IS Group), 1997, p.10.
108. Lee to Deane, 9 May 1950.
109. Lawrence, 'Some Comments on the Prague Trial', *SO*, 2 January 1953.
110. G. Healy, 'The Way to Socialism in Britain', *Labour Review*, vol.1, no.2, May-August 1952. Van Gelderen interview. The review has also been attributed to George Novack: information from Al Richardson.
111. Labour Party Executive Minutes, 24 April 1953, 10 June 1953.
112. Labour Party Executive Minutes, 10 June 1953; Labour Party Annual Conference Report, 1953, p.196.
113. *Tribune*, 9 October 1953.
114. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism, A Documentary History*, vol.2 (New Park Publications), 1974, p.145.
115. *SO*, January 1950; Harry Constable to Keith Sinclair, 8 June 1994.
116. *IS Documents*, vol.2, p.182.
117. Burns [Healy], 'The Struggle Against Revisionism', n.d., October 1953. This, largely pasted together from SWP statements, was the only document Healy produced in the dispute. Together with the absence of anything from the Lawrence group, it underlines both the unprincipled basis of the split and the ideological poverty of the Club.
118. *Ibid.*; An Anonymous Author, 'The Disunity of Theory and Practice: The Trotskyist Movement in Great Britain since 1945', *Revolutionary History*, vol.6, nos.2/3, Summer 1996, n.44, pp.213-14; David Goldhill to Jim Raisin, London Labour Party Organiser, 25 June 1953.
119. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.1, p.145. In the best traditions of Healy-style mythmaking, by 1957 he had extended and embellished his original comment, stating: "Time and again we hushed things up about his pro-Stalinist behaviour as Editor of the *Socialist*

- Outlook* on a request from the Pablo centre”, *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.3, p.34.
120. Peng Shu Tse to Cannon, 20 April 1958, in SWP, *The Struggle to Re-Unify the Fourth International*, vol.3, 1978, p.76.
121. ‘Rise and Decline of Stalinism’ in SWP, *The Development and Disintegration of World Stalinism*, March 1970, p.24. This is the version approved after amendment by the 1954 World Congress.
122. ‘Rise and Decline’, p.15.
123. ‘Rise and Decline’, p.16.
124. ‘Rise and Decline’, p.25.
125. ‘Rise and Decline’, p.20.
126. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, p.130.
127. See, for example, Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (Oxford University Press), 1949; idem, *Russia After Stalin* (Hamish Hamilton), 1953; idem, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (Oxford University Press), 1954; idem, *Heretics and Renegades and Other Essays* (Hamish Hamilton), 1955. For comments on this, see *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, pp.45, 210-2. Alex Acheson, Lawrence’s fellow member of the RWL, recalls meeting Deutscher at Hilda Lane’s house late in 1940. Deutscher contributed several articles to *Workers Fight* under the pseudonym “Josef Bren”, characterising the war as a clash between rival imperialisms: see Bornstein and Richardson, *Stream*, p.50, n.97.
128. *IS Documents*, vol.2, p.82.
129. SWP, *International Committee Documents*, vol.1, pp.60-1.
130. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.1, pp.139-42. Clarke, who was known in Paris as “the cowboy”, ironically shared a pseudonym, “Collins”, with Lawrence.
131. *IS Documents*, vol.4, p.186.
132. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.1, p.148; *IC Documents*, vol.2, pp.99-101.
133. *IC Documents*, vol.2, pp.99-102. Some observers emphasised Healy’s concern that Lawrence, well-known as the editor of the paper and now with a direct link to Pablo, was an immediate threat to his leadership: Anonymous Author, ‘Disunity of Theory and Practice’, p.217; Goffe interview.
134. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2 pp.75-77.
135. Lawrence, ‘To Members of the British Section’, *IS Documents*, vol.4, pp.162-3.
136. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, pp.76-9.
137. Acheson interview.
138. Goffe interview. In reality, members of both sides of the split were deeply involved in activity in the labour movement. Goffe’s comments really relate to the desire of many in the Lawrence group to remove all barriers to this activity. Other members of the Club such as Arthur Cooper soon fell away but eventually re-established relations with Pablo: information from Al Richardson.
139. Editorial, *SO*, 27 November 1953; Ratner, *Reluctant Revolutionary*, pp.195-6.
140. *SO*, 18 December 1953.
141. *SO*, 11, 18 December 1953, 8 January 1954.
142. *SO*, 18 December 1953, 8 January 1954.
143. *SO*, 6 February 1953.
144. *SO*, 15 January 1954.
145. *SO*, 26 February, 5 March, 2, 9 April 1954.
146. Lawrence, ‘British Labour Holds Key to Peace or War’, *SO*, 12 March 1954.
147. *SO*, 19 March 1954.
148. Lawrence, ‘The Editor Replies’, *SO*, 19 March 1954.
149. Lawrence, ‘Jennie Lee Starts Something’, *SO*, 2 April 1954.
150. *SO*, 9 April 1954.
151. Lawrence, ‘On the Art of Evasion: A Reply to G. Healy’, *SO*, 16 April 1954.
152. Tom Braddock and John Lawrence, ‘Our Aim is Left Unity’, *SO*, 7 May 1954.
153. Lawrence, ‘This Was Trotsky’ – review of *The Prophet Armed*, *SO*, 12 March 1954; *SO*, 26 March 1954.
154. *SO*, 26 March 1954.
155. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, pp.81-2.
156. Jenkins, *Bevanism*, p.220.
157. Barry McKaig, ‘The Origins of Trotskyism’, *WNV*, 13 March 1954; ‘Background to *Socialist Outlook*’, *WNV*, 20 March 1954; *SO*, 26 March 1954. Lawrence was seen in some internal CP documents as pushing a non-Trotskyist line: Information Memo, 16 June 1954. Betty Reid, the CP’s expert on such matters, was at pains to correct this. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Stanley was working for the CP given Reid’s exasperation at those in the party who put his involvement with *SO* down to gullibility. As far as she was concerned, he had no such excuses, for its Trotskyist animation was very clear: Reid to Peter Kerrigan, n.d., June 1954. (The Communist Party materials I have used here are in the party archive at the National Museum of Labour History, Manchester. To save space I have not used the full references, but the majority of documents are to be found in the CP/cent/org/14/2, the CP/Lon/DC and the CP/Lon/Memb series for the relevant years.)
158. *SO*, 9 April 1954; ‘A Letter from Tom Braddock and John Lawrence to all Shareholders’, 9 April 1954.
159. Quoted in Bob Pitt, ‘Rise and Fall’, *Workers News*, October-November 1990.
160. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, p.83; Van Gelderen interview.
161. CP, Information Memo, 16 June 1954.
162. *SO*, 21 May 1954.
163. Information Memo, 16 June 1954. Baird was briefly a supporter of Militant before his death in 1964. See Michael Crick, *The March of Militant* (Faber), 1986, pp.46-7. And see the comment, “John Baird, Labour Party MP who was always on our side”, in Pierre Frank, *The Fourth International: The Long March of Trotskyism* (Inklinks), 1979, p.149.
164. Lawrence to Mahon, 17 October 1958.
165. *IS Documents*, vol.4, p.201.
166. CP, Further Report on Trotskyist Org, 1 February 1955; Betty Reid, Report to CP Executive, n.d., 1958.
167. *Ibid.*
168. *IS Documents*, vol.4, reprinted from the Socialist Union’s *The Educator*, May 1954.
169. Lawrence letter to CP, reproduced in CP memo, 4 November 1958, *IS Documents*, vol.4, p.207.

170. *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, p.145.  
 171. *IS Documents*, vol.4, p.209; *Trotskyism vs Revisionism*, vol.2, p.xiv.  
 172. Lawrence, 'Revolution Can't be Crushed', *Tribune*, 11 June 1954.  
 173. Reid, 'Report to CP Executive', n.d., 1958.  
 174. Ibid.  
 175. Ibid.  
 176. Ibid.  
 177. Acheson interview. "Andy" may have been Andy Wolfe who was with Lawrence in Cannock Chase.  
 178. Handwritten, unsigned CP memo, n.d., 1956,  
 179. Henry Friedman to author, 24 June, 15 July 1996.  
 180. Bob Pitt, 'Red Flag Over St Pancras'; Duff, *Left, Left, Left*, *Left*.  
 181. Goffe interview.  
 182. Unsigned CP memo, n.d., 1956.  
 183. Laurens Otter to author, 4 May 1996  
 184. CP, The Position of the Trotskyist Org in Britain, January 1956.  
 185. For the *American Socialist*, see *Tribune*, 8 October, 12 November 1954, 28 January 1955.  
 186. Extract from a letter from Lawrence quoted in CP statement, 4 November 1958. See also the report in February 1956 that Lawrence told his supporters "not to waste time on" a French woman supporter of Pablo, presumably Michele Mestre, recently in London: Sutherland to Mahon, 26 February 1956.

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