

Finsbury Communist Association

British Eyewash

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A spectre is haunting Britain's communists, the spectre of the British Road to Socialism.

The British Road was the long-term programme of the Communist Party of Great Britain from January, 1951 until its self-dissolution in 1991. Over this period the party made several minor changes but the key provisions remained unchanged, namely that Socialism in Britain would be brought about by the vote of a majority of Communist and Left Labour MPs in the House of Commons.

The United Kingdom ruling class would hand over all its power and nearly all its wealth in obedience to a parliamentary majority.

This is absolute rubbish. The ruling class would resist with every weapon at its disposal. The ruling class has plenty of weapons at its disposal. The ruling class would resist – and win.

To start with, the Queen would refuse to sign the Bill bringing in Socialism. This would force Parliament to resort to unconstitutional action or climb down. Parliament has not the ability to resort to unconstitutional action.

Stalinists have always maintained that the British Road is nonsense. Anti-Stalinists have retorted that Stalin personally endorsed the British Road. Stalinists have said that this assertion was either a lie or an example of Stalin showing his respect for the decision of a fraternal party, even though it went against his own beliefs.

Fast forward to September 2007, the Indian Marxist half-yearly magazine Revolutionary Democracy has obtained from the Russian Archives a record of the actual conversations about the draft British Road between Stalin and Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the CPGB.

On 5th January, 1951 Pollitt presented Stalin with the final draft of the British Road which 'was prepared in accordance with the September letter of Comrade Stalin'. Stalin made a few more amendments with which Pollitt was in 'full agreement'.

On 19th January, 1951 Pollitt sent Comrade Stalin a letter enclosing 'the final proof' of the British Road. Pollitt admits to having made 'many changes' to the agreed draft. However, 'the changes do not in any way alter the political formulations which remain as they were with the exception of putting them into the best English.'

Stalin not only endorsed the British Road. He helped to draw it up. Why?

In 1950, the CPGB still had, as its long term programme, for a Soviet Britain, dating from 1935. For a Soviet Britain envisaged a revolutionary transfer of power in Britain.

By 1950 such a revolutionary transfer of power in Britain was unlikely, to say the least.

Communists in the United States were being persecuted, victimised, sacked, and convicted of 'conspiracy to overthrow the state by force and violence.'

In the United Kingdom communist civil servants were purged in 1948. It was not a good idea to say to all and sundry, 'Yes, our aim is to overthrow the state by force and violence.' A new programme was needed, quickly.

The Communist Party of Great Britain was not able to overthrow the British State by force and violence.

Its unstated main purpose in life was to prevent the Anglo-US imperialists from overthrowing the Soviet State by force and violence.

The party's membership of about 45,000 was fragile, not capable of standing up to persecution. Indeed, a majority of Finsbury working class members left the party simply because in 1949 HMS Amethyst, which had no business being up the Yangtse in the first place, was fired on by communist Chinese troops.

The CPGB's programme had to look acceptable. And so the British Road was born.

As one-time London District Secretary of the CPGB Johnie Mahon told a present member of Finsbury Communist Association:

'The more we explained the old programme, the less people liked it. They pushed over the platform. The more we explained the British Road, the more people liked it.'