Downton Abbey Socialism: Stalin’s Sympathizers in the British Establishment

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Glossary

Bourgeoisie- Owners of the land and factories that produce the goods that are essential to modern society. Within orthodox Marxism they are accused of enjoying most of benefits of the value of the goods produced by their employees despite usually not doing physical labor themselves.

Communism- belief in a revolutionary, state-based form of socialism modeled on the Soviet Union.

Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)- the British branch of the Comintern.

Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CCCP)- the ruling party and dominant political power in the Soviet Union.

Communist International, Third International, or Comintern- An organization of political parties affiliated with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and (secretly) funded by the Soviet government that existed between 1919 and 1943.

Fabian Society- A society of intellectuals that believed they could guide the UK on a path to socialism that would not involve a violent revolution. Members of the society had varied political views but agreed on balancing the interests of consumers with those of the industrial working class.

Historians Group of the Communist Party (HGCP) - An organization of historians within the Communist Party of Great Britain. It was formed in 1946 and dismantled in 1956 when many of its prominent members resigning in protest after the revelations of Khrushev’s “Secret Speech” and the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

Means of Production- the technological resources that produce a society's essential goods and services.

Labour Party- A UK political party that before the twenty first century defined itself as the representative of the working class.

Liberal Party- A UK political party defining itself by its devotion to personal freedom, a market economy and free trade.
Orthodox Marxism - The “correct” interpretation of the works of the philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) as defined by any Marxist individual, party, coalition of parties, or government. It generally includes the beliefs that all issues society, economics, and politics can be explained in terms of a struggle between two classes with mutually incompatible material desires, that value of a good is equivalent to the labor that produced it regardless of consumer demand, and that the proletariat will rise up and overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Proletariat- wage laborers employed by the bourgeoisie.

Scientific Socialism- The belief that history is a predictable series of classes taking political control from each other by appropriating the existing means of production or creating new ones, and that the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat will end this cycle and lead to a stable society.

Social Democracy- A school of socialist thought that emphasizes compromise with the bourgeoises and achieving power through electoral and constitutional means.

Tory/Conservative Party- A UK political party that defines itself by its devotion to British tradition in culture, politics, and economics.

Utopian Socialism- the belief that a fair society can be deliberately created by individuals using reason to transcend their class interest.
Introduction

Joseph Stalin’s (1878-1953) political skills allowed him to exercise de facto control of the Soviet Union from the late 1920’s to 1953.¹ In modern western societies, his government is widely condemned for orchestrating the Ukrainian famine and arresting and executing its own citizens on a massive scale, but in the 1930’s his government was seen as innovative and progressive by socialist and center-left intellectuals in the West, some of whom continued to defend Stalin’s policies from criticism during the 1940’s and 1950’s.² Before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 and after the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, many liberals and progressives in Western Europe and America saw the Soviet Union as a bulwark against fascism.³ Some details of the 1931-33 Ukrainian famine were available, but were obscured by politicized press coverage; with many prominent critics of the USSR being discredited on the left due to their support for fascism.⁴ There was only one non anonymous first-hand account that acknowledged the famine from a center left perspective in the English language.⁵

This thesis will focus on why certain British intellectuals were sympathetic to the Soviet Union as well as how they felt about and interacted with British political and cultural institutions. It will show that while these individuals had varying political views and reasons for their attraction to Soviet Russia, they were all intimately connected with “Bourgeois” institutions and

³ Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 288: Ludmilla Stern, Western intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 11.
⁵ Timothy Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 56.
lifestyles. The first chapter will explore how George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), Sidney Webb (1859-1947), and Beatrice Webb (1858-1943) - close friends and longtime political collaborators - came to see their own ideas of how to solve the issues of industrial society reflected in Stalin’s policies and worked to convince others that the USSR was an improvement over Czarist Russia and that the Soviet model was workable for less developed countries. The second chapter will show how Harold Laski (1893-1950) was unable to retain his position in the Labour Party when his support for the Soviet Union became an electoral liability for party leader Clement Attlee (1883-1967) (PM 1945-1951) in the general election of 1945. The third chapter will explore the work the Marxist Historians Group - a group of Academic Historians belonging to the Communist Party of Great Britain - did to advance the Soviet cause, the more subtle effects of their ideology in their academic work, and how politics continues to frame how historians see their writings.

This thesis is about elite British admirers of Joseph Stalin, so it is understandably confusing that extensive discussions of American historians from the 1970’s and the 1980’s are included so early. However, one needs to be familiar with the prevailing trends in the secondary literature in order to understand why scholarship with greater focus on the diversity of political views, including those usually affiliated with the right wing of the political spectrum, held by Stalin’s western admirers is necessary. Without knowing the context of the politically loaded historiography of this topic, the argument of this thesis would seem obvious and irrelevant.

In the Late Cold War, some scholars reduced the motivations of these pro Stalin intellectuals to naivety about Soviet domestic politics and a desire for complete social justice, obscuring the variety of opinions these individuals had on political violence, representative institutions, and race and class hierarchies. An example of this can be seen in Paul Hollander’s
Political Pilgrims (1981) and David Caute’s The Fellow Travelers (1973). Hollander was fixated on the fallout of the counterculture movement of the previous decade when he listed images of “policemen dispersing demonstrators, the grief of families who lost their sons in Vietnam,” among the factors he thought were encouraging pro-Marxist and anti-American views.⁶ David Caute’s The Fellow Travelers acknowledges that there is a legitimate role for dissent in American Society, and that the pro-Stalin intellectuals could and often did object to certain Soviet policies, but still implies that a shared utilitarian urge drove these intellectuals to praise the Soviet Union.⁷

Hollander and Caute apply their firsthand observations of the motivations of Western admirers of communist regimes of China, Vietnam, and Cuba in the 1960’s and 1970’s back onto those with favorable views of the USSR during the Stalin era. In 1973, Caute devoted the last three chapters to the recent history of Western admirers of those three regimes, and accused the Cuban government of weaponizing ideological tourism to a greater extent than the USSR did by pushing impressionable young radicals to commit terrorism on U.S. soil.⁸ Their analysis of Western intellectual attraction to the Soviet Union is demonstrably affected by their disapproval of the foreign policy positions of the New Left.

The Fall of the Soviet Union in 1992 opened up new possibilities for research in this field as Western Scholars now had access to the archives of Soviet organizations that interacted with friendly Western intellectuals during the Stalin Era. This institutional approach -seen in Ludmilla Stern’s Western Intellectuals and The Soviet Union (2007), and Michael David-Fox’s Showcasing the Great Experiment (2012)- examines the interactions between pro-Soviet Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union.

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⁸ David Caute, The Fellow Travelers, 16.
intellectuals (both those who were members of the Soviet Communist Party and those who were not) and the Soviet bureaucracy. Fox’s work also recognizes the influence of quasi-orientalist views about Russian society on Western intellectuals' reactions to the Soviet Union. While this approach illuminates a fascinating and unique perspective on the pro-Stalin intellectuals, it tends to focus more on developments within the Soviet Union than it does about that country's foreign admirers and the world that they lived in.

In the twenty-first century historians examining intellectuals who were sympathetic to the Soviet Union in the French context explored how the ideas of socialism, the nation, dictatorship, and democracy were portrayed in the works of individual pro-Soviet French intellectuals. Andrew Sobanet’s *Generation Stalin* (2018) is a close reading of four French texts intended to be laudatory of Stalin and the Soviet Union published by French communists over the course of the Stalin era. Sobanet argues that under Joseph Stalin and Maurice Thorez (leader of the PCF), the French Communist Party went from denouncing France as just another corrupt bourgeois state to claiming the legacy of the French Revolution and emphasizing the anti-German and pro-French credentials of Stalin and the Soviet Union. Tony Judt’s *Past Imperfect* (2011) explores how French intellectuals in early post occupation France used pro-Soviet rhetoric to express their frustrations with the French political system and their fears of American mass media overwhelming French culture.

The 2006 book *The Webbs and Soviet Communism* by Thomas Morgan applied some of the more nuanced analysis that emerged from French scholarship in a British context. It still argues that the Webb’s embrace of Stalin was due to disillusionment with Western culture and

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9 Michael-David Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*, 2.
British politics. However, he cautions that when drawing broad conclusions about what type of intellectuals were attracted to Stalin’s USSR, “Simple lines of causation, tautologically sufficient to the individual case, invariably break down when confronted with the multiple trajectories” which lead Western intellectuals to defend the Soviet Union. Morgan acknowledges that no single ideology or psychological profile can explain intellectual support for Stalin.

I will seek to join scholars like Morgan, David-Fox, Sobonet, and Judt in contributing to a deeper understanding of the political, historical, and ideological context behind the pro Soviet views of Western intellectuals during the Stalin era. This thesis is mainly based on the published works of the figures it studies. Since they are all either academics, politicians, or engaged in the public sphere there is a great variety of speeches, pamphlets, articles, and books to build on. The memoirs of Clement Attlee, Beatrice Webb, and Ivan Maisky (the Soviet Ambassador to London) are drawn upon for a more personal view of the relevant events and characters. It will also draw on modern day biographies of the key characters and current scholarly treatment of the works of the Marxists Historians.

The figures explored in this thesis occasionally generated controversy and were perceived as subversive, but they were also respected academics, politicians, and literary figures. Despite the title, there were not all peers of the realm -although some were raised to that status- but they were all members of the upper middle class throughout their adult lives. They demonstrate an overall shift in rhetoric from enthusiastic praise of the Soviet Union during the early Stalin era to more refrained portrayals as the lesser of two evils during the opening stages of the Cold War, challenging earlier ideas that these intellectuals were unwilling to revise their rhetoric about the

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Soviet system in the face of negative press because of their quasi-religious faith in the Soviet Union.¹⁴ Even during the height of optimism about the Soviet system, they were generally cautious about the applicability of Soviet policies for their own country.

Chapter One

Conservative Revolutionaries: George Bernard Shaw and the Webbs

The Fabian Society was a group of intellectuals who believed that a class of experts could use the new technologies produced by the industrial revolution to create a society in which all would be able to contribute to their full potential. The Fabian society was founded as a forum to discuss ways to alleviate urban poverty in late nineteenth century Britain. It provided a network and a platform for politicians, economists, and writers interested in the social questions of modern urban life; Its lecture series started in 1884 and continues to this day.15 Before the Labour Party gained a significant presence in Parliament after World War I (1914-1918), the Fabian society’s lobbying efforts among reform minded Tory and Liberal politicians was the main driving force behind progressive legislation.16 Even after the Labour Party became significant on a national stage, the Fabian Society remained a major socialist think tank.17

The Fabian Society had no official political line, but its unofficial “Triumvirate” of George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, and Beatrice Webb supported the Soviet Union because they believed that Joseph Stalin’s policies promoted their longtime causes of industrial efficiency, social harmony, and public morality.18 Shaw and the Webbs believed that some lessons from the Soviet experience could be useful in a British context, but that a communist revolution in Britain was neither necessary nor desirable.

17 Mark Menon, “The Fabian Society during the 1940’s: The Search for a ‘Socialist Foreign Policy,’” European History Quarterly 30 no. 2 (April, 2000), 240.
18 Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 209.
Shaw’s skepticism about the virtue and intelligence of the masses contributed to his unique view of socialism. Artistically, Shaw was influenced by the philosophies of Nietzsche and Ibsen, which taught that truly talented individuals were held back by the inferior masses.\textsuperscript{19} By 1904, he expressed regret for the dramatic expansion of working class suffrage in 1884, claiming that working class men collectively vote against their own interest on trade policy because they believe “an increased cost of living will lead to a rise in wages.”\textsuperscript{20} In 1911, Shaw’s biographer concluded that Shaw believed that capitalism's main source of support was not the very wealthy and large corporations, but wage laborers and middling entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{21} The biography argued that the logical conclusion of Shaw’s beliefs was that it would be exceptional middle and upper class thinkers who would push for “collectivist measures, municipal reforms, civic virtue, and social progress.”\textsuperscript{22} Shaw supported egalitarianism and democracy when they aligned with his other political goals, but they were not his core values.

While Shaw was arguably not a nationalist, he never actively protested a major war effort or took an anti-imperial stance that was not already uncontroversial. He argued that the Fabian Society should not condemn the Boer War (1899-1900) for practical and utilitarian reasons. At the time, Shaw did not believe that international relations could be significantly reformed, so by condemning the Boer War the Fabians would throw away political capital for nothing.\textsuperscript{23} Shaw also saw no moral issue with the annexation of the Boer republics since he believed the British

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\textsuperscript{21} Archibald Henderson, \textit{George Bernard Shaw}, 167-68.
\textsuperscript{22} Archibald Henderson, \textit{George Bernard Shaw}, 180-81.
Empire would provide superior administration.²⁴ Shaw left the Liberal Party at the turn of the century because he felt it prioritized resisting imperialism and state funding for Anglican schools over advocating for the economic policies he wanted.²⁵ By the 1930’s, Shaw supported autonomy for the imperial dominions, but by that time that was not a radical belief.²⁶ Shaw was just as willing to praise the policies of the British empire as he was to praise the policies of its enemies, and he never felt the need to atone for British imperialism.

In the interwar era, Shaw was the most right leaning member of the Fabian Club. He believed that the proletariat needed the firm autocratic guidance of leaders like Stalin and Lenin to create a viable alternative to capitalism.²⁷ His admiration of centralized elite rule was not confined to the left of the political spectrum, and he publicly praised Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) (Il Duce 1922-1943) “as its [Italy’s] savior from parliamentary impotence and democratic indiscipline.”²⁸ In the 1928 edition of The Intelligent Woman’s Guide To Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism (hereafter referred to as The Intelligent Woman’s Guide), Shaw contrasted dictatorships of both the left and the right favorably with parliamentary democracy, claiming the latter system had proven so ineffective that it was “suspended and replaced by dictatorship in Italy, Spain, and Russia without provoking any general democratic protest beyond a weary shrug of the shoulders.”²⁹

²⁴ Fred D. Schneider, “Fabians and the Utilitarian Idea of Empire,” 507.
Shaw believed that political rights were meaningless, and the amount of liberty that it was desirable for a society to allow its citizens could be achieved through economic means alone. For Shaw, one had liberty “If you can at any moment of the day say ‘I can do as I please for the next hour’ then for that hour you are at liberty.” 30 Shaw did not see the ability to participate in politics as a good in itself. In the 1937 edition of *The Intelligent Woman's Guide*, Shaw dismissed universal adult suffrage as “the bunch of carrots which for a whole century kept the electoral donkey pursuing it [that] has now been overtaken and eaten without giving the poor beast the least refreshment.” 31 He did not see inherent value in liberal democratic institutions and practices.

While Shaw was critical of his own society, he did not see Soviet society as a perfect alternative. Shaw’s approval of the Soviet Union was conditioned on the level of innovation and progress he saw from it. From 1917-1920, Shaw publicly defended the Bolshevik Revolution as a form of shock humor, but he privately considered the Soviet Union to be a backward and insignificant country throughout the 1920’s. 32 When Stalin abandoned the relatively liberal and agrarian focused five year plan in favor of state-planned heavy industry, Shaw felt like the Soviet government was deliberately putting his theories into practice. 33 Shaw’s sense that Stalin was inspired by his ideas eroded his doubts about the USSR. While the Soviet records of the one on one conversation between Josef Stalin and George Bernard Shaw are unavailable, new scholarship on the Soviet response to the 1934 visit of H.G. Wells -who also saw himself as a source of inspiration for Stalin- argues that Soviet agencies were uncomfortable with working with Westerners who saw themselves as teachers of Stalin even if humoring those views could

lead them to become more invested in the success of the Soviet state.\textsuperscript{34} Shaw’s reluctance to accept the Stalin cult would likely have been another source of tension between himself and the Soviet government.

Despite the complexity of his relationship with the USSR, Shaw worked to legitimate the Soviet system for British audiences as an example of Fabianism in practice. He claimed that during his 1931 trip to the USSR he “lived and traveled in perfect comfort (they treated me as if I were Karl Marx himself) and found no such horrors as I could have found in the distressed areas and slums of the Capitalist west.”\textsuperscript{35} Shaw was impressed with Stalin’s willingness to abandon ideological purity to promote industrial efficiency, and in The Intelligent Woman’s Guide (1937) praised the Soviet policy that “imported Belgians, Germans, Englishmen and above all Americans [as industrial experts] … Before long they [Soviet factories] were working with all-Russian staff as smoothly as the factories of Detroit or Pittsburgh.”\textsuperscript{36} Shaw argued that the goal of Stalin’s five year plan was to accumulate capital to a level at which equality of income and equality of leisure would be achievable in Russian society.\textsuperscript{37}

Shaw was not squeamish about using mass political violence to promote political progress but seems to have been deceived or been in denial about the extent of repression in the Soviet Union. He interpreted the prosecution of leading members of the Communist Party as a legitimate anti-corruption effort instead of a power grab by Stalin, claiming that “fortunately mistakes are not hushed up in Russia: they are attacked and remedied with uncompromising vigor.”\textsuperscript{38} The Shaw scholar Matthew Yde argues that it would be naive to expect Shaw to

\textsuperscript{34} Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 228: Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment, 236.  
\textsuperscript{35} George Bernard Shaw, The Intelligent Woman’s Guide, 410-11.  
\textsuperscript{36} George Bernard Shaw, The Intelligent Woman’s Guide, 415.  
\textsuperscript{37} George Bernard Shaw, The Intelligent Woman’s Guide, 420.  
\textsuperscript{38} George Bernard Shaw, The Intelligent Woman’s Guide, 411.
condemn the Soviet Union on humanitarian grounds since his public support for lethal eugenics dated back to 1910.39 However, Yde acknowledges that Shaw minimized the extent of political violence in the Soviet Union rather than giving his open support to the Great Purges. Shaw declared in 1935 that repression in the USSR had served its purpose and would soon be wound down, but the number of arrests would not peak until 1937, and the number of executions would continue to rise even after that.40 Shaw argued that Stalinist violence was necessary, while he - deliberately or not- gave a misleading impression of its scale.

Shaw used the Fabian society as a vessel to recruit the Webbs to the Soviet cause. After returning from a tour of the Soviet Union in 1931, Shaw praised the USSR on the Fabian Society’s summer lecture circuit.41 He encouraged the Webbs’ own interest in the Soviet experiment which led them to visit the USSR and become communist sympathizers in their own right. While Shaw admired the autocratic methods and the violent aesthetics of the Soviet system, the Webbs came to see the Soviet system as a way to balance centralized efficiency with input from ordinary workers and consumers.

Sidney Webb was a career civil servant who became a politician late in his life. He was a co-writer of the Labour Party constitution and a co-founder of the London School of Economics, served in the cabinet during the wartime administration of the Liberal Party’s Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863-1945) (PM 1916-1921) as well as in the first Labour dominated government in 1924, and was appointed as a member of the House of Lords (the British

39 Matthew Yde, “Bernard Shaw’s Stalinist Allegory: The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles” Modern Drama 56 no. 1, (Spring 2013), 19.
equivalent of a senator) for Passfield after Labour secured a plurality in the election of 1929. In the 1929-1931 Labour government, He was appointed as Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Webbs’ responsibility for maintaining colonial rule in a time of nationalist unrest led them to believe that Britain was in decline and that the future of the world would be determined by other rising powers like Italy, Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

Beatrice Webb felt unwelcomed in the aristocratic settings that her husband's career brought her into. She described the atmosphere of the first garden party she attended at Buckingham Palace as “not kindly, let alone courtly.” While Sidney and Beatrice came from middle class and upper middle-class backgrounds respectively, Sidney’s political success brought them into the nobility as Lord and Lady Passfield. Despite their support for the Monarchy and the House of Lords as constitutional institutions, they requested not to be referred to by their aristocratic titles. This decision resulted in open hostility to the Webbs from the press and from their Tory colleges. Beatrice Webb recalls Mrs. Baldwin -the wife of the Tory party leader Stanley Baldwin (1867-1947) (PM 1923-1924, 1924-1929, 1935-1937)- shouting “‘Lady Passfield we shall call you whether you like it or not’” at her in the presence of the Royal Family. Contrary to the normal experience of the pro-Stalin British figures explored in this thesis, Beatrice Webb’s politics made her feel unwelcome in aristocratic and conservative spaces.

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The Webbs believed that British society was capable of allowing more personal freedom than other societies, and that it was understandable for other countries to restrict civil liberties to an extent that would be undesirable for Britain. In 1926, Beatrice Webb believed that both Soviet Communism and Italian Fascism were excessively brutal and authoritarian, but qualified her criticism of those regimes by remarking that both emerged in countries that “had lost all codes of morals, private and public; they had no rule of conduct to which all instinctively adhered. They needed some code of conduct in order to be effective.’’ 48 The Webbs’ ideal system of government had what they believed was a fair trade off between freedom and order, and in what they considered to be foreign and exotic countries, erring on the side of order was more acceptable.

Disenchantment with liberal democracy led the Webbs to become enthusiasts for the Soviet Union abroad and made them skeptical of mainstream Labour Party politicians at home. Beatrice Webb’s diary entries from the 1920’s indicate her frustrations with the moderate approach of Ramsay Macdonald (1866-1937) (PM 1924-1924, 1929-1935) and Philip Snowden (1864-1937), the leaders of the Labour party at that time. She did not consider Ramsay Macdonald to be a socialist, but rather a “believer in individualist democracy tempered in its expression by utilitarian socialism.’’ 49 The political disagreements between the Webbs and the Snowdens were aggravated by personal dislike as Beatrice Webb felt that Ethel Snowden went out of her way to snub her at social gatherings. 50 Beatrice’s disenchantment with British society had a cultural dimension as well, as Beatrice disapproved of “the cultural mores of the jazz age

… primitivism and the shallow hedonism of having a ‘good time.’” 51 The Webbs may not have
wanted a violent insurrection at the start of the 1930’s, but they were primed to want a
fundamental transformation of British politics, economics, and culture.

Sidney was more comfortable interacting with political elites than Beatrice. He had good
relations with his Liberal and Tory colleges in the Labour led coalition governments of 1924 and
1929-1931.52 Ramsay Macdonald, who was not portrayed favorably in Beatrice Webb’s diary,
considered Sidney Webb his most loyal minister.53 The historian Kevin Morgan notes that
Beatrice felt privately confined and underappreciated in her role as a politician's wife, and
implies that she might have influenced her husband towards support of the Soviet Union in the
1930’s after the repeated failures of reformist socialism in the 1920’s. Morgan states that “if the
focus is on Sidney and his political career, then the leap in the Webb’s outlook is accentuated,
from Macdonaldism to Stalinism in what seems like eighty days. Only in Beatrice’s diaries, and
in the subtexts of their rare collaborations, is the moodier alter ego to this unsuspected Dr. Jekyll
of reformism recorded.” 54

Prior to declaring their support for the Soviet Union in 1935, the 1931 collapse of the
second Labour government -in which Sidney Webb was a minister- made Beatrice Webb lose
even more of her confidence in the British Labour movement. Ramsay Macdonald and Philip
Snowden left the Labour Party along with a minority of its members and renounced the majority
of the party as radical Marxists after failing to get a majority of the Labour Party to support a
cabinet shuffle which gave more power to the Tories and the Liberals as a response to the

52 Kevin Morgan, The Webbs and Soviet Communism, 125.
54 Kevin Morgan, The Webbs and Soviet Communism, 127.
delayed effects of the Great Depression hitting the British economy.\textsuperscript{55} At around the same time, another significant portion of up-and-coming Labour Party politicians defected with Sir Oswald Mosely to form the nucleus of the British Union of Fascists, while the orthodox Marxist left wing of the party split off under Jimmy Maxton as the Independent Labour Party.\textsuperscript{56} Beatrice Webb lamented that “The capitalists will remain, for this fourth decade of the twentieth century, in complete and unchallenged control of Great Britain,” and the dismal prospects for socialism at home lead her to search for hope abroad.\textsuperscript{57}

The Webbs became advocates for the Soviet system after visiting the Soviet Union in 1934.\textsuperscript{58} The Soviet government had developed a substantial bureaucracy to attract foreign supporters such as the Webbs. In 1934, Webb's visit would have been managed by the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, hereafter referred to by its Russian acronym VOKS.\textsuperscript{59} VOKS showed Beatrice and her husband Sydney new factories and collective farms -portraying them as improvements to the industry and agriculture of Czarist Russia even if not up to western European standards- and continued to supply the Webbs with materials on life in the Soviet Union after they returned to Britain.\textsuperscript{60}

The Webbs portrayed the Soviet Union as democratic, tolerant, and progressive while acknowledging that it was a one-party state with few checks and balances. They recognized that eligibility for candidates in Soviet elections -which were often won unanimously or nearly so- depended on approval for the Communist Party, but argued that these elections were preceded by

\textsuperscript{55} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 261.
\textsuperscript{56} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 262: Clement Attlee, \textit{As it Happened}, 72.
\textsuperscript{57} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 267.
\textsuperscript{58} David Caute, \textit{The Fellow Travelers}, 84.
\textsuperscript{59} Michael David-Fox, \textit{Showcasing the Great Experiment}, 178.
\textsuperscript{60} Michael-David Fox, \textit{Showcasing the Great Experiment}, 217.
lively debates among the voters. The Webbs, especially Beatrice, were more egalitarian than Shaw and sincerely believed in democracy and workers self-management. They believed that the political system of the USSR allowed for a balance of popular control with centralized guidance.

The Webbs argued that the Soviet Union encouraged transparency in its bureaucracy. They observed that “the public speeches by Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and other soviet statesmen - in striking contrast with those of British, French or American statesmen - nearly always lead up to a tirade of criticism of some part of Soviet administration.” Low and mid-level bureaucrats were often attacked by the Soviet press in the early to mid 1930’s, but this was more about more powerful figures justifying their own shortcomings and laying the groundwork for the purges then the free expression of popular disapproval with certain officials and policies. Although the most high profile incidents of purging - or expulsion from the Communist Party for political reasons - happened after the Webbs published Soviet Communism: A New Civilization, the Webbs were aware of this practice and addressed it in their book. The Webbs viewed the prospect of being purged as a motivation for members of the communist party to perform better at their jobs, and credited purging with preventing the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from growing into a complacent oligarchy.

Privately, the Webb’s were concerned about the state of intellectual freedom in the USSR. In their chapter on Soviet science, the Webbs encouraged Soviet scientist to be wary of “the disease of orthodoxy,” subtly encouraging free inquiry.

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64 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Soviet Communism I, 377.
Union had an independent civil society would be further shaken by the Great Purges of the late 1930’s. Although she still believed in the integrity of the Soviet justice system, she worried that the purge trials would hurt the morale of Soviet citizens by revealing that so many once respected members of the Communist Party had engaged in treasonous activity.\textsuperscript{66} She also sympathized with her friends at the Soviet Embassy in London, including the Ambassador Ivan Maisky (1884-1975) and his family, whom she observed were psychologically strained from fear of being recalled to arrest or execution.\textsuperscript{67} Like Shaw, the Webbs were uncomfortable with the magnitude of Stalinist violence during the late 1930’s and early 1940’s.

The Webbs were also convinced that ethnic and racial harmony prevailed in the USSR. On racial issues, the Webbs were fairly progressive for their time, but some of their racial views would be controversial in a modern setting. On one hand, they believed that the world was divided into “backwards” and “advanced” races, and that the gender roles of the non-European cultures of the USSR were uniquely oppressive and needed to be reformed by the communist authorities.\textsuperscript{68} Sydney Webb also enforced racial segregation in colonial cities during his tenure as Secretary of State for the colonies (1929-1931) and nominated a eugenicist for the position of Dean of Social Biology at the London School of Economics.\textsuperscript{69} Since Russians were on the low end of the Webb’s civilizational hierarchy, the Webbs were less responsive to humanitarian objections to Soviet policy since they believed that famine, death, and suffering were inevitable parts of Russian peasant life.\textsuperscript{70} On the other hand, they approved of Soviet policies designed to protect minority languages and asserted that “scientific anthropology knows of no race, whether

\textsuperscript{66} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume IV}, 411.
\textsuperscript{67} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume IV}, 411.
\textsuperscript{68} Sidney and Beatrice Webb, \textit{Soviet Communism I}, 156.
\textsuperscript{69} Kevin Morgan, \textit{The Webbs and Soviet Communism}, 133.
\textsuperscript{70} Kevin Morgan, \textit{The Webbs and Soviet Communism}, 211.
white or black, of which the most promising individuals could not be immeasurably advanced by appropriate education and an improvement in economic and social environment.” 71 The Webb's vision of racial justice was equality of opportunity combined with a balance between assimilation and multiculturalism.

Beatrice Webb and her husband disapproved of sexual freedom available in the early years of the USSR. They projected their traditional views of sex and marriage back onto Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), reporting him as saying “The revolution demands concentration, increase of forces. From the masses, from individuals. It cannot tolerate orgiastic conditions… Dissoluteness in sexual life is bourgeois, is a phenomenon of decay.” 72 They applauded Stalin’s expulsion of people with a history of marital infidelity from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and criticized the Soviet marriage law of 1920 -which was still on the books in 1935- for making divorce too easily available.73 The Webbs hoped the example of the Soviet Union would reinforce, not challenge, traditional sexual mores.

The liberation of women was not a priority for the Webbs, but it was not something they were inherently opposed to. Despite their opposition to lifestyles that did not prioritize marriage, the Webbs approved of the USSR’s limited legalization of contraception and abortion.74 The Webbs justified their position on reproductive rights by claiming that while in general motherhood was good for society and should be encouraged, women should be able to terminate their pregnancies if they were financially or physically unable to have and support children.75 They were also not opposed to the economic and legal equality between men and women within

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a marriage under Soviet law.\textsuperscript{76} The Webbs had mixed reactions to the feminist and anti-racist ideas they encountered in Soviet law and rhetoric, but were ultimately uninterested in pushing the Soviet Union to become more feminist and anti-racist.

The Webbs believed that Stalin was guiding the USSR in the direction of Fabian socialism. They perceived the Soviet Communist Party as the body of benevolent, meritocratic elites guiding a democratic industrial society that the Fabians had advocated for.\textsuperscript{77} The Webbs were also enthusiastic about the public moralism that permeated through the Soviet system, seeing it as an alternative to the spiritual emptiness of capitalist society. They returned from the Soviet Union convinced that the country had overcome “the outburst of license that followed on the general overturning of 1917” and was developing a “puritanism of a rational kind… founded on … hygiene and economics… manifesting itself … in the modern essentials of the good life, notably in improvement of one’s own qualifications and character, in the fulfillment of family duties, and in a personal behavior useful to society and considerate of the comfort of others.’’ \textsuperscript{78}

The Webbs approved of Stalin’s hierarchical and socially conservative interpretation of Marxism.

The Webbs were willing to look past the technological shortcomings of the Soviet Union because of its potential to revitalize public morality in the modern world; explaining through the mouth of an unnamed Soviet guide that “You say we are doing things that Europe does better, cheaper, cleaner, and quicker than us. Yes, Europe is making things - but we are by no means merely making things!” \textsuperscript{79} The potential of the USSR to fulfill the Fabian vision led the Webbs to minimize its negative aspects. The Webbs stopped trying to be objective observers of the

\textsuperscript{76} Sidney and Beatrice Webb, \textit{Soviet Communism II}, 815.
\textsuperscript{77} Sidney and Beatrice Webb, \textit{Soviet Communism II}, 793.
\textsuperscript{78} Sidney and Beatrice Webb, \textit{Soviet Communism II}, 1070.
\textsuperscript{79} Sidney and Beatrice Webb, \textit{Soviet Communism II}, 790.
Soviet Union and allowed the Soviet embassy to edit their work on the USSR prior to publishing so their final work would contain nothing the Soviet government considered to be objectionable. The Webbs committed themselves wholeheartedly to promoting the Soviet Union’s economic and social policies.

The Webbs were uneasy with the Soviet Union’s hostility to foreign capitalist governments. They believed that the Soviet experience could not be transplanted in other countries, which had their own paths to socialism that did not have to include a violent revolution. The Webbs believed the Communist Party of Great Britain was too focused on recreating the Russian revolution to bring about the changes that they wanted in a British context. While the Webbs were usually willing to give the Soviet system the benefit of the doubt, they described the Soviet media’s coverage of foreign affairs as “of doubtful accuracy[.]” They believed that their defense of the Soviet Union was compatible with their love of Britain and were uncomfortable with manifestations of Soviet hostility towards the western world that pressured them to choose between socialism and patriotism.

Despite their deep dissatisfaction with the status quo, the Webbs believed that reform was the best path to socialism for Britain. Although she believed that George Lansbury, the leader of the ultra-revolutionary wing of the Labour Party, was a more admirable individual than Ramsay Macdonald, she saw his ideas as “wild and chaotic.” The Webbs disapproved of revolutions and strikes. In the late Victorian Era, the Webbs were opponents of the revolutionary syndicalism popular among Welsh miners. Beatrice Webb considered strikes to be attempts at

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“coercing the whole community” and inconsistent with her desire for social harmony.\textsuperscript{85} As an alternative to the industrial inefficiency of strikes and lockouts, She proposed a system in which producers and consumers would democratically plan production in a way that was fair to producers and consumers with a strong government to enforce agreement and ensure constant production.\textsuperscript{86} The same desire for an ordered and harmonious society which attracted the Webbs to the Soviet Union prevented them from welcoming the prospect of a communist revolution in their own society.

The Webb’s writing about their tour of the Soviet Union in 1935 was unambiguously favorable. While some of this is due to the success of their Soviet tour guides, it is also a reflection of Stalin’s adoption of a relatively pro-British foreign policy. In response to the remilitarization of Germany under the Nazi’s, Stalin was persuaded to adopt a new foreign policy strategy called the Popular Front. The idea was to get foreign communist parties -covertly funded by the Soviet government- to unite with Socialist and Liberal Parties in order to create governing coalitions friendly to the USSR, while simultaneously emphasizing the ideological threat of fascism to both communist and liberal governments over official channels.\textsuperscript{87} While the Labour Party and the British government ultimately rejected these overtures in the 1930’s, Soviet inspired anti-fascist rhetoric resonated with some British intellectuals, including the Webbs, who were both patriotic and left wing.

The Webbs approved of efforts to build a popular front in the UK and supported anti-fascist causes behind the scenes. Beatrice did not share George Bernard Shaw’s sympathy for

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\item \textsuperscript{85} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 106.
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fascism. She referred to the Nazi party as a “group of gangsters.”\textsuperscript{88} Although she respected Mussolini’s political acumen, she believed that Italian fascism had “no philosophy, no notion of any kind of social reorganization” to justify its dictatorship.\textsuperscript{89} Beatrice encouraged her nephew Sir Stafford Cripps (1889-1952) to run on a popular front platform in his 1935 campaign for Labour Party leader.\textsuperscript{90} Whether due to his Aunt's advice or not, Cripps eventually became an advocate for unity between the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain.\textsuperscript{91} Antifascism helped the Webbs to keep their doubts about the Great Purges private, and reconcile their support of the Soviet Union with their fondness for traditional British institutions and values.\textsuperscript{92}

The Webb's support of the Soviet Union would end with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939. The influence of the Nazi-Soviet pact on the Webbs politics has been missed by earlier scholars, including Morgan, because their disappointment with the USSR was channeled into internal defeatism rather than public denunciation and renewed advocacy of other causes. Beatrice had lost confidence in the physical and intellectual abilities of herself and her husband, referring to themselves as the “aged and decrepit Webbs.”\textsuperscript{93} She also believed that the war would lead to civilizational destruction for both Britain and Germany, and that by making an unofficial alliance with Germany, the Soviet Union had “lost not merely moral prestige, but also the freedom to develop the new civilization, whilst the old western civilization was being weakened and perhaps destroyed by the war.”\textsuperscript{94} While defeatism muted the Webb’s public

\textsuperscript{88} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 339.
\textsuperscript{90} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 357-358.
\textsuperscript{91} David Caute, \textit{The Fellow Travelers}, 167.
\textsuperscript{92} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 412.
\textsuperscript{93} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 440.
\textsuperscript{94} Beatrice Webb, \textit{The Diary of Beatrice Webb Volume Four}, 442.
reaction to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, it would be a mistake to think their sympathy for the USSR survived it.

Although Beatrice Webb and Sir Stafford Cripps would not have known it, the 1935 Labour Party leadership contest was a turning point in the marginalization of illiberal ideas, both authoritarian and revolutionary, within the Labour Party. The winner of that contest, Clement Attlee, would cement Labour’s role as an establishment and anti-communist political party, closing the door on the remote possibility of a Labour government transforming the UK into a technocratic utopia or a Soviet style state. Since Beatrice died in 1943, she was unable to make a nuanced analysis of Attlee as Prime Minister, but she recorded her disappointment in his rise to Labour party leader in her diary in 1935, citing his uninspiring personality and previously uneventful career as a backbencher.95 The cases of Shaw and the Webbs demonstrate that there was no one path by which contemporary British defenders of Stalin arrived at their pro-Soviet views, and their admiration for certain features of the Soviet regime did not necessarily imply or stem from a hatred of British institutions.

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Chapter Two

The Politician and the Professor:
Attlee, Laski, and the Defeat of the Revolutionary Labour Party

After the Labor Party's fragmentation and disastrous exit from government in 1931, a faction within the party led by Harold Laski advocated merging with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the ultrarevolutionary Independent Labour Party (ILP).\textsuperscript{96} Clement Attlee emerged as the leader of the opposition to the proposal, arguing that these parties beliefs were incompatible with the Labour Party’s constitutional and democratic values.\textsuperscript{97} Attlee’s victory in this political conflict, which culminated in Laski’s expulsion from the Labour Party in 1945, allowed the Labour Party to shed its association with the Soviet Union in the minds of British voters and become a major party.

While the Labour Party had gained pluralities in the House of Commons in 1924 and 1929, unwarranted fear of revolution and radicalism prevented them from legislating effectively and ended their governing coalitions prematurely. In 1924, the Liberal Party withdrew from its coalition with Labour and the Conservatives won the subsequent snap election in a landslide after the right wing magazine \textit{Daily Mail} published forged documents alleging that the Labour Party had been infiltrated by Soviet agents intent on overthrowing the King and Parliament.\textsuperscript{98} In 1931, the Conservative dominated National Government coalition isolated the second Labour plurality in parliament to avoid a devaluation of the pound (which was considered a radical

\textsuperscript{97} David Caute, \textit{The Fellow Travelers}, 170.
economic proposal at the time) and then gained an electoral majority with a campaign that portrayed the Labour Party platform as “‘Bolshevism run mad.’”  

In the 1945 campaign, the Conservative Party once again tried to tie the Labour Party to Communism and the Soviet Union. The leader of Labour’s parliamentary delegation and candidate for Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, was attending the Potsdam Conference because he was a viable candidate and the Deputy Prime Minister in the outgoing wartime coalition government consisting of all major parties. Laski criticized Attlee’s opposition to Soviet claims at the conference, and unsuccessfully attempted to replace Attlee as candidate with the more pro-Soviet Herbert Morrison (1888-1965). Attlee’s loyalists within the National Executive were able to vote down this motion and expel Laski for his misbehavior, but Laski’s pro-Soviet maneuvers were called out in a radio address by the Tory candidate Winston Churchill so it still became an election issue.

Unlike previous Labour scandals relating to communism or the Soviet Union, the Labour Party not only held its ground, but won an all-out majority in the subsequent election. The scandal was unable to stick despite the significant ideological similarities between the two men, as Laski was a critical admirer of Stalin who did not want to simply import the Soviet model to Britain, while Attlee himself pushed for accommodation with the Soviet Union abroad and major economic changes at home despite never praising Stalin’s policies. Attlee was able to reassure the British people that the Labour Party reflected their values in spite of his ideological similarities to Laski.

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100 Clement Attlee, *As it Happened*, 145.
While the expulsion of Laski is an obscure event from the perspective of modern-day Americans, the issues and personalities connected with it have had a lasting legacy in Britain. In the 1980’s, conservative military historians questioned Attlee’s commitment to challenging Soviet interests.\textsuperscript{104} The image of Attlee as a patriotic moderate was pushed by the Labour Party under the leadership of Ed Miliband in the early 2010’s.\textsuperscript{105} In the 2015 campaign for Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn -a wildcard candidate from the left wing of the party- used “What would Clement Do?” as a campaign slogan.\textsuperscript{106} The issue of just how moderate and constitutional Clement Attlee actually was continues to affect Labour Party politics.

The British labor movement had a complicated relationship with its Russian counterpart. Although Karl Marx (1818-1883) lived and worked in England, the dominant forms of socialist thought in late 19th century Britain were the technocratic socialism of Edward Bellamy (1850-1898) and the Fabians and the utopian agrarianism of William Morris (1834-1896), which both emphasized peaceful, constitutional reforms.\textsuperscript{107} The British Labour Party, unlike the Bolsheviks - the underground organization that would become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union - narrowly decided to support the Allied cause in World War I.\textsuperscript{108} When the Russian Revolution occurred, the Labor Party was sympathetic to the Bolsheviks, but real or imagined ties to the Soviet Union quickly became an electoral liability for the Labour Party.\textsuperscript{109} While there were real philosophical differences between the moderate and radical branches of the Labour Party,

\textsuperscript{104} Smith and Zametica, “The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered”, 237.
\textsuperscript{106} John Bew, Clement Attlee, xvi.
\textsuperscript{107} John Bew, Clement Attlee, 98.
\textsuperscript{108} John Bew, Clement Attlee, 77.
\textsuperscript{109} John Bew, Clement Attlee, 92.
the moderates had strong electoral incentives to emphasize their differences with the radicals and their criticisms of the Soviet Union.

Both Laski and Attlee had occupations before entering politics. Attlee was a social worker in the East End of London during the first decade of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{110} While this form of charity work was a common upper class pastime, Attlee was genuinely affected by his experiences in the East End, and became determined to fight the root causes of the poverty he encountered.\textsuperscript{111} Laski worked at Harvard as a Professor during the late 1910’s and early 1920’s.\textsuperscript{112} While in America, Laski became close friends with Supreme Court Justices Oliver Wendel Holmes and Felix Frankfurter.\textsuperscript{113} Laski is more well known for his works of academic political philosophy than he is for his brief and unsuccessful career as a politician. In their own way, both were committed to the ideals of the Labour Party and the Socialist movement.

Political philosophers traditionally think of Laski’s thought developing from pluralism before World War I to syndicalism from 1917 to 1931 before finally adopting orthodox Marxism, but this framing has been challenged by more recent work.\textsuperscript{114} The political theorist Michael Newman agrees that Laski did come closer to Leninism over time, but that he consistently “challenged liberals to explain how equality could be achieved within capitalism and Marxists to explain how democratic liberties could be reconciled with revolution.”\textsuperscript{115} Laski’s theoretical works show that he always advocated for a pluralistic and democratic system of

\textsuperscript{110} Reeves and McIvor, “Clement Attlee and the foundations of the British welfare state”, 42.
\textsuperscript{111} Reeves and McIvor, “Clement Attlee and the foundations of the British welfare state”, 43.
government while simultaneously becoming increasingly cynical about the possibility of reform within the western democracies.

Laski’s academic specialization was the American political system, but his 1919 work *Authority in the Modern State* focused disproportionately on French political theories, particularly on schools of thought that flourished during the restoration era. Chapters 2 and 3 of *Authority in the Modern State* are devoted to criticism of traditionalism and ultramontanism, Royalist schools of thought that were the least willing to compromise with the ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.\(^{116}\) This pattern frames the French Revolution as the central issue in politics and gives the impression that the accomplishments of that revolution are under threat from reactionaries. These are unusual choices in the context of 1919, when the last of Europe’s traditional monarchies had fallen and were being replaced by governments with liberal or socialist aspirations.

Laski’s analysis of 19th century French politics demonstrated his bias against Catholicism. The movements he criticized were both explicitly Catholic. Laski claimed that Catholicism “forbids man to think for himself.”\(^ {117}\) He criticized not only the use of Catholic faith by French reactionaries, but the policy of the Vatican itself. Laski accused Pope Gregory XVI (r.1831-1846) of accepting the persecution of Catholics by the British and the Russians in Ireland and Poland respectively in an attempt to preserve the churches “temporal interest resultant on her massive organization, and she was not prepared to sacrifice substantial material possessions.”\(^ {118}\) Laski believed that the Catholic Church was inherently hostile to liberalism and modernity.


\(^{117}\) Harold J. Laski, *Authority in the Modern State*, 76.

\(^{118}\) Harold J. Laski, *Authority in the Moderns State*, 118-19.
Authority in the Modern State criticized the norm of state sovereignty. Laski argued that the state could not force its citizens to renounce all loyalties to other institutions, specifically religious organizations and trade unions.\textsuperscript{119} While this seems to be fairly mainstream and unoriginal, he proposed a radical application of these ideas. Taking inspiration from the rise of syndicalism among French government workers, Laski argued that workers' self-management could be used to insulate the process of promotions and demotions within the bureaucracy from politicians and give government employees the "opportunity for the exercise of the creative faculties which responsibility alone will call into play."\textsuperscript{120} While it does not mention the Russian Revolution or the emerging Soviet State, Authority in the Modern State already portrays traditional representative democracy as inadequate and is interested in the revolutionary possibilities of workers self-management. Laski’s earliest comments on the USSR were ambivalent. In a 1923 article comparing Soviet Communism to Italian Fascism, he admitted that “the implicit danger in each philosophy is a similar one” despite arguing that the western establishment was hypocritical to shun the Soviet Union while praising Benito Mussolini and others like him.\textsuperscript{121}

Liberty in the Modern State, published in 1949, developed on Laski’s rejection of traditional notions of state sovereignty in his earlier work. He argued that political philosophy had romanticized state sovereignty and state power as normative ends in themselves, instead of recognizing the state is only a means to improve the lives of its citizens.\textsuperscript{122} Laski was critical of what he called the “idealist school” of political philosophy and argued that “from the Greeks to Rousseau it was always conceived that a man’s freedom is born of a limitation upon what his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Harold J. Laski, Authority in the Modern State, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Harold J. Laski, Authority in the Modern State, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Harold J. Laski, “Lenin and Mussolini” Foreign Affairs 2, no. 1 (September, 1923), 52-53.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, 40.
\end{itemize}
rulers may exact from him; since Rousseau, and, more particularly, since Hegel, it has been urged that conformity to a code, and even compulsory obedience to it, is the very essence of freedom.” 123 While Laski could acknowledge the positive achievements of dictatorships, a state without some form of pluralism, popular representation, and political rights would not be acceptable as the best possible system for him.

Laski also remained a steadfast defender of trade unions and strikes. He doubled down on his position that no government has the moral authority to outlaw strikes in any industry, no matter how critical to public life.124 He also maintained his support for unionism and political activity among government employees, but he now believed that political activism by the police and the military could destabilize democracy.125 Laski believed that unions, rather than a central party, should take the lead in building socialism.

Laski had grown disenchanted with the Labour Party and Democratic Socialism. He thought that the Labour/Liberal coalition governments of the 1920’s and 1930’s were too moderate and ineffective and had come to believe that violent socialist revolutions might be inevitable in both Great Britain and the United States if comprehensive reforms did not come quickly enough.126 Laski was also disappointed in the foreign policy record of the British Labour government led by Attlee and wished they would give more aid to “socialist states abroad.” 127 This phrase most likely includes, but is not limited to, the Soviet Union and its allies. It is possible that Laski -a proponent of a Jewish State- could have been referring to Israel under the Labour government of David Ben Gurion, since he explicitly criticized the anti-

Zionist policies of the British government earlier in the book, accusing it of breaking “its often and solemnly pledged word to the Jews… to maintain the goodwill of a small class of functionless efendi to whom the purposes of socialism are devoid even of meaning.” 128 Laski’s desire for a more pro socialist foreign policy from the Labour government does not necessarily mean he wanted the Labour government to copy the Soviet system and join the Soviet Bloc.

Laski directly commented on the Soviet Union in Liberty in the Modern State. In 1949 he urged the Soviet Union to move to a multiparty system, criticized Stalin’s cult of personality, and argued that the Soviet’s nuclear capability and expansionist foreign policy were no less dangerous to world peace than those of the United States.129 However, Laski believed that once capitalism fell, the Soviet Union would be able to gradually reintroduce political democracy without risking the economic achievements of socialism. While critical of some of Stalin’s policies, he believed that the introduction of political reforms in the Soviet Union should be put off until there was no longer a military threat from the capitalist world.130 Laski granted the leaders of the USSR wide latitude to delay democratic reforms, claiming that “If critics like Trotsky [who had been assassinated under Stalin’s orders in Mexico City nine years earlier] announce that the first condition of Russian salvation is the “removal” of the present leaders, that is an incitement to reprisals which are bound to slow down the attainment of an atmosphere in which a full right of free criticism emerges. If America becomes hysterical about Soviet ‘expansionism,’ it slows down the pace of Soviet democratization.” 131

128 Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, 16.
130 Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, 29.
131 Harold J. Laski, Liberty in the Modern State, 30.
Laski believed that it would be easier for the Soviet Union to introduce democracy and freedom of speech than it would be for the United States to promote economic equality. While Laski enjoyed America’s egalitarian culture, he was disappointed by the conservative political views of America’s working class. He saw them as pointlessly divided by ethnicity, race, and religion.\textsuperscript{132} Even more disheartening for him was his somewhat uncharitable impression that the majority of the American working class believed that the trade union movement sought to prevent men like “Carnegie or Charles M. Shaub from making the best of themselves.”\textsuperscript{133}

Laski was also concerned about the political ambitions of the American military and arms manufacturers. He interpreted fascism as an alliance between nationalistic officers and military contractors eager to turn an aggressive foreign policy into personal profit.\textsuperscript{134} He also believed that fascism was a tool for capital owners to beat organized labor into submission.\textsuperscript{135} Laski’s view of fascism as a purely economic phenomenon lead him to worry that the political power of America’s defense industries could mold U.S. foreign policy along the lines of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.\textsuperscript{136} Laski implied that aggressive, expansionist warfare was necessary for economic growth under capitalism, writing that “it must be remembered that, seven years after the Great Depression, no nation had achieved its 1929 level of production, and those that had surpassed it in 1939, namely Germany and Japan, had done so because their whole economy had been based upon preparation for war.”\textsuperscript{137}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Harold J. Laski, \textit{The American Democracy}, 205.
\item Harold J. Laski, \textit{Liberty in the Modern State}, 20.
\item Harold J. Laski, \textit{Liberty in the Modern State}, 20.
\item Harold J. Laski, \textit{Liberty in the Modern State}, 20.
\end{enumerate}
Laski was pessimistic about the prospects for future political progress in America. Laski’s pessimistic take on American culture draws heavily on Gilded Age America and downplays the progressive achievements of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s (1892-1945) (POTUS 1933-1945) and Harry Truman’s (1884-1972) (POTUS 1945-1953) administrations. Laski mused that if the Democrats choose a “genuinely progressive candidate after President Truman’s term is over, it might well succeed in breaking the Solid South by driving the reactionary elements into the Republican camp. On this basis, the Republican Party would become … a national conservative party…while the Democratic Party would become a national liberal party.” 138

While it is impossible to know how Laski would react to developments in American politics that occurred after his death in 1950, it is at least clear that he did not consider President Truman's efforts to build on the New Deal to be convincing progressive credentials.139 He was skeptical of the New Deal Coalition’s ability to make lasting, meaningful change and stand the test of time.

Laski saw the development of a third party representing the interests of the working classes as preferable to and more realistic than the long-term survival of the New Deal coalition. He envisioned this third party as a merging of smaller left wing parties, the progressive wings of the two major parties, and the Communist Party of the United States.140 Laski believed that American socialists could work with the communist towards shared goals, but that communist involvement could be a double edged sword for the hypothetical American labor movement. He was worried that the right could use the presence of communists to paint this labor movement as disloyal, but he was also concerned about the communist’s willingness to put the needs of the American labor movement before the foreign policy interest of the Soviet Union.141

Laski had a lasting negative reaction to the strength of religious fundamentalism in rural America. His experience of American political culture led him to revise his earlier position that Catholicism was inherently more reactionary than Protestantism.\textsuperscript{142} He cited the 1925 Scopes Trial in Tennessee as an example of the influence of Evangelical fundamentalism on American politics.\textsuperscript{143} Laski believed that southern industrialists patronized conservative religious preachers in order to distract their workers from the endemic poverty of that region, and accused evangelists like Billy Sunday of being “‘public relations’ experts of big business. In return for fantastically high fees, [they] devoted [their] skill in transferring mass anger against bad economic conditions to the excitement of religious revivalism.”\textsuperscript{144} The fear of the anti-intellectualism of rural America was quite common among left wing circles in Europe.\textsuperscript{145} Religious intolerance was and is a problem in American society, but Laski exaggerated its prevalence and strength in America for political purposes.

Laski compares the treatment of minorities, particularly Jews, in the Soviet Union favorably with the state of anti-Semitism in the United States. He seemed to believe that racism and anti-Semitism had no other causes besides the manipulations of capitalists seeking to divide the working class. He claimed that after the Russian Revolution, “in hardly more than a generation there is a virtually complete disappearance of both anti-Semitism and colour prejudice.”\textsuperscript{146} Laski once again focuses on more distant events that are easier to accommodate into his narrative, such as the explicitly right wing American anti-Semitism associated with the

\textsuperscript{142} Harold J. Laski, \textit{The American Democracy}, 287.
\textsuperscript{143} Harold J. Laski, \textit{Liberty in the Modern State}, 78.
\textsuperscript{146} Harold J. Laski, \textit{The American Democracy}, 486.
Red Scare of the late 1910’s/ early 1920’s and the isolationist campaigns of the 1930’s, while refraining from examining more recent events that challenged the direct equation between anti-Semitism and reactionary political views, such as the Roosevelt administration’s failure to intervene in the Holocaust or even the rise of anti-Semitism in the USSR itself during the 1940’s.  

In addition to politics and academia, Laski dabbled in the book publishing industry. In the interwar years he was a leading figure in the printing press Left Book Club alongside John Strachey and Victor Gollanz (1893-1967). Left Book Club was an antifascist project that published left wing authors with diverse ideological views, but its founder Victor Gollancz had ties to VOKS, or the All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Parties, a Soviet propaganda organization. Left book club published some of the Soviet propaganda materials provided by VOKS, but it continued to publish anti-Soviet writers as well. The relationship between Left Book Club and the Soviet government ended in 1940 when Victor Gollanz wrote an open letter renouncing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Laski’s links to the Soviet Union in the late 1930’s was not limited to his association with Victor Gollanz and his work for the Left Book Club. He also publicly praised the Soviet justice system and in the words of Paul Hollander praised the Soviet prosecutor during the purge trials.

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150 Ludmilla Stern, *Western intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 162.
as “far superior to his British counterpart.” Laski’s pro-Soviet statements and behavior were weaponized by the Conservative Party in the general election of 1945. Attlee distanced himself from Laski in his first parliamentary speech as Prime Minister after removing Laski from his position within the Labour Party during the campaign in order to avoid being tarnished by Laski’s pro Soviet statements and activities.  

Both Attlee and Laski were active members of the Fabian Society at one time in their lives. One of Attlee’s first political experiences was working on Beatrice Webb’s (1858-1943) campaign for poor law reform in the first decade of the 20th century, and as Prime Minister he referred to Sidney Webb (1859-1947) as “a very distinguished leader of my party.” Despite this early connection, Attlee did not make a strong impression on Beatrice Webb, as she saw Laski and her nephew Sir Stafford Cripps as the future of the Labour Party and the Fabian Society in 1934. Attlee is not mentioned by name in the final volume of Webb’s diary, and the cabinet shuffle that promoted Attlee into a ministerial post in 1940 is addressed in a footnote added by the editors.

Laski’s and Attlee’s lives once again came together in the Labour Party of the late 1930’s and early 1940’s. The 1930’s were a difficult and fractious time for the Labour Party. They were associated with the political violence that accompanied the general strike of 1926 and the

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153 Reeves and McIvor, “Clement Attlee and the foundations of the British welfare state”, 49
coalition government which dealt with the fallout of the Great Depression in the early 1930’s.\textsuperscript{156} Locked out of power by conservative governments, Labour leaders argued among themselves about the best path forward. The issues debated included the extent of economic reforms, whether to join the Communists or compromise with the Conservatives, and whether disarmament or deterrence should be the basis of the party’s foreign policy. Laski became part of the Labour Party’s radical wing, while Attlee led it on a more moderate path.

In May 1940, Conservative Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940) (PM 1937-1940) - tainted by the prewar policy of appeasement - resigned in the wake of military disasters in Scandinavia and a new cabinet took office.\textsuperscript{157} Labour was now the junior partner of a governing coalition under Winston Churchill (1874-1965) (PM 1940-1945, 1951-1955), the leader of the anti-appeasement faction of the Conservative party.\textsuperscript{158} Attlee had brought the Labour Party back into power on an anti-appeasement platform, but not before overcoming significant external and internal opposition. An influential faction of the Conservative Party was prepared to give Nazi Germany significant concessions in Eastern Europe and West Africa so that British foreign policy could focus on the threats posed by the Soviets and the Italians.\textsuperscript{159} A faction within the Labour Party also promoted improving relations with the Third Reich in the name of pacifism.

Attlee used his political clout as the leader of a major party to help unite the anti-appeasement wings of Britain's three major parties (Tories/Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour) behind Winston Churchill’s government in May 1940. The Soviet Ambassador Ivan Maisky (1884-1975) observed that Attlee was unwilling to commit his party to a coalition with the

\textsuperscript{157} Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 48.
\textsuperscript{158} Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 21.
\textsuperscript{159} Richard Griffiths, \textit{Fellow Travelers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-1939} (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2010), 280.
Tories until he was sure the pro-German wing of that party would be politically sidelined.\textsuperscript{160} Attlee was willing to temporarily set aside his domestic political goals to secure his preferred foreign policy.

Harold Laski was among the pacifist voices on the left wing of British politics opposing Attlee, continuing to advocate for peace two weeks after the official declaration of war.\textsuperscript{161} Laski’s early opposition to World War II (1939-1945) was in line with Soviet foreign policy at the time, but his reasons for opposing the war focused more on domestic issues than those of the Soviet government. The Soviet Ambassador to Britain believed that the war on Germany was part of a larger anti-Soviet strategy by the British conservatives. Maisky -who often attributed his own ideas to British politicians for political safety during the purges- reported that the liberal leader David Lloyd George (1863-1945) (PM 1916-1922) had said that Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had a “class based hostility to the Soviet State" and that the British press believed that a reconciliation between Britain and Germany at the expense of the USSR was imminent.\textsuperscript{162} Laski also expected the war to end quickly with a truce, but this prediction was based on his observations of military stalemate rather than belief in the anti-Soviet intentions of the British government.\textsuperscript{163} At this time the geopolitical and military aspects of the war were unimportant for Laski, whose main antiwar and anti-coalition argument was that Labour MP’s were elected to push for economic reforms, not support conservative lead governments in the name of patriotism.\textsuperscript{164}


\textsuperscript{161} Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 33.


\textsuperscript{163} Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 87.

\textsuperscript{164} Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 87.
Laski continued to subordinate foreign policy to domestic politics after the Soviet entry into the war in 1941. Laski publicly advocated for anti-coalition electoral challenges to Attlee’s leadership of the Labour Party and Churchill’s position as Prime Minister in 1942 and 1945.\textsuperscript{165} Maisky -although unusually Anglophilic for someone of his station within Stalin’s Soviet Union and thus a less than accurate indicator of the Soviet government's overall position on British politics- praised Churchill’s ability to boost Britain's morale as critical to the allied war effort within five days of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.\textsuperscript{166} The Soviet Ambassador did urge his left wing intellectual friends to criticize the government during the war years, but this effort was directed at securing more support for the Soviet military rather than changing the composition or the ideological outlook of the British government.\textsuperscript{167} The Soviets would not have encouraged Laski to challenge the Churchill-Attlee government for its economic policies.

It would be incomplete to consider Laski only as a Soviet sympathizer, and the other participant in this drama has a political identity which is just as complex. Unlike Laski, Attlee’s main body of writing consists of parliamentary speeches and electoral polemics. While these documents provide useful insights into Attlee’s thoughts, they are less straightforward and more wary of public opinion than Laski’s academic works on political theory. Attlee avoided the language of Marxist theory and did not praise any aspect of the Soviet system, but his belief in the need for a transition to fairer society was just as sincere as his more radical counterparts.

\textsuperscript{165} Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 137: Robert Crowcroft, \textit{Attlee’s War}, 138.
\textsuperscript{167} Ivan Maisky, \textit{The Complete Maisky Diaries Volume 3}, 1186.
On the issue of British participation in World War II (1939-1945) Attlee and Laski had mutually exclusive visions for the Labour Party, but on other foreign policy issues they would have been able to find common ground. While Attlee’s government joined NATO, Attlee had a relatively soft line on the Soviet Union. It was Attlee who restored communications between the Labour Party and the Soviet Embassy after they had been stopped in protest of the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939.\textsuperscript{168} Attlee called for democracy in Eastern Europe after the end of World War II, but he did not call on the Soviet Union to withdraw from that region.\textsuperscript{169} He was not initially opposed to the construction of new Soviet bases in the Middle East and North Africa when those possibilities were raised by Soviet diplomats near the end of World War II.\textsuperscript{170} Attlee was also an advocate for a reduced British naval presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, but he wanted it replaced with British airpower in cooperation with the U.S., the U.N., and the USSR, not by the Soviets alone.\textsuperscript{171} Attlee did not want an alliance with the Soviet Union, but he believed the Soviets could and should play a positive role in the cooperative international system he envisioned.

Attlee’s idealism in foreign policy was considered naive by some veterans of the British foreign office, but he was not considered too soft on the Soviet Union by his American counterpart. The Truman administration shared Attlee’s view that an extensive British presence in the Mediterranean was anachronistic.\textsuperscript{172} Truman’s State Department defended Clement Attlee’s Labour government from charges of being soft on the USSR.\textsuperscript{173} The existence of

\textsuperscript{168} Ivan Maisky, \textit{The Complete Maisky Diaries Volume 2}, 791.
\textsuperscript{171} Smith and Zametica, “The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-7”, 240.
\textsuperscript{172} Smith and Zametica, “The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-7”, 244.
criticism of Attlee’s approach to the Soviet Union from anti-communist perspectives demonstrated how subtle the differences between pro and anti-Stalin left wing figures in this era could be.

Attlee was willing to pursue a good working relationship for the Soviets, but he avoided the appearance of being ideologically aligned with them. He avoided drawing attention to the ideology of the Soviet Union in his speeches by referring to that country as Russia.\textsuperscript{174} Attlee embraced Australia, New Zealand, and the Scandinavian countries as the models for what socialism would look like in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{175} Attlee may have refrained from attacking the USSR, but he never praised it. While Attlee spoke softly about the Soviet Union, he did not prevent the British military from committing to the global Cold War (1945-1989) against the USSR. By late 1946, British troops were on the ground protecting the disputed territory of Venezia Gulia from annexation by communist Yugoslavia and aiding the anti-communist side of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949).\textsuperscript{176}

Attlee worked to improve ties with the United States in the waning months of World War II and the early years of the Cold War. Attlee visited North America two months into his administration as Prime Minister, where he bonded with American President Harry Truman and Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King (1874-1950) (PM 1921-1926, 1926-1930, 1935-1948) over their experiences as soldiers in World War I (1914-1918), celebrated Armistice Day, and

\textsuperscript{174} Clement Attlee, “A Speech to the House of Commons during the Debate on the Address” \textit{Purpose and Policy: Selected Speeches}, 17.
\textsuperscript{176} Clement Attlee “A Speech to the House of Commons in a Foreign Affairs Debate”, \textit{Purpose and Policy: Selected Speeches}, 181-182.
spoke to a joint session of the United States Congress. Unlike Laski, Attlee believed that American prosperity was not a threat to European security. Attlee was not instinctively suspicious of the postwar intentions of either of Britain's wartime allies.

When it came to the domestic systems of the two superpowers, Attlee was more sympathetic to the American model. He was proud of the democratic tradition shared by Britain and America, declaring that the Labour Party was “in line with those who fought for Magna Carta and habeas corpus, with the Pilgrim Fathers, and with the signatories of the Declaration of Independence.” Meanwhile, Attlee was critical of the domestic political system of the USSR. Speaking to the Trade Union Congress in 1946, he accused the Soviet press of giving a “fantastic misrepresentation of the world outside Soviet Russia. A wall of ignorance and suspicion is built up between the nations… We must hope for a change.” From 1947 to 1952, the Soviet Union’s reputation in the West, even in left wing circles, was damaged by the suppression of noncommunist left wing political parties and the politically motivated prosecution of prominent communists in its central European protectorates, especially Czechoslovakia which had been a progressive democracy during the interwar era. Attlee was close friends with many Czech members of the suppressed Social Democratic Party, and the Soviet organized communist coup against the pro-Western Czech government in 1948 was a major blow to Attlee’s remaining hopes of productive collaboration with the USSR. Attlee recalled that event as the “declaration of the ‘Cold War.’” While both Attlee and Laski agreed that the democratization of the

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177 Clement Attlee, “A Speech to Congress” Purpose and Policy: Selected Speeches, 144.
181 Tony Judt, Past Imperfect, 107.
182 Clement Attlee, As it Happened, 170.
Soviet Union would be beneficial, Attlee did not think that the opening of the Soviet system had to be preceded by Western concessions.

However, Attlee’s government was not completely subservient to the United States. Attlee sometimes found American positions on the Soviet Union and anti-colonial movements to be naive, but on occasions he shared Laski’s concerns about the US taking an overly aggressive approach to the Cold War. In 1945 and again in 1950-51, Attlee and Truman butted heads over the level of economic aid the US provided to the UK; Attlee became especially irritated with the Americans on the second occasion because they were simultaneously demanding more British troops and equipment for the Korean War (1950-1953). Attlee also extended diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China in 1949 (which the United States would not do until 1972), referring to the Republic of China on Taiwan as a “discredited government.” He expressed concern that the political ambitions of the maverick American right wing general MacArthur could spark a full scale war with the Soviet Union and its powerful new ally.

Attlee’s views on domestic policy were close to Laski’s. As Postmaster General in 1931, Attlee decentralized the British Post Office and loosened restrictions on political activity among post office employees, putting into practice some of Laski’s theories on bureaucracy. Many of the far left Labour politicians who backed Laski’s earlier attempts to remove Attlee went on to have prominent roles in domestic politics during Attlee’s administration: Herbert Morrison became the Majority Whip, Sir Stafford Cripps became Chancellor of the Exchequer, and

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186 Clement Attlee, *As it Happened*, 199.
Aneurin Bevan became the Minister of Health with responsibility for launching the National Health Service (NHS).\(^{188}\) In his autobiography, Attlee explicitly declared that “our [the Labour Party’s] policy was not a reformed capitalism but progress toward a democratic socialism.” \(^{189}\)

Attlee worked within the parliamentary system, but he believed the programs introduced by his government would radically transform Britain. He interpreted the Second World War as a failure of civilization, and believed it was critical that the rebuilding effort be guided by those who would introduce radical changes. While usually willing to pursue multi partisanship, in 1945 Attlee pushed for new elections to replace the Churchill coalition government before the Japanese surrender in order to be sure that the Labour Party could be free to “create a world in which free people living their own distinctive lives in a society of nations cooperate together, free from the fear of war.” \(^{190}\) Attlee may have been more suspicious of the Soviet Union than Laski, but he was just as determined to make a decisive break with the status quo.

Attlee was more idealistic than Laski in the sense that Attlee derived his version of socialism from what he believed to be just and fair, while Laski envisioned a political system that would be the most stable based on the competing class interests he saw in society. While describing Laski as a scientific socialist is incomplete, he relied heavily on the methodology of class conflict to describe political events in his later work. Laski interpreted the Labour movement as a utilitarian device to protect the interest of the working class since the other parties only served “the requirements of the manufacturer and the shopkeeper.” \(^{191}\) Attlee believed that the cause of the Labour Party was not “the will of a section, but something


\(^{189}\) Clement Attlee, *As it Happened*, 163.


\(^{191}\) Harold Laski, *Liberty in the Modern State*, 149
absolute… the Christian principle that all men are brothers of one another.”  

Attlee believed that universal ideals were more important than class interests.

While at other times there might have been room for both philosophies within the Labour Party, in the post-World War II world it needed to shed its associations with revolutionary and authoritarian forms of Marxism and the growing Soviet bloc to become politically viable. For the humanist Attlee, who was inspired by the New Deal Coalition and disappointed with Soviet society, anti-communism was both a politically expedient and morally justified position, but Laski - who remained hopeful about the Soviet experiment and saw in American society the worst excesses of racism, militarism, and capitalism- became far too radical and politically toxic for the party that Labour was becoming.

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Not all pro Stalin intellectuals operated within the Labour Party. The leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain was indifferent to intellectual support during the Stalin era, but the waves of communist led anti-fascism from 1934 to 1939 and 1941 to 1945 brought many intellectuals into the party ranks despite the party’s lack of deliberate effort to recruit this class.\(^{193}\) The Historians Group of the Communist Party (HGCP) -hereafter referred to as the Marxist Historians- were among the most influential of these intellectuals. They were an organization of historians within the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) formed in 1946 that included many who went on to transform their fields: including the economic historian Maurice Dobb (1900-1976), the sixteenth-seventeenth century English specialist Christopher Hill (1912-2003), the medievalist Rodney Hilton (1916-2002), and the eighteenth-nineteenth century British Labour movement expert turned popular historian E.J. Hobsbawm (1917-2012).\(^{194}\)

This chapter will start with an examination of these individual figures, focusing on how their political beliefs affected their works and legacies. It will go on to compare *Past and Present* -the influential history journal founded by the Marxist historians as a group in 1952- with its mainstream rival the *English Historical Review*. It will argue that while they were inspired by some developments in the Soviet Union under Stalin, they were ultimately attached


to their own interpretations of history and Marxism. The group disbanded over the course of 1956 and 1957 when several of its high profile members left the Communist Party due to the impact of the revelations from Khrushchev’s Secret Speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary.\textsuperscript{195} Yet despite realizing that the Soviet Union was not the socialist paradise they had envisioned, they held onto their revolutionary socialist views.

While their works that focus on the twentieth century explicitly praise and defend the Soviet Union, works of history that focus on earlier eras - such as the Middle Ages, the Reformation, or the English Civil Wars- tend to use the historical material to create analogies to what was unfolding in their own time. The choices of what historical movements are used to represent socialism and what historical figures are used to stand in for Lenin or Stalin reveal how the pro-Soviet authors expected their audiences to understand Western history in general and their own national histories specifically.

Table 1: Occupation of key members of the Historians Group of the Communist Party (1946-1956) by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Maurice Dobb</th>
<th>Christopher Hill</th>
<th>Rodney Hilton</th>
<th>Eric Hobsbawm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935-1938</td>
<td>Lecturer (Pembroke College, Cambridge)</td>
<td>Fellow (All Souls College, Oxford), Fellow (Balliol College, Oxford)</td>
<td>Undergraduate Student (Balliol College, Oxford), Graduate Student, (Merton College, Oxford)</td>
<td>Undergraduate Student (King’s College, Cambridge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1939-1945 | Lecturer (Pembroke College, Cambridge) | Fellow (Balliol College, Oxford), Lieutenant (Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire light infantry), Major (Army Intelligence Corp, Soviet liaison for Baltic theatre), Foreign Office (Northern Division) | Graduate Student, (Merton College, Oxford) British Army (Unknown Rank, Unknown Regiment) | Private (560th Field Company of Royal Engineers), Sergeant (Army Educational School)

1946-1956 | Lecturer (Pembroke College, Cambridge), Fellow (Trinity College, Cambridge), Unknown (Unknown College, Oxford) | Fellow (Balliol College, Oxford) | Lecturer and Reader, (Unknown College, Birmingham) | Fellow (King’s College, Cambridge), Lecturer (Birkbeck College, London)

After 1957 | Unknown, (Unknown College, Oxford) | Fellow, Master (Balliol College, Oxford), Retired (Numerous Honorary Degrees) | Personal Chair of Medieval History, (Unknown College, Birmingham) | Lecturer, Reader, Professor, Emeritus Professor, (Birkbeck College, London)

Since the members of the Marxist historians group specialized in pre-twentieth century British history, they rarely wrote directly about Soviet Russia, but when they did, they were noticeably less submissive to Stalin than their European and Soviet contemporaries. In 1948, Dobb praised Stalin’s logistical management of the Eastern Front, but did not claim that Stalin
won the war single handedly or prevented Britain from becoming an occupied dependency of Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{196} Dobb’s portrayal of Stalin as a competent economic and military manager fell short of the way the Soviets wanted Stalin to be talked about. The culture and propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CCCP) urged writers to emphasize that Stalin had the unconditional love of the masses and that his grasp of socialist theory was equal to Lenin’s.\textsuperscript{197} Dobb’s praise of Stalin was more subtle and subdued.

Dobb justified Stalin’s economic policy decisions in the interwar era. He argued that Stalin’s focus on building up Soviet industry with domestic resources was the only practical alternative given the reality that a socialist revolution was unlikely to sweep the industrialized Western world in the near future.\textsuperscript{198} He wrote that adopting Trotsky’s policy of prioritizing revolution in Western Europe at the expense of domestic affairs would inevitably lead to a return to a market economy in Russia.\textsuperscript{199} Unlike many of his colleagues, Dobb would remain a member of the Communist Party after the events of 1956.

The Marxist historians may have accepted that it was possible to work towards socialism through Britain's parliamentary system, but Christopher Hill’s work on the Russian Revolution did not extend the same benefit of the doubt to other capitalist countries. Hill lamented that the victory of anti-communist forces in the Hungarian Civil War (1918-1920) doomed that country to “twenty-five years of narrow class dictatorship” before it was allegedly liberated by the Red Army in 1945.\textsuperscript{200} Hill also dismissed the independent noncommunist governments temporarily established in Western Ukraine (1917-1921) and the Baltic states (1920-1940) as puppets of

\textsuperscript{197} Andrew Sobanet, \textit{Generation Stalin}, 59.
\textsuperscript{198} Maurice Dobb, \textit{Soviet Economic Development since 1917}, 178.
\textsuperscript{199} Maurice Dobb, \textit{Soviet Economic Development since 1917}, 178.
\textsuperscript{200} Christopher Hill, \textit{Lenin and the Russian Revolution}, 153.
French and British imperialism respectively.\textsuperscript{201} While none of these inter-war regimes was a stable liberal democracy, Hill’s legitimization of the use of political violence -in the form of the Red Army- to spread the Soviet political system was at odds with his criticism of revolutionary violence in the seventeenth century and his support of constitutional methods in contemporary domestic politics.

The Marxist historians were receptive to the idea of an antifascist popular front, moving further towards nationalism than the Fabians in not only accepting Britain's constitutional system as a legitimate way to work towards socialism, but also celebrating it as the culmination of the struggles of previous generations of British workers and peasants. The way that Christopher Hill and Rodney Hilton respectively write about the English Civil Wars and Commonwealth era (1640-1660) and the 1381 English Peasant Revolt (also called Wat Tyler’s Rebellion) clearly celebrates egalitarian patriotic movements.

When political violence committed by parliamentarians is discussed in \textit{The English Revolution}, it is directed not against royalists but against more radical anti-monarchists who are portrayed sympathetically. The leaders of the Levelers, who in 1940 were portrayed by Hill as advocates of dramatically expanded male suffrage, were executed on the orders of military leaders who were Independents, a political faction which Hill argued were satisfied with an end of the monarchy, the House of Lords, and the state church.\textsuperscript{202} Hill claimed that “Cromwell’s shooting of the Levelers at Buford made a restoration of monarchy and the lords ultimately inevitable.”\textsuperscript{203} Hill also sympathized with the Diggers -described as “the nearest the English Revolution got to representing the interest of the propertyless.”\textsuperscript{204} He portrayed the Diggers as a

\textsuperscript{201} Christopher Hill, \textit{Lenin and the Russian Revolution}, 161.
\textsuperscript{202} Christopher Hill, \textit{The English Revolution, 1640, an Essay}, 50.
\textsuperscript{203} Christopher Hill, \textit{The English Revolution 1640, an Essay}, 52.
\textsuperscript{204} Christopher Hill, \textit{The English Revolution 1640, an Essay}, 52.
religious pacifist movement linked to the Quakers and the Anabaptists whose agrarian voluntarist communes on which all property was held in common were forcibly broken up by parliamentary forces. Hill claimed that moderate parliamentarians controlled the popular radical groups with either the “army (which in the long run proved crushingly expensive as well as difficult to control) or by a compromise with representatives of the old order.” According to Hill’s interpretation of the English Civil Wars, political violence -far from bringing unity and focus to the revolutionary forces- was used to repress truly revolutionary ideas.

In Hill’s earlier writings, The Puritan roundheads were portrayed as patriots fighting for progressive causes, but they were not presented as entirely virtuous. In a 1952 micro history about the life and attitudes of the Elizabethan Puritan William Perkins, Hill argued that while Puritan theology was necessary to overcome the limits that medieval Catholicism placed on economic growth, it was also responsible for paternalistic attitudes towards the poor and the working class that persisted in Britain to his day. In the 1960’s, Hill would become even more critical of the parliamentarians. By 1963 he emphasized that the Levelers -a relatively radical parliamentarian faction that Hill had praised as proto-democrats in his earlier work- vision of expanded political participation extended only to independent male property owners, and had no room for workers, immigrants, or those in poverty.

By that time Hill had left the communist party in response to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956.

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207 Christopher Hill, “Puritans and the Poor,” *Past and Present* no. 2 (November, 1952): 34.
The contrast between Christopher Hill’s The *English Revolution* (1940) and *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) shows that Hill became increasingly critical of mainstream sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritanism. The older Hill argued that the Puritans focus on sin and thrift strengthened capitalism. He argued that the Reformed Church’s doctrine of the innate depravity of man was used to justify hierarchy and inequality since its beginnings in sixteenth century Europe. Hill also portrayed the Puritan’s crusade against idleness as a self-serving effort to increase the labor supply for their middle-class adherents.

The more mature Hill was more impressed with the radical movements of the late civil wars and the Commonwealth era, whose willingness to challenge social norms reminded him of the dramatic -and from Hill’s point of view, positive- challenges to social norms that were occurring in his own day (late 1960’s- early 1970’s). He drew an explicit comparison between the consumption of alcohol and tobacco at the meetings of Ranters -a religious movement that renounced the concepts of sin and hell- and the counterculture's use of drugs to reach physical and spiritual ecstasy. Hill also emphasized that the Ranters and the Quakers -another movement that advocated radical spiritual equality- where movements of the youth. He wrote that “We think of refusal of ‘hat honour’ and the use of ‘thou’ by Quakers as gestures of social protest,... but they also marked a refusal of deference from the young to the old, from sons to fathers.” The 1968 wave of student activism had rocked Britain's universities, so Hill would

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210 Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), 156.
have been aware of the youth movement that was changing the politics and culture of his own
time while he was writing *The World Turned Upside Down*.\(^{214}\)

*The World Turned Upside Down* was more ambivalent than its predecessor about pacifist
tendencies among the radical political and religious groups of mid seventeenth century England.

Hill now thought that the inability, or unwillingness, of these groups to fight for their ideas made
it inevitable that they would be suppressed, and that they had a more opportunistic stance on
political violence then he had originally believed. Hill argued that the Levelers lost political
momentum in the fall of 1647 when they submitted to the authority of Cromwell and Ireton in
response to the renewed threat of the royalist army raised by the escaped King Charles I.\(^{215}\) Hill
described Quaker resistance to conscription in the 1650’s not as an expression of universal
pacifism, but of “political objections to the government of the Commonwealth [under
Cromwell].”\(^{216}\) Hill argued that this selective conscientious objection only became universal as
part of an effort to sanitize Quakerism for the middle classes and the nobility after the restoration
of the monarchy in 1660.\(^{217}\)

The 1980’s and 1990’s saw significant pushback against Marxist interpretations of the
English Civil Wars. The decline and fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the Regan and
Thatcher governments made Marxists ideas seem less relevant. R.C. Richardson, a historian
sympathetic to Hill’s ideas, lamented that the collapse of the Eastern bloc turned Hill and other
Marxist historians who wrote about the English Civil Wars into “historiographical dinosaurs” in

\(^{214}\) Christopher Dyer, *Introduction to Bond Men Made Free, Medieval Peasant Movements and
the English Rising of 1381*, by Rodney Hilton, (Routledge, 2003), xi.


\(^{217}\) Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, 252.
the eyes of his colleagues.²¹⁸ The most prominent historians leading this non Marxist revisionist
drew were Conrad Russell and John Morrill. Both of these scholars portrayed Royalists and
Parliamentarians as satisfied with the traditional balance of power between the Monarchy and
Parliament. In their eyes, the English Civil wars were not about the constitutional structure of
England, but about the theological composition of the Anglican Church. Russell argued that the
radicalized Scottish Presbyterians, who had an armed presence in Northern England after their
victory in the Bishops Wars (1639-1640), drove their more moderate English coreligionists to
violence in the time between 1640 and 1642.²¹⁹ Morrill claimed that the Parliamentarian’s fear
of the conspiratorial and quasi-magical powers of the alleged crypto-Catholics amongst Charles
I’s advisors also contributed to the failure to find a peaceful solution.²²⁰

While Morrill and Russell presented a strong argument against the idea that radical
political ideas were the primary cause of the initial outbreak of the first English Civil War in
1642, they did not argue that radical ideas had no role during that era or see themselves as part of
an anti-Marxist movement. In 1980, the year of Hill’s retirement from Oxford, Morrill
acknowledged his own debt to Hill’s work on seventeenth century English history.²²¹ Morrill
looked up to Hill’s dedication to 17th century English history and had no strong objection to
Hill’s politics.²²² Morrill aspired to build on Hill’s work of looking at the English Civil War

²¹⁸ R.C. Richardson, review of *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England: An Essay on the
Fabrication of Seventeenth Century History*, by Alastair McLachlan, *The Historian* 60, no. 1,
(Fall 1997): 431.
²¹⁹ Conrad Russell, “The British Problem and the English Civil War,” *History* 72, no. 236,
²²¹ John Morrill, review of *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth Century History
Presented to Christopher Hill*, ed. Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas, *The English
²²² “Interview with Professor John Morrill,” *Making History: The changing face of the profession
in Britain*, March 26, 2008.
from the perspective of the “middling sort”, but his work in the “Bodleian Library …. in the depositions of exactly these people” led him to different conclusions.\(^{223}\) The more respected revisionist historians do not claim to have made Hill completely irrelevant despite pushing back against some of his ideas.

In the 1980’s, Hill was still respected as a historian even though some of his core ideas were no longer accepted by his peers. Hill’s major work in this decade was titled *The Experience of Defeat*. It examined how “individuals coped with the experience of living through a revolution that they had originally welcomed, and with the defeat of that revolution.”\(^{224}\) Hill still insisted that the upper classes’s fear of radicalism was responsible for the return of the monarchy in 1660, despite the reviewer Perez Zagorin’s clear rejection of that thesis in favor of the idea that the Restoration was due to the “nearly universal desire for the return of kingship in the legitimate line as the sole alternative to military rule or political disintegration.”\(^{225}\) Despite Hill’s sense of ideological isolation, many of his new critics such as Morrill and Zagorin -far from seeing him as an irrelevant fossil- were admirers of his work. Zagorin, although not a Marxist, agreed that “ideas that focused on parliament, representation, the suffrage and the reform of the electoral system, citizenship and its rights, the rule of law, and the proper limitations of government” could legitimately be seen as part of the intellectual legacy of the English Civil Wars.\(^{226}\)

\(^{223}\) “Interview with Professor John Morrill,” *Making History: The changing face of the profession in Britain*, March 26, 2008.


\(^{226}\) Perez Zagorin, “Review of *The Experience of Defeat*”, 551.
Like Hill, Hilton is most well-known for his work on a single subject, in Hilton’s case the English Peasant Revolt of 1381. Hilton also produced work on his academic specialization both during and after his time in the Marxist Historians group. The more obscure *The English Rising of 1381* was published in 1951, and the more well-known *Bond Men Made Free* was published in 1973. In 1951, Hilton was sympathetic, but critical, towards the peasant rebels. Rather than arguing that the political violence inflicted by the peasant rebels was beneficial to England, Hilton stated that the peasants’ decision to commit violence was understandable given their pent up frustration at the middle class, the nobility, the church, and the legal system, and their understanding that “once they had received authority from the king to execute all the traitors they were acting, as they thought, in their right as the only legal force in the land.”

While this approach implied that the violence of the peasants was subjected to an unfair double standard, it also implied that the peasants could have made a better decision if they controlled their anger and were not mistaken about the King’s intentions. Hilton also condemned the peasant rebel’s xenophobic violence against the Flemish and Italian populations of London as an “act of injustice.”

Hobsbawm’s case complicates this thesis, as he was introduced to communism through radical student activism, a lifelong opponent of nationalism, and a supporter of revolutionary activity in the developing world. Among the factors that prevented Hobsbawm from rising in the ranks of British Army despite his university education were his attempts to spread communist propaganda to his fellow soldiers. At seventeen, he fantasized about taking part in a Marxist

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uprising in London.\textsuperscript{230} However, a closer examination of Hobsbawm's life reveals that his case is actually a weak argument against this thesis.

Unlike the other intellectuals covered in this thesis, Hobsbawm was effectively a first-generation immigrant with a very cosmopolitan family history and early childhood. His father was born in 1881 in East London to a family of Jewish immigrants from the part of Poland that was then controlled by Czarist Russia.\textsuperscript{231} While working in the informal British colony of Egypt, Hobsbawm’s father fell in love with an Austrian Jewish woman, married her, and raised their family in Austria and ultimately Germany before moving back to Britain in 1933.\textsuperscript{232} His status as a political radical from an enemy country limited his opportunities for advancement in the British army during World War II and earned him the attention of MI5 special branch, which kept him under surveillance from 1942 to 1973.\textsuperscript{233} Hobsbawm’s reluctance to embrace English national identity cannot be ascribed to his ideology alone.

Hobsbawm was not an ideological conformist and pushed innovations in both history and Marxist thought. In a 1952 article, He acknowledged that the Luddites, a group of late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century workers and artisans who sought out and destroyed machinery that could make their jobs redundant, failed to topple the capitalist class in Britain, but argued that other socialist historians had been overly dismissive of their theories and practices. Hobsbawm argued that the Luddites were not opposed to the idea of new technology as their left wing critics claimed, but that the destruction of machinery and other property was actually a form of “collective bargaining by riot” to coerce wage increases from employers.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{230}Richard J. Evans, \textit{Eric Hobsbawm}, 79.
\textsuperscript{231} Richard J. Evans, \textit{Eric Hobsbawm}, 2-3.
For Hobsbwm, the Luddite’s attempt to improve the standard of living for workers justified their attempts to slow down Britain's industrial growth.

Hobsbwm ’s ideas about the economic history of seventeenth century Europe were also ahead of their time. In 1954, He recognized that the general trend of economic activity in Europe in that century was contraction and decline, and made an early attempt to synthesize the research of historians which had “tentatively suggested something like that ‘general check to economic development’ or general crises with which this paper deals. It may therefore be convenient to take a bird’s eye view of the field, and speculate about some sort of working hypothesis, if only to stimulate better ones, or further work.’” 235 Hobsbawm asserted that this trend was previously overlooked by his peers because they were paying too much attention to the lives of that era’s monarchs, whose use of conspicuous consumption as a form of propaganda created the illusion of prosperity.236 While Hobsbawm blamed this general economic decline on legal and social restrictions that limited business and technological innovation, it has come to be understood as an effect of wetter, cooler temperatures on agriculture.237 The idea of the seventeenth century crisis, which Hobsbawm was early to promote, would become a key building block of the new discipline of environmental history.

Hobsbawm’s friend and student Victor Kiernan urged Marxist historians to be more sympathetic to conservative religious movements among the working classes, in his case the revival of Methodism in early nineteenth century Britain.238 His 1952 article on Methodism

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238 V. Kiernan, “Evangelism and the French Revolution,” *Past and Present* no. 1 (February, 1952), 44.
acknowledged that this religious movement was encouraged by the government and the upper classes as a response to the French Revolution, but he also recognized that it was a valid way for the masses to fulfill their spiritual and material needs.\textsuperscript{239} The article foreshadowed the development of postmodernism when it criticized the supposed rationality of eighteenth century Anglicism for only being rational from the point of view of the upper classes.\textsuperscript{240}

Hobsbawm’s revolutionary enthusiasm faded with age. In the 1950’s, he started to abstain from the activities of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) because he grew irritated with the ideological demands the party leadership made regarding his academic work and career choices.\textsuperscript{241} In the 1970’s and 1980’s, Hobsbawm began to urge the CPGB and the Labour Party to make alliances with the middle class to overcome their declining electoral fortunes.\textsuperscript{242} Hobsbawm has been praised, and blamed, for the rise of the more business friendly new Labour Party of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, with Hobsbawm himself -who refused to vote for the new Labour candidate Tony Blair for Prime Minister in 1997- among the latter.\textsuperscript{243} Hobsbawm managed to combine admiration for Stalin with revolutionary aspirations as a very young man, but he distanced himself from both views as he matured.

The founders of \textit{Past and Present} and \textit{The English Historical Review} were both advocates for the importance of history to the contemporary world but had different visions for how greater knowledge of history would benefit society. In 1886, the founding editors of \textit{The English Historical Review} stated their intent to illuminate the shared past of all English-speaking

\textsuperscript{239} V. Kiernan, “Evangelism and the French Revolution,” 45.
\textsuperscript{240} V. Kiernan, “Evangelism and the French Revolution, 46.
\textsuperscript{241} Richard J. Evans, \textit{Eric Hobsbawm}, 347.
people. They saw the identity of “English speaking peoples” as natural, not a political construction. In fact, the editors of The English Historical Review saw part of their job as rejecting articles with controversial positions on contemporary issues in US and UK politics.245 In contrast, the first editorial board of Past and Present did not believe that controversy should disqualify prospective articles, and wanted the primary goal of their magazine to be the pursuit of knowledge about the causes and inhibitors of revolution, meaning a change of the economic class that has political dominance in a society.246

The editors of The English Historical Review did not write about their views on history, society, and politics after the first issue in 1886, so one has to look at the articles to make an accurate comparison between the approaches of the two magazines in the early 1950’s. The articles in each magazine’s 1952 and 1953 issues will be categorized on whether they fulfill the mission statement of The English Historical Review, Past and Present, or neither. Articles that are in line with the mission statement of The English Historical Review are those that argue that the historical phenomena they examine are part of the development of modern English national institutions in politics, economics, or culture. Articles that are in line with the mission statement of Past and Present are those who present the events they portray as one class seizing political power from another class or trying and failing to do that. The results are illustrated in the table below.

244 The English Historical Review 1, no. 1 (January, 1886): 2.
245 The English Historical Review 1, no. 1 (January, 1886): 4.
246 Past and Present, no. 1 (February, 1952), i.
Table 2: The Articles published over the course of 1952 and 1953 in The English Historical Review, and Past and Present categorized by whether their articles describe the evolution of the English national identity, contribute to theories of revolution (defined by a change in the politically dominant class), or neither. The categories were determined by the respective mission statements of The English Historical Review and Past and Present.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title 1</th>
<th>National Identity</th>
<th>Revolution</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>The English Historical Review</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Past and Present</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Past and Present</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The English Historical Review of the early 1950’s promoted a narrative of Englishness by stressing the antiquity of political centralization, the independence of the English church from Rome, and checks on arbitrary monarchical behavior. J. Hurstfield emphasized the strength of the Tudor monarchy over the feudal barons.247 J.W. Gray and H.S. Deighton pointed to the role of the indigenous nobility and monarchy in the government of the church in medieval England.248 J.S. Roskill and Evangeline des Villers argued that Parliament increased its power

during the late medieval and early modern eras. Overall, *The English Historical Review* stressed the antiquity and inevitability of key features of the modern English identity.

The editors of *Past and Present* also had a favored historical narrative. *Past and Present* promotes the Marxist theory of history: which holds that political power comes from a certain class’s control of the means of production (the technologies that produce societies most critical goods and services) and that revolutions happen when formerly denied classes create their own means of production or take over existing means of production by force. Traditional Marxist theory holds that societies will proceed through a variety of set stages dominated by specific classes, but by 1952 the editors and contributors of *Past and Present* were employing a more flexible version of Marxist theory that paid more attention to factors other than class and eliminated some of Marx’s racial bias against Middle Eastern and East Asian monarchies.

The contributors to *Past and Present* interpreted their material through the lens of class-based revolution. R.R. Betts argued that the fifteenth century Hussite movement was a revolution of Czech peasants against German landlords, citing the Minister of Education of the then four year old Communist government of Czechoslovakia in the process. E.A. Thompson described the *Bacuadea* (a series of slave revolts over the second and third centuries CE in Roman Spain and Gaul) as an attempted revolution by agricultural slaves with allies among the free peasants and the middle classes. Rodney Hilton argued that wealthy merchants in

medieval Western Europe tried to join the dominant landowning class at the expense of building their own power structure based on financial capital. Although Hilton came to the conclusion that no revolution occurred in the time and place he examined, he framed his conclusion around the absence of a factor (in this case the political will of the merchant class) which would have allowed a revolution to occur under those conditions.

Despite breaking up over the Secret Speech and the invasion of Hungary in 1956, the former Marxist historians still kept their revolutionary worldview into the 1960’s. E.P. Thompson supported radical student activism against the recruitment activities of the military and defense contractors at universities and in favor of divestment from apartheid South Africa. E.J. Hobsbawm continued to make radical criticisms of the British political establishment after the break with Stalin, criticizing the British Labor movement for its failure to overthrow the government during the General Strike of 1926 and praising Gamel Abdel Nasser’s (1918-1970) (De facto head of state of Egypt 1952-1970) defiance of the British government in the Suez crisis of 1956. The Marxist Historians remained revolutionary leftists.

While the Marxist Historians were unwilling to knowingly and openly support the United States, the Labour Party adopted themselves to the liberal new order in Europe. The second chapter of this thesis explored Clement Attlee’s reasoning for supporting the United States in the Cold War. On the academic side, E.J. Hobsbawm argued that Social Democratic Parties such as the UK Labor Party were bought off by the recognition of unions and the implementation of national welfare programs by bourgeoisies dominated governments. The chasm between the

254 David Caute, Isaiah and Isaac: The Covert Punishment of a Cold War Heretic, 216.
left in politics and the left in academia raises interesting questions for further research. For now, it is enough to state that the revolutionary idealism of the Marxist historians made them unwilling to compromise with what they saw as capitalist forces even when many of them could no longer defend the actions of the Soviet Union.
Conclusion

This thesis illustrates that the phenomenon of Western intellectual support for Joseph Stalin did not imply a rejection of nationalist, imperial, or conservative values. In an attempt to avoid overgeneralization, readers should be cautious about applying the observations described here to non-British intellectuals, or to British intellectuals who were not discussed in depth in the preceding chapters. While Stalin is almost universally seen as a mass murderer and an enemy of the democratic world in our own day, it is important to remember that most British intellectuals who wrote positively about the Soviet Union and Stalin’s policies did not see themselves as authoritarians or traitors. British admirers of Joseph Stalin were not monolithic in their views of either Soviet or British society.

High profile members of the Fabian Society, the Labour Party, and the History departments of Britain's most prestigious universities had different core motivations for defending the Soviet Union. George Bernard Shaw and the Webbs were inspired by the economic and moral improvements achieved by Stalin’s policies. Harold Laski wanted to defend a major socialist country from a hostile capitalist world. The Marxists Historians Group saw the Soviet Government as a possible source of proof for their theories about how history, politics, and economics worked.

Secondary causes for these individuals to praise the Soviet Union are distributed more widely across the cases but are still inadequate for explaining all of them. Maurice Dobb shared Laski’s concern for the USSR’s vulnerability to Western depredation, but the Webbs were frustrated with Soviet isolationism and xenophobia. Beatrice Webb, Rodney Hilton, and Christopher Hill were interested the possibilities of communist patriotism opened up by the
antifascist Popular Front strategy, while Shaw did not see fascism as a threat to the stability of Europe and Laski’s pacifism extended even to an anti-fascist war that included the USSR.

Although all of the individuals identified as Soviet sympathizers in this thesis were critical of certain elements of capitalism and British society, their success in politics and academia challenges Hollander’s idea that “the concept of estrangement is central to explaining the political pilgrimages and the whole range of attitudes associated with the social role of the intellectual.” 257 For all their radicalism, Laski and the Marxist historians acknowledged the value of Britain's democratic and parliamentary traditions. Shaw was willing to support British foreign policy for pragmatic purposes. The Webbs were unwilling to permanently live under the material and political conditions of Stalin’s USSR. They all were usually accepted in mainstream liberal or even conservative spaces throughout British academia and politics.258 While these intellectuals wanted to reform some aspects of British society, none of them -with the partial exception of Eric Hobsbawm- could be defined by their estrangement from it.

Many of the Marxist historians became part of the New Left after the death of Stalin, but the intellectuals studied in this thesis were not vocal anti-imperialists during Stalin’s lifetime. Among the Fabians, Shaw publicly defended imperial policy and Sidney Webb took part in imperial administration.259 In 2005, the historian David Renton criticized the Marxist historians, specifically Cristopher Hill, for being insufficiently critical of British rule over much of Africa.260 Support for Stalin among British intellectuals was compatible with support for the British Empire and other traditions and institutions usually associated with the political right.

260 David Renton, “Studying Their Own Nation without Insularity?” 564.
Clement Attlee’s ideological similarity to his pro-Stalin rivals demonstrates that political worldview on its own is limited in explaining Western intellectuals' reactions to Joseph Stalin. Attlee’s admiration for American civil society under the progressive Truman administration had a role in making his Cold War foreign policy increasingly anti-Soviet over time, but his initial moves against Soviet sympathizers within the Labour Party were motivated by purely political considerations. Attlee was also profoundly critical of British society and Western civilization, accusing the former of failing its working-class citizens and the latter of attempting to destroy itself in two world wars.261

Future studies of Western intellectuals and Soviet Union should continue to respect the diversity of factors influencing Western intellectuals in this era. One does not have to condone or sympathize with the beliefs of these individuals in order to study them, but one should make a good faith effort to understand the historical context they emerged from and how they subsequently developed. This topic has the potential to improve our understanding of the intellectual history of the twentieth century, but only if it is approached with the appropriate balance.

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