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The British Labour Party, Penal Politics and the Soviet Union, 1880-1939

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a critical examination of the British Labour Party's approach to the issues of crime, punishment and penal reform in the inter-war years. Specifically, the study examines the development of Labour's penal politics in relation to the 'socialist' exemplar of the Soviet Union. At present, little is known about the attitudes of the Labour Party to penal politics and its relation to socialism prior to the Second World War. Through a series of inter-related themes and enquiries that engage with the contemporary inter-cultural, transnational, political and economic conditions, an analysis of the Labour Party's approach to criminality provides an opportunity for a re-evaluation of British socialism, Labour policy and the party's relationship with the Soviet Union from a novel perspective.

The thesis presents three principal arguments. First, in contesting the limited historiography that has been established on British socialism and criminality, it argues that the Labour Party failed throughout the inter-war period to develop a cohesive and unified approach to penal politics. Secondly, the thesis presents a re-assessment of the relationship between the Labour Party and the Soviet Union. In its analysis of British admiration for the developing Soviet penal system and the extent to which the labour movement was willing to indulge or tolerate ostensibly 'communist' ideas, it is argued that a focus on crime highlights in new ways how the Soviet Union influenced the Labour Party's ideological development. Finally, it is contended that the themes of criminality and the Soviet Union together provide a window through which to examine the type of socialism to which the labour movement aspired, and the extent to which this changed over time.

DECLARATION

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Max Hodgson

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A Note on Transliteration

All Russian names have been rendered into the Latin text in accordance with the Library of Congress system of transliteration. All translations are my own.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Acronyms in Archival Citations

BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics
GARF	*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii* (State Archive of the Russian Federation), Moscow
LHASC	Labour History Archive and Study Centre (hereafter LHASC), Manchester
LRSFB	Library of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, London
MERL	Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading
MRC	Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick
RGANI	*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii* (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History), Moscow
RGASPI	*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii* (Russian State Archive of Social-Political History), Moscow
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
WCML	Working Class Movement Library, Salford

Abbreviations

Arcos	All-Russian Co-operative Society
BCDPPR	British Committee for the Defence of Political Prisoners in Russia
BSP	British Socialist Party
CO	Conscientious Objector
Comintern	Communist International
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain

GPU	State Political Administration
GTC	Government Training Centre
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ILPACR	Independent Labour Party Annual Conference Report
ITB	Industrial Transfer Board
LPACR	Labour Party Annual Conference Report
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
LRD	Labour Research Department
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
LSR	Left Socialist Revolutionaries
Narkomindel	People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs
Narkompros	People's Commissariat for Education
NCADP	National Council for the Abolition of the Death Penalty
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEP	New Economic Policy
NFRB	New Fabian Research Bureau
NJC	National Joint Council
NKIu	People's Commissariat of Justice
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NUPPO	National Union of Police and Prison Officers
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
OGPU	Joint State Political Administration

PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SLON	Northern Camps of Special Designation
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionaries
SSIP	Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda
TIC	Transfer Instructional Centre
Tsentrosoiuz	Central Union of Russian Co-operatives
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
USC	United Socialist Council
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

INTRODUCTION

In 1922, in their *English Prisons Under Local Government*, the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb wrote that it is 'quite impossible to make a good job of the deliberate incarceration of a human being in the most enlightened of dungeons'.[1] The Webbs' work accompanied the publication of Fenner Brockway and Stephen Hobhouse's *English Prisons To-Day* (1922), the report of an enquiry by the Labour Research Department (LRD)—itself an organisation established by the Webbs—in reaction to the curtailment of liberties during the First World War, the lengthy imprisonment of conscientious objectors, many of whom came from the labour movement ranks, and the terrible prison regime to which they had been subjected. In a number of ways, the report represented the zenith of the labour movement's, and in particular the Labour Party's, engagement with the issue of penal politics and prison reform, forcing the movement to focus upon issues that it had, on the whole, otherwise neglected since the late nineteenth century. In their own account, the Webbs reaffirmed the failings of the British penal system that Brockway and Hobhouse had revealed, and concluded that 'it passes the wit of man to contrive a prison which shall not be gravely injurious to the minds of the vast majority of the prisoners, if not also to their bodies'.[2]

In the years following the Webbs' account, little official progress was made within the labour movement on the issue of penal politics. The Labour Party held office twice throughout the decade, first in 1924 and again between 1929 and 1931, and, as minority governments both administrations encountered difficulties in the areas of prison and penal reform. To all intents and purposes, the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Trades Union

[1] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, 9 vols (London, 1963 [1922]), VI, 247-8.
[2] Ibid, 248.

Congress (TUC) appeared disinterested in these issues; what mattered in this period was electoral politics, as Labour sought to displace the Liberals and reinforce its own position as Britain's official opposition, if not the governing party. Reformist measures in penal politics, it was acknowledged, were not vote winners.[3] Yet, despite the movement's apparent inaction, by 1932 the Webbs had been converted to a new type of prison, and one which they had previously deemed 'impossible'. Upon visiting the Soviet Union, the Webbs hailed the Soviet penal system, which seemed 'to go further, alike in promise and achievement, towards an ideal treatment of offenders against society than anything else in the world'. Soviet communism, they asserted, was not 'merely … performing a great engineering feat', but was 'achieving a triumph in human regeneration' through its humane, progressive and world-leading prison system.[4] When Harold Laski, a leading Labour theorist on the left of the party, visited the USSR in 1935 and saw much 'ground for experimenting with Russian theory', the Webbs agreed wholeheartedly with him that 'any reflection upon the Russian atmosphere must lead any Englishman to the conclusion that the times require a new Bentham'.[5]

Within the space of a decade, the Webbs had moved from an unequivocal condemnation of the British penal system—a system so flawed, they deemed, that it extinguished all hopes they harboured for a successful, reformative prison regime anywhere in the world—to the championing of a Soviet penal system which, in its principles, objectives and results appeared to offer to all nations an idealised blueprint for the reformation and treatment of society's criminals. That the Webbs had acted, at different times, as Labour Party architects, meant that their opinions and analyses carried with them great force. Indeed, as a mark of their influence,

[3] 'Editorial', *The Howard Journal: A Review of Modern Methods for the Prevention and Treatment of Crime and Juvenile Delinquency*, 2, 4 (1929), 283.
[4] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (London, 1935), 587-9; 591.
[5] Harold J. Laski, *Law and Justice in Soviet Russia* (London, 1935), 26; 34-5.

which was itself on the wane by the mid-1930s, the book in which the Webbs' assessment of Soviet prisons was presented, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* (1935), quickly became the standard reference work for the British left on the Soviet Union.[6] How the Webbs, the labour movement and members of the Labour Party came to espouse the Soviet prison model is a much lesser known development.

The dramatic shift in the Webbs' opinion is indicative of two key points. First, their emphatic support for a prison regime that was triumphing in 'human regeneration' suggests that much had happened with regard to penal politics and the labour movement through the 1920s and early 1930s, despite an almost total neglect of this area in the academic literature. At present, the established historiography of the labour movement suggests that the engagement of British socialists with the issues of crime, punishment and prisons was restricted to a handful of punctuated episodes: the early writings of utopian socialists in the nineteenth century; the 1919 LRD enquiry into the English prison system and its report in 1922; the implementation in 1948 of the Criminal Justice Act; and the abolition of the death penalty in 1965. The actions of Labour governments in this area in 1948 and 1965 have been granted more scholarly attention, albeit for the most part within broader, bi-partisan histories; but far less is known of the exploits of the labour movement in the periods *between* these episodes. Labour's relationship to the issue of penal politics and how this changed over time is yet to be uncovered in detail or subjected to any sort of critical examination.[7]

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[6] In 1937, with the publication of the second edition of the Webbs' *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?*, the title's question mark was famously dropped.
[7] For more Labour-focused studies, see Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke, 2008), 174; G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), 417; 466; and Keith David Ewing, *Trade Unions, the Labour Party and the Law: A Study of the Trade Union Act 1913* (Edinburgh, 1982); For more generalised accounts of the Criminal Justice Act (1948) see for Lionel W. Fox, *The English Prison and Borstal Systems: an account of the prison and Borstal systems in England and Wales after the Criminal Justice Act 1948, with a historical introduction and an examination of the principles of imprisonment as a legal punishment* (London, 1952), 65-6; 266-8; 314; 350; 393-7; R. S. E. Hinde, *The British Penal System, 1773-1950* (London, 1951), 142-3; 174-7; 183-6; 199; 204-11; Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, *A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750*, 5 vols (London, 1948), V, 719;

The second point to which the Webbs' analysis alludes is that, in the period from 1919 to 1932, the labour movement's attitudes towards Soviet Russia (and after 1922, the Soviet Union) changed greatly. In the first decade of the twentieth century, British socialists were staunchly critical of their own monarchy for visiting, hosting and associating with Nicholas II, the Tsar of Russia, in light of the execrable Russian penal system over which he presided.[8] Yet by 1932, many in the labour movement were praising the new Russian system, encouraging British authorities to study it in their own search for improvement. Of course, a great deal had changed in Russia in the intervening years, as two revolutions in 1917 saw the Bolsheviks seize power and forge a path to Soviet communism. But it is no coincidence that, between the years of 1919 and 1932—circumscribed by the LRD's prison enquiry and the Webbs' praise of the USSR—the labour movement had begun its own journeys to the Soviet state, as Labour figures in individual capacities and group delegations, spanning the Labour Party, the ILP and the TUC, travelled to the revolutionary state to witness the construction of socialist society. Upon their return, a great majority of visitors reserved their most fulsome praise for the Soviet penal system, and in doing so they played a crucial part in the development of the Labour Party's relationship with the Soviet Union.

David Faulkner, *Crime, State and Citizen: A Field Full of Folk*, 2nd edn (Winchester, 2006), 94; Giles Playfair, *The Punitive Obsession: An Unvarnished History of the English Prison System* (London, 1971), 107; Vivien Stern, *Bricks of Shame: Britain's Prisons* (Middlesex, 1987), 185; 198; Philip Priestley, *Jail Journeys: The English Prison System Since 1918* (London, 1989), 180; Norval Morris, *The Habitual Criminal* (London, 1951).; John C. Spencer, 'The Use of Corrective Training in the Treatment of the Persistent Offender in England', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 44, 1 (1953), 40-8; and for accounts of the abolition of the death penalty see Harry Potter, *Hanging in Judgement: Religion and the Death Penalty in England from the Bloody Code to Abolition* (London, 1993), 142-3; 159; 199-202; 204; Neville Twitchell, *The Politics of the Rope: The Campaign to Abolish Capital Punishment in Britain, 1955-1969* (Bury, 2012); Brian P. Block and John Hostettler, *Hanging in the Balance: A History of the Abolition of Capital Punishment in Britain* (Winchester, 1997); Elizabeth Orman Tuttle, *The Crusade Against Capital Punishment in Great Britain* (London, 1961); James B. Christoph, 'Capital Punishment and British Politics: the Role of Pressure Groups', in Richard Kimber and J. J. Richardson (eds), *Pressure Groups in Britain: A Reader* (London, 1974), 143-9; Lizzie Seal, 'Imagined Communities and the Death Penalty in Britain, 1930-65', *British Journal of Criminology*, 5, 54 (2014), 908-27; Frank Dawtry, 'The Abolition of the Death Penalty in Britain', *British Journal of Criminology*, 2, 6 (1966), 183-92.

[8] See for example *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 22 July 1909, vol. 8, cc641-6.

This thesis presents a critical examination of the Labour Party's approach to the issues of penal politics, crime, punishment and prison reform in the inter-war period, with a specific focus on the influence of the 'socialist' exemplar provided by the Soviet Union. Through a series of inter-related themes and enquiries, it seeks to analyse the developments of the party and the broader labour movement in the intervals between those better-known episodes of penal-political engagement, and to reconsider more broadly the development of British socialism according to both temporal and contextual changes. The thesis presents three principal arguments. First, in its analysis of the relationship between the Labour Party and the issue of criminality, it contends that the party (and the movement more generally) failed throughout the inter-war period to develop a coherent and cohesive approach to penal politics. Contrary to Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, who argue that 'modern British socialism brought with it a socialist interpretation of crime which embodied a distinctive and coherent point of view', the thesis argues instead for the incongruent, at times inchoate and transient character of Labour's penal politics.[9] That a number of socialists developed a 'distinctive' penal approach, drawn from their general theory of society and their creed of socialism, is indeed correct; but this approach was never coherent in the sense that it formed a unified, or even a majority, body of opinion.

Instead, the approaches of British socialists towards crime and punishment were inherently linked to the changing temporal and contextual circumstances in which they found themselves. The labour movement's approach to these issues alternated over time, and their fluctuations, often between utopian and more practical approaches, had a significant impact upon their engagement. Indeed, the very *types* of understanding often dictated the movement's levels of engagement. Early utopian socialists, for instance—most explicitly Robert Owen and William

[9] Radzinowicz and Hood, *History of English Criminal Law*, V, 34.

Morris—cultivated the ‘distinctive’ approach to crime that Radzinowicz and Hood point to, in which the existence and preservation of private property was held to be the root cause of crime. As property and industry became socialised, these socialists claimed, the motivations for crime, and thus crime itself, would cease. Distinctive though this view was, it was one held by a minority; and, moreover, it was a view that in fact had the effect of inhibiting socialist discussions on criminality. Via its teleological narrative, crime was reduced to a tangential phenomenon that would ‘naturally’ cease in line with society’s march towards socialism, and further considerations of the subject often appeared unnecessary. This view did not, to be sure, prohibit engagement with the issue of criminality altogether, as Fabians, ‘scientific’ socialists and those connected to the eugenics movement offered their own theorisations, but a consistent engagement with crime in the early twentieth century was certainly lacking.

From 1914, the labour movement was forced to engage far more regularly with penal politics, as the First World War, the sufferings of conscientious objectors at the hands of the British penal system, and the emergence in Soviet Russia of a ‘socialist’ penality all affected the Labour Party in a much more direct way. Forced to engage with the issue as governmental office loomed in the 1920s, the party’s approach to criminality was nebulous and subject to a host of competing influences. A desire in 1924, for instance, to prove Labour’s respectability as a party of government saw the party increase its engagement with the issue, yet fail to implement any practical changes to Britain’s penal politics. Similarly, the exemplar of Soviet Russia exposed Labour to many radical ideas on criminality throughout the decade, ensuring their levels of engagement were high and often of an idealistic nature; but between 1929 and 1931 the crippling effect of the financial crash limited the party’s legislative programme, ensuring penal politics remained a low-priority issue. Through the 1930s, the alleged creation of a new moralistic civilisation in the USSR re-ignited within a number of Labourites their

earlier utopian ideals on crime, but the party had little opportunity to develop any sort of cohesive policy.

Thus, it was not that socialists had not provided the labour movement with a 'distinctive' approach to crime; instead, there never emerged a single, dominant approach to penal politics around which a unified party policy could be developed. Party actions were often reactive in their character and formed on an ad-hoc basis as party officials and ministers 'learned' penal politics on the job. Increased engagement with the issue did not necessarily equate to a straightforward development of a coherent approach, and as Labour's political stature grew over the decades, the 'distinctiveness' of any socialist approach to crime increased and, to a greater extent, diminished, in relation to its changing circumstances.

Second, through the lens of criminality and penal politics, the thesis presents a re-assessment of the relationship between the Labour Party and the Soviet Union. In recent years, the role of the Soviet Union in relation to the development of the Labour Party and its own style of socialism has undergone a significant re-evaluation. Principally the result of the work of Jonathan Davis and Kevin Morgan, the social democracy of the Labour Party, its constitutionalist and gradualist organisation, and the revolutionary communism of the Soviet regime have been respectively entrenched; but the complexities and nuances of the relationships between these groups have begun to be unearthed in greater detail, with the important acknowledgement that, despite its rejection of a majority of Soviet policy, the Labour Party used the USSR as a 'key definer' of its own brand of socialism throughout the inter-war years.[10] In particular, Morgan notes that in order to reassess the complexities and perviousness

[10] See Kevin Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, 3 vols (London, 2006-13); Jonathan Davis, 'Altered Images: The Labour Party and the Soviet Union in the 1930s', Unpublished PhD Thesis, De Montfort University, Leicester (2002); idem, 'Left Out in the Cold: British Labour Witnesses the Russian Revolution', *Revolutionary Russia*, 18 (2005), 71-87; idem, 'Labour's Political Thought: the Soviet influence in the interwar

of Labour's socialism, individual subjects need to be brought into 'sharper focus'; while Davis has argued that the principal positive influences of the USSR upon the Labour Party were its economics and its approach to foreign policy.[11] This thesis builds upon these works, and argues that, in a number of ways, a focus on Soviet Russia through the lens of criminality provides new ground for an important re-evaluation of Soviet-Labour Party relations.

On a basic level, a focus on criminality, Labour and the USSR demonstrates the development through the inter-war period of a significant amount of admiration for the Soviet penal system. Following the visits of Labour figures between 1919 and 1936, the Soviet penal system was generally considered to be the most outstanding accomplishment of the Soviet regime;[12] and at different times through the 1920s and 1930s, as confidence in the Soviet system grew and the concurrent urgency for penal reform in Britain intensified, the Soviet system was openly hailed as an example upon which the labour movement could base its own penal philosophy. The impact of the Soviet Union on Labour's own approach to penal politics was minimal in practice, but as the reports of party members, their correspondence with Soviet officials and their own British colleagues (within both the party and parliament) demonstrate, the theoretical influence of the Soviet system in shaping left-wing understandings of punishment, moral rehabilitation and social reform was significant. Enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment waxed and waned according to the political circumstances in both Britain and the USSR, but in contrast to Davis' assertion that Soviet economics and foreign policy were all that the British

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years', in Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis (eds), *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Politics, Internationalism and Foreign Policy* (London, 2008), 64-85; idem, 'Labour and the Kremlin', in John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Reappraisal* (Manchester, 2011), 150-69; idem, 'A New Socialist Influence: British Labour and Revolutionary Russia, 1917-1918', *Scottish Labour History*, 48 (2013); idem, 'An Outsider Looks in: Walter Citrine's First Visit to the Soviet Union, 1925', *Revolutionary Russia*, 26 (2013), 148.

[11] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, I, 16; Davis, 'Labour's Political Thought', 73-84.

[12] Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba* (New York, 1983), 142.

Labour Party admired through the late 1920s and 1930s, even the earliest visits of the labour movement demonstrate how, with respect to the issues of criminality, prisons and penal reform, a great deal of enthusiasm for the Soviet system had developed.

An examination of Soviet Russia also reveals, in far greater detail than previously, the pivotal role that criminality came to occupy in the development of a Soviet cultural propaganda machine, and how the practice and institutionalisation of this apparatus necessitates a reconsideration of the Labour Party's relationship with the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviets developed a novel style of cultural diplomacy labelled '*kul'tpokaz*', or the 'exhibition of culture', and its application to penal politics was built upon the Bolsheviks' short-lived 'progressive' penal policy in the immediate post-revolutionary period.[13] In its examination of previously unexplored material from the Russian state archives, this thesis demonstrates the prodigious reach, rigorous research and elaborately choreographed propaganda programme of the *kul'tpokaz* agenda in relation to Britain and the exhibition of Soviet prisons. Indeed, more so than many other institutions, the Soviet penal system became a principal weapon with which the Soviets targeted their British guests, the choreographed prison system veiling the more oppressive measures employed in the USSR while simultaneously providing a periscopic diversion towards the otherwise hidden humane face of the revolution. As the *kul'tpokaz* programme was entrenched, the more that Labourites praised the system the greater the intensity with which they were targeted.

[13] The term 'progressive' is employed here in the style used by Peter H. Solomon Jr., who defines a progressive penal policy as 'one which met contemporary standards, that is, one which reflected the set of reform ideas and ideals that pervaded Western penology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which was eventually adopted, in whole or in part, by many of those countries'. Peter H. Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy, 1917-1934: A Reinterpretation', *Slavic Review*, 39, 2 (1980), 196. See also Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, *Prison Reform at Home and Abroad* (London, 1924).

And while model ‘show prisons’ and stage-managed visits became the norm in the late 1920s and 1930s, the early visits of Labour figures were not always so well scripted, and as a result Labourites frequently witnessed accurate representations of the Bolsheviks’ progressive penal policy. Moreover, that the Soviets regularly imitated the latest western penal philosophies before selling them back to western visitors highlights the extent to which the British labour movement was willing to indulge or tolerate ostensibly ‘communist’ ideas. Taken together, it is argued that each of these factors uncovers a previously neglected aspect of the complex relationship between Labour and the Soviet Union, and demonstrates the need for more nuanced re-evaluations of the political, social and cultural interactions of both. In its examination, the thesis thus builds upon contemporary work that seeks to move beyond the entrenched assessments of early visitors—British or otherwise—to the Soviet Union as ‘naïve’ or unable to adequately examine the Soviet state outside the parameters of their own biases.

Finally, the thesis contends that, by analysing the approach of the Labour Party to criminality and its relationship to the Soviet Union through the lens of penal policy, an important reconsideration of British socialism, Labour policy and attitudes to the USSR can be undertaken. At first look, these themes might appear somewhat disparate, but their close interrelation in fact provides a unique and hitherto neglected position from which to reconsider the nuances of British socialism and Labour Party policy. Indeed, in many ways, not least through a set of specific historical circumstances, the two themes complement each other. By 1919, for example, it was established among the left that penal reform was urgently required in Britain; and, lacking detailed ideas for change, Labour’s early exploration of ‘socialism’ in Soviet Russia provided a fresh perspective on the problem. Equally, in seeking to justify the growing attachment in certain factions of the labour movement to the Soviet experiment, as well as the Labour Party’s own objective of a distinctive form of socialism, positive reports of

'humane' Soviet prisons and penal policy provided encouraging reinforcement of the benefits that socialism could purportedly bring about. The two themes were, as a result, closely linked, and a great many pro-Soviet Labourites sought to cultivate this connection.

In its reconsideration of British socialism and Labour policy, the themes of criminality and Soviet Russia provide a platform upon which to examine the type of socialism to which the labour movement aspired, and the extent to which this changed over time and in relation to political circumstance. In particular, approaches to crime reveal much about the ways in which the labour movement viewed the relationship of the individual to the state under socialism. Early utopian socialists, for instance, urged the self-governing of society, in which there was no place for a police or juridical apparatus. Like the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and later the Socialist League, which agitated for rule by referendum and against the role of a stratified parliamentary system, utopians sought to construct a socialism in which civic virtue, public opinion and involuntary social(ist) habits protected society from the possibility of criminal behaviour. In opposition to them, the Fabian Society entrusted the adequacy of 'constitutional' means for achieving socialism.[14] The Fabian view, as alleged by the *Clarion*'s Robert Blatchford, that 'true democracy does not mean that the people are to rule themselves, but only that they should have the power to choose who rules them', found significant expression in Ramsay MacDonald, who would come to lead the Labour Party through its first two periods in government.[15] It also found expression in the works of H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw, who, in their own utopias sought a bureaucratic, top-down and juridical approach to preventing, containing and punishing criminality under socialism.[16]

[14] Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1996), 31; 38-9.
[15] *Clarion*, 24 November 1894
[16] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (London, 1902); G. B. Shaw, 'Preface to On the Rocks', in G. B. Shaw (ed.), *The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw* (London, 1965), 354; H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of*

The differences in the roles of the individual to the state under socialism in these approaches are therefore substantial, and by examining the Labour Party's approach to criminality over time, a more nuanced understanding of the type of socialism that it sought can be gained. That MacDonald—a state socialist in favour of a 'governing' class, whose 'deference' for the 'dignity and authority' of parliament remained steadfast—led Labour through its most formative and successful period ensured that any 'utopian' aspirations were likely to be suffocated.[17] Yet even MacDonald, who judged the public's opinions to be unpredictable and often reactionary,[18] urged in 1918 against protection through organised force and in favour of a reliance upon 'involuntary social habits'.[19] Testament to the impact of changing political circumstances upon the labour movement's aspirations, it is therefore vital that Labour's approach to criminality in relation to the fluctuations of the inter-war period, and most prominently to the exemplar of the Soviet Union, is critically examined in order to understand in greater depth the changing nature of British socialism.

Although not unimportant, less significant to this thesis are the debates over how much socialism, if indeed any, the Labour Party was committed to.[20] Instead, in analysing Labour's attitudes towards criminality, and in line with the approaches of some of the most recent research on the party, the principal focus rests on the success or failure of the party's attempts to formulate and implement a penal policy according to its *own* objectives and expectations, as

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the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought, 3rd edn (London, 1902); idem, *Mankind in the Making*, 2nd edn (London, 1903); idem, *A Modern Utopia* (London, 2005 [1905]).

[17] James Ramsay MacDonald, *Socialism and Society* (London, 1905); William English Walling, *Socialism As It Is: A Survey of the World-Wide Revolutionary Movement* (London, 1912), 149-50.

[18] Steven Fielding, *The Labour Governments, 1964-70*, 3 vols (Manchester, 2003), I, 193.

[19] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 1 August 1918, vol. 109, c720.

[20] See for instance David Howell, *MacDonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922-1931* (Oxford, 2002); Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900-1931* (Oxford, 1994); A. W. Wright, *G. D. H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford, 1979); F. S. Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution* (London, 1982), 182; Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge, 1977), 196–7; Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924* (Oxford, 1983), 247.

well as those of the broader labour movement.[21] In doing so, a significant and unexplored aspect of Labour history is examined.

i. Literature review

In an examination of the Labour Party's attitudes and approaches to penal politics in the inter-war period, there is little academic literature to draw upon which deals directly with Labour and penality. Very few of the more expansive histories (in terms of their temporal parameters) visit the topic of criminality, including a number of centenary histories published at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[22] Of those that do, references are most often in passing, or focus briefly on the Labour Party's post-war engagement with crime and reform. G. D. H. Cole, in *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (1948), for instance, notes the party's role in attempting to overhaul the justice system in the 1940s and comments on the humanising of criminal law which led to the Criminal Justice Act (1948).[23] Andrew Thorpe recognises the 'creditable achievement' of the Labour government in 1965 in abolishing capital punishment, but the rest of his work's dealings with criminality are focused upon the New Labour era.[24] The same can be said of the centennial work of Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo, which recognises the 'courageous' achievements of the Labour Party in arguing for abolition,

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[21] See Jose Harris, 'Labour's Political and Social Thought', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), 10; 13-14; John Shepherd and Jonathan Davis, 'Britain's second Labour government, 1929-31: an introduction', in John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Reappraisal* (Manchester, 2011), 13-14.

[22] See for instance Henry Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 5th edn (London, 1976); Brian Brivati and Richard Heffernan (eds), *The Labour Party: A Centenary History* (Basingstoke, 2000); Keith Laybourn, *The Rise of Labour: The British Labour Party, 1890-1979* (London, 1988); idem, *A Century of Labour: A History of the Labour Party, 1900-2000* (Stroud, 2000); David James, Tony Jowitt and Keith Laybourn (eds), *The Centennial History of the Independent Labour Party* (Halifax, 1992); Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2011).

[23] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 417; 466.

[24] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 174; 208; 244; 253; 261; 273.

and of Kevin Jefferys' *Leading Labour*, which also posits its brief focus on both the 1960s and James Callaghan's premiership.[25]

Accounts that focus on the labour movement's traditions, its ideology and socialism also omit the topic of criminality,[26] while histories of the party during specific periods—the first and second Labour governments, the 1930s, and the inter-war years—also grant little attention, if any, to Labour's penal politics.[27] Such lack of coverage means that there is an urgent need to uncover the party's history in this area. In focusing solely on Labour's reforms after the Second World War, current scholarship neglects a significant part of the movement's history, and by implication prohibits an accurate understanding of the provenance of, and the reasons for, the later actions of Labour in the area of penal politics. A vast body of knowledge stemming from the 1880s through the inter-war period is at present missing.

In light of this dearth of scholarship, it is more fruitful for the purposes of this thesis to attempt to locate the labour movement within broader histories of penal reform and criminological studies. Once more, accounts that focus specifically on the Labour Party or socialists are few. The fifth volume of Radzinowicz and Hood's *History of English Criminal Law* (1948) is the account that gives most attention to the study of socialism and criminality. The authors, whose

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[25] Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000); Kevin Jefferys (ed.), *Leading Labour: From Keir Hardie to Tony Blair* (London, 1999), 136; 142.

[26] David Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism* (Cambridge, 1975); Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History* (London, 1985); Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson and Nick Tiratsoo, *'England Arise!' The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester 1995); John Callaghan, Steven Fielding and Steve Ludlam, *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History* (Manchester, 2003).

[27] Richard W. Lyman, *The First Labour Government* (London, 1957); John Shepherd and Keith Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government* (Basingstoke, 2013); Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump* (London, 1994 [1967]); Philip Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932* (Cambridge, 1992); Neil Riddell, *Labour in Crisis: The Second Labour Government, 1929-1931* (Manchester, 1999); Howell, *MacDonald's Party*; John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Reappraisal* (Manchester, 2011); Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London, 2005).

account runs only to six pages in its relation to British figures, emphasise the 'distinctive' nature of the socialist approach that was developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but recognise its limitations as a result of its minority status.[28] Nevertheless, their study is pivotal in its starting point and opens the way for a far more detailed analysis that argues against their claims of a 'coherent' penal approach among the left. Beyond this, Gordon Rose's 1961 study of the Howard League for Penal Reform relates, in more detail than any other account, the engagement of the labour movement with the League and its predecessors prior to 1921.[29] While Rose provides a good overview of the actions of a number of Labour figures who were at different times intimately associated with the Howard League, his account takes a particularly critical view of the labour movement's dealings with criminality while in office. In particular, Rose emphasises the failings of the Labour Home Secretary in 1929, J. R. Clynes, as well as his castigation by the Howard League. In its own analysis, this thesis demonstrates that the labour movement, and especially the Labour government of 1929, achieved a good deal more than Rose allows.

Other studies which focus upon penal reform pay little attention to the Labour Party, even when dealing with legislative acts that Labour governments passed.[30] Away from accounts that focus on penal politics more broadly, a number of works concentrate specifically upon capital punishment and its 1965 abolition, and grant the Labour Party more attention in this area. Neville Twitchell's account, *The Politics of the Rope* (2012), is the most fruitful here, providing a (still brief) analysis of Labour's development through its early years into Britain's self-proclaimed 'progressive' party, while noting the party's 'preponderant', if not

[28] Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, *History of English Criminal Law*, V, 34.
[29] Gordon Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform: The Howard League and its Predecessors* (London, 1961).
[30] See Fox, *The English Prison and Borstal* Systems; Hinde, *The British Penal System*; Faulkner, *Crime, State and Citizen*; Playfair, *The Punitive Obsession*; Stern, *Bricks of Shame*; Priestley, *Jail Journeys*; Morris, *The Habitual Criminal*.

'overwhelmingly', abolitionist sentiment in the inter-war years.[31] Most significantly for this study, Twitchell suggests that penal politics remained, for the most part, tangential to British party politics throughout the twentieth century. Penal reform was most prominently the domain of reformist groups, rather than political parties; but there is much to be examined in the differing levels of engagement with these pressure groups of party-political figures. Importantly, too, Twitchell notes that while there was nothing intrinsically 'socialist' about the abolitionism of the labour movement, abolition did in many ways represent the penal equivalent to pacifism, and this is largely borne out in the examination below of Labour and criminality in relation to the First World War.

Further studies that focus on capital punishment, including Tuttle's *Crusade Against Capital Punishment* (1961), Potter's *Hanging in Judgement* (1993) and Block and Hostettler's *Hanging in the Balance* (1997), provide useful political context, while John McHugh's 1999 article on Labour's role in the abolition of the military death penalty does a great deal to highlight both the paucity of material currently available on Labour's history in this area and the significance of the inter-war period's political developments in the broader histories of penal and party politics. McHugh's research is limited to the specific case of the military death penalty, but his acknowledgement of the limitations that surround the subject as a result of the lack of official party material, and his attempts to overcome these barriers through wide-ranging archival research are important for this thesis.[32] Combined with the work of Séan McConville, who has demonstrated the role of early socialists in the Gladstone Committee (1895), a broad historical

[31] Twitchell, *The Politics of the Rope*, 14-15.
[32] Tuttle, *The Crusade Against Capital Punishment*; Potter, *Hanging in Judgement*; 159; 199-202; 204; Block and Hostettler, *Hanging in the Balance*; John McHugh, 'The Labour Party and the Parliamentary Campaign to Abolish the Military Death Penalty, 1919-30', *The Historical Journal*, 42, 1 (1999), 233-49.

framework from the beginnings of organised socialism through to the post-war period can be utilised here.[33]

On Labour's relations with the Soviet Union, a good deal more literature is available. Stephen Richards Graubard was the first to examine the reaction of the labour movement to the Russian Revolution, and his *British Labour and the Russian Revolution* (1956) provides useful accounts of the earliest Labour delegations to Soviet Russia, with a focus on the prevailing notion that the Russians were to be granted time and space to develop their own political identity.[34] Bill Jones' *Russia Complex* followed in 1977, and provided an important contribution to the field of Anglo-Russian and Labour-USSR relations in its emphasising the importance of the perceptions of the Labour Party in the development of its attitude to the Soviet Union. Jones examines why so many Labour figures appeared to ignore evidence of Soviet oppression, and while his conclusion that Labour maintained a 'love affair' with the USSR has been disputed, his work nevertheless provides an important foundation for this study.[35] Andrew Williams has also demonstrated, in his *Labour and Russia* (1989), how the USSR, particularly in the period following the fall of the second Labour government, influenced the Labour Party and acted as something of an exemplar for British socialists; while Stephen White's early work on the delegations of the labour movement to Soviet Russia provides detailed accounts of the early interactions of the two proponents of socialism.[36] Each of these important works are drawn upon here to demonstrate the capacity of the Soviet Union to influence the Labour Party.

[33] Séan McConville, *English Local Prisons, 1860-1900: Next Only to Death* (London, 1995), 554-62.
[34] Stephen Richards Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1924* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).
[35] Bill Jones, *The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union* (Manchester, 1977).
[36] Andrew Williams, *Labour and Russia: The Attitude of the Labour Party to the USSR* (Manchester, 1989); See Stephen White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia, 1920', *English Historical Review*, 109 (1994), 621-40; and Morton H. Cowden, *Russian Bolshevism and British Labor, 1917-1921* (Boulder, 1984).

There are, of course, broader works that deal with Britain or other British political castes and the Soviet Union more generally. In particular, Thorpe's works on Stalinism and British politics, as well as the relationship between Moscow and the British Communist Party, are important in understanding the distinctive approach of the Labour Party to the Soviet Union, in housing communists and revolutionaries within their own ranks (unlike the majority of their European social democratic counterparts), and in examining Labour's capacity for, and vulnerability to, Soviet ideas in the defining of its own ideology.[37]

In more recent research, Davis and Morgan have done much to advance understandings of the complex relationships between Labour and the USSR. Davis' work has shown in great depth how the USSR came to act as an 'exemplar' for the Labour Party in the inter-war years and was a significant factor in the party's definition of its own brand of socialism. Through its visits to the Soviet Union and its dealings with the Kremlin while in office, Davis has demonstrated that while Labour rejected most aspects of Soviet socialism, it was nevertheless open to the Soviet experiment and in certain factions maintained an enthusiasm for particular features of the revolutionary system. Moreover, its willingness to identify and engage with the USSR has been shown to have made the party vulnerable to the more extreme ideas and practices of the Soviets, and to have forced Labour to have compromised on a number of its long-held principles.[38] In similar vein, Morgan has sought to understand in greater detail the process through which, at least within the established literature, Stalinism and communism came to be definitively separated from the parliamentary socialism of the Labour Party in the 1920s. Such

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[37] Andrew Thorpe, 'Stalinism and British Politics', *History*, 83 (1998); idem, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester, 2000). See also Gabriel Gorodetsky, *The Precarious Truth: Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1924-27* (Cambridge, 1977); idem, (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991: A Retrospective* (Oxford, 2013); Stephen White, *Britain and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Study in the Politics of Diplomacy, 1920-1924* (London, 1979); F. S. Northedge, *Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution* (London, 1982).
[38] Davis, 'Altered Images'; idem, 'Left Out in the Cold'; idem, 'Labour's Political Thought'; idem, 'Labour and the Kremlin'; idem, 'A New Socialist Influence'; idem, 'An Outsider Looks in'.

a separation in the 1930s is accurate, but the process of its attainment through the 1920s requires revisiting. Using penal politics to bring these complexities into 'sharper focus', as well as the role of Russia as a 'political nexus' for Labourites, the thesis engages directly with, and builds upon, these works.[39]

The thesis also utilises the 2009 work of John Callaghan, who has sought to employ the example of the Soviet Union as a 'window on socialist convictions' in Britain, and to demonstrate the influence of the USSR upon Labour, especially in the period following the demise of the second MacDonald administration.[40] While it is maintained here that Callaghan's accentuation of Labour's 'lurch to the left' following 1931 is somewhat overstated, the temporal focus of his research on the USSR provides an important link in the narrative constructed here, which demonstrates a continued enthusiasm for, and openness to, Soviet ideas on criminality. Equally important in carving out space for such an examination through the early revolutionary period and the 1920s is Ian Bullock's *Romancing the Revolution* (2011), which, through its impressively sourced analysis demonstrates the wide-ranging enthusiasm across the labour movement for the Soviet project, and highlights the extent to which much of the left sought, from the outset, to capitalise on the formative role that Soviet socialism could offer.[41]

The most recent publication on Labour and the Soviet Union is Giles Udy's *Labour and the Gulag* (2017). Udy's research draws upon an extensive range of British sources and seeks to demonstrate the extent to which the labour movement was willing, often with a good deal of information, to indulge the more unsavoury practices of the Soviets with regard to the regime's

[39] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, I, 12-13.
[40] John Callaghan, 'British Labour's turn to Socialism in 1931', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 14, 2 (2009).
[41] Ian Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution: The Myth of Soviet Democracy and the British Left* (Alberta, 2011).

treatment of ‘undesirables’. Udy relates, fleetingly, certain Labour figures’ admiration for the Soviet penal system, but his evident anti-Labour bias impinges greatly upon his critical analysis.[42] Moreover, Udy too often conflates the sentiments and actions of the radical left—and regularly even those of individual radicals—with the Labour Party itself, while his tendency to cast all pro-Soviet Labourites as variably naïve or ‘evil’ rests on an inadequate source base; his omission of any Russian-language material sees his analysis fail to accurately contemplate the overarching and at times powerfully subliminal propaganda machine to which the left was subjected. Grounded in its own British and Russian archival source base, this thesis seeks to build a far more comprehensive analysis of the intercultural and political dynamics that were at play in the labour movement’s relations with the Soviet Union, and how this manifested itself in relation to penal politics.

Indeed, much of Udy’s examination is developed in the style of the 1970s and 1980s studies of the fellow-travelling community, which often disparagingly dismissed the reports and analyses of early visitors to the Soviet Union for their failure to probe beneath the Soviet veneer.[43] To counter this, this thesis leans heavily on the work of Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment* (2012). Through extensive use of Russian state archival collections, David-Fox’s research focuses on the role of Soviet *kul’tpokaz*, or the exhibition of culture, within the broader programme of Soviet cultural diplomacy and propaganda.

[42] Udy explains in his preface that it ‘has been hard’ to remain objective, while his anti-Labourism sees him call for an apology from the present-day Labour Party ‘to the people of Ukraine … Belarus and Russia, the descendants of the kulaks and of the spiritual leaders and ordinary believers who lost their liberty, their homes, and, in many cases, their lives’. He also fails to avoid bringing his contemporary political views into play, citing the 2015 election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour leadership as a return to 1931-32 and ‘to familiar territory – Marxian Socialism’. Elsewhere, Udy’s work is replete with sweeping statements that equate the ‘irredeemable’ works of Marx with Nazism, and lazily cast Stalin and ‘so many … Bolshevik leaders’ as ‘psychopaths’. See Giles Udy, *Labour and the Gulag: Russia and the Seduction of the British Left* (London, 2017), xi; 533; 535-7; 539-40.

[43] See for instance Sylvia R. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924-1937* (Madison, 1968); David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* (London, 1973); Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba* (New York, 1983).

Principally, David-Fox demonstrates the vast extent and elaborate nature of Soviet propaganda in winning over western visitors, while simultaneously rehabilitating (many of) those westerners who, rather than consistently seeing only what they wanted to see, in fact neither sought nor found utopia in the Soviet Union.[44] David-Fox demonstrates the increasingly important place which the Soviet penal system came to occupy in the regime's cultural diplomacy, but the internationalist outlook of his work necessarily diminishes the attention given specifically to British visitors. In drawing on the works of David-Fox, the most recent Soviet-Labour literature, and both British and Russian archival collections, this thesis forms the first comprehensive examination of the Labour Party's approaches to crime and the exemplar of the Soviet Union.

ii. Sources and methodology

Despite their significance, the works of Graubard, Jones, Williams and White are considerably limited in scope given their publication prior to the opening of the Russian state archives. Works completed after 1991 have been able to make use of material housed within the Russian archives, and while this has been the case with regards to the works of Davis, Morgan and Thorpe, no Labour-focused study has yet to emerge that utilises a comprehensive survey of primary Russian material. Morgan, Davis and Thorpe make use of the archives of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow, while Michael David-Fox makes comprehensive use of several archives across Russia, but, again, his study does not relate specifically to Britain or the Labour Party.

[44] Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford, 2012). See also Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London, 2007).

This thesis includes new documentary evidence from the State Archives of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), and the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). It also draws upon Russian material from the Hoover Archives, University of Stanford, California, to shed new light on the Soviet-Labour relationship. Within Britain, the thesis draws upon material from the Labour Party archives in Manchester, the personal papers of leading Labourites, party pamphlets and conference reports to analyse the development of Labour's penal politics. Cabinet papers and parliamentary debates are also examined, while a range of newspapers and journals that formed the Labour Press have been consulted to ensure an accurate and representative analysis of the movement's approaches to criminality, penal reform and the Soviet Union. Over the timespan of the study, the diaries of several prominent Labour figures, including Walter Citrine, Fred Bramley and the Webbs are also utilised.

In its approach, the thesis examines the Labour Party's development in penal politics in chronological fashion. This allows a base to be built from the early years of organised socialism, from which to proceed with a more detailed analysis of the role of the Soviet exemplar. At times, given the nature and scope of the subject, and the fact that the relevant and distinctive periods in Soviet history do not always match temporally with those in Britain, there is necessarily a certain amount of jumping forward and revisiting time periods, but a broadly chronological approach remains. A note should also be made at this point on the use of the terms 'Labour', the 'Labour Party' and the 'labour movement'. The thesis is principally a study of the Labour Party's approach to penal politics, but given the intertwined nature of the labour movement as a whole—countless figures were members of multiple organisations, parties and trade unions—and the fact that visits to Russia were often made under the umbrella term of the

‘labour movement’, the terms are at times used interchangeably. Where the analysis focuses specifically on the Labour Party and its policy, the language reflects this.

iii. Chapter summary

In chapter one, the attitudes and approaches to crime and punishment of nineteenth-century British socialists are examined in relation to the broader understandings that had at that time been established in both Britain and Europe. The chapter also analyses British attitudes in the period up to the First World War, demonstrating that while utopian, more pragmatic and ‘scientific’ approaches to penal politics emerged among the socialist community, no single dominant style was achieved. The ramifications of these differing approaches for the type of socialism that the British labour movement aspired to are evaluated, and are shown to reveal a new perspective from which to analyse early British socialism. This is followed in chapter two by an examination of the role of the war, the experience of conscientious objectors and the impact of the Russian revolutions in forcing the Labour Party to engage more seriously and consistently with the issue of penal politics. In particular, as a broad array of reactions to the Russian revolutions of 1917 carved out sufficient political space for an enthusiasm for Russia to develop, and as approaches to criminality in Russia began to form an increasingly important aspect of the new Soviet regime, the chapter demonstrates the ways in which Labour’s utopian attitudes to the issue diminished in favour of a more pragmatic approach.

Chapters three and four undertake the most substantial analysis of the thesis, evaluating the development of Labour’s penal politics through the 1920s and in Labour’s second period in office between 1929 and 1931. Chapter three examines the visits of the labour movement to Soviet Russia through the decade as well as its first period in government in 1924. Throughout this time, the Labour Party engaged in penal politics with increasing frequency, and was

subjected to the development of an intensifying, all-encompassing and propagandistic system of Soviet cultural diplomacy. Exposed to a host of Soviet ideas on criminology, and developing an increasing enthusiasm for the Soviet project, the party nevertheless failed to act decisively on penal politics as its utopian ethic and its more practical ideas on penality were suppressed in its efforts to cultivate an image of respectable governance.

Chapter four concentrates on Labour's second period in office and seeks to re-evaluate what has historically been seen as a disastrous phase for the party. The chapter examines the party's approaches to issues of crime, compulsion, unemployment and the Soviet Union in order to show how a number of the party's long-held principles were compromised in favour, once more, of a pragmatic attempt in office to highlight its respectability as a political entity. In particular, the party failed to meet its own expectations with regards to penal politics, as a number of specific objectives set down by the labour movement were abandoned in the face of financial meltdown. Nevertheless, the chapter also highlights how the party achieved a great deal in penal politics, reforming several aspects of Britain's penal system and, in an official capacity, bravely pushing an abolitionist agenda for the first time. Uncertainty remained throughout this period in terms of the party's ideology and a dominant approach to penality remained elusive, but an examination of Labour's penal politics highlights a number of important successes for the party that have hitherto been overlooked.

Chapter five analyses Labour's penal politics as it returned to opposition, entered a period of deliberation with regard to its ideological agenda, and recalibrated its policy programme. A 'lurch to the left' between 1931 and 1932, though brief and somewhat shallow, appeared to present opportunity for the movement to develop a 'socialist' penal policy, especially in light of the largely positive experiences with Soviet penal politics that it had garnered through the

1920s. Visits to the Soviet Union proliferated through the 1930s, but an increasingly convoluted relationship with the Soviet state complicated its relations with the Labour Party. The allure of the Soviet penal system changed through the decade, as the ‘regeneration’ of human beings and the development of a new moral system replaced a previous emphasis on the institutional aspects of the Soviet penitentiary system. At the same time, though, and despite the Soviets’ economic success in the early 1930s, in its increasing familiarity the Soviet system was proving less exciting for British visitors. A proscriptive Stalinism now occupied the space that had once existed for Labour figures to project their social, cultural, economic and political hopes upon, and increasingly the Soviet experience failed to offer comprehensive solutions to the problems facing Britain: it appeared more and more just another state to be dealt with as its ‘mystical’ qualities evaporated and its dictatorship presented moral dilemmas for the labour movement. In light of this, Labour’s penal politics remained incoherent, and took up an increasingly unimportant place within the party’s agenda.

CHAPTER ONE

Socialist Approaches to Crime and Penal Reform in Britain, 1880-1914

1.1 Introduction

Traditional narratives of criminality, prisons and penal reform in Britain have tended to concentrate on the late nineteenth century as the beginning of a great phase of reform. The major event of the period, the Gladstone Committee (1895), which undertook a thorough review of English penal practices and proposed a number of reforms, is often heralded as the catalyst, after which much was said to be done to 'crystallise liberal penal thinking'.[1] The subject of penal reform seldom commanded contemporary national attention, but its effects on the working classes in Britain, particularly those affected by poor relief under the Poor Laws, were widespread. British socialist organisations, in particular the Fabian Society and the ILP, which would form the basis of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900 and the Labour Party in 1906, and which ostensibly sought to represent the working classes in parliament, fought throughout the period for issues of justice, equality and social improvement.[2] Yet the attitudes of socialists towards criminality, prisons and penal reform—issues they encountered regularly through their attention to poverty, pauperism and the working classes—have until now been largely overlooked. That several socialists played a pivotal role in bringing about the Gladstone Committee only accentuates this omission.[3]

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[1] Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* (London, 2011), 201; W. J. Forsythe, *Penal Discipline, Reformatory Projects and the English Prison Commission, 1895-1939*, (Exeter, 1990); Christopher Harding, '"The Inevitable End of a Discredited System"? The Origins of the Gladstone Committee Report on Prisons, 1895', *Historical Journal*, 31, 3 (1988), 591-608; Hannum, E. Brown, 'The Debate on Penal Goals: Carnarvon, Gladstone and the harnessing of Nineteenth Century "Truth", 1865-1895', *New England Journal on Prison Law,* 7 (1981), 97-103. See the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Prisons*, Cmd. 7703 (the Gladstone Report) (London, 1895).
[2] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 14.
[3] See the roles, at times controversial, of the socialists John Burns and William Douglas Morrison in the early 1890s, in McConville, *English Local Prisons*, 554-62.

Official commentary by the left on issues of criminality and penal reform was never prolific, particularly in the period from the founding of organised British socialism until the First World War, and there are few clear instances of the formation of official party policy on the subject. Nascent socialist organisations were concerned principally with growing their political movements and bases during these years, but that such little discussion on penal politics took place in this period remains of interest for two principal reasons. First, early British socialists dedicated great efforts to developing a vision of an idealised socialist civilisation; the political pamphlets, speeches, campaigns and utopian fiction of the time abounded with socialist imagery and organisation. Within these media, the subject of crime played a fundamental role, since it provided a way for observers to evaluate a population's progress towards socialism, and to make assumptions about the nature of that society.[4] Questions remain, therefore, as to how the British labour movement understood crime and its associated institutions, both in the present and in the future; how this affected its ideas as to the role and relationship of the individual to the state under socialism; and what the implications of this were for the *type* of socialism that the Labour Party would come to aspire to in the inter-war years.

Secondly, in the nineteenth century the 'condition of England question' had unearthed crushing poverty in Britain amid a range of social ills. Criminality was not least among them, and the attribution of these troubles to the economic liberalism of the period, combined with 'the denial of the social responsibility of the state', was leading to the decline of the principle of *laissez faire*.[5] In reaction, the ILP and the SDF were, by the late 1890s, proclaiming causal connections between issues of unemployment, poverty and crime among the working classes. There were,

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[4] Sharon A. Kowalsky, *Deviant Women: Female Crime and Criminology in Revolutionary Russia, 1880-1930* (Dekalb, 2009), 8; 15.

[5] J. H. Stewart Reid, *The Origins of the British Labour Party* (Minneapolis, 1955), 7-15. See also the 17 volumes of the third edition of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London*, his *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (Toronto, 1890), and Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York, 1898 [1879]); Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford, 2009 [1845]).

moreover, increasing fears over the emergence of a 'dangerous underclass' in Britain, defined variably as the 'redundant population', the 'residuum', the 'lumpenproletariat', and the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor'.[6] Ostensibly harbouring society's outcasts, this class was alleged to be formed in no small part by habitual criminals, and was generally accounted for by a mixture of moral failure, inadequate socialisation, and economic or biological arguments.[7] With the issues of criminality, prisons and penal reform brought further into the public spotlight following the Gladstone Committee, socialists' understandings of these problems would have differed markedly from their contemporary political opposition.[8] Unearthing the approaches of the left in Britain to these issues thus provides a new avenue for examining the political landscape of the early twentieth century.

With few exceptions, though, the majority of contemporaneous discussion among the left rarely related directly to criminality or prison reform. Instead, socialists and left-leaning liberals tended to focus on the problems of poverty, unemployment, their causes and solutions. Britain was no stranger to innovative methods in its attempts to deal with these; for centuries workhouses had pulled in the state's paupers and jobless, while the Poor Laws attempted to provide forms of relief. Since the time of Robert Owen (1771-1858), ideas of land nationalisation and labour and unemployment colonies had also been under experimentation. Owen, a social reformer often described as the founder of the utopian socialist movement, had proclaimed as early as 1816 that the conditions causing poverty, unemployment and crime could be permanently removed through a reorganisation of the community structure.[9] Yet the

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[6] Lydia Morris, *Dangerous Classes: The Underclass and Social Citizenship* (London, 1994), 10-32.
[7] Ibid, 2.
[8] McConville, *English Local Prisons*, 549-84.
[9] See Robert Owen, *The Book of the New Moral World, Containing the Rational System of Society, Founded on Demonstrable Facts, Developing the Constitution and Laws of Human Nature and of Society* (London, 1836), xxii; Arthur L. Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen* (London, 1962), 59; 121; 125-7; 137; John F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), 24.

role of labour colonies in modern British and Labour history has, for the most part, gone unnoticed.[10] In spite of this, labour colonies were a relatively consistent, if not wholly mainstream, part of British life prior to the end of the First World War; many colonies, for instance, were designed to tackle social issues that dominated contemporary political agendas, there being at one time even a camp in Deptford dedicated solely to children, hailed by the left as achieving 'wonders' in results.[11] In lieu then, of sustained conversation regarding penal policy and criminality among the left in the period up to the First World War, the attitudes of early socialists in Britain to these ideas and practices take on greater significance, and their examination offers practical insight into contemporary socialist ideas on compulsion and incarceration. Most significantly, discussions of these issues formed, to some degree, the embryo of the Labour Party's own approaches to criminality in later years.

In critically analysing the left's attitudes to criminality and punishment, it is essential to account for the variation in ideology that existed among the many socialist organisations of the period. The revolutionary rhetoric of the SDF and the Socialist League (a dissident offshoot of the SDF), for instance, contrasted markedly with both the Fabians' evolutionary gradualism and the ILP's ethical socialism. That many socialists were frequently members of multiple organisations, which each often espoused differing policies and approaches, complicates matters further.[12] Nevertheless, the last decades of the nineteenth century saw the rapid growth of the 'religion of socialism' in Britain, which, at its base represented a change from the economic and political orthodoxy of the time.[13] For many in the labour movement, though, it

[10] John Field, *Working Men's Bodies: Work Camps in Britain, 1880-1940* (Manchester, 2013), 3-4.
[11] See W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England, 1560-1960* (London, 1961), 224-37; 272-429; *Daily Herald*, 6 July 1914.
[12] See for example S. G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left* (London, 1938), 28.
[13] Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop*, 4 (1977), 5-56.

began to characterise more than just new policy; instead, it embodied the desire for and the basis of 'a more just and natural way of life'. Increasingly, many socialists believed that comprehensive 'change in society would "just happen"', and 'the obvious moral justification of socialism alone would be enough to develop naturally into a new utopian socialist existence'.[14] As a result of this teleological assumption, and in their rejection (for the most part) of revolutionary methods, the movement invested 'astronomical sums of human capital' in 'the strategy of piecemeal reform', often, it appeared, without a cohesive and connected broader strategy.[15] How idealistic views of socialist ends were reconciled with laboured, fragmentary reform and a policy of gradualism was a problem that beleaguered socialists in the pre- and inter-war years. Through an examination of the early labour movement's approaches to criminality, a novel vehicle of analysis grants new emphasis to this paradox of idealistic aims, gradualist methods, and dissatisfaction with incremental reform. For the labour movement up to 1914, a major effect of this paradox was actually to inhibit socialists' understandings of crime, revealing a rather uncertain approach to the issues of prison and penal reform.

This chapter seeks to examine the left's understanding of criminality, prisons and penal reform through the period from 1880 to 1914. In doing so, it presents three main arguments. First, it contends that, while throughout this period there was a growing acknowledgement of the need to reform the penal system in Britain, no single dominant view of penal politics can be located among socialist groups. Instead, there existed a number of different approaches, some of which placed more emphasis upon the punitive treatment of offenders, while others sought to challenge the established 'classical' notions of deterrence through a drive for the rehabilitation

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[14] Jacqueline Turner, '"The Soul of the Labour Movement": Rediscovering the Labour Church 1891-1914', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Reading, (2010), 78.
[15] E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), *The Socialist Register 1965* (London, 1965), 343.

of deviants.[16] Other groups, too, proposed more radical programmes which drew on the claims of the Eugenics Society. Most factions, however, supported the use of non-punitive measures, and an analysis of contemporary socialist materials reveals a widespread view among the early labour movement that acts of criminality would diminish 'naturally' as society moved towards socialism. Drawn from the early writings of 'utopian' socialists like Owen and William Morris, an important implication of this teleological assumption was that, as a result, the left in Britain engaged only intermittently with the issue of crime and the problems surroundings its causes, effects and prevention. With individual exceptions, a broad narrative was constructed and, it appears, largely relied upon, whereby it was felt at times unnecessary to focus on the issue, since it was assumed that its redress would occur intuitively in line with society's march toward socialism. Such postulation greatly hindered the labour movement's understanding of, and at times engagement with, the problems of criminality, prisons and punishment in Britain.

Secondly, the chapter contends that in the years prior to the war, a preponderance of the engagement of the labour movement with the issue of penal reform focused less on the institutional aspects of prisons themselves, and far more on the ethics and moralistic value systems that socialists sought to inculcate. This was, in no small part, a consequence of the predominance of the 'utopian' view of crime as withering away naturally, and its paramountcy is indicative, in light of the Gladstone Committee's own emphasis on the institutional aspects of prison regimes, of the extent to which this idea gripped much of the labour movement. There were, once again, exceptions, as the likes of Edward Carpenter and Robert Blatchford attempted to tackle with rigour and detail the problematic state of the British prison system;

[16] Classical approaches to deterrence have traditionally been concerned with 'the establishment of a reformed, equitable and efficient system of justice' that utilised utilitarian philosophy, 'and in particular the pleasure and pain principle', in which punishment was proportional to the crime committed. Crime, under this approach, is a matter of free will and rational self-interest. John Tierney, *Criminology: Theory and Context*, 2nd edn (London, 2006), 50-1.

but, on the whole, emphasis was placed upon the ways in which the movement could begin to refashion society itself, rather than just the penal system. Prison reform, it was assumed, would occur as a by-product of broader socialist transformation. This approach is significant, for, in the period from the outbreak of war until the early 1930s, the movement's 'utopian' outlook would diminish rapidly, as a more practical approach to penal reform began to emerge.

Finally, it is contended that, in understanding the labour movement's attitudes towards crime in this area, a more nuanced and accurate assessment can be made of the type of socialism that early figures of the left envisioned and aspired to. Issues concerning the nature or even existence of prisons, for instance, or the methods for effecting penance, belay deeply held and often differing views on the nature of socialist society, the roles of community and public opinion, and the relationship of the individual to the state. Those in the movement who advocated more punitive approaches to the treatment of crime often envisioned a more bureaucratic and juridical state of affairs, whereby the legal codification of crimes and criminal behaviour regulated the state's and citizens' social functions. Prior to the First World War, though, the reliance of many in the labour movement on the canon of Owen, Morris and the ILP leader Keir Hardie, ensured that an idealistic vision of socialism was propagated, in which the need for organised force was nullified by the development of imbued involuntary social habits that effectively policed human behaviour.

In its examination, the chapter delivers a new perspective on the development of British socialism and Labour Party policy over time, and provides a much-needed analysis of the labour movement's approach to penal policy in the years leading up to its most well-known engagement, in 1919, through the Labour Research Department's enquiry into the English prison system. The chapter first traces the intellectual and ideological provenance of early

socialist analyses of crime by charting the ideas of Malthus, Carlyle, Bentham, Marx and Engels, as well as the domestic and religious influences on the labour movement, before examining the internal debates on the issue within the British left up to the turn of the century. It then analyses the impact of the development of scientific criminology and the eugenics movement upon socialist discourse around criminality in the years up to the war, charting the ways in which the left engaged intermittently with crime in practice.

1.2 Approaches to Crime in the Nineteenth Century

In the 1880s, the organised socialist movement in Britain had little socialist material on crime to consult. Throughout the nineteenth century, crime had increasingly been associated with poverty and pauperism, and as early as 1806 T. R. Malthus (1766-1834) branded poverty a product of society's moral failure. A 'redundant population' had been produced, he suggested, through overpopulation and a lack of self-restraint among the lower classes. Malthus' solution lay in moral control, since those 'educated in workhouses where every vice is propagated, or bred up at home in filth and rags', display an 'utter ignorance of every moral obligation'.[17] As Lydia Morris notes, Malthus' conservatism led him to conclude that poverty is 'brought upon the sufferer by his own failures' and the 'resolution to the problem lies in moral education'.[18] Evangelicals took a similarly moralistic view. In their fusion of classical economics and atonement theology, poverty 'constituted a form of atonement by which people paid for their sins'.[19] Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), too, despite his aversion to Malthusianism, stressed the significance of self-reliance, summarising his disdain for the indolent with his observation that: 'He that will not work according to his faculty, let him perish according to his necessity'.[20]

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[17] Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Overpopulation* (ed.), Phyllis James, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1989), II, 88; 112.
[18] Morris, *Dangerous Classes*, 12.
[19] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1991); Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton, 2011), 26.
[20] Thomas Carlyle, *English and Other Critical Essays* (London, n.d.), 177.

Perhaps most significantly, Jeremy Bentham (1747-1832) dedicated significant labours to the specific issues of crime and punishment through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His death in 1832 coincided with the first Reform Act, instigating what Dicey calls the 'period of Benthamism' in Britain.[21] Moving beyond causal associations between poverty and crime, Bentham's attempts to construct a 'map of universal delinquency, laid down upon the principle of utility', produced the most detailed accounts yet of criminality and prison life.[22] This was, of course, most famously represented through his planned Panopticon, described by Michel Foucault as a sinister instrument of modern totalitarian power relations.[23] But in his reaction to the revelations of penal reformer John Howard (1726-1790) on the ignominy of contemporary gaols, and in spite of his more severe ideas on punishment, Bentham became a prescient advocate of reform, the abolition of capital punishment, the necessity for 'active or laborious imprisonment', and the idea that prisoners be considered as having individual tendencies, warranting individualised approaches to their treatment.[24] Bentham's ideas were certainly complex, but as part of his utilitarianism punishment remained a necessity for preventing crime.[25]

For socialist analyses of crime, one had to look to Marx and Engels. Criminality, though, was never a subject upon which they wrote elaborately, and few in the British labour movement in the 1880s had read, or taken up the cause of, Marxist analysis. Nevertheless, elements of Marx's ideas are key in understanding British socialists' attitudes, the 'socialist emphasis on

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[21] A. V. Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England*, 2nd edn (London, 1930), 126.
[22] Cited in Bentham's 'Principles of Morals and Legislation'. See Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (ed.), J. Bowring, 11 vols (Edinburgh, 1838-43), I, 139.
[23] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Middlesex, 1982). See also Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York, 1978), 109.
[24] Radzinowicz and Hood, *History of English Criminal Law*, I, 370; 376; 389-93; Janet Semple, *Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (Oxford, 1993), 28. See also Bentham's twelve principles that formed the foundation of his understanding of penitentiaries in 'Rationale of Punishment'. Bentham, *Works*, I, 402-6.
[25] Bentham, *Works*, I, 396; Radzinowicz and Hood, *History of English Criminal Law*, I, 382; 392.

the inequalities and inefficiencies of capitalism' necessarily infusing Labour with a class dimension.[26] While Marx disagreed with Malthus' explanation of poverty, he affirmed the existence, in his view necessarily, of a relative surplus population under capitalism. This group, however, explicitly excluded the criminal classes, who instead formed the *lumpenproletariat*.[27] Marx and Engels' accounts of the *lumpenproletariat* can appear particularly moralistic at times, but both drew on the arguments of the theory of natural rights and Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (in contrast to Malthus).[28] Their later views were 'uncompromisingly political and based on the proletarian class position', asking always of any social class or activity 'what is its effectivity in the struggle of the proletariat for socialism', and 'does it contribute to the political victory of the exploited and oppressed?'[29]

For Marx, crime was associated with poverty and broader economic structures and conditions. The 'anti-social sources of crime', he claimed, 'must be destroyed'.[30] Engels wrote in more detail on the nature of crime, relating it specifically to Marx's 'anti-social source'—capitalist competition. Crime was not, according to Engels, the result of some disruption of the normal social relations or moral panic; rather, it was one of the necessary forms that capitalist social relations took.[31] The attitudes of both Marx and Engels towards the 'permanent underworld of professional thieves and robbers … whose social relations are antipathetic to all forms of class

[26] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 15.
[27] Karl Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols (London, 1930), II, 713.
[28] See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, 2010), 43; Marx, 'The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850', in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1962), I, 155; Paul Q. Hirst, 'Marx and Engels on Law, Crime and Morality', *Economy and Society* 1, 1 (1972), 40; Malthus, *Principle of Overpopulation*, 126. For Thomas Paine on crime and his views against corporal and capital punishment see Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings* (ed.), Mark Philp (Oxford, 2008), 109; 292-301.
[29] Hirst, 'Marx and Engels on Law', 40.
[30] Marx, cited in David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, 3rd edn (London, 1995), 32; see also Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', in David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford, 1977), 184; John Lea, 'Poverty, Crime and Politics: Frederich Engels and the Crime Question', in John Lea and Geoffrey Pilling (eds), *The Condition of Britain: Essays on Frederick Engels* (London, 1996), 90-2.
[31] Ibid, 91.

consciousness' were, relatively, more ambivalent,[32] and it is occasionally suggested that under socialism these figures would be outlawed or made to work. The sardonicism cutting through Marx's treatment of crime in his *Theories of Surplus Value*, however, suggests that he saw no important societal function that crime could fill.[33] On capital punishment, though, Marx was unequivocal. Writing in the *New York Tribune* in 1853, he criticised the pro-capital punishment message of an earlier *Times* article from 25 January, and made plain his opinion of capital punishment as a form of barbarism.[34] Using data to claim that far from having a deterrent effect, the execution of criminals was usually followed closely by murders and suicides, Marx stated that 'since Cain the world has neither been intimidated nor ameliorated by punishment'.[35] He also echoed the positivist, moral statistician, Adolpe Quetelet, in his recognition of 'relative poverty' as a key factor in violent crime, arguing that there is a 'necessity for deeply reflecting upon an alteration of the system that breeds these crimes, instead of glorifying the hangman who executes … criminals to make room only for the supply of new ones'.[36]

Marx's vision was that in the higher stages of a stateless, communist society, class antagonisms would disappear and human beings would become 'species-beings', rendering tools of the state—and therefore capital punishment—redundant.[37] He claimed in *The Civil War in France* that in higher society central government would have 'few but important functions', though what these functions would be remained unaddressed.[38] According to McLellan (and perhaps of most significance to this analysis), in Marx's view force would 'not be needed by communist

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[32] Ibid, 98-9.
[33] Hirst, 'Marx and Engels on Law', 45-50; Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (trans.), Emile Burns (London, 1969), 387-8; Tierney, *Criminology*, 47-9.
[34] *The Times*, 25 January 1853.
[35] See Marx*, Despatches for the New York Tribune: Selected Journalism of Karl Marx* (ed.), J. Ledbetter (London, 2007), 119-21.
[36] Marx*, Despatches*, 122-3; Robert M. Bohm, 'Karl Marx and the Death Penalty', *Critical Criminology*, 16, 4 (2008), 286; Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young, *The New Criminology: For a Social theory of Deviance* (New York, 1974), 37-8.
[37] Bohm, 'Marx and the Death Penalty', 288.
[38] Marx, 'The Civil War in France', in, McLellan, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 542.

governments, certainly not exterior force … for punishment would be "the judgement of the criminal upon himself"', as a kind of civic virtue regulated human behaviour.[39] One need not have been a Marxist, of course, to question the role of the death penalty in Britain. Indeed, although Marxism's 'analysis of the conditions of the working class in nineteenth century England actually gave the strongest dynamic impulse to world socialism', and while many of Marx's terms soon became part of the left's lexicography, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, with the exception of the SDF, the small Socialist League and a handful of trade unions, the burgeoning British labour movement owed far more to Methodism than Marxism.[40] But Marx's utopian ideas around the 'sort of human nature that would be prevalent in the future communist society' were, as demonstrated below, not dissimilar to the positions of many British socialists. His claim for the self-regulation of human behaviour under socialism is particularly significant in understanding early socialist attitudes to crime and the relationship of the individual to the state under socialism in Britain.[41]

Away from Marxism, the influences upon British socialists were many, from trade unionism, democratic socialism, radical republicanism and pro-Gladstonian Liberalism, to nonconformist Christianity, anti-modernist medievalism and the 'quest for advanced "scientific" modernity'.[42] In fact, in the 1880s there existed, according to Henry Pelling, 'no distinctive labour political creed'; Owenite socialism was identified with a utopianism too impracticable to form a realistic

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[39] McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, 241.

[40] Egon Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (London, 1925), 198; Shaw Desmond, *Labour, the Giant with the Feet of Clay* (London, 1921), 38; Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1965), 5; 125-44; See also Ross McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Britain?', in Ross McKibbin (ed.), *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1991), 1-41; and Gerald Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, 5 vols (Manchester, 1988), I, 94; Reid, *Origins of the British Labour Party*, 46-7.

[41] McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx*, 241; Abram L. Harris, 'Utopian Elements in Marx's Thought', *Ethics*, 60, 2 (1950), 93-4; 97-8; Avraham Yassour, 'Communism and Utopia: Marx, Engels and Fourier', *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 26, 3 (1983), 223-5.

[42] Jose Harris, 'Labour's Political and Social Thought', 9; Clive Behagg, *Labour and Reform: Working Class Movements 1815-1914* (London, 1991), 117-18.

political programme, the ILP remained a sectional body, and the SDF held to its Marxist doctrine.[43] Nonetheless, Liberalism was perhaps the greatest influence upon the left, and liberal revisionists have demonstrated how the inter-class appeal of nineteenth-century political radicalism tethered together the various elements of the labour movement. Revolutionary groups aside, the 'natural political home of [a majority of] working class reformers ... was the left wing of the Liberal Party'.[44] Even Robert Owen's earlier approaches to reducing crime and his faith in the vigour of public opinion to police behaviour had been rooted in the liberal theory of John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) and the idea of a 'love of fame'. Central to Owen's utopia was a resolute belief in the capacity of small, unified groups to regulate their members' behaviour, and through this 'eye of the community' an entrenched moral economy would, it was thought, see criminality disappear.[45] Conversely, other liberals like John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty* (1859) railed against society's ability to pressure individuals to conform, and even the philosophical anarchist William Godwin, who had once shared Owen's communitarian faith, cast his doubts in *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794).

Mill, of course, was wrestling with his own Benthamite education, and in the years up to the turn of the century the leaders of the labour movement were engaged in similar dialogues: this was the intellectual milieu influencing the early left's approaches to criminality. The Fabians owed more to Bentham and Mill than to Marx, and the ILP, until at least 1900, was more

[43] Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*, 6-7; Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, *Labour and Politics, 1900-1906: A History of the Labour Representation Committee* (London, 1958), 164.
[44] Neville Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society, 1850-1920* (Manchester, 1998), 11; Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism*, 8; Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1968).
[45] Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), 109-12.

concerned with organisation than fundamental socialist principles.[46] The Liberal heritage of many of the socialists who would come to play major roles in the Labour Party—Ramsay MacDonald, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, George Lansbury, Arthur Henderson and Edward Carpenter, for example—was strong, and discussions of crime in this early period would be largely defined by the tussle between competing liberal and utopian ideas.

1.3 British Socialists and Crime, 1880-1900

In 1893 in London, Edward Carpenter, an erstwhile Liberal and at this time a Fabian, gave a paper on the topic of vivisection on behalf of the Humanitarian League. Voicing his discontent at the invasive trends of modern science and medicine, he followed, in 1894, in an article in Robert Blatchford's socialist newspaper, the *Clarion*, with an attempt to link the issue with the working class movement, asking: 'Does it not look, comrades, very much as if the professors were not only experimenting on the animals, but experimenting on us?'[47] A year later, in his reaction to the retirement of Sir Edmund Du Cane as the Chairman of the Prison Commission, Carpenter breathed 'a sigh of relief at the prospect of a possible change in the conduct' of England's prison institutions. The 'terrible cruelty' of the old system and its use of solitary confinement had been disguised from public conscience for too long, he claimed, and in the wake of the Gladstone Committee there was hope that a system with 'hardly one positive or redeeming feature' might be replaced.[48]

The Gladstone Committee did indeed set the foundations to effect great change in Britain's

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[46] Carl F. Brand, *The British Labour Party: A Short History* (London, 1965), 5; Robert E. Dowse, *Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party, 1893-1940* (London, 1966), 9. On the Fabians, see Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Pursuit of Certainty* (Cambridge, 1965), 188.
[47] Edward Carpenter, cited in Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844-1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge, 1980), 112-13; idem, 'Modern Science, the True method and the False', *Vivisection*, Humanitarian League Publications, 6 (London, 1893); *Clarion*, 1 December 1894.
[48] Edward Carpenter, 'The Humanising of our Prisons', *Labour Leader*, 11 May 1895, also published in *Humanity Reprints*, 1 (London, 1899).

penal system, but the pace of reform was laboured in the *fin de siècle* years. As John Tierney notes, Britain's approach to penality was fragmented, and a relatively strong emphasis on the 'genetically determined psychological traits' of criminals and their 'moral degeneracy' remained.[49] Since the Prison Act (1877) had created a nationalised prison system, extending uniformity from convict prisons to local gaols, a centralised and secretive administration had become almost immune to outside influence, and what reform did occur 'was largely driven by the needs of the system … carried out by those with … vested interest[s]'.[50] Nevertheless, Carpenter persisted in his efforts and, in 1897, following a National Humanitarian Conference that called for prison reform, gave an address on 'Prison Methods' at Essex Hall in which he stressed the link between slum life and criminality. 'The slum is the vestibule of the prison', he claimed, advocating the 'transformation of our prisons into industrial centres'.[51] And two years later, he turned his attention to capital punishment, calling for the complete abolition of the death penalty.[52] Carpenter was thus one of the first socialists to address the issue of prison reform directly—a subject he would take up in greater detail after the turn of the century. Analyses of the prison system and its role in addressing criminality were otherwise rare; and it was not until after the First World War and the experiences of conscientious objectors were exposed that the labour movement would begin to engage seriously with these issues. Carpenter's interest in prisons and his attacks on Britain's punitive practices thus appeared at times to be a minority view.

Otherwise, socialists painted an equivocal picture of crime and punishment during this period, partly because their principal focus remained on the impoverished and unemployed, rather than

[49] Tierney, *Criminology*, 55.
[50] Ibid, 56.
[51] Edward Carpenter, cited in Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward* Carpenter, 112-13; idem, 'Prison Methods', *Humanity*, December (1897).
[52] Edward Carpenter, 'Mary Ansell and Capital Punishment', *Humanity* (September 1899).

the criminal. Many in the labour movement, though, valued the potency of punitive measures against the poor. George Lansbury, Poor Law guardian for the district of Poplar and a future Labour Party leader, at first proposed a system of punitive labour camps for the 'treatment of the habitual casual and repression of the loafer' (though, it should be noted, these were terms he also ascribed to the apathy of the upper classes).[53] Such a proposal appears at odds with Lansbury's pacifism, his devotion to eliminating poverty, and his ferocious criticism from a young age of the division of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor by middle-class outsiders.[54] Lansbury acknowledged the existence in society of those who are simply 'bad and deceitful', but also held that, 'taken in the mass the poor are as decent as any other class'.[55] He soon took a far less authoritarian approach to the 'under-class', though he remained a keen supporter of labour colonies, appealing to a long-standing radical tradition on land agitation in Britain.[56]

Other more enduring advocates of penal measures were Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who enthusiastically classified society into distinct categories. Such classifications, popularised by Charles Booth's division of the unemployed in his study of mass London poverty (1902), appeared in some ways to justify the use of penal measures, and Sidney Webb in particular drew upon the works of Bentham—his 'intellectual godfather'—that denoted punishment as evil but necessary.[57] By separating the 'really irreclaimable' unemployed from the struggling labourer, advocacy of compulsion and punitive discipline seemed more just than general

[53] John Shepherd, *George Lansbury: At the Heart of Old Labour* (Oxford, 2004), 61; see Lansbury, cited in Bob Holman, *Good Old George: The Life of George Lansbury: Best-loved Leader of the Labour Part*y (Oxford, 1990), 62.
[54] Holman, *Good Old George*, 45.
[55] George Lansbury, *My Life* (London, 1928), 133.
[56] Field, *Working Men's Bodies*, 13.
[57] See Charles Booth (ed.), *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 17 vols (London, 1902-3), I, 1-19; Bentham, *Works*, I, 528; Semple, *Bentham's Prison*, 25-6; Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (eds), *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*, 2nd edn (New Delhi, 2011), 341; D. J. Manning, *The Mind of Jeremy Bentham* (London, 1968), 88; Radzinowicz and Hood, *History of English Criminal Law*, I, 382-3.

remedial measures, and thus discredited the 'undeserving poor' and their threat to the 'legitimate' claims of the 'deserving'. The Fabian Society, of which Sidney Webb was a founding member, outlined a four-tiered classification of the unemployed in 1904, but it is clear that already in 1890 Sidney was proposing penal measures to extirpate indolence.[58] He claimed that with 'chronic cases of sturdy vagrancy, idle mendacity and incorrigible laziness', there need be no 'fear that the Democracy will deal tenderly' with them.[59] Under the system of compulsion proposed by the Fabian and SDF member Annie Besant, many of the unemployed would have no choice in these matters, being forcibly 'drafted' from town to country.[60] Clearly there were, in the years prior to the turn of the century, socialists who deemed penal measures against the unemployed as acceptable and ultimately profitable.

Such views were not typical of socialist circles, however. The first leader of the Labour Party, Keir Hardie, for example, frequently called for land colonisation as a means for addressing unemployment, without any emphasis on punitive practices.[61] Lansbury soon backtracked on his earlier view and, following his first visit to the Poplar workhouse, wrote of his fear of the 'mental and moral degradation' inflicted by punitive practices.[62] At conferences on cooperatives and colonies, too, punitive approaches to unemployment and pauperism were condemned. At Holborn Town Hall in October 1894, it was accepted that some of the unemployed overseen in cooperative experiments were 'irreclaimable', but reformatory practices of a punitive nature were not the solution for these—mostly liberal—conference

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[58] Fabian Society, *Memorandum on Methods of Assisting the Unemployed and the Power of Local Authorities in Respect Thereto* (Fabian Society, 1904).
[59] Sidney Webb, 'The Reform of the Poor Law', *Contemporary Review*, 58 (1890), 115; idem, *Socialism: True and False*, Fabian Tract, 51 (London, 1894), 4.
[60] Annie Besant, 'Industry Under Socialism', in G. B. Shaw (ed.), *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (London, 1889), 139-40.
[61] Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A study in English social policy, 1886-1914* (Oxford, 1972), 90-5.
[62] Lansbury, *My Life*, 136.

attendees.[63] Addressing the issue of punishment most frequently—and in relation to criminality and not merely pauperism—was the SDF.[64] The death penalty was intermittently debated in the columns of *Justice*, the organ of the Federation, and both H. M. Hyndman, its founder, and Belfort Bax, a socialist lawyer, made their overall opposition to such action clear, though not without contradictions. In an article entitled 'Indecent Strangulation' in 1884, the SDF claimed that the 'disgusting conduct of the hangman … will without doubt strengthen the hands of those who wish to do away with capital punishment'. 'We are beginning to understand', it stated, 'that death is scarcely a deterrent from crime and that society has little right to revenge'.[65]

Bax denounced capital punishment as 'vile and demoralising',[66] claiming that: 'To ninety-nine Socialists out of a hundred, capital punishment … the systematic butchery of criminals with the forms of law, is a base, brutal, and cowardly crime'. Echoing Marx, Bax wrote of the 'often-proved fact that the death-penalty is not effective in reducing murder or any other crime in amount'. 'This is noteworthy', he suggested, 'although for our part we should object to the death-penalty equally even … [if] it were of proved efficacy, just as we should object [to] torture'. And continuing his abolitionist agitation in the Socialist League's journal, *The Commonweal*, Bax claimed that: 'On all the above ground, Socialists claim the … absolute elimination of the death-penalty from criminal law'.[67] Yet in the same piece, he conceded that it 'must not be supposed that we condemn as an article of faith the taking of life under any circumstances. There are some cases—such as revolutionary crises—where, as a special

[63] Walter Hazell, 'A Training Farm for the Unemployed', in J. A. Hobson (ed.), *Co-operative Upon the Land (And Other Papers). The Report of A Conference Upon 'Land, Co-operation and the Unemployed'. Held at Holborn Town Hall in October, 1894* (London, 1895), 59-62. See also H. V. Mills, 'The Colony at Starnthwaite', *Co-operative Upon the Land*, 64; Bolton Smart, 'The Unemployed Experience at Abbey Mills', *Co-operative Upon the Land*, 73; J. A. Hobson, *Co-operative Upon the Land*, 80-2.
[64] Ironically, Lansbury left the SDF citing the incompatibility of his pacifism and Hyndman's 'insistence on the necessity for a violent revolution'. Holman, *Good Old George*, 32.
[65] *Justice: Organ of the Social Democracy*, 15 March 1884.
[66] Ibid, 7 December 1901.
[67] Ibid, 2 November 1901; *The Commonweal: The Official Journal of the Socialist League*, 19 June 1886.

measure, summary executions might be necessary. Its special loathsomeness consists in its being part of a system permanently established'.[68] The justification of the death penalty, then, depended for Bax upon whether a socialist or bourgeois regime implemented it and the cause in which it was invoked. 'What we condemn is the peculiar amalgam of the bourgeois character, which, while fattening itself on social conditions which produce criminals—capital and otherwise—derives a sentimental satisfaction from the hanging of them. This to our thinking is most offensive'.[69] Bax's socialism had 'no objection on principle to the employment of physical force', provided it was 'a last resort, organised and sanctioned by a body representing the interests of the class fighting for freedom'.[70]

Notwithstanding Bax's acceptance of capital punishment in certain instances, his writing is suggestive of the broader feeling among the left on the causes of crime. It was, for the most part, a product of the social and economic relations under capitalist production. Hyndman, for instance, stated explicitly in a debate with Charles Bradlaugh that crime and misery spawn directly from poverty.[71] Through *Justice* the SDF also attacked advocacy of penal servitude, claiming that it 'is clear that the governing class regards punishment not only as a deterrent, but as an act of revenge, but to Socialists it will seem hard that Society, *having engendered criminals*, should torture them for being what they are'.[72] Thus, as Marx had argued in his 1853 *Tribune* article, systemic alteration was required for the SDF and the Socialist League. This was especially so given that, according to the SDF, the treatment of Britain's paupers was far worse than that of the criminal, such that it appeared the 'Local Government Board … desires either to drive the unemployed workers into … crime, or to reduce their numbers by a

[68] *The Commonweal*, 19 June 1886.
[69] Ibid.
[70] *Justice*, 8 March 1884.
[71] Ibid, 19 April 1884.
[72] Ibid, 20 September, 1884; 25 February 1899, emphasis added. All emphasis is original, unless otherwise stated.

deliberately designed system of starvation; and 'crimes of brutal violence' were treated with 'shameful leniency' as compared those affecting property.[73] Such statements are indicative of the tensions engendered by penal evolution in Britain at this time, between eradicating harsh punitive measures and lengthy prison sentences, yet ensuring the deserving poor were not treated on the same level as, or worse than, convicted criminals.

Crime under socialism

Despite these mixed understandings of criminality, there is little expression in contemporary party literature on the issue of what might happen to crime under a future socialism. This might be attributed to a lack of specificity often seen as characteristic of socialist and Marxist analyses, but there is no doubt that contemporary socialists were searching for visions of future society, in both reality and fiction.[74] As Paul Ward notes, early British socialists often sought new ways of life that drew upon fierce patriotism and romantic views of an Arcadian past.[75] Hyndman's *England for All*, for instance, looked back to the golden era of fifteenth-century England (a sentiment echoed by Keir Hardie), while Blatchford's *Sorcery Shop* and his extraordinarily popular *Merrie England* sought to restore past English glories.[76] For these figures, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had been a golden age 'because the people were organically attached to the soil', uncorrupted by the pollution of capitalism.[77] William Morris'

[73] *Justice*, 3 May 1884; 21 June; 30 August.
[74] See Marx, 'Letter to Ruge', in Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (eds), *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society* (New York, 1967), 212. For a drawing together of Marx's projections see Bertell Ollman, *Social and Sexual Revolution: Essays on Marx and Reich* (London, 1979), 48-98.
[75] Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881-1924* (Woodbridge, 1998), 21-2. For example, see the labour song 'England, arise!', in Edward Carpenter (ed.), *Chants of Labour: A Song Book of the People* (London, 1888), 18-19; William Morris, *News from Nowhere; Or an Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*, (London, 1970 [1890]); Robert Blatchford, *The Sorcery Shop: An Impossible Dream* (London, 1907); Roger John Smith, *The Gothic bequest: medieval institutions in British thought, 1688-1863* (Cambridge, 1987), 171.
[76] H. M. Hyndman, *England for all: the textbook of democracy* (Brighton, 1973); see also Hyndman, *The Historical Basis of Socialism in England* (London, 1883), 2; Keir Hardie, *Young Men in a Hurry* (London, n.d.), 5; idem, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), ch. v; Blatchford, *Merrie England* (London, 1894); idem, *Sorcery Shop*; idem, *Britain for the British* (London, 1902), 1.
[77] Ward, *Red Flag*, 24; Clare V. J. Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside: The Politics of Rural Britain 1918-1939* (Oxford, 2007), 8; 25.

love for medievalism and the art and aesthetics of labour inspired his work in the Arts and Craft movement, and his pastoral, utopian vision in *News from Nowhere* (1890) offered a direct and deliberate contrast to the urban, industrial and technology-based ideals offered by the American Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888).[78] The Socialist League, of which Morris was a leading member, retained links with the Garden City movement and its objective of a 'more harmonious combination of city and country',[79] and other socialists like John Glasier were influenced by radical and Liberal land agitation as espoused by The Land Nationalisation Society and the English Land Restoration League.[80] These connections may well explain early socialists' support for the land and labour colonies that had gone before them; the imagined idyll of migrating back to the land, of restoring artful craft to labour, and of cultivating 'real' skill in conjunction with the native soil afforded such labour colonies a certain utopian aesthetic.[81]

William Morris in particular, described by E. P. Thompson as the 'pioneer of constructive thought as to the organisation of the social life within Communist society', provided the most explicit discussion as to the condition of crime under socialism.[82] In his novel, *News from Nowhere*, protagonist William Guest discusses the organisation of political life in a future communist England. Discovering that there exist no prisons and no civil or criminal law, Guest is informed that, with 'private property being abolished, all the laws and the legal "crimes" which it had manufactured of course came to an end. Thou shalt not steal, had to be translated into, Thou shalt work in order to live happily'. All prior injustices are attributed in this utopia

[78] *The Commonweal*, 21 June 1889; see also Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (New York, 1996 [1888]).
[79] Ward, *Red Flag*, 30-3; Raymond Unwin, *Nothing gained by overcrowding: how the type of garden city development may benefit both owner and occupier* (London, 1912), 1; Morris, cited in E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York, 1976), 652.
[80] Ward, *Red Flag*, 25; 46.
[81] Thompson, *William Morris*, 654; Morris, cited in Thompson, *William Morris*, 649; 652.
[82] Ibid, 682.

to the poverty of past capitalist eras and the 'systematised robbery' by the rich of the poor. Now, following radical change in relationships to the mode of production, 'there is no rich class to breed enemies against the state by means of the injustice of the state', and there are no criminal classes.[83]

As to violent crimes, by 'far the greater part of these in past days were the result of the laws of private property, which forbade the satisfaction of their natural desires to all but a privileged few … All *that* cause of violent crime is gone'. Socialised property is also responsible for the disappearance of violent crimes caused by the 'artificial perversion of the sexual passions', as well as those caused by the 'family tyranny'.[84] Morris' communists are wont to stress, however, that while crime has all but vanished, '[h]ot blood will err sometimes' and a 'man may strike another'. But punishment—in past times an 'expression of fear' on the part of the rulers of society, 'dwelling like an armed bandit in a hostile country'—is an unnecessary evil, perpetuating the cycle of humiliation, injury and further crime. It can only ever be an additional damage to the 'serious injury of a man momentarily overcome by wrath or folly'. When such crimes do occur, the transgressor is expected, and indeed expects of himself, to make 'atonement' for his behaviour.[85] What is more, given there is 'no punishment to evade, no law to triumph over, remorse will certainly follow transgression', a fact expounded by the absence of recidivism in Morris' future socialist society.[86] 'In law, whether it be criminal or civil, execution always follows judgement, and some one must suffer'. In a society of equals, crime becomes a mere 'spasmodic disease, which requires no body of criminal law to deal with it'.[87]

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[83] Morris, *News from Nowhere*, 68.
[84] Ibid, 68-9.
[85] Ibid, 69-70. This is especially so, Guest is told, 'when we *know* that if he had been maimed, he would, when in cold blood and able to weigh all the circumstances, have forgiven his maimer'.
[86] Ibid, 70. See the homicide detailed by Walter Allen later in the narrative, 142-5.
[87] Ibid, 71.

Morris' outlook supposes that radical changes in relationships to the mode of production and the abolition of private property would entail a natural decrease in the occurrence of criminal activity, such that law would become superfluous. His society also rejects punishment in all forms as ineffective and redundant; in its place a deep-rooted ethical code prevails among its citizenry. Indeed, Morris' faith in the power of the community appears even greater than Owen's. Without law or even a 'code of public opinion' (as per Owen), Morris relies on community spirit—similar to a republican sense of 'civic virtue'—as a means through which members perceive themselves as having an obligation to their fellow citizens as participants in a cooperative enterprise. Small communities were imperative to both Morris and Owen, since the efficacy of public opinion and civic virtue are compromised when diffused over larger spaces and populations.[88] As Thompson notes, however, Morris' fictional narrative is, of course, as its title suggests, not to be interpreted literally. It should not, furthermore, be taken as indicative of all socialist prophesising.[89]

Aside from fictional utopias, though, the condition of crime under socialism in this period was seldom discussed. Prior to 1900, the most overt non-fictional assessment was published in the newspaper for which Morris was the chief writer, *The Commonweal*. In an article published four years prior to *News from Nowhere*, the parallels between the views of the author, Henry Glasse, and those presented in Morris' novel are striking, and are indicative of Morris' influence over the League. In his article, 'Crime under Socialism', Glasse dismissed the idea that socialism is fit only for the virtuous. Noting that enquirers were often particularly interested in what would happen to criminals under socialism, he proposed that:

[88] Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship and Republican Liberalism* (Oxford, 1997), 79; Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, 113; Harris, 'Utopian Elements in Marx's Thought', 97-8.
[89] Thompson, *William Morris*, 696.

> With the exception of certain crimes against Nature, such as drunkenness and the indulgence of other perverted appetites, the victims of which may rightly be restrained but are none the less worthy of commiseration as sufferers from our execrable social system … all that is now recognised as crime may be classified under one or other of two headings: 1st, offences against property, and 2nd, offences against the person. Crimes of the first category will cease with the abolition of monopoly in the means of subsistence and enjoyment, for no sane person can have any motive for depriving another of that which he needs when he himself possesses an equal share of all things requisite, particularly when his own claim is entirely dependent upon his recognition of the equal claim of everybody else to an undisturbed participation in all available advantages.[90]

Like Morris, Glasse assumed that by changing relationships to the mode of production and redistributing property equitably, motivations (at least of the 'sane') for committing crime against property would be diminished, if not eradicated. Of crimes against the person, Glasse continued:

> by far the greater number are committed in the execution of attacks against the property, and are therefore referable to that baleful usurpation. The desperate deeds perpetrated by highwaymen, burglars, garotters, and poachers, belong to this category, and must cease with the removal of their cause. It may safely be said that crimes of violence which are totally unconnected with attacks upon or disputes concerning property do not contribute more than a very small contingent to this second class of crimes, and will be greatly and progressively diminished by the ever-deepening sentiment of fraternal

[90] *The Commonweal*, 19 June 1886.

> solidarity inculcated and fostered by every detail of the relationship between men in the future associations of equals, which will, moreover, be far more competent to protect their members than is our present miscalled 'society', which, torn of conflicting interests, is compelled to act through the agency of an administration organised mainly in order to support the existing unjust social system. The justest judge will be an untramelled public conscience, and a free people the best police.[91]

Undoubtedly there is an assumption in Glasse's writing that a reduction in crime is a natural outcome of a socialistic order, and the parallel remains with Marx's dictum that 'the judgement of the criminal upon himself', or some prevailing ethical obligation, would be the greatest penance under socialism, making punishment and law extraneous. Oppressive forms of social control are unnecessary for inhibiting criminality in these visions, and, contrary to the classical theories of criminality of the time, criminality is certainly not held to be an intrinsic constituent of human nature. These early socialists were closer, in fact, to being prescient advocates of the 'neoclassical' and 'positivist' ideas on crime that were in their infancy at the end of the nineteenth century; most likely due to the Socialist League's Marxism, they identified with the deterministic assumption that the causes of crime were to be found in the environment of exploitative capitalist social relations.[92] Through their vision of a society without prisons or punishment, their imaginations in some instances ran further even than progressive neoclassical thinkers would in the early twentieth century.

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Neoclassical approaches to crime, in opposition to earlier 'classical' approaches, identified *degrees* of criminal responsibility and asserted that, since free will is not absolute, 'then providing for extenuating circumstances is understandable. Following this line of reasoning, criminal codes began to specify ranges of punishments'. In conjunction with burgeoning positivist approaches, neoclassicism emphasised the assumption that the causes of crime were found within the environment, shifting the focus from crime to criminals, and focusing attention on the need for the reform, rehabilitation and individualised treatments of offenders. Stephen E. Brown, Finn-Aage Esbensen and Gilbert Geis, *Criminology: Explaining Crime and its Context* (Ohio, 1991), 229-31.

The Boer War and concentration camps

In lieu of such discussion, contemporary events help to shed light on the views of the more moderate left. In particular, the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was the period of most intense turmoil during these years. For the purposes of this analysis, the war is significant for two reasons. First, it provided early glimpses of leftist sentiment towards punitive concentration camps; and second, it reveals, on the part of a number of socialists, a burgeoning intolerance of 'backwards' communities and a concern for the politics of 'national efficiency'—both issues that would take on greater significance in the years ahead for socialists and the Labour Party. Great atrocities were committed during the war, with estimates of between 20,000 and 40,000 deaths of both Boer and coloured men, women and children.[93] A large majority of these occurred in the concentration camps established by the British in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State; and the war itself fed into contemporary debates on the role and style of British imperialism and empire, as well as conscription and eventually the role and morality of concentration camps. Among the left, this was an opportunity to voice opposition to, complicity in, or ambivalence towards issues of compulsion, incarceration and punishment.

For the ILP and the SDF, the war was the terrible result of Joseph Chamberlain's aggressive politics.[94] The ILP claimed Britain's imperial mission to be unjust and immoral, calling at their 1901 Annual Conference for an end to the 'crime against humanity.[95] The SDF, too,

[93] Iain R. Smith and Andreas Stucki, 'The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps (1868–1902)', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39, 3 (2011), 425; Marouf Hasian Jr., 'The "hysterical" Emily Hobhouse and Boer War concentration camp controversy', *Western Journal of Communication*, 62, 2 (2003), 146; Ward, *Red Flag*, 59.

[94] Philip P. Poirier, *The Advent of the Labour Party* (London, 1958), 100.

[95] ILP Pamphlet, 3, *Imperialism: Its Meaning and Tendency* (London, 1900), 5; Philip Snowden, *Parliamentary Election Pamphlet, 1900, County Borough of Blackburn* (Blackburn, 1900), 4; Edward Carpenter, Labour Press Leaflet, *Boer and Britain* (Manchester, 1900), 2; idem, 'Empire in India and Elsewhere', *Humane Review*, October (1900): 1; Ward, *Red Flag*, 66; *Independent Labour Party Annual Conference Report* (ILPACR), *1901*, 4. Interestingly, Keir Hardie appealed to the pastoral nature of Boer society, seeing within it a future England

condemned the Jameson Raid of 1896, which intended to stir an uprising of British workers against the Transvaal, as 'criminal'.[96] In contrast, Robert Blatchford took a pro-war stance, and was unafraid to publish the anti-Jewish and anti-immigrant expressions of his *Clarion* writers.[97] The *Clarion* carried Blatchford's vehement opposition to pro-Boer socialists, and he questioned their insistence that 'the present is a war of aggression … and that it is therefore immoral, and should be condemned'.[98] Claiming, in spite of his military experience, that he detested all war and 'its blood-stained panoply', it nevertheless 'behoves us all in the present crisis to support the prosecution of this war to a finish'.[99] Blatchford's inability to understand the 'self-righteous prigs' of the socialist movement in their support of the Boers, and his intransigence in supporting England through war sat comfortably with his lack of compassion for the war losses.[100] Without directly commenting on the concentration camps, Blatchford's views were clear: 'I was not even thinking of the culpable ignorance and recklessness of the "strongest government of modern times"; for, although they have wasted hundreds of lives and millions of pounds by their gross incompetence, there is nothing disgraceful in that'.[101]

In its own considerations of the British concentration camps, the ILP was less forthright than it had been over the war, but still opposed them. Indeed, the actions (or 'hysterics') of the peace campaigner, Emily Hobhouse, in raising awareness of the atrocities committed by the British were far more vocal than any leftist sentiment.[102] The ILP nevertheless endorsed the 1901 sermon on the camps of Charles F. Aked, Minister of Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, which

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and claiming the Boers' 'methods of production' as 'much nearer our ideal' than capitalist Britain. *Labour Leader*, 6 January 1900.

[96] Martin Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation* (Keele, 1994), 158.

[97] *Clarion*, 9 January 1892; 12 October 1895; 22 June 1906.

[98] *Clarion*, 10 February 1900.

[99] Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman* (London, 1951), 9; *Clarion*, 6 January 1900.

[100] *Clarion*, 13 January 1900; Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914* (New York, 1968), 217-18.

[101] *Clarion*, 9 February 1900.

[102] See Hasian Jr., 'The "hysterical" Emily Hobhouse'.

argued that 'Great Britain is engaged in an infamous crime'. Aked rebuked the flurry of calls by British newspapers to put all Boer prisoners to death, even following surrender. 'My charge', he stated, 'is against the men in high places who sat at home, and commanded a resort to barbarism. The Concentration Camps have been Murder Camps', culminating in at least 8,000 deaths.[103] Ramsay MacDonald, ILPer and future Labour Prime Minister, compiled a detailed report on the camps following a trip to South Africa in 1902. His account, *What I Saw in South Africa*, was replete with remorse and compunction. The 'camps were a profound mistake' with 'appalling mortality', he claimed, policies of herding Boers into camps along with common criminals causing resentment that will endure generations.[104] The penal nature of the camps offended MacDonald, and he whitewashed suggestions of humane intentions in their establishment.[105]

The ILP echoed MacDonald's sentiment at its 1902 conference, condemning the 'shame' of the concentration camps, 'women … punished with starvation … disease and death', and the 'shooting of prisoners'.[106] The SDF's agitation over the camps was more ambivalent. According to Crick, the Federation had begun to play down the war, and 'when the concentration camps … and … loss of life amongst Boer women and children gave anti-war critics a new credibility, it [the SDF] can be held in part responsible for the failure of the anti-war movement'.[107] In particular, Hyndman's alacrity in returning to the party's core aim of making socialists seemed to many 'an abdication of responsibility'.[108] The Fabians, meanwhile, after fumbling over whether even to declare an official stance, failed to comment on the

[103] Charles F. Aked, *The Annual Sermon: Our Cowardly War* (Liverpool, 1902), 12-14.
[104] James Ramsay MacDonald, *What I Saw in South Africa: September and October 1902* (London, 1902), 24; 35.
[105] Ibid, 24. For an account of camp conditions and prisoner treatment see Frederic Mackarness, *Lifting the Veil in Cape Colony: Being Some Further Facts about Martial Law* (London, 1902).
[106] *ILPACR, 1902*, 11.
[107] Crick, *History of the SDF*, 163.
[108] Ibid, 164.

concentration camps.[109] But their attitudes towards the Boers with regards to 'progress' and 'backwardness' reveal the kernels of what was to become a broader base of support for the eugenics movement in the first decade of the twentieth century. As Poirier states, 'not over a handful of Fabians would have advocated force as a solution in South Africa, but once hostilities had begun most of them … felt that final settlement could come only through the arbitrament of arms and that the British Empire had to win'.[110] Beatrice Webb discerned the Fabian division: George Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas and Fred Whelen all pro-war, MacDonald and Sydney Olivier against.[111] Sidney Webb, while loathing the war and avoiding as much as possible the subject, felt that once begun it must end in British victory.[112]

Exposing themselves to accusations of imperialism and expansionism, the Webbs and Shaw's 'infatuation with measurement by results … left little room for small independent states of backward farmers' and antediluvian pretences about peoples' just struggles for freedom.[113] According to Kevin Morgan, it was during the war that Sidney Webb succumbed to Shaw's proclivity for Fabian elitism and 'emphatically reaffirmed his own deep affinities with social imperialism and the politics of "national efficiency"'.[114] Certainly, the sentiment underlying Elizabeth Van Heyningen's recent suggestion that the British Colonial Office used the Boer concentration camps as a 'tool for modernisation' in South Africa is not altogether incongruous

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[109] Poirier, *Advent of the Labour Party*, 104. Such hesitancy was also displayed in the Fabians' failure to comment on 'the Jewish question', though Beatrice Webb (at this time, Potter) had in earlier years taken a jaundiced view by drawing on fashionable hostile stereotypes in her disparaging references to Jews as 'deficient in … human sentiment' and 'social morality'. See Edmund Silberner, 'British Socialism and the Jews', *Historia Judaica*, XIV (1952), 35; Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (London, 1979), 21-3; Beatrice Potter, 'The Jewish Community', in Booth (ed.), *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 2 vols (London, 1889), I, 564-90; idem, 'East Labour London', *Nineteenth Century*, XXIV (1888), 176-7.
[110] Poirier, *Advent of the Labour Party*, 104.
[111] Beatrice Webb, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, 4 vols, (eds), Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie (London, 1982-5), II, 164-6, entries 10 October and 30 October 1899.
[112] Ibid, 165-6.
[113] Poirier, *Advent of the Labour Party*, 100; 106-7; Sidney Webb, 'Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch', *Nineteenth Century* (September 1901), 371. See also J. Ernest Jones, *The Case for Progressive Imperialism*, 2nd edn (London, 1902) and Ward, *Red Flag*, 62-4.
[114] Kevin Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 28.

with the tone of Shaw's *Fabianism and the Empire*, which advocated that a Great Power govern in the interests of civilisation as a whole.[115] The contrast between the Fabians' authoritarian, top-down bureaucratic stance and the ILP's international fraternity and evangelical roots was clear. But it is important to note that episodic racialism and anti-Semitism was confined neither to Fabian elitism nor Blatchford's loosely-edited *Clarion*.[116] The SDF struggled to develop an 'adequate analysis' of imperialism, and Hyndman's Anglo-centric socialism, as wed to his nationalistic tendencies and jingoism, often led to overt anti-German and anti-Semitic outbursts against alleged Jewish warmongers.[117] Broad opposition to Hyndman's views did appear rapidly, with SDFers Bax, Harry Quelch, Theodore Rothstein and Herbert Burrows all maintaining ardent anti-imperialist, anti-racist and anti-war stances,[118] but even the ILP and the TUC were not immune to exploiting racial prejudices in pursuit of their goals.[119]

Throughout this period, the views of the labour movement on criminality were varied. Issues of crime and punishment rarely topped the socialist agenda, and the specific matter of prison reform was seldom engaged with directly. But through other means, in particular utopian fiction, socialist attitudes were articulated. Punitive measures for dealing with the linked social issues of unemployment, poverty and crime found expression within pockets of the Fabian Society and among other socialists, but a popular view emerged via the Socialist League that assumed criminal activity's cessation under conditions of equality in terms of the relations to

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[115] Elizabeth Van Heyningen, 'A tool for modernisation? The Boer concentration camps of the South African War, 1900-1902', *South African Journal of Science*, 106, 5/6 (2010), 1-10; G. B. Shaw (ed.), *Fabianism and the Empire* (London, 1900), 23-4.
[116] Thompson, *Robert Blatchford*, 168.
[117] Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, 69; Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (ed.), Henry Pelling (London, 1961), 128; Crick, *History of the SDF*, 158-9. As Crick states, however, sole 'concentration on Hyndman distorts the picture considerably', 158; *Justice*, 1 July 1899; 30 September 1899; 7 October 1899.
[118] Crick, *History of the SDF*, 158-62; 166; *Justice*, 28 October 1899; Bill Baker, 'The Social Democratic Federation and the Boer War', *Our History*, 59 (1974), 3; Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, 69.
[119] See Crick, *History of the SDF*, 159; 169; Holmes, *Anti-Semitism*, 67-8; 70; *Labour Leader*, 23 December 1899; John S. Galbraith, 'The Pamphlet Campaign on the Boer War', *Journal of Modern History*, XXIV (1952), 119; Jonathan Schneer, *Ben Tillett* (London, 1982), 60; Ward, *Red Flag*, 67; J. A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Effects* (London, 1900), 226.

production. Each of English patriotism, opposition and ambivalence was expressed throughout the Boer War; and an expression of Fabian intolerance of backward communities in South Africa and elsewhere was, in the next few years, to feed in to contemporary debates and ideas around the eugenics movement and its relation to the issues of crime and punishment.

1.4 Criminality and 'Scientific' Socialist Theorising, 1900-1914

Following Edward Carpenter's newspaper articles on vivisection in the 1890s, the Humanitarian League prepared a written protest against the practice. Almost all leading socialists signed; Hyndman and the Webbs—'believers in science and progress'—were the conspicuous absentees.[120] Biological science and Darwinism had a significant influence on a number of leading socialists in Britain, from Edward Aveling, the Russian émigré Peter Kropotkin and Herbert Spencer, to Annie Besant and Ramsay MacDonald.[121] For some, often especially those associated with the Fabian Society, this translated into support for the eugenics movement and its proclaimed objective of improving the composition of society through genetic intervention. The effect of this upon attitudes towards criminality could be strong.

According to John Carey, the prevailing intellectual concern of the early twentieth century was the issue of overpopulation and the dangerous underclass.[122] Drawing on a Nietzschean revulsion of humanity's excess and the threat of mass culture, contemporary intellectuals—including many in the labour movement—often espoused extreme and contradictory views in their bids to harmonize Nietzsche's doctrines with socialism.[123] In England, Carey attributes the '"Revolt of the Masses" which these cultural celebrities deplored' to the educational

[120] Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 112-13.
[121] David Stack, *The First Darwinian Left: Socialism and Darwinism, 1859-1914* (Cheltenham, 2003).
[122] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London, 1992), 1-22.
[123] Ibid, 4.

legislation of the nineteenth century, 'which introduced universal elementary education'. Rising literacy levels were key.[124] Fearful of redundancy as a result of the development of the mass production of the printed text, the reactions to mass culture among leading figures of all ilks was to influence later leftist opinion. Nietzsche, for instance, declared in *The Will to Power* (1901) that a 'declaration of war on the masses by higher men is needed'; the 'majority of men have no right to existence, but are a misfortune to higher men'.[125] T. S. Eliot, the anglicised essayist and social critic, later took up a Nietzschean opposition to mass education, while the poet and playwright D. H. Lawrence added his own preferred methods of industrial murder to cleanse the land.[126] The Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, also took great interest in the works of Nietzsche and the Eugenics Education Society in the hope that their work might avert 'the danger of degeneration inherent in the mass'.[127]

Within the British labour movement, George Bernard Shaw, the famous Irish playwright, socialist and Fabian, was sympathetic to the Eugenics Society, asserting that 'the majority of men at present in Europe have no business to be alive', and 'if we desire a certain type of civilization and culture, we must exterminate the sort of people who do not fit into it'.[128] The novelist H. G. Wells, another early member of the Fabian Society, was also anxious of overcrowding and urged increased means of population control.[129] Describing the unemployed residuum of the early twentieth century as the 'vicious, helpless and pauper masses', their culling would, Wells claimed, be vindicated in order for the progression of the human race.[130]

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[124] Ibid, 5.
[125] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (trans.), W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (London, 1968), 77; 476.
[126] See T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York, 1968 [1949]), 185; Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 12-15; D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (Harmondsworth, 1971 [1921-22]).
[127] Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 13.
[128] Shaw, 'Preface to On the Rocks', 354.
[129] Wells, *Modern Utopia*, 124.
[130] Wells, Anticipations, 81-2.

Carey notes that Shaw was in essence a 'sentimental pseudo-Nietzschean who disparaged the democratic electorate', but only really ascribed to a 'woolly-headed socialist mysticism of a perfectly harmless variety'.[131] Wells, however, committed far more attention to the details of genocide in both his fiction and his social forecasts. His interest in social investigations of the kind produced by Booth and Seebohm Rowntree led to his advocacy of liberal social welfare reforms like the minimum wage and a 'state guaranteed "Minimum Standard of Life"'; but his yearning for 'better births and a better result from the births we get' encouraged his more extreme ideas.[132] As a pioneer of science fiction, with his often-prescient accounts of the future, his was the next utopia, based on medico-scientific and technological development.

Crime, for Wells, was a central problem in the search for an idealised society, a theme running through all his work, but one that was never dealt with convincingly, despite his despotic fancies. In 1905, for instance, in *A Modern Utopia*, he asked:

> what Utopia will do with its congenital invalids, its idiots and madmen, its drunkards and men of vicious mind, its cruel and furtive souls, its stupid people … the man who is 'poor' all round, the … spiritless … incompetent low-grade man, who on earth … tramps the streets under the banner of the unemployed.

His answer was that the superior 'species must be engaged in eliminating them', using nature 'to crush them'.[133] Prior to *A Modern Utopia*, however, in 1901 Wells had already recommended clinical killings of degenerates and criminals in his *Anticipations*. In this Wellsian future, 'good scientifically caused pain' and death by opiates is accompanied by

[131] Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 62-3.
[132] Richard Toye, 'H. G. Wells and the New Liberalism', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19, 2 (2008), 162-3; Wells, *Mankind in the Making*, 32.
[133] Wells, *Modern Utopia*, 95-6.

restrictions on breeding eligibility that are based on finance, intelligence and education levels.[134] Two years later, in *Mankind in the Making* (1903), criminals are, somewhat leniently for Wells, sent to labour colonies to live in isolation.[135] And in 1905, in *A Modern Utopia*, a certain synthesis is provided: juveniles, first time offenders and 'defectives' are given remedial treatment, but there are 'no lethal chambers'. 'Even for murder', Wells stated, 'Utopia will not, I think, kill. I doubt even if there will be jails'.[136] Thus, while Wells' sanguinary approaches appeared to have abated somewhat, crime clearly existed in his utopia, and the vernacular of eugenics is conspicuous. In contrast to Morris' *News from Nowhere*, crime is punished through the employment of punitive measures.

Carey notes that Wells' long-standing aversion to the violation of nature was influential in conditioning his urge to destruction.[137] Yet, other socialists, William Morris in particular, also professed a 'love of the earth' without resorting to genocidal designs.[138] Despite the gulf that appears to separate their utopias, though, both Wells and Morris—and Owen before them—were ultimately wrestling with the same issue of the relationship of the individual to the state under socialism. Unlike Morris, however, the liberalism that informed Wells' socialism had, at its core, the scepticism expressed by Mill and Godwin as to the power of the community to suppress individualism. As a consequence, in his numerous idealisations Wells envisaged far greater responsibilities for the juridical roles of the law, police and punishment in controlling and reducing the capacity for crime under his own style of socialism.

[134] Wells, *Anticipations*, 300-1; Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 125.
[135] Wells, *Mankind in the Making*, 37; 63-4; 68-72; 99-101.
[136] Wells, *Modern Utopia*, 100.
[137] Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 118; 132.
[138] Anna Vaninskaya, 'Janus-Faced Fictions: Socialism as Utopia and Dystopia in William Morris and George Orwell', *Utopian Studies*, 14, 2 (2003), 84; Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought*, 32-6.

The majority of Wells' ideas on crime were, of course, represented through his science fiction, but the fact that biological theories of criminality were emerging and growing in influence in continental Europe at this time should not be overlooked. Stemming from the work of the Italian criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, who 'popularised the notion of genetically determined, distinct criminal types', it was argued via 'a crude physiognomy … that criminals were atavistic beings … throwbacks to an earlier stage of human evolution' and 'physically different from non-criminals'.[139] According to David Garland, Lombroso's 'identification of human types' led him and others to 'isolate such types as the genius, the insane, epileptoid and the criminal, and to subject them to scientific scrutiny and categorisation'. Lombroso's 'differentiation of the "criminal type"', however, 'chimed with deep-rooted cultural prejudice'.[140]

It is often argued that criminology in Britain did not develop out of the Lombrosian tradition; but the late nineteenth century witnessed a rapid growth in the popularity of the Italian School's 'scientific' criminology through Lombroso, Enrico Ferri and Raffaelo Garofalo, and this in turn had a distinct influence on the criminological programme.[141] Quite possibly, it had a great influence, too, on those intellectuals not well-versed in theories of criminality, yet interested in—and susceptible to the hyperbolic headlines of—the progression of the natural sciences. For socialists who were receptive to the influence of the human and natural sciences upon their political identity (and who were not, as seen above, necessarily exempt from their own cultural and racial prejudices), it is not inconceivable that the idea of a 'distinct criminal type' informed their understandings of crime and of the relationship between individuals and the state under socialism. Even Ramsay MacDonald, 'from his earliest writings … self-consciously developed

[139] Tierney, *Criminology*, 51.
[140] David Garland, 'British Criminology Before 1935', in Paul Rock (ed.), *A History of British Criminology* (Oxford, 1988), 2.
[141] Garland, 'British Criminology Before 1935', 2; Tierney, *Criminology*, 51.

a "biological view" of socialism', and remained a long-time friend of Ferri.[142] In an examination of the approaches of British socialists to crime and punishment in this period up to the First World War, such context is vital.

Eugenics, Blatchford and Carpenter

Between 1900 and 1914, penal politics appeared to merit more discussion than during the years surrounding the Boer War. This should not, perhaps, be a surprise, given that the years 1907-1914 heralded a particularly progressive period of penal reform in Britain. Evidence of reform following the Gladstone Committee of 1895 had been conspicuously lacking for almost a decade, despite the intentions of Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, the new Chairman of the Prison Commission. Ruggles-Brise was unwilling to abolish the practice of solitary confinement for convicts upon their incarceration, but the passing of a number of legislative acts heralded progress in other areas. The Probation of Offenders Act (1907), the Prevention of Crime Act (1908), the Children Act (1908), the Mental Deficiency Act (1913) and the Criminal Justice Administration Act (1914) all acted as 'constructive remedial measures', collectively introducing borstal training for young offenders, prohibiting capital punishment for persons under sixteen, extending the range of mitigating factors taken into consideration in sentencing, and allowing further time for paying fines, thus reducing overall levels of imprisonment.[143]

Despite these reforms, however, there remained tension and confusion within the labour movement as to how crime was, or should be, understood. Many perceived crime to be a socially constructed phenomenon—a consequence of the capitalist environment—while others

[142] Stack, *The First Darwinian Left*, 54; see also MacDonald, *Socialism and Society*, and MacDonald's 'Preface' in Enrico Ferri, *Socialism and Positive Science (Darwin-Spencer-Marx)* (London, 1905).
[143] Leon Radzinowicz, 'Introduction', in Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, VI; John Laurence Pritchard, *A History of Capital Punishment with Special Reference to Capital Punishment in Great Britain* (London, n.d.), 17-18.

took biology and heredity as the root causes of criminality. The ILP, for example, remained intent on branding poverty a 'social disease', with hunger driving men to crime.[144] In the *Socialist Review* it claimed that criminals were undoubtedly made by political conditions,[145] and in its first hint on the effects of socialism upon crime, the party forecasted that under socialism corruption would vanish, the 'corrupting influence of competition' and the 'dread of poverty which haunts us all' removed under nationalisation schemes.[146] The formation of the Labour Party in 1906 added another voice to the debate, and it too contended that 'the Unemployed man … adds to our slum population, increases the number of our paupers and criminals, and … puts upon the State an enormous burden of poverty and degeneration'.[147]

Other ILP literature, however, suggested less sociologically based outlooks. Addressing the 'problem of alien immigration', for instance, the party claimed in *The Foreigner in England* that the 'criminal is a being apart, and … can be dealt with in a very simple and effective way'.[148] Just which way remained undisclosed, but the article was infused with the 'scientific' vernacular of eugenics—of 'different' and 'allied races', of 'prejudices to physical … progress', and of keeping 'virile by the steady stream of alien blood'.[149] Sidney Webb, writing in *The Crusade* on 'Eugenics and the Minority Report', stated that 'we cannot afford to leave unchecked the influences that produce slums and disease, physical starvation, mental perversion, demoralisation of character and actual crime'. It was, he suggested, their 'business

[144] ILP, *General Election Manifesto 1910* (London, 1909); *Special Election Leaflet issued by the Independent Labour Party, and addressed to the Working-class Electors of Great Britain* (London, 1906).
[145] *The Socialist Review: A Monthly Review of Modern Thought*, III, March-August 1909 (London, 1909), 71.
[146] ILP, *Corruption Under Socialism?* ILP Leaflet, 3 (London, 1908).
[147] Labour Party, *The Labour Party and Unemployment*. Labour Party Leaflet, 35 (London, 1908), 3.
[148] Henry Snell, *The Foreigner in England: An Examination of the Problem of Alien Immigration* (Keighley, 1904), 5.
[149] Ibid.

as eugenists deliberately to manipulate the environment so that the survivors may be of the type which we regard as the highest'; the eugenist 'must interfere, interfere, interfere'.[150]

At the beginning of the century the Eugenics Society sought to reach out to the labour movement in order to impress upon them the compatibility of socialism and eugenic ideas.[151] With speeches to Fabians in Glasgow, Beatrice Webb lecturing on the subject, and pro-eugenics articles appearing in the *Socialist Review*, the issue was certainly prominent. Indeed, the Eugenics Society had a great influence upon both the government of the day and parliament; many MPs, including Arthur Henderson, Fred Jowett and Will Crooks in the labour movement, supported the society's Feebleminded Control Bill of 1911, which sought the segregation of those considered 'mentally defective', and which had many of its demands met in the passing of the subsequent Mental Deficiency Act (1913).[152] This advocacy was occasionally tempered, particularly by those who saw the objectives of eugenics as being met at the cost of 'a lower sum of human happiness and a less moral and equitable social state',[153] but the notion that 'environmentalism was not enough for race improvement' persisted.[154] For Shaw, who engaged enthusiastically with developments in eugenics, every step towards the paradise of socialism rightly took 'industry more and more out of the hands of brutes and dullards';[155] and for Wells, society's 'criminals and degenerates' remained 'hopeless' and irreclaimable.[156]

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[150] *The Crusade Against Destitution: Being the Organ of the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution* 1, 5, June 1910; see also Sidney Webb, 'Breeding and National Standards', in Frank Bealey (ed.), *The Social and Political Thought of the British Labour Party* (London, 1970), 71-2.
[151] David Redvaldsen, 'The Eugenics Society's Outreach to the Labour Movement in Britain, 1907-1945', *Labour History Review*, 78, 3 (2013), 302; see also *Eugenics Review* 2, 2 (1910).
[152] Redvaldsen, 'The Eugenics Society's Outreach', 307; Jayne Woodhouse, 'Eugenics and the feeble-minded: the Parliamentary debates of 1912-14', *History of Education*, 11, 2 (1982), 127-37. See also the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded* (London, 1904).
[153] *Socialist Review*, X, September-February 1912-1913 (Manchester, 1913), 17; see also *The New Statesman. Blue Book Supplement*, 21 June 1913; *New Statesman. Special Supplement on Motherhood and the State*, 16 May 1914.
[154] Redvaldsen, 'The Eugenics Society's Outreach', 307.
[155] G. B. Shaw, *Socialism and Superior Brains*. Fabian Socialist Series, 8 (London, 1910), 43-4.
[156] *Daily Herald*, 3 July 1914.

Outside conversations on eugenics, the works of two socialists in particular in this period dominated dialogues on crime among the more moderate left. Robert Blatchford and Edward Carpenter analysed crime in terms less utopian than Morris or Wells, but equally radical and, for the most part, forward-looking. Blatchford, for instance, took a special interest in the subject, and in 1906 published *Not Guilty: A Defence of the Bottom Dog*. At pains to show that crime was the outcome of both environmental and hereditary factors, *Not Guilty* was a clear attack on the 'barbarism' of British penal codes and an attempt to spread the messages of tolerance, rehabilitation and the urgency of penal reform. Criminals, for Blatchford, were never to be blamed nor punished for criminal acts, because, subjected to the forces of heredity and environment, the matter was out of their hands.[157]

The influence of William Morris can be seen in a number of aspects of Blatchford's approach to criminality. Like Morris, Blatchford penned a fictional utopia, *The Sorcery Shop: An Impossible Dream* (1907), in which the socialisation of production and property eradicates crime, and prisons and police are abolished.[158] And in *Not Guilty*, Blatchford retained the ideas that social service, or a sense of civic virtue, should govern the moral condition of society, and that citizens' contributions to the community should be both a pleasure and a counterweight to criminality.[159] Blatchford's understanding of heredity, though, also saw him describe crime in more 'Wellsian' terms. He considered 'atavism' the source of much criminal activity, and understood the 'born criminal' as having not 'the kind of brain' required for certain acts. Perhaps implied by the 'Impossible' subtitle of his utopia, Blatchford appears to have leaped from a society unencumbered by police and prisons in *The Sorcery Shop*, to the more pragmatic reality of *Not Guilty*, in which rapid systems of detection were required in order to prevent

[157] Robert Blatchford, *Not Guilty: A Defence of the Bottom Dog* (London, 1906), 8-9; 20; 83-5; 209; Thompson, *Robert Blatchford*, 176.
[158] Blatchford, *Sorcery Shop*, xiv; 47; 83; 131-2; 188-9.
[159] Blatchford, *Not Guilty*, 48; 224; idem, *Sorcery Shop*, 52; 61; 123.

criminal activity.[160] Indeed, Laurence Thompson, Blatchford's biographer, describes *The Sorcery Shop* as the 'dying voice of William Morris in a world thrilling to the new voice of H. G. Wells'. Placed between these two figures, Blatchford's advocacy of neoclassical ideas of reformation, rehabilitation and reduced prison sentences saw him adopt a more practical and progressive, though at times confused, programme on criminality.[161]

Carpenter was also drawn to varieties of utopianism through his idea of 'larger Socialism', but sought to deal with the question of crime more consistently than perhaps any other figure in the early British labour movement.[162] Reasonably a result of the social alienation that he was exposed to for his open homosexuality—the 'crushing legislation and moral opprobrium' of the time—Carpenter was a 'Victorian gentleman in revolt', and held some particularly interesting views on crime that were based upon his own experiences.[163] In 1897, Carpenter had published *Civilization, its Cause and Cure*, which contained an essay on the 'The Defence of Criminals: a criticism of morality'. The essay was a bold endeavour to liberate homosexuals from contemporary laws and the public excoriation they faced, and hinted at a perceived ideal state that was rooted in the past (an approach, as noted above, also invoked by other early socialists). Emphasising the role of the exploitative capitalist environment in criminality, Carpenter suggested that the criminal was often 'that person who is protesting against the too exclusive domination of [the] passing ideal of private wealth'. It was 'the so-called criminals', he claimed, who, through their 'protests' actually kept 'open the possibility of a return' to a

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[160] Blatchford, *Not Guilty*, 30; 77; 140; 224.
[161] Thompson, *Robert Blatchford*, 184; Blatchford, *Not Guilty*, 77; 223.
[162] Keith Nield, 'Edward Carpenter: The Uses of Utopia', in Tony Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism* (London, 1990), 26; Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 115; 159-60; 199; Edward Carpenter, *Prisons, Police and Punishment: An Inquiry into the Causes and Treatment of Crime and Criminals* (London, 1905), 98-105.
[163] Nield, 'Edward Carpenter', 17-18; Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter*, 197-8; Emile Delavenay, *D. H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter: A Study in Edwardian Transition* (London, 1971), 5; 78.

fuller, truer democracy.[164] As Delavenay notes, Carpenter understood that '[t]o break the law' was 'in fact to prevent public opinion from ossifying, and society from dying. "The Outcast of one age is the Hero of another"'.[165]

Carpenter was thus another socialist who ultimately saw the route to crime's eradication through the establishment of the people upon the land, the socialisation of property, and a 'return to nature and [the] community of human life'.[166] In his fullest study of criminality, entitled *Prisons, Police and Punishment* (1905), he built on this notion and produced a nuanced analysis that identified a central, ubiquitous problem: crime was merely a construction of protean norms—'one law-making body repeals the crimes that another creates'.[167] But in his yearning for a moral, agrarian utopia, Carpenter was not so naïve as to neglect existing problems, and became one of the early forerunners in the cause of prison and penal reform (the likes of whom would not emerge again until after the First World War). Contemporary British prisons, he claimed, were worse than even their notorious Russian counterparts, and criminal institutions required carefully moulding in the direction of reform and rehabilitation. The most important step in preventing crime, he suggested, was to ensure that social conditions were greatly improved and privation rapidly diminished.[168]

The most significant aspect of Carpenter's study was perhaps his early advocacy of neoclassical measures in dealing with crime. Like Mill, Godwin and Wells before him, Carpenter drew on the liberalist ideas that informed his socialism to inveigh against the

[164] Edward Carpenter, *Civilization, its Cause and Cure, and other essays* (London, 1889), 152-3; Delavenay, *D. H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter*, 78; 82. See Delavenay for a good overview of Carpenter's writings on crime.
[165] Delavenay, *D. H. Lawrence and Edward Carpenter*, 78.
[166] Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation: its Cause and Cure*, 5th edn (London, 1897), 35; 226; idem, *Prisons*, 47; 78.
[167] Carpenter, *Prisons*, 28.
[168] Ibid, 4-5; 64.

suppression of individualism inherent in Britain's penal system. Society, he claimed, had the right to 'social defence', but the continued application of classical ideas of harsh, uniform punishments and solitude was both wrong and detrimental to the prisoner. Instead, criminals were to be looked upon as individuals with distinct characteristics, each therefore requiring unique measures for their rehabilitation. In much the same vein, Carpenter struck a percipient (and, for the labour movement, original) chord with neoclassicism in his robust promotion of the use of 'indeterminate' sentences. Fixed sentences failed, he claimed, and in their place he championed the radical idea that, like hospital patients who are released only when restored to health, prisoners be released only when they are reformed, be that in a week, a year or a decade.[169]

1.5 Practical Penal Politics, 1900-1914

In spite of the left's inchoate and rather disconnected understanding of criminality, the movement attempted to apply itself more vigorously to the issue in the years up to the First World War. Indeed, sections of the left were espousing change with much greater frequency early in the century. Already in 1905, for instance, the ILP recorded its 'abhorrence of the condition of our Penal system', declaring the 'retention of the death penalty' a 'standing disgrace to a civilised country', and considering 'the publicity given to murder trials and executions by a degenerate and capitalist press … a fruitful source of crime among people of weak intellect and the criminal classes'.[170] The *Labour Leader* in 1906 called the 'manufacture of incipient criminals' an 'abominable evil of the present social system', suggesting that under a 'system which afforded a proper training and a proper environment', 'reformatories and industrial schools would be absolutely unnecessary'.[171] Some Fabians, too, thought Britain was

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[169] Ibid, 12; 17; 25; 105-13. See also McConville, *English Local Prisons*, 563-4.
[170] *ILPACR, 1905*, 9.
[171] *Labour Leader*, 19 October 1906.

ripe for a new penal system. 'The path of penal reform is seen to lie', they suggested, 'towards the prevention of crime by removing causes' and through 'humane curative and educational treatment'.[172] Old ideas of penal discipline to 'crush and break' were here considered anachronistic, with such punishments causing recidivism and hardened criminals.[173]

Throughout this period, the 'failure' and 'brutality' of the Poor Law was alleged by the left to lead directly to thieving and murder, and by 1907 the ILP was increasingly questioning the 'liberal' need for some unemployed margin.[174] Relief schemes were sought to improve the situation, and national and local public works were championed.[175] Low-cost labour colonies, often administered by reform associations, were a popular potential remedy among the left, and their appearance across the country was for a time commonplace.[176] The SDF even encouraged 'the unemployed to "take back some of that which had been taken from them"' in a series of radical land grabs.[177] But these camps, or 'semi-penal establishments'—including those established with the help of Lansbury at Laindon and Hollesley Bay—were repeatedly shut down by authorities and land owners, lacking sufficient financial support.[178]

Questions also remained as to whether these colonies would simply become a haven for criminals, with answers sought from examples abroad, and from German colonies in

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[172] Helen Blagg and Charlotte Wilson, The Fabian Women's Group, *Women and Prisons*. Fabian Tract, 163 (London, 1912), 4-5.
[173] Ibid, 5; 12.
[174] C. A. Glyde, *A Peep Behind the Scenes on a Board of Guardians. The brutality of the Poor-Law System*. Pamphlets for the People, 4 (Keighley, 1904), 7; Gavan T. Duffy, *Capitalism in Parliament. The Crimes of a Session*. Tracts for the Times, 8 (London, 1907), 4.
[175] See Percy Alden (ed.), *Guildhall Conference. February 27th and 28th, 1903. The Problem of the Unemployed* (London, 1903); Hardie, *The Unemployed Problem with Some Suggestions for Solving it* (London, 1904), 3; 14-16; *ILPACR, 1905*.
[176] See for instance Scottish Labour Colony Association Ltd., *Annual Report, 1902*; *Annual Report, 1903*; *Annual Report, 1904*; *Labour Leader*, 20 July 1906; 27 July; 3 August; 10 August; 17 August; 24 August.
[177] Crick, *History of the SDF*, 177-8.
[178] *Labour Leader*, 27 July 1906; 10 August 1906; 17 August; Holman, *Good Old George*, 48-9; The National Committee to Promote the Break-up of the Poor Law, *How the Minority Report Deals with Unemployment* (London, 1909), 6.

particular.[179] Punitive measures in camps during this period were rarely employed, and through the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws both Lansbury and Sidney Webb admitted that there remained insufficient evidence on which to 'speak positively as to the actual percentage of those thus benefited'.[180] Nevertheless, Webb remained eager to promote colonies, and was especially pleased by the Minority Report's consideration of detention colonies in order to reduce pressure on the nation's jails. In 1910 plans for colonies in Scotland, Ireland and England were already being drawn up.[181] Still, Webb maintained his advocacy of punitive treatment, if in a manner less explicit than in earlier years: 'I would not abrogate the penal principle … But I would not rely upon compulsion to any great degree'.[182] Lansbury, conversely, had revived his earlier opinion, considering punitive measures to be redundant.[183]

The debate over the death penalty also continued through the years until 1914. Increasingly, the Humanitarian League and their executive committee, upon which sat certain members of the left— including for a time, Shaw—expressed their desire to reform Britain's penal system and abolish capital punishment. In tones similar to earlier reformers, they claimed that while death used to be the 'panacea for crime', its deterrent effect had never been proven.[184] The ILP's theoretical journal, the *Socialist Review*, concurred, and in 1910 remained intent on attributing crime to the failures of Britain's social system. Quoting the French criminologist Lacassagne, it stated that 'every society had the criminals it deserved'. Amid this reformism, however, it is interesting to note the view that 'possibly some way of putting men to death

[179] Holman, *Good Old George*, 50-1; P. Ryan, 'Poplarism, 1894-1930', in Pat Thane (ed.), *The Origins of British Social Policy* (London, 1978), 68; Alden, *Guildhall Conference*, 8; Field, *Working Men's Bodies*, 16.
[180] *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress*, Part VI (London, 1909), 428.
[181] *The Crusade*, 1, 10 November 1910.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Holman, *Good Old George*, 31; Jonathan Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), 25-6; *Justice*, 11 May 1895; Lansbury, *The Principles of the English Poor Law: Being a paper read at the Central Poor Law Conference held at the Guildhall 1897* (London, 1897), 6; 11.
[184] Hypatia B. Bonner, *The Death Penalty*. Humanitarian League, Criminal Law and Prison Reform Department (London, 1903), 2.

should be legalised', if 'only for the benefit of those suffering from torturing and incurable diseases, whether physical or mental'.[185]

There was consideration, too, among the left, of the fact that there existed still far harsher punishments for offences against property than against the person, but brief debates in parliament on these issues had no practical outcomes.[186] Overall, it appears in this period that the theorising of socialists like Carpenter and Blatchford, who were far more engaged with issues of criminality and prison reform, failed to have a concerted effect on the organised labour movement. Increasingly through the first decade of the twentieth century, organisations within the labour movement appeared to espouse vague ideas of reform as advocated by the likes of Carpenter, and a great many figures involved did indeed agree with the principles behind the cause. But broader confusion and variation among the left as to their own understandings of criminality meant that any campaign for reform was often restricted to irregular attacks on the penal system and nebulous commentaries on the need for systemic reorganisation. Superficially, a progressive narrative of reform was established through these years as the labour movement began to identify itself as the 'progressive' force in British politics. But competing talk of punishment and heredity—and even the successes of the Eugenics Society—showed that the roots of a true commitment to reform remained embryonic.[187]

International condemnation

Despite a relative lack of domestic action on penal politics in the pre-war years, the British labour movement did emerge as something of an organ for international surveillance on issues of criminality and the tyrannies that were often associated with it. Facilitated by the feelings of

[185] *Socialist Review*, VI, September-February (London, 1911), 365-7; 374-5.
[186] Bonner, *Death Penalty*, 5.
[187] See Carl Heath, *Some Notes on the Punishment of Death* (London, 1908), 1.

international solidarity and fraternity that pervaded socialist movements around the world through the Second International, and most often in reaction to those regimes perceived as antipathetic to socialism, contemporary leftist publications in Britain were brimming with denunciations of foreign criminal activity. Russian tsarism, in particular, was a popular target of socialist agitation. With a government that 'allows prisoners to be outraged, tortured, and afterwards shot', wrote the ILP, the Russian state, under the rule of Nicholas II, 'proves itself unfit to be regarded as anything but brutal and barbaric'.[188] Details of prison conditions in Russia and their overpopulation were emphatically protested by the left, and the King's reception of, and visit to, the Tsar in 1909 prompted great outrage and demonstrations.[189] In a powerful speech in the Commons, Arthur Henderson quoted extensively from the writings of the Russian exile, Petr Kropotkin, using damning figures on overcrowding, suicides, death sentences, executions and torture in Russian prisons to question the morality of both the Russian and the British governments.[190] Further protests continued at the punishments inflicted upon the Russian people, from exile and forced labour to hangings, executions and the shooting of strikers. The *Labour Leader* even had a regular column dedicated to coverage of the 'Red Ruin in Russia', condemning the abhorrent punitive treatment of prisoners and the slaughter of minorities in Russia, that great 'Chamber of Horrors'.[191]

The left's condemnation of tyranny abroad was not restricted to Russia, though. Following the Boer War, the issue of indentured Chinese labour in South Africa was equated by the ILP to modern slavery. (Perhaps tellingly, however, it also was felt that such labour was 'inimical to

[188] ILP, Leith Branch, *An Appeal for Justice Against Liberal Truckling to Russian Despotism* (Leith, 1905).
[189] ILP, *By Order of the Czar: Imprisonment & Death* (London, 1909); H. R. Stockman, *The Case for the Labour Party. A Handbook of Facts & Figures for Workers* (London, 1909), 112; Labour Party Flyer, *Mass Meeting in Trafalgar Square*, 25 July 1909.
[190] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 22 July 1909, vol. 8, cc641-6.
[191] For example, *Labour Leader*, 29 June 1906; 6 July 1906; 13 July 1906. See also *Socialist Review*, I, March-August (London, 1908), 335-7; 340-2.

the … interests of the Empire'.)[192] Shootings and massacres in South Africa were castigated;[193] western Australians' use of neck-chains, brutality and rape upon aborigine populations;[194] decapitations in the Congo and shootings in Trinidad;[195] atrocities in Bulgaria—all countries were 'tarred with the same brush'.[196] Socialism, it was held, remained the 'hope of the victims of … tyranny'.[197] In Britain itself, the ongoing issue of child labour continued to attract the attention of the left, despite limited signs of progress,[198] and the inordinate number of workplace deaths was also a concern.[199] More directly related to penal politics, particular attention was given to cases of alleged torture in Scottish prisons, while chilling descriptions of forcible feeding and injections in Perth in 1914 mirrored the details often given of 'foreign tyranny'; universal suffrage was professed to be the solution for preventing the torture of women in prison.[200] For the *Daily Herald*, these issues and the recidivism that persisted throughout society remained a damning 'indictment of our … civilisation'.[201]

Up until the outbreak of the First World War, attitudes towards and engagement with the issue of penal politics remained varied among the left. As the first decade of the twentieth century progressed, penal reform certainly began to gain prominence, and a significant proportion of the labour movement supported, through media statements and individual actions, if not official party policy, the proposed turn away from punitive measures towards reformation and

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[192] ILP Flyer, Stanley Branch (1904); *ILPACR, 1904* (London, 1904), 5.
[193] Clarence Henry Norman, *Empire and Murder* (London, 1906), 6; C. L. Everard, *Botha and Labour: The Iron Heel at Work* (London, 1914), 4-6.
[194] Norman, *Empire and Murder*, 8-10.
[195] *The Case Against the Congo Free State* (London, 1903), 20-1; 27; Henry N. Hall, *Is This Imperialism? The Value of Human Life in the West Indies* (Trinidad, 1903).
[196] *Socialist Review*, XI March-September (Manchester, 1913), 505-13.
[197] Norman, *Empire and Murder*, 16.
[198] *ILPACR, 1899*, 2; *ILPACR, 1900*, 8; *ILPACR, 1901*, 5; *ILPACR, 1902*, 11; *ILPACR, 1903*, 14; *Manchester Evening News*, 20 April 1914.
[199] For example see Labour Party, *The Killed and Wounded in our Industrial War*. Labour Party Leaflet, 54 (London, 1910).
[200] *Daily Herald*, 10 July 1914; 13 July.
[201] Ibid, 11 July 1914.

rehabilitation. Abolition of the death penalty, too, continued to be a point of agitation, while crime and tyranny abroad occupied a large proportion of the left's intercourse with issues of criminality. There nevertheless remained those in the movement who viewed crime and punishment in less sociological terms. Amid an environment in which Lombroso's biological school of criminology was gaining popularity, and with influential figures like Shaw and Wells unafraid to express their more extreme views on the problems of overpopulation and crime, it is perhaps unsurprising that groups like the Fabians were attracted to the policies of eugenics and sought, through their bureaucratic, hierarchical style, to hold on to more punitive means of punishment.

1.6 Conclusion

Without many concrete policy proposals, it is difficult to ascribe to the labour movement a particular approach to penal politics between 1880 and 1914. Indeed, little is currently known of the left's attitudes towards the issues of criminality and punishment in the period before the outbreak of war, the experiences of conscientious objectors and the subsequent LRD-instigated enquiry into English prisons in 1919. This chapter has sought to breach the gap that presently exists. Examining a variety of materials, events and socialist figures in the years leading up to the war, it has demonstrated that while at times the labour movement engaged directly with penal politics, it is possible to draw together a more accurate picture of the left's understandings by widening the scope of enquiry to issues pertaining more broadly to poverty, unemployment and compulsion. Whether those in the labour movement at the time acknowledged it or were even aware of it, the issues of criminality and penal politics played an important part in their political endeavours, reacting as they were to concerns over social justice, overpopulation, the inequities of industrial capitalism, unemployment, outbreaks of war and the influence of the

burgeoning fields of biological criminology and eugenics in pushing civilisation to the next stage of a progressive, scientific narrative.

Within the labour movement in general, punitive measures were considered antithetical to socialism. For much of the left, capital and corporal punishment had no deterrent effect, and failed to address the sociological problems that were considered to be at the root of criminal activity. Yet for other, less populous factions, utility could be found in the employment of punitive practices. On the whole, poverty, unemployment and crime were considered to go hand in hand, and although socialist theory on criminality was sparse, crime was most often attributed to the inequalities present in relations to the mode of production. As a result of these factors, and as this chapter has demonstrated, while a consensus could be found on the *need* for penal reform, no single dominant view of penal politics existed among socialist groups. A number of different approaches can be located, but a popular view emerged in the late nineteenth century in which many socialists expected crime to disappear, or at least be dramatically reduced, under the transition to a socialist order. Stemming from the utopian works of Robert Owen and William Morris, the teleological understanding, or even expectation, of crime and socialism that arose from this approach was, in all likelihood, a principal factor behind the absence of any sustained and detailed early socialist discussion on crime. Most significantly, the construction of this narrative often hampered the left's ability, and sometimes even their desire, to engage with the problem of criminality.

The chapter has also demonstrated how, in the years prior to the war, the labour movement's engagement with penal politics often took on an idealistic form, focusing to a much greater extent upon a grander aspirational objective that sought to imbue within society an established set of ethics for regulating human behaviour. Less emphasis, as a result, was given to the

practical aspects of prison or penal reform, or to the institutional aspects of prisons themselves. Exceptions to this did exist, as the works of figures like Robert Blatchford and Edward Carpenter did much to bring the conditions of prisons to a wider reading public, but in general an engagement with the practical aspects of penal politics was lacking. This was the result of a number of factors. First, it was in no small part a direct implication of the view among many in the movement that crime would naturally cede under a transition to socialism, and more often than not its effect was to make any attempt at serious engagement with the subject of reform increasingly difficult. With little experience of the prison regime or prison life, the labour movement was often left only with the notion that prison reform would be brought about without intervention, a by-product of a broader socialist transformation. Secondly, it was a result of the fact that, beside the appeals of a number of concerned socialists and a general commitment to social justice, there was no pressing or immediate personal connection between the movement and crime. A great majority of the time, party political issues superseded penal politics, though this would change following the outbreak of war.

Finally, the chapter has argued that, by examining the labour movement's approaches to crime and punishment, a more accurate assessment can be made of the type of socialism and society to which the left aspired. In the few suggestions for penal reform that were proposed during the period, understandings of the role and relationship of the individual to the state can be discerned, while the roles of community, public opinion, or more juridical tools in policing behaviour shed light on the size, organisation and functions of the idealistic socialist societies that were being theorised. While some in the movement advocated more punitive approaches to the prevention and treatment of crime, and as a result offered images of a 'perfected' society in which a bureaucratic, top-down and often autocratic state regulated society's behaviour, the prevailing, if not singly dominant, view that was established understood the need for any

organised force to police behaviour as being nullified by the development of a set of involuntary social habits that socialism would engender. From 1880 to 1914, this idealistic vision of socialism was propagated most frequently in relation to criminality, and while its potency was at times challenged and diminished somewhat in the latter years of this period, this approach to criminality demonstrates the persistence of a grand, idealistic socialism within the labour movement.

In the following chapter, the crucial role of the First World War in forcing the labour movement to engage with penal reform is examined, before the part of Soviet Russia, its appeal to the left and its own revolutionary socialist approach to crime is analysed. In doing so, the second of the principal themes of the thesis, the relationship between the Labour Party and the Soviet Union, is introduced. Tracing the development of the relationships of Labour and criminality and Labour and the USSR over the next four chapters, the thesis provides a nuanced reconsideration of British socialism over time from a hitherto unexplored perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

War, Conscientious Objection and Soviet Criminology

1914-1919

2.1 Introduction

Until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, many socialists in the labour movement appeared to have one overriding (though in many cases, perhaps, rather shallow) understanding of criminality, based upon the canon of early British socialist writing. The likes of Robert Owen, William Morris and Keir Hardie had championed the notion that crime would naturally diminish, if not disappear altogether, as a socialist society was created; and this idealistic and teleological narrative, within which the role of public opinion and ingrained social habits would phase out acts of crime, often enabled a representation of criminality to be constructed in which penal and prison reform would develop organically, with little individual interference, in parallel with the march towards socialism.

A significant implication of this assumption, however, was that the left's ideas on the practical side of criminality in the present were rather more amorphous. The labour movement did, at different times, express progressive sentiment by calling for reform and expressing condemnation of the contemporary system. Moreover, as noted in chapter one, a number of figures also expressed more extreme opinions, many of which drew on controversial ideas that were flourishing within the Eugenics Society. But aside from a small number of socialists like Carpenter and Blatchford, the movement as a whole failed to engage with the issue to any great extent or with much regularity, and subsequently offered few pragmatic solutions. An early mark of the left's idealism, their socialist fantasising was to an extent a burden upon their ability, or even at times their desire, to establish a coherent approach to the practical problems

of criminality in Britain. In later years, and particularly through the Labour Party's first period in government in 1924, this problem would continue to beleaguer them.

In two distinct ways, though, the First World War forced, for the first time, penal politics on to the labour movement's agenda for an extended period. Most significantly, the plight of conscientious objectors, over 1,000 of whom refused to be conscripted into assisting the war effort in any way on the grounds of religious, political or moral objection, forced the left to engage with the ways in which the war was, on a broad level, threatening the liberal values of the British state.[1] Secrecy and censorship increased, the Defence of the Realm Act (1914) granted the government wide-ranging powers to suppress anti-war activity, and party offices were regularly subjected to police raids.[2] More specifically, despite being provided with assurances of exemption upon the demonstration of 'genuine' objection, many objectors found themselves court-martialled and sentenced to lengthy and repeated periods of a loss of liberty. A great many conscientious objectors had political affiliations with either the Liberal Party or the labour movement; indeed, one of the most prominent anti-conscription organisations established during the war, the No-Conscription Fellowship, was founded by two ILP socialists, Fenner Brockway and Clifford Allen, and proclaimed as a central tenet of its resistance its 'Socialist opinion and international faith, which find their expression in the Brotherhood of Man'.[3] As objectors faced arrest, court-martial and lengthy prison sentences under harsh conditions—despite their 'genuine' objection—the issues of prison and penal reform became a significant aspect of the Labour Party's day-to-day politics.

[1] Stephen Deakin, 'Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Britain', in Andrea Ellner, Paul Robinson and David Whetham (eds), *When Soldiers Say No: Selective Conscientious Objection in the Modern Military* (Surrey, 2014), 117.
[2] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 26-7; 29; John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy. A History* (London, 2007), 30.
[3] Library of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain (LRSFB), London, TEMP MSS 122/1, *The Position of the Conscientious Objector* (n.d).

Protests were held regularly as the severity of prison conditions began to be exposed, and despite committing itself officially to a military victory, the Labour Party became increasingly concerned with prison reform throughout the war. The roles of conscientious objectors like Stephen Hobhouse, the Liberal Quaker, E. D. Morel, who would join the socialist ranks as a result of his experience in prison, and Fenner Brockway, who would, following his own time in prison, begin a lifetime's work through which he would become the labour movement's most important figure in penal politics, were the key to facilitating this concern. These objectors did a great deal to publicise prison conditions that were 'more like penalisation than exemption', and their subsequent movement across to, or continued work within, the labour movement provided a new empirical aspect to the movement's composition.[4]

Instead of merely theorising about the creation of idealistic prison systems as a by-product of the transition to socialism, or even about societies without the need for such systems, by the end of the war the Labour Party possessed the experience and personnel required to engage seriously, practically and robustly with the specific problems of the English penal system in a manner that the 'old guard' of Labour could not. The experience of conscientious objectors inside prisons thus provided the Labour Party with its most formative lesson in penal politics, and the generally well-educated status of many objectors ensured that the case against the current system—and in later years the case for reform—could be made powerfully and persuasively.[5] The increasing focus of the Labour Party towards the end of the war, moreover, on post-war reconstruction and the creation of an ideologically distinct party, provided figures like Brockway the opportunity to associate the issue of penal reform with the beginning of a new party era.

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[4] *The Tribunal*, 14 September 1916.
[5] See LRSFB, YM/MfS/Ser 7, G. Horwill, *Prisons and Prisoners* (n.d.).

In addition to the roles of conscientious objectors, the Russian revolutions of 1917 and their effect on the war were also to have, in time, a profound effect on the labour movement's attitudes to criminality and penal policy. Reactions in Britain in 1917 to news of foreign revolution were shaped predominantly by interpretations of its likely impact upon the outcome of the war. But the events in Russia, more often than not shrouded by slow and difficult international communications, would come to play a defining role in the British labour movement in the forthcoming decades. Following the brief rule of a provisional socialist government, the new ruling ideology from October 1917, Bolshevism—which would become Soviet Communism—sought to reshape the capitalist material it now handled into a greater, enlightened collective ideal. The ultimate goal of the Bolshevik experiment was the transformation of human nature in accordance with the principles of its guiding Marxist philosophy: a society freed from the yoke of class oppression, a centrally planned economy that facilitated equitable distribution, and workers' control of industry.[6] How the labour movement in Britain perceived the Bolshevik project would be an important and formative experience in the evolution of British socialism; and interest, admiration, condemnation and ambivalence were all evoked at different times towards the new Soviet Russia.[7]

Amid a cataclysm of revolution, global and civil war, foreign and domestic opposition and intervention, the Bolsheviks' attitudes and approaches to criminality would prove pivotal to their fundamental goal and its tangible manifestation. Civil strife and hardship saw crime rates, already increasing in the last years of the Tsar, rise dramatically as Russia was dragged to military defeat and collapse in 1916-17.[8] Following the October Revolution, crime rates soared

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[6] Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London, 1997), 830.
[7] See Davis, 'Left Out in the Cold', 71-87.
[8] Peter H. Juviler, 'Contradictions of Revolution: Juvenile Crime and Rehabilitation', in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1989), 262-3.

even higher,[9] and yet the Bolsheviks proclaimed boldly in 1917 that once capitalist 'social excess' had been curbed and removed, criminality would wither away until its total cessation under communism.[10] Crime, for Lenin, therefore performed the role of societal barometer. As Sharon Kowalsky notes, the study of criminality was of the utmost importance to burgeoning socialist regimes, since it 'provided a way for observers to evaluate the population's progress towards socialism and the distance remaining to the successful construction of a socialist society'. Analysis of crime allowed regimes 'to assess the … fundamental assumptions about the nature and structure of society' within the context of an understanding of contemporary acceptable social norms.[11] For the Bolshevik regime, the study of crime thus lent 'coherence and specificity' to their 'fears about the residual effects of capitalism on the mentality and morality of its citizens after 1917'.[12]

As the regime moved through distinct phases of civil war and war communism (1917-1922) and the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1921-28), its attitudes to crime largely fluctuated in line with these correlate political circumstances.[13] Most significant to this study, though, is the early implementation and codification of a progressive strand of penal reform that was to last, ostensibly, until the late 1920s. Although sceptical of Bolshevik methods and ideology, the labour movement was nevertheless drawn, to a greater or lesser extent in different factions, to the proclamations of 'socialism' in the Soviet state; and as the movement reacted to the revolutions in relation to the war, the claims of a new and superior style of Soviet democracy, and Labour's examinations of its own political identity and ideology, progressive Bolshevik

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[9] Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 55.

[10] Vladimir I. Lenin, 'Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia', in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th edn (Moskva, 1962), 33; 91.

[11] Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 8; 15.

[12] Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, 2008), 203.

[13] *Novaia ekonomicheskaia politika*.

approaches to crime were to form an attractive facet of the new regime. Indeed, as the labour movement began to visit Soviet Russia from 1919 in order to study its social institutions—and as the Soviets developed and intensified their revolutionary methods of cultural diplomacy and propaganda—Soviet prisons were to become, for a malleable Labour Party that still existed in many ways as a 'loose collection of socialist ideals', the most hailed aspect of Soviet socialism.[14]

This chapter builds on the analysis in chapter one by examining the development of the labour movement's understandings of, and approach to, the issues of crime and penal reform through the years of the First World War. It presents three main arguments. First, it contends that the role of conscientious objectors must be understood as the most significant influence upon the labour movement's understanding of penal politics; their function in bringing the issues of prison and penal reform to the attention of the left through their own objection, their highlighting of the illiberal British prison system, and their swelling of the Labour ranks from the Liberal Party cannot be ignored in attempts to examine the penal politics of Labour. Second, the chapter demonstrates that, despite the Labour Party's overall aversion to Bolshevism, the broader labour movement's reactions to, and misconceptions about, revolutionary Russia facilitated enough space within the political landscape for a permissible level of interest and enthusiasm to develop towards the Soviet state; just what Soviet Russia would become remained open to question. A set of specific historical circumstances that included a growing feeling of war-weariness on the left, a simultaneous period of ideological self-reflection for the Labour Party, and overwhelming difficulties in obtaining accurate and current information on Soviet Russia, meant that actions that might otherwise have turned even radical labour figures away were often obfuscated, allowing for enthusiasm and a sense of hope to become attached

[14] Davis, 'Labour's Political Thought', 64-85.

to the regime. In doing so, the 'socialist' exemplar of Russia became an object to look towards and study, in the hope of taking away ideas for Britain.

Finally, the chapter introduces the approach to crime taken by the Soviets in the years immediately following the revolution and through to the years of the NEP. In examining the role of the lesser known progressive penal policies of the Bolshevik regime and the changing rationales behind them, it is argued that, in line with the increasing interactions of the Soviets with foreigners throughout the 1920s, the penal system began to assume a significant position in the Soviet objective of transforming society. In light of the labour movement's reactions to the Russian revolutions and the Labour Party's own broadly related socialist endeavours, the party soon became a target of Soviet cultural-diplomacy, and the progressive arm of Soviet penal policy, hitherto in the shadow of the Bolsheviks' brutal authoritarianism, became indispensable in its advances.

In advancing these arguments, the broader contentions of the thesis also begin to be developed, as it is demonstrated how, over time, the idealism that had lain behind early socialist attitudes towards penal policy in Britain diminished, in favour of a more pragmatic engagement with penal reform. This idealism had left the labour movement with few practical ideas on the subject, a coherent penal philosophy remained elusive, and the events of the war highlighted the need for a broader reconsideration of the role and relationship of citizens to the state under socialism. The role of Russia is also introduced, and by examining the penal philosophy of the Soviets a base is established upon which the interactions between Labour and Soviet Russia can be re-evaluated in the following chapters from an original perspective.

2.2 War, Prison Camps and Conscientious Objectors, 1914-1917

Not unexpectedly, the outbreak of the First World War at first pushed the issue of penal reform to the margins. Over time, though, the impact of the war impelled much of the labour movement out of its inertia over criminality and prisons, and also brought a number of Liberals into the Labour Party as a result. In no small part, this was because the war saw the creation of a new camp system in Britain, as well as the establishment of a gruelling prison regime through which many members of the left and a number of Liberals were to pass. Unlike earlier colonies, these camps were designed to manage conscientious objectors and war resisters, and were neither proposed, supported, nor instigated by the left; instead, the Home Office controlled the influx of inmates. The reactions of the labour movement to the camps and to the treatment of conscientious objectors, who 'posed moral conundrums in a liberal society, especially for Liberal politicians', are critical in understanding the labour movement's attitudes to crime, punishment, compulsion and imprisonment.[15]

The war itself surprised the labour movement and put on hold many socialist objectives.[16] Its effect was also divisive, ending remaining hopes in Britain and internationally for socialist unity. 'The British labour movement as a whole barely spoke with a united … voice on international affairs', as the ILP's internationalist policy failed to win over the Labour Party before the war.[17] Trade unionists, too, remained apprehensive of ILP internationalism.[18] Yet as a member of the Second International, Labour was officially dedicated to opposing war and

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[15] Alyson Brown, *English Society and the Prison: Time, Culture and Politics in the Development of the Modern Prison, 1850-1920* (Woodbridge, 2003), 137; Chris Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour: The Post-War Coalition 1918-1922* (London, 1990), 9.
[16] *The Socialist Review: A Quarterly Review of Modern* Thought, XIII (London, 1916), 321; John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain, 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), 42.
[17] Horne, *Labour at War*, 30.
[18] Douglas J. Newton, *British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace, 1889-1914* (Oxford, 1985), 71; 333-4; 338; 340; 342.

ending 'hostilities by coordinated working class action'.[19] In its annual conferences in the years leading up to the war, the party called consistently for grassroots measures in its attempts to prevent war's outbreak,[20] but once war was officially declared, the vulnerability of the party to accusations of defeatism ensured that, in what Horne describes as the 'choice of 1914', Labour invoked the nation as the incarnation of the 'defence of democratic principles against the aggression of "militarist", "imperialist", and "autocratic" regimes'.[21]

The 'pragmatic and relatively undoctrinal nature of the pre-war British labour movement' was reflected in the oscillating patriotism, support and defeatism of party officialdom, itself often reacting to contemporary public opinion of the war.[22] Feelings of patriotism and war weariness fluctuated, and incidents of widespread venality suggest that while 'patriotism was the hegemonic ideology', it was 'not an all-binding social cement'.[23] According to Crick, the ILP assumed a more ambiguous position towards the war than is generally attributed to them.[24] MacDonald, Snowden and Hardie (before his death in 1915) criticised the 'division of Europe into armed camps' and advocated transparency in foreign policy,[25] but in its opposition to all forms of war, the organisation certainly took the strongest position against the conflict.[26] At 'national and local level', though, 'there were very few members … who adopted a clear-cut pacifist position', and 'Hardie's famous article, "We Must see the War Through, but denounce Secret Diplomacy"', for Crick 'best summed up their attitude'.[27] For Horne, a focus on the immorality of secret diplomacy in engendering war, the outrage of the Union of Democratic

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[19] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 36; John Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), 73.
[20] *Labour Party Annual Conference Report* (*LPACR*), *1912*, 101; *LPACR 1913*, 111; *LPACR,1914*, 121.
[21] Horne, *Labour at War*, 43; G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in Wartime* (London, 1915), 55-6; idem, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 21.
[22] Horne, *Labour at War*, 220.
[23] Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England, 1914-1918* (Leamington Spa, 1987), 190; 231-5.
[24] Crick, *History of the SDF*, 275.
[25] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 46-7.
[26] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 30; Pelling, *A Short History*, 36.
[27] Crick, *History of the SDF*, 275.

Control (UDC)—an anti-war propaganda body established by MacDonald and the four Liberals, Norman Angell, E. D. Morel, Charles Trevelyan and Arthur Ponsonby—and the Labour Party at the 'elitist and unacceptable system for managing the European balance of power', followed by the rapid switch from repudiation to acceptance of war, best demonstrated the disorientation of British labour leaders.[28]

As extended fighting quickly appeared inevitable, though, the Labour Party was soon supporting the war effort, with most Labourites taking a 'line similar to … Henderson and Sidney Webb, that the war was "just", but that the defence of working-class interests should not be forsaken'.[29] Under the administrations of both Asquith and Lloyd George, Labour Party politicians took up positions in the war coalition, and Labour officially agreed to join the government effort.[30] In protest, MacDonald resigned the leadership of the PLP (although even the UDC officially supported a victory in the war once fighting was underway).[31] The British Socialist Party (BSP), having formed out of the SDF and now with Hyndman as its representative, called, after some initial hesitation, for the war to be won, and Hyndman's attitude only hardened as war casualties increased.[32] Hyndman and his pro-war lobby were, however, expelled from the party in 1916, as a majority of members returned to an anti-war stance as espoused by the Zimmerwald Manifesto.[33] As in the Boer War, the Fabian Society

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[28] Horne, *Labour at War*, 42; 44; 220; Pelling, *A Short History*, 37.
[29] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 40
[30] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 31; Pelling, *A Short History*, 36. Under Asquith, George Henry Roberts, MP for Norwich, was appointed to the Junior Lords of the Treasury, William Brace, the member for South Glamorganshire, was made Secretary of State for the Home Department, and Arthur Henderson entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Education. In Lloyd George's first ministry (1916-18), Henderson sat in the five-person War Cabinet, John Hodge, MP for Manchester Gorton, was appointed Minister of Labour and George Barnes, MP for Glasgow Blackfriars and Hutchesontown, became Minister of Pensions. James Parker, member for Halifax, Stephen Walsh, member for Ince, George James Wardle, member for Stockport, William Brace, J. R Clynes and George Roberts were each appointed to junior posts.
[31] E. D. Morel, 'The Morrow of War', in Peter Stansky (ed.), *The Left and War: The British Labour Party and World War I* (New York, 1969), 88.
[32] Crick, *History of the SDF*, 270-1.
[33] Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain*, 74; Crick, *History of the SDF*, 269.

‘took no collective position, but was clearly split on the issue with most of the old guard taking a patriotic view’.[34] The Socialist Labour Party (SLP) asserted its neutrality, claiming to be ‘neither pro-German nor pro-British’, ‘but anti-capitalist and all that it stands for in every country of the world’.[35] The SLP was, however, an organisation of only eight branches.[36]

As a result, and even as it began to be made clear that military conscription would soon be required, there remained not an abundance of anti-war agitators; as Callaghan points out, almost three million men volunteered for the war in its first two years.[37] According to critics of the war, though, ‘Prussian’ methods adopted by British authorities in order to maintain the war effort backfired. There was, for instance, increased secrecy and censorship, the Defence of the Realm Act in 1914 suppressed anti-war activity, and party offices—especially those of the ‘anti-war’ ILP—were subjected to police raids. After several partial steps towards full compulsory military service and the increasing protestations of trades union opposition, the Military Service Act of 1916 introduced conscription.[38] Labour organisations had protested at each step on the road to compulsory service, but following the ‘lavish’ promises of Asquith as to the safeguarding of the position of married men and conscientious objectors, the Labour Party deftly pledged to oppose the institution of conscription in principle, while simultaneously indicating its willingness to cease agitation if the Military Service Act was passed through parliament.[39]

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[34] John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History* (London, 2007), 27.
[35] Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London, 1977), 125.
[36] Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain*, 74.
[37] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 26; Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, 29.
[38] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 26-7; 29; Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, 30.
[39] Pelling, *A Short History*, 38-9; Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 26-7.

In spite of official Labour Party support for a military victory, each of these factors gradually combined to engender opposition to the war, and a number of resistance groups began to emerge, including the Peace Society, the National Peace Council, the International Arbitration League and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The No-Conscription Fellowship, founded in late 1914 by the ILP socialists Fenner Brockway and Clifford Allen, took on perhaps the most prominent anti-war role, particularly in relation to the activities and arrests of conscientious objectors.[40] Despite the war's overshadowing of contemporary issues around penal reform, especially in its early stages, the actions and attitudes of these dissident figures on the left are critical in understanding the development of the Labour Party's ideas on criminality and penal reform as the war progressed.

The imprisonment of conscientious objectors was the principal cause for agitation. Under the Military Service Act, exemption from military conscription could be granted 'on grounds of conscience', and many objectors were 'highly educated, principled … actively religious or political'.[41] Altogether, 16,000 conscientious objectors 'refused to be conscripted. Many of these … worked in unarmed, uniform military support roles; others worked in important civilian jobs'. Moreover, many came from the labour movement and the younger strata of the Liberal Party. Over 1,000 objectors assumed the strongest stance, refusing to aid the war effort in any manner, and were court-martialled and jailed.[42] As Deakin notes, upon their incarceration it was protocol that imprisoned conscientious objectors, like regular prisoners under sentences of penal servitude, were subjected to hard labour following an initial 28-day

[40] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 29.
[41] Deakin, 'Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Britain', 116-17. See, for example, James Maxton's plea for exemption in *Forward*, 4 March 1916.
[42] Deakin, 'Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Britain', 117.

period of solitary confinement. During the course of the war, nine objectors died of illness in prison.[43]

The increase in the frequency of arrests of conscientious objectors and the suppression of free speech saw anger on the part of the left grow sharply.[44] Arrests of radical socialists on the Clyde for anti-war chanting, renditions of 'The Red Flag' and the obstruction of army recruitment became commonplace as practices of dissidence, and alleged 'kidnappings' by the police also increased. The internal deportations and arrests of leading anti-war agitators for oppositional campaigns, in particular James Maxton and David Kirkwood of the ILP, and James MacDougall and John Maclean of the BSP, fuelled hostility within the labour movement at the perceived diminution of British liberal democracy.[45] Summing up in the trial of Maclean, the Lord Justice-General stated that 'in normal times the expressions which the accused was stated to have used would not come under the cognisance of the criminal law, but we … [are] not living in normal times'.[46] In wartime, wrote *The Call*, the newspaper of the BSP, the working class 'now live under exceptional law, under the militarism this war was commenced in order to destroy', and under an utter 'loss of rights'.[47] Maclean, who would be sentenced to five years' penal servitude for sedition in 1918, was sentenced to three years' for his anti-war protests, to the labour movement's outrage.

[43] Ibid. See also John Rae, *Conscience and Politics* (London, 1970), 201, and Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London, 1942), 103.
[44] *The Tribunal*, 30 November 1916; Joseph Melling, 'Work, culture and politics on "Red Clydeside": the ILP during the First World War', in Alan McKinlay, and R. J. Morris (eds), *The ILP on Clydeside, 1893-1932: From Foundation to Disintegration* (Manchester, 1991), 110.
[45] *The Call*, 6 April 1916; 18 May 1916; William Kenefick, *Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, c.1872 to 1932* (Edinburgh, 2007), 151; Brian J. Ripley and John McHugh, *John Maclean* (Manchester, 1989), 86-8; William Knox, *James Maxton* (Manchester, 1987), 22-6.
[46] *The Call*, 20 April 1916.
[47] Ibid.

Even before the Military Service Act had become law, though, and before the intensity with which conscientious objectors were being arrested had amplified, the No-Conscription Fellowship was organising anti-war rallies in violation of the warnings of regional military authorities, and sought to publicise the rationale behind its refusal, through conscientious motives, to bear arms and inflict death.[48] The Fellowship's founders, Brockway and Allen, were soon court-martialled and imprisoned, and in response the Fellowship distributed over five million leaflets within two weeks to raise awareness of the increasingly challenging plight of objectors. Given the socialist politics of Brockway and Allen, their access to socialist organs like the *Labour Leader*, and the official expression by the Fellowship of its 'Socialist opinion and international faith, which find their expression in the Brotherhood of Man', the organisation made enormous strides in bringing the issue of conscientious objection and, by association, penal reform, to the attention of the wider socialist movement in Britain.[49] When Allen was arrested in 1917, he even wrote to colleagues from Maidstone prison that he was 'very glad to have been imprisoned with ordinary criminals', since he was always 'anxious … that the Socialists amongst the Conscientious Objectors should function very actively. To be here would compel life service from them'.[50]

As the harsh conditions of the camps and the prison regimes that objectors were exposed to became more widely known, associations between the plight of objectors and the issue of penal and prison reform grew stronger among socialists. The conditions of the camps, wrote those who had experienced them in *The Tribunal*, the organ of the No-Conscription Fellowship, were far more like 'penalisation than exemption'.[51] *The Call* claimed in 1917 that the 'position of

[48] LRSFB, TEMP MSS 122/1, 'Letter from A. Fenner Brockway', 4 November 1915; No-Conscription Fellowship, *Statement of Principles* (n.d.).
[49] LRSFB, TEMP MSS 122/1, No-Conscription Fellowship newsletter, 31 January 1916; No-Conscription Fellowship, *The Position of the Conscientious Objector* (n.d); Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 124-5.
[50] LRSFB, Arnold Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/7, 'Letter from Clifford Allen', 12 February 1917.
[51] *The Tribunal*, 14 September 1916.

the conscientious objectors still cries aloud for redress', and that anti-militarists were unjustly penalised given that they had a legal right to exemption.[52] The statement by Lord Kitchener, the secretary of State for War, that 'in future, "genuine conscientious objectors would find themselves under the civil power" was, the paper asserted, 'mere soothing syrup of the thinnest description'.[53] Writing in *The Tribunal*, C. H. Norman stated that the camps were in essence 'quasi-penal colon[ies]', with their contract of employment, or 'slavery agreement', forced upon objectors under conditions of duress, misrepresentation and the concealment of legal facts.[54] And in his own letters from both within and without prison, Brockway used similarly inflammatory language, proclaiming defiantly in January 1917 his intentional act of discourtesy by declining to make his application to the Central Tribunal as a result of the conditions of 'slavery' to which he would have to submit under Home Office regulations.[55]

On increasingly broad levels the left looked shamefully upon what it perceived to be the barbarities of the camps and the treatment of those imprisoned, as brutal methods were adopted by 'militarists' in their efforts to 'break in' conscientious objectors to military service. Some objectors, for instance, were 'sent to France [to fight] in spite of the storm of protest that arose when others were similarly treated' in earlier years. Others had served full sentences in prison, only to be tied up, 'put into a sack, and thrown into a pond eight times' upon their release.[56] '[E]xtreme punishment' and torture were condemned in a memorandum to the Prime Minister, while illegal brutalities against prisoners were investigated by the War Office.[57] Signatories to the memorandum to Lloyd George, which also objected strongly to the long-term

[52] *The Call: An Organ of International Socialism*, 4 October 1917.
[53] Ibid; 1 June 1916.
[54] *The Tribunal,* 28 September 1916.
[55] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/7, 'Brockway to Central Tribunal', 17 January 1917.
[56] *The Call*, 28 June 1917. See also National Council for Civil Liberties, *British Freedom, 1914-1917* (London, 1917), 7.
[57] *The Tribunal*, 12 October 1916; 5 October 1916.

imprisonment of objectors, included a number of high-profile figures from the labour movement, from Henderson, Edward Carpenter, George Bernard Shaw, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, to Robert Smillie, Ben Turner and Susan Lawrence, demonstrating that the issues of prisons and penality were forming an increasingly important part of these members' agenda.[58]

Protests against the long-term imprisonment of objectors were consistently being held, and anti-war organisations kept as accurate records as possible of the numbers imprisoned, released, ill or having died in prison at any one time.[59] Protests were also made as it became increasingly clear that the conditions under which conscientious objectors were labouring in prison were, given the prominence of repeated two-year sentences, far more severe than those for ordinary prisoners. The conditions of 'imprisonment with hard labour', a letter to Arnold Rowntree, Quaker and Liberal MP for York, claimed, were 'so rigorous that a two years' sentence is supposed to be the utmost that a strong man can stand, and the authorities made it the maximum'. For ordinary prisoners—not conscientious objectors—serving sentences over two years, the sentence had to be reduced in severity to one of penal servitude, 'the rules for which are so framed that … prisoners can stand it for 20 years without becoming mental and physical wrecks'.[60] That the conscientious objector, upon the expiry of his sentence, was so often 'returned to the Army under the terms of the Military Service Acts' and made 'again liable to a further term of imprisonment', meant that he had no hope of release and was condemned to imprisonment in perpetuity.[61] On top of this, *The CO's Hansard*, a weekly leaflet of the No-Conscription Fellowship that detailed every consideration of objectors in parliament,

[58] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/6, 'Memorial on the Conscientious Objectors in Prison' (1918).
[59] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/6, 'Untitled letter', March 1918 and 'Development of Conscientious Objection and Alternatives to Service' (1918).
[60] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/6, 'Note sent to Arnold Rowntree, MP (On Illness Among COs in Prison)', 16 February 1917.
[61] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/6, 'Untitled letter', March 1918; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 93.

made noise over the Home Secretary's failure to answer any questions as to the reduced rations of long-term objectors in prison.[62]

Equally exasperating for the labour movement was the work being undertaken in the Home Office camps.[63] '[E]conomically wasteful' and 'penal in character', it was judged 'such as could only be devised for punishment rather than utility'.[64] Criticisms like this chimed with earlier socialist attitudes regarding the treatment of the unemployed. In the labour farms and colonies supported by the left in the early 1900s, for example, the labour involved in the reformation process was invariably designed to be productive, whether on the land or in acquiring new industrial or technical skills. Even for those who advocated more punitive treatments, such as Sidney Webb and, more fleetingly, Lansbury, the driving force behind their schemes was always to recondition the inmate so as to enable them to make positive, functional contributions upon their return to society. In contrast, through the Home Office camps the government was 'condoning and permitting a policy under which extensive waste of national resources, in men, money, and materials' had 'been continued at a period when economy in national resources was considered a vital need'.[65] The continued refusal by government ministers to answer questions on the conditions for conscientious objectors in prisons and Home Office camps, or to consider any ameliorations of the system, was decried by the labour movement and anti-war groups as an outrage.[66]

While the wellbeing and release of conscientious objectors was the primary objective of the labour movement in its protests, it is not a surprise that the system which was the cause for

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[62] *The CO's Hansard*, 8 November 1917, 538.
[63] See *The Herald*, 3 February 1917; 10 March; 26 January 1918; 2 February; 16 February; 2 March.
[64] Memorial, The Work Centre, Princetown, *Letter Sent to all Members of the War Cabinet, by the Special Committee on behalf of C.O.s under the Home Office Scheme* (1917).
[65] Ibid.
[66] *The CO's Hansard*, 11 July 1918; 10 April 1919.

such concern should also have come under great scrutiny. Indeed, the war and the activities of conscientious objectors, often of socialist politics, cast a sharper spotlight on the issues of prisons and penal reform than at any stage since the Gladstone Committee of 1895, and the objectors' plight finally forced the labour movement into a period of consistent engagement with penal politics. After Stephen Hobhouse, the Liberal Quaker, had suffered a prolonged period of imprisonment for his conscientious objection, concerned colleagues agitated increasingly against the fact that the government consistently failed to honour its pledge to release objectors who were in poor health, and that 'the Home Office will do nothing unless each individual case is pressed upon them'.[67] Recognising the urgent need for penal reform, it was realised that the particular experiences of conscientious objectors could do more than any previous efforts. The '[f]ailure of philanthropists and reformers', the reform movement claimed, 'to contribute substantially to the reformation of the masses for who[m] they strive, has for its cause their inability to live and experience themselves the hardships, temptations and baneful influences which the objects of their labour daily undergo'.[68] Conscientious objectors, it was reasoned, able to express their experiences powerfully and persuasively, were now better positioned than anyone to argue the systemic reforms required. They quickly became the most important factor in Labour's engagement with penal politics.

Brockway was the most outspoken critic. In 1917, in a series of letters to the *New Statesman* and several other newspapers, he outlined his ideas on prison reform based on his own experience as an objector. English prisons, he suggested, were run on a system of fear and suspicion that suppressed all individuality, in both prisoners *and* warders. While prisoners existed under a forced silence and always remained under suspicion, warders were continually

[67] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/6, 'Henry Hobhouse to Rowntree', 31 December 1917.
[68] LRSFB, YM/MfS/Ser 7, G. Horwill, *Prisons and Prisoners* (n.d.).

threatened with being reported to prison governors if they failed to comprehensively enforce the strict and unjust rules of the system.[69] This, Brockway contended, was one of the most significant barriers to reforming the methods with which society treated its criminals. 'One could easily suggest many humanising reforms of routine … but the greatest step towards reform would be … to change the status of the warders', who, instead of being the prisoners' 'keepers', 'should be allowed to become their friends, in the sense of encouraging them to lead better lives in the future'.[70] One of Brockway's first public forays into the area of penal reform, he would in the coming years build on this position, becoming the unofficial spokesman of the labour movement on penal politics as he published further critiques based upon his own prison experiences.

Elsewhere, Margaret Hobhouse, mother of Stephen and the sister of Beatrice Webb, wrote of the penal system's urgent need of reform in light of the treatment of conscientious objectors, before penning the 'cruel deprivations' they suffered at the hands of the authorities.[71] Stephen Hobhouse, in his own condemnation of the English prison system, attacked the inhumanity of the silence system that was imposed upon prisoners and described for the reading public the 'worst … punishment'—solitary confinement.[72] E. D. Morel, secretary of the UDC, who was imprisoned for sending through neutral Switzerland a copy of his *Truth and the War* to Romain Rolland—the French essayist, pacifist, future communist and, in the 1930s, fervent admirer of the Soviet penal system—soon began to publish his own fiery critiques of the aims and techniques of the penal system, its universal punishments and brutality.[73] While Morel served

[69] LRSFB, YM/MfS/Ser 7, 'Brockway to Editor of New Statesman and other papers, Prison Warders and Prison Reform', September 1917.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Margaret Hobhouse, *I Appeal Unto Caesar* (London, 1917), xxi; 44-70.
[72] Stephen Hobhouse, *The Silence System in British Prisons* (London, 1918), 1; idem, *An English Prison from Within* (London, 1919), 15.
[73] E. D. Morel, *Thoughts on the War: The Peace and Prison* (London, 1920), 66-68.

out his sentence, letters of protest were sent to the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave; and the ILP, which could by 1918 count Morel as a member, sent letters of support to Morel and his wife, Mary, with further copies sent to Philip Snowden, the Prime Minister and the *Labour Leader*.[74] Morel and his wife also received personal letters of support from Ramsay MacDonald and George Lansbury, each commending Morel's attempts to change public opinion on the issues of objection and penal reform, once more highlighting the increased attention that penal politics was commanding of labour figures.[75]

Labour's amplified interest in penal reform from 1917 onwards came at a time when the party was also beginning to consider life after the war and the problems that Britain would face in terms of reconstruction. Resolutions on the issue, passed at the party conference in January and drafted by Sidney Webb, dealt with the post-war use of war factories, unemployment, nationalisation of the mines and the railways, and the assurance of a living wage.[76] In prescient anticipation of the establishment of Labour's new constitution in 1918, followed by its programme, *Labour and the New Social Order*, Brockway called for penal reform to be added to the reconstruction agenda. 'The present', he stated to his colleagues, 'is an admirable time for reconstructing the prison system; except for 1,200 conscientious objectors the prisons are comparatively empty. May I suggest that in the consideration which is now being given to after-the-war problems a place should be found for prison reform?'[77]

[74] See the collection of letters at the British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London School of Economics (LSE), in Morel/F1/4, Folder 1, Pentonville Prison (1917).
[75] BLPES, Morel/F1/5, Folder 2, Pentonville Prison (1917-1918), 'MacDonald to Morel', 12 February 1918 and 'Lansbury to Morel', 25 February 1918.
[76] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 31-2.
[77] LRSFB, YM/MfS/Ser 7, 'Brockway to Editor of New Statesman and other papers, Prison Warders and Prison Reform', September 1917.

Indeed, it was not only an 'admirable time' for reform because of 'empty' prisons or Labour's consideration of post-war problems. Labour's demand by the end of the war for a peace without annexations had 'brought to the party many of the able young Liberals who had opposed the war … despaired of their own divided party', and suffered as conscientious objectors.[78] Almost all the intellectuals of the UDC 'streamed into the Labour Party', and many Liberal recruits to Labour crossed over in response to the undermining of Liberalism that the war had caused, and to the treatment of conscientious objectors. An influx of members, then, who had often identified closely with the principles of Labour in the past, and who now possessed practical and theoretical experience of the questions of objection, prisons and penal reform in a way not common among the 'old guard' of the labour movement, began to change the composition of the Labour Party.[79] As the party itself sought to establish its own ideological base, the opportunity to usurp the Liberals presented itself clearly, and the issue of penal reform gained great traction in newly formed party circles.[80]

In 1916, in the trial of John Maclean, the Lord Advocate Mr Robert Munro had contended that in opposing the war 'Maclean had committed a felony punishable by penal servitude for life, or even by death!' *The Call*, which reported on the trial, described the British penal system as 'positively savage' as a result.[81] Equally desolate was the plea from Clifford Allen, a year later, in which he claimed that it 'is heart-breaking … for us to have no horizon to our theories of imprisonments'.[82] Yet, in 1918, with Liberal recruits beginning to swell the ranks of Labour and the end of the war in sight, the Labour Party remained optimistic in their consideration of penal reform under reconstruction. In a parliamentary debate on the establishment of a League

[78] Pelling, *A Short History*, 47.
[79] A. J. P. Taylor, 'The Great War—The Triumph of E. D. Morel (II)', in Peter Stansky (ed.), *The Left and War: The British Labour Party and World War I* (New York, 1969), 311; Pelling, *A Short History*, 47.
[80] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 13.
[81] *The Call*, 20 April 1916.
[82] LRSFB, Rowntree papers, TEMP MSS 977/1/7, 'Letter from Clifford Allen', 12 February 1917.

of Nations, MacDonald rejected the idea of an 'International Police Force' as merely a semantic veil for the employment of national armies in perpetuity. In his rejection of the police force analogy, though, MacDonald revealed the idealism that still remained at the heart of a potentially distinctive penal philosophy. Striking the tones of William Morris, MacDonald claimed that: 'My protection really is, not that there is organised force round about me, but that there are involuntary social habits round about me … It is not so much the policeman that one depends on as public opinion'.[83]

A cohesive penal policy remained elusive, and contradictions in Labour policy meant that, at the time of the armistice, questions were still being formed on the issue, quite before any answers could be sought.[84] The war, though, and most significantly the plight of conscientious objectors, were the most important factors in propelling the issue of penal politics on to the Labour Party's post-war agenda.

2.3 The Russian Revolutions in Britain

In conjunction with the experiences of conscientious objectors, another major event of the First World War, the fall of the Russian Tsar in February 1917, was also to have a major impact upon the British labour movement. In particular, the replacement of the regime of Nicholas II with a provisional liberal-socialist government, followed by the rise to power of the Bolsheviks, was, it is argued here, to have a significant impact upon the Labour Party's understanding of criminality, prisons and penal reform through the 1920s and 1930s. The Russian revolutions, and particularly the Bolshevik takeover of October 1917, brought about wide-ranging reforms of Russian society, and in the years immediately following the takeover

[83] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 1 August 1918, vol. 109, c.720.
[84] A. J. P. Taylor, 'The Great War—The Triumph of E. D. Morel (II)', 312.

the Russian penal system was overhauled as a number of reformist measures were introduced in an attempt to align the nation's penal politics with the new deterministic, Marxist ideology of the nascent Soviet regime.

As noted in chapter one, the tsarist penal system had been an object of much vilification among the labour movement in Britain, and there had been little reason to look to Russia in Labour's searches for reformist ideas in penal politics. The end of the Romanovs' rule and their replacement by a Provisional Government changed this. In time, the Bolshevik takeover dented the hopes for a democratic Russia that had been fostered by the Provisional Government; but, as E. H. Carr claimed, 'the first vital steps of the [Bolshevik] regime were taken under the banner … of democracy', and enthusiasm for the world's first ostensibly 'socialist' state, mixed in with condemnation of Bolshevik violence, was demonstrable among the British labour movement.[85] Admiration for the Soviet penal system would not emerge publicly until 1919, but the lure of Russia's 'socialism' was to prove strong before then, as, in Kevin Morgan's words, inter-war Soviet Russia began to provide a 'political terminus … for countless British socialists'.[86] On a range of issues including the war, the myth of Soviet democracy and the shifting self-identity of the Labour Party in this period, this section examines how the new revolutionary Russia attracted broad swathes of the labour movement and laid the foundation for its later role as a significant influence upon Labour's search for a cohesive approach to penal politics.

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[85] E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, 14 vols (Middlesex, 1977 [1950]), I, 116.
[86] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 150.

The labour movement reacts

The reactions of the left to events in Russia in 1917 were diverse, 'the pluralistic nature of the labour movement' allowing 'considerable room for expression'.[87] Indeed, scholarly reactions to the famous Leeds Convention, called in June 1917 by the United Socialist Council (USC) to hail the stimulus of the February Revolution, perhaps best demonstrate the assortment of interpretations that have been accorded to the left's reaction to Russian events. The convention brought together British 'revolutionaries' and constitutionalists alike, and passed four resolutions, the most radical of which called for the creation of Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates, or British Soviets. A number of scholars relate to Leeds a remarkable (if for some, ephemeral) surge of revolutionary fervour, where extra-constitutional action was seriously considered.[88] Others are more cautious, dismissing the idea that a revolutionary movement genuinely captured the imagination of the delegates.[89] Building on this, Stephen R. Graubard implies that the actions of many of the left at Leeds were specious; delegates talked like Bolsheviks but merely sought a prominent platform in order to increase their standing abroad.[90] The convention, in these accounts, amounted only to political posturing, and achieved little in practical terms.[91] David Marquand suggests that the failure of the Labour Executive, absent from the event, to endorse the convention demonstrates this limited capacity, while

[87] Ibid, I, 19.
[88] See Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour*, 2nd edn (London, 1972), 55; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 1; Fenner Brockway, *Socialism over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford* (London, 1949), 153.
[89] See Keith Laybourn, *Philip Snowden: A Biography, 1864-1937* (Aldershot, 1988), 78; Robin P. Arnot, *The Impact of the Russian Revolution in Britain* (London, 1967), 65; L. J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its Origin and Development Until 1929* (London, 1966), 21; James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London, 1973), 241.
[90] Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, 39-40.
[91] Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden* (London, 1966), 157; Davis, 'A New Socialist Influence', 163; Pelling, *A Short History*, 41; Taylor, 'The Great War—The Triumph of E. D. Morel (II), 310.

others insist that the convention ought instead to be seen as a pacifist rally more reflective of war-weariness.[92]

Reactions were evidently mixed, and considerable literature has been dedicated to the British left's response to Russian events in 1917, so only the main themes emerging from a broad review will be examined here. These concentrate principally upon war interests, ideas of democracy and liberty, the hopes and misconceptions of the labour movement, and the movement's own self-identification. In order to ground a thorough and accurate examination of the Labour Party's search for a socialist penal policy, the Soviet exemplar to which it was exposed, and the impact of this model on its own understandings of penality, it is critical to analyse the initial reactions of the left in its earliest and most impressionable period following the revolutions. To guide this part of the analysis, the themes are considered within the broader context of Alan Bullock's assessment of the British left between the wars as being 'already fascinated by', yet 'profoundly ignorant of [the] Russian experience'.[93]

War weariness and Soviet democracy

As noted above, reactions to the February Revolution in some circles in Britain were largely coloured by the ongoing war. The overthrow of the Tsar was universally approved by the left, and the labour movement was relieved that Britain's awkward military alliance with Imperial Russia was at an end. Concurrently, the pro-war left, including the Labour Party, felt a new Russian government was likely to continue the war effort, while anti-war groups perceived renewed hope for withdrawal and an immediate armistice.[94] Arthur Henderson, sent to Russia

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[92] David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1977), 208-9; Stephen White, 'Soviets in Britain: the Leeds Convention of 1917', *International Review of Social History*, 19, 2 (1974), 166; Laurence Thompson, *The Enthusiasts: A Biography of John and Katherine Bruce Glasier* (London, 1971), 225-6.
[93] Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, 2 vols (London, 1960), I, 75.
[94] Ward, *Red Flag*, 142-3. See also Northedge and Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism*, 25-8.

on behalf of the British government and Lloyd George's Cabinet, was unwavering in his support of the Allied cause and found an ideal representative in Alexander Kerensky, who took over as leader of the Provisional Government from Prince Georgy Lvov in the summer of 1917.[95] And while, as demonstrated by Kevin Morgan, it is an oversimplification to suggest that all trade unions matched Henderson's pro-war stance, and that all socialists sought a truce,[96] ILP socialists nevertheless maintained their anti-war stance, MacDonald resigned as chairman of the PLP in protest at the party's pro-war position (though his own position afterwards was rather more ambivalent), and Liberals, radicals and socialists worked together through the UDC.[97]

When the Bolsheviks took power in October, a Labour Party tiring of war began to identify with Russian peace aims. This sentiment was intensified when the Bolsheviks published the allies' secret agreements, revealing the imperialist and expansionist motives that underlay Lloyd George's war aims. While disagreeing with Bolshevik methods, Labour subsequently refrained from criticising the Brest-Litovsk agreement. Further to the left, the ILP supported Bolshevik calls for peace, while the BSP continued to rejoice in all things Bolshevik.[98] Throughout the Russian civil war (1917-1922), the left as a whole inveighed against British interference, as sympathy and a sense of obligation towards the fate of the revolution developed; and as war in all its forms became protracted, the left rallied to the 'beleaguered spirit of socialism' as embodied by the Bolsheviks.[99] For the Labour Party, fear of extended

[95] Davis, 'A New Socialist Influence', 164; J. M. Winter, 'Arthur Henderson, the Russian Revolution, and the Reconstruction of the Labour Party', *The Historical Journal*, 15, 4 (1972), 760-1; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2008), 49; Orlando Figes, *A People's* Tragedy, 400; Horne, *Labour at War*, 308.
[96] See Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party* (Oxford, 1974), 90; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 48-54.
[97] Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of* Labour, 4.
[98] Cowden, *Russian Bolshevism and British Labor*, 13-14; 17; Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, 44; 48; 50-2; 54; 56-7.
[99] Davis, 'A New Socialist Influence', 174; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 5-6; F. M. Leventhal, 'Seeing the Future: British Left-Wing Travellers to the Soviet Union, 1919-32', in J. M. W. Bean (ed.), *The Political Culture of*

war and civil discontent, habituation to violence, and the spreading of revolution saw them lend support to revolutionary Russia.[100]

The revolutions also raised questions about democracy and liberties among the left. For many, the February Revolution was regarded as a blow to the status of British liberties; the Provisional Government rapidly instituted '[u]niversal and unconditional freedoms … of opinion, faith, association, assembly and the press',[101] and Russia was now considered by many to be the freest and most progressive nation, especially when compared to Britain's own record on the franchise.[102] Subsequent moves by the new regime to implement an eight-hour working day, to provide legislation for improved factory conditions and to abolish capital punishment only further captivated the labour movement.[103] Even for those who resisted unencumbered enthusiasm for the revolutionary regime, the revolution at least placed the new democracy of Russia in accord with Britain. A 'love for all things Russian', however, combined with an idealisation of the Russian state as being controlled by workers—as demonstrated by the 'revolutionary pretenders' at Leeds—suffused a number of factions on the left in the summer of 1917.[104]

Modern Britain: Studies in Memory of Stephen Koss (London, 1987), 209; *LPACR, 1919*. See also Richard H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, 3 vols (Princeton, 1961), I and II.

[100] See Arthur Henderson, *The Aims of Labour* (London, 1918), 58; 67-73.

[101] Robert Service, *The History of Modern Russia: From Tsarism to the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd edn (London, 2009), 34.

[102] See Ward, *Red Flag*, 145; *The Herald*, 24 March 1917; Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*, 104; Richard Sakwa, *Communism in Russia: An Interpretive Essay* (Basingstoke, 2010), 39. Hyndman even asked whether Britain should follow the Russian example and called for the establishment of a British republic. See *Justice*, 22 March 1917; 5 April.

[103] Nikolai N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* (ed. and trans.), Joel Carmichael (Princeton, 1983), 211-13; Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 403.

[104] Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, 38; 40; Challinor, *Origins of British Bolshevism*, 180; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (Oxford, 1998), 39. See also the headline of *The Call* on 14 February 1918, entitled 'Learn to Speak Russian'.

British enthusiasm remained even after the Bolshevik takeover, too. After the Bolsheviks' rapid seizure of power in November 1917,[105] elections to form a Constituent Assembly were held in which Lenin's party gained just over half the votes won by the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), and less than half their number of seats.[106] The SRs clearly won the vote of the peasantry, who made up a sizeable majority of the Russian electorate; but despite this, and the fact that most Bolshevik delegates elected to the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets (the supreme governing body of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) had run on a coalition platform, the Bolsheviks dissolved the democratically elected assembly after its first session in January 1918, forcibly prohibiting the establishment of a coalition government with the Mensheviks and SRs. With the establishment of the Bolshevik-dominated Third Congress of Soviets and the powerful *Sovnarkom* (the Council of People's Commissars), 'the party forfeited mass support … and shifted its power base from Soviet democracy to administrative and military coercion'.[107] Even after these undemocratic actions of the Bolsheviks, there was a reticence among some on the radical left in Britain to condemn such behaviour. Unashamedly courting Lenin's approval, for instance, Sylvia Pankhurst of the Workers' Socialist Federation claimed that the suppression of the assembly should be defended on *democratic* grounds, the Soviet system being more directly representative of its constituents than any alternative.[108]

This is not to suggest, though, that there were no criticisms whatsoever. The Bolsheviks' programme of violence was widely condemned from its beginnings, while many on the left, and especially a large proportion of the Labour Party, rejected Bolshevism and its extremism

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[105] Prior to 1917, Russia used the Old Style, or Julian calendar, before switching to the Gregorian calendar.
[106] Oliver Henry Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls: the Election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* (Ithaca, New York, 1989), 79.
[107] Edward Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London, 1990), 209. *Sovnarkom—Sovet narodnykh kommissarov*.
[108] *The Workers' Dreadnought*, 26 January 1918, cited in Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*, 80-8.

outright.[109] But a general level of support was nevertheless fostered among the labour movement for the Soviet system. Raymond Challinor has claimed that October was a disaster in the eyes of the British left, citing the disapproval of leadership figures including MacDonald, Snowden and railwaymen's leader Jimmy Thomas. This was certainly the case for some sections of the left. But the genesis of a 'pro-Soviet' sentiment, or at least a 'refocusing' of the 'radical traditions of British socialism', and the fact that even some ex-Liberals were becoming Bolshevik supporters, emboldened in their newfound loyalty to Russia, highlights that for others there were lessons in democracy to be learned from Bolshevik Russia.[110]

As Ian Bullock notes, however, many of these lessons were shrouded in the 'myth of soviet democracy', the third theme emerging from the literature. Just as Russians hoped and expected revolutionary institutions to assume a democratic nature, so too did the British left.[111] In many ways, a number of those on the left of the labour movement in Britain represented the Bolsheviks' ideal constituents—schooled in socialist theory, conscious of the ideas of class struggle and eager for social change, they were everything the uneducated Russian peasantry was not. For the more moderate figures, on the other hand, it is important to note that they were not suddenly converted to the ideas of Bolshevism or extra-constitutionalism. But, for some, the opportunism and political calculation of Lenin had them convinced. As early as his *April Theses* (1917), for instance, Lenin's palliation of language on issues of civil war, land nationalisation and dictatorship (which became 'workers' control'), as well as his internationalist focus on land concessions, had won a number of Britons over to his

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[109] Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, 67; 70; Winter, 'Arthur Henderson', 761-3; 765; Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the Wider World*, 2 vols (Manchester, 2004), I, 67.
[110] Challinor, *Origins of British Bolshevism*, 175; Ward, *Red Flag*, 160; 165-6; Darren G. Lilleker, *Against the Cold War: The History and Political Traditions of Pro-Sovietism in the British Labour Party, 1945-1989* (London, 2004), 49; Chris Wrigley, 'The European Context: Aspects of British Labour and Continental Socialism Before 1920', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Surrey, 2009), 92-3; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 98.
[111] Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 40.

'moderation'.[112] The fallacy of Soviet democracy and widening democratic control, the bases of which were thought similar in respects to guild socialism, would remain significant.[113]

In reality, due to poor communications, time lags and propaganda, the broader labour movement knew little about the Soviets or Bolshevik Russia. The Bolsheviks, it was thought in certain quarters, had truly transferred all power to the workers, and had even offered to share power; the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' meant, principally, mass strike action.[114] Robert Dell, a socialist formerly associated with the circles of William Morris and a contemporary Fabian, for instance, questioned the veracity of accounts of Bolshevik violence in 1920 and maintained socialism's answers as being rooted squarely in the proletarian dictatorship. Less than a year later, and with an updated iota of information, Dell's confidence was wavering, despite his conviction that it is 'too much to ask of men that … have been sent to Siberian prisons' to 'be tolerant when they get the upper hand' (a sentiment that would be echoed almost twenty years later by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in their own eulogy of the Soviet state).[115] Thus, many on the left, and especially those who were removed from official sources of information, saw only what they wanted to see—'the ascendancy of the unions, co-operatives and other social movements, even to the extent of the assumption of state functions'. 'It was not so much that they saw only the state, [but] rather that they hardly saw it at all'.[116] Even in the 1940s, democratic participation was perceived by many to be at the heart of Stalinist Russia, highlighting the strong and protracted purchase of the Soviet myth.[117]

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[112] Vladimir I. Lenin, 'April Theses', in *Lenin, Collected Works*, 45 vols (Moscow, 1960-70), XXIV, 21-6; Robert Service, 'The Bolshevik Party', in Edward Acton, Vladimir Iu. Cherniaev and William G. Rosenberg (eds), *Critical companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921* (London, 2001), 234-5; Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle* (trans.) A. M. Sheridan-Smith (London, 1975), 87.
[113] Davis, 'A New Socialist Influence', 164; see Kevin Morgan, 'British Socialists and the Exemplar of the Panama Canal', *History of Political Thought*, 28, 1 (2007), 133-5.
[114] *Labour Leader*, 24 January 1918; Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*, 53; 73; 81.
[115] Robert Dell, *My Second Country (France)* (London, 1920), 273; idem, *Socialism and Personal Liberty* (London, 1921), see author's note and 97.
[116] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, I, 19.
[117] James Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens: Engineering Democracy in 1940s Britain* (Aldershot, 1994), 10-11.

The Soviets were perceived by many in the labour movement as a higher form of democracy, their structure, accountability and powers of recall fueling the romantic tale of revolutionary Russia among the British labour movement.[118] The ILP, for example, continued to publish pamphlets hailing the moral and social force of Bolshevism.[119] Moreover, the fact that the upheavals in Russia were seen as a great social experiment appears to have absolved the Bolsheviks of much democratic responsibility in the eyes of some on the left. And while this view could be found principally at the 'dissident individual level' in the Labour Party, Bullock demonstrates that many established leaders, including even Philip Snowden, were willing to dismiss flagrant miscarriages of justice in the transitional period. The revolutionary government, it was supposed, had the 'right' aims and would eventually conform to more conventional behaviour.[120] MacDonald, too, in the *Socialist Review*, claimed that despite Lenin's 'evil necessities and his tyrannies', the balance would eventually remain in his favour.[121]

Kevin Morgan concurs, claiming that Bolshevism was often extenuated in light of its transitional character and 'in anticipation of the democratic future it was believed to be creating'.[122] That the Bolsheviks rode a wave of popular support prior to October, but had quickly reneged on their pledges of localist conceptions of power within a wider concept of social revolution, and instead engineered an insurrectionary *coup d'etat*, seemed not to matter to many sympathisers in Britain.[123] The perceptions, or indeed misconceptions, of the labour

[118] Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*, 99-101; Cowden, *Russian Bolshevism and British Labor*, 30.
[119] See for example the work of the Liberal radical Joseph King, *Bolshevism and Bolsheviks. The History of the Russian Socialist Party called Bolsheviks; their doctrines, aims and methods; the International Socialism which they advocate; and the spread and prospects of Bolshevism in other lands* (London, 1919), 17.
[120] Lilleker, *Against the Cold War*, 43; Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*, 114-15; 91-2. See also Charles G. Bolte, *The Soviet Question in British Politics: From October Revolution to Cold War* (Indiana, 1989), 22-4.
[121] MacDonald, cited in Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, 63.
[122] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 182.
[123] See Service, 'The Bolshevik Party', and Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution*. Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924* (London, 1995), 498; Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 519; 523

movement, therefore, played an extremely important role in their attitudes to Russia, and coloured their own post-revolution reflections on democracy and liberty.

Labour and socialism

The final theme emerging from the literature concerns the labour movement's own self-identification in relation to the Russian Revolution. As Ward notes, British socialism had by 1917 already been defined as 'evolutionary, statist, non-violent and parliamentary', and it is not the aim of this study to suggest that these principles changed dramatically following the revolutions.[124] Despite the substantial development attributed to Arthur Henderson's political ideas following his trip to Russia in the summer of 1917, particularly regarding his attitudes towards the international socialist conference in Stockholm, the moderate socialism of the left was not drastically altered.[125] The effect of the new Labour Party constitution, adopted in 1918, and its inclusion of the famous Clause IV commitment to 'secure for the producers by hand and by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the common ownership of the means of production', although significant, should also not be exaggerated at this time. As Worley notes, while Clause IV 'related to the Fabian influence of Sidney Webb and Labour's desire to mark a clear distinction between itself and the Liberal Party', it did not transform Labour into a fully-fledged socialist organisation.[126]

Nevertheless, Winter suggests that Henderson effectively asked the Labour Party to 'begin a new political life' upon his return from Russia.[127] In *The Aims of Labour* (1918), Henderson

[124] Ward, *Red Flag*, 155.
[125] Andrew Thorpe, 'The Only Effective Bulwark Against Reaction and Revolution. Labour and the Frustration of the Extreme Left', in Andrew Thorpe (ed.), *The Failure of Political Extremism in Interwar Britain* (Exeter, 1989), 11-27.
[126] *LPACR, 1918*, 140; Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 12.
[127] Winter, 'Arthur Henderson', 753; 758-9; 765-70.

asked, along more pragmatic than ideological lines, whether the movement is 'so organized and equipped to qualify it to interpret and direct the new consciousness of democracy'. His answer was a resounding no. To cope with the rapid development of democratic ideals in synchronicity with the introduction of the 1918 franchise extension, Henderson focused on party reorganisation in order to capitalise on the opening of 'a tremendous vista of political achievement' and the division of the Liberals.[128] In much the same vein, he was simultaneously convinced of the need to provide in Britain a socialist alternative to the followers of Lenin's revolutionary extremists. In anticipation of a leftward swing in working class opinion, his prominence among the 'non-socialist craft union wing of the organized labour movement' allowed him to reflect the shift leftwards of a number of Liberals in the movement.[129]

The 1918 constitution and its inclusion of Clause IV thus served several purposes: it attempted to establish an ideological base that distinguished Labour from the Liberal Party in its pursuit of an enfranchised electorate; it sought to prevent Labour's left wing from moving too far left 'at a time of heightened radical tensions'; and it signaled the party's socialist intent for those on the left who rejected Soviet socialism outright.[130] *Labour and the New Social Order*, the programme adopted at the party conference in June 1918, outlined actual Labour policy based on 'the four pillars of the house of tomorrow': the establishment of a national minimum wage, the democratic control of industry, the revolution of national finance and the redistribution of surplus wealth for the common good.[131] The radical-liberal traditions and moderate socialist views of the party were therefore reinforced, but the hardline Marxist approach of the

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[128] Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, 14. On Henderson's concern for pragmatism, see McKibbin, *Evolution of the Labour Party*, 91-3; 99.
[129] Davis, 'A New Socialist Influence', 158; Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 12-13; Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 48; Winter, 'Arthur Henderson', 754.
[130] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 12; Davis, 'A New Socialist Influence', 175.
[131] Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction* (London, 1918); Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 12.

Bolsheviks remained foreign to a Labour Party committed to gradualism, despite its own inherent class dimension, and the ideological basis of the party remained broad.[132] To be sure, MacDonald, who would resume his leadership of the party in 1922 for almost a decade, was far more in tune with the more moderate Menshevik ideology, but would go on to resist the leftist pull of even this group.[133]

Factions further left of Labour, on the other hand, were more encouraged by Bolshevik developments.[134] The BSP and the Socialist Labour Party supported the Bolsheviks wholeheartedly, while Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation was the first British party to affiliate to the Comintern, as the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International).[135] The left wing of the ILP, too, defended the Bolsheviks, although its party split over the divisive issue of Comintern membership. But, for Labour and the majority of the labour movement, the moderate middle ground was reached for. The October Revolution forced Labour to reconsider its ideological position, and the immediate period after the Bolshevik power-grab can be viewed as an early example of the formative process that the Labour Party underwent in establishing its own path via the exemplar of Soviet Russia (and from 1922 the Soviet Union). As Davis asserts, Labour's own path and ideology would, in the coming decades, be defined largely through its rejection of Soviet practices.

It is argued here, however, that enough support and optimism for—as well as misconceptions about—the Soviet project remained across the labour movement to warrant further investigation into the Soviet institutional practices that were received positively by the left.

[132] Ibid; 15.
[133] John Shepherd, 'A Gentleman at the Foreign Office: Influences Shaping Ramsay MacDonald's Internationalism', in Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis (eds), *The British Labour Party and the Wider World: Domestic Politics, Internationalism and Foreign Policy* (London, 2008), 45; Davis, 'Left Out in the Cold', 83-4.
[134] See Harry Pollitt, *Serving My Time: An Apprentice to Politics* (London, 1941), 91-2.
[135] *The Socialist*, 12 December 1918.

Raymond Challinor claims that October clarified a period in British politics that had been blurred by the February Revolution. But when considering Labour's broader ideological composition, it is much more accurate to state, as Rhiannon Vickers does, that October only compounded the complex situation to which the party was forced to respond.[136] 'Labour encapsulated a series of "socialisms" that conformed more readily to a set of values, assumptions and instincts than to a comprehensive social-political theory', and socialism thus 'arguably became a unifying *symbol* for the Labour Party from 1918, with the detail of its implementation and extent remaining open to interpretation at least until the 1930s'.[137] In this vein, Soviet Russia also had the capacity to provide a collective rallying point and even a new identity—a utopian dream to be emulated, in part or as a whole, in the eyes of different factions of the left. The means for doing that, of course, could be very different to Bolshevik methods.

Despite the Labour Party's overall aversion to Bolshevism, then, a number of specific historical circumstances ensured that the party, though often reserved in its evaluations, did not wholly turn its back on the Soviet project. On the one hand, among the more sceptical Labour figures, war-weariness and a formative period of self-reflection kept alive the feeling of responsibility that the 'socialism' being constructed by the Bolsheviks had to be protected against the perils of capitalist encirclement. On the other hand, a number of misconceptions about Soviet democracy and the idealistic hopes of the left-wing of the party allowed, at times very thinly, for the justification of trenchant support for the Bolshevik regime and its extenuation in light of unsavoury actions. Open enthusiasm for the broad aims and parameters of the Soviet project could exist, if not comfortably, then at least without fear of party-wide condemnation; and on more particular institutional issues, like criminality and penal reform, Soviet Russia possessed

[136] Challinor, *Origins of British Bolshevism*, 180; Vickers, *The Labour Party and the Wider World*, 67.
[137] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 13-14.

the capability for providing an ideologically evolving labour movement with an example to be witnessed, evaluated and perhaps even emulated.

What is of utmost importance to this study are the ways in which the Bolsheviks' aims, specifically in relation to crime, punishment and prisons, were *perceived* by the labour movement in Britain, and how this translated into domestic party action. As will be seen below, through visits to Russia in the 1920s and 1930s some Labour members would come to see nothing in Bolshevik ideology. Others would be critical, but sympathetic to what the Soviet regime was trying to achieve. And yet others would give their full support to the revolution and the development of Soviet socialism.[138] Why each group did so, and how this affected the Labour Party's own identity is key to understanding more accurately the history of the left, its ideological development, and its attitude towards the type of socialism it sought to achieve. As the *New Statesman* proclaimed in 1920, 'theoretically there is evidently much to be said for the Soviet system … We therefore have everything to gain by studying it as' a 'vital and important experiment', and 'may even be led to adopt such features as seem to offer a prospect of real improvement in the character of our own … institutions'.[139]

2.4 Soviet Approaches to Criminality, 1917-1928

As noted above, the Bolshevik takeover of October 1917 brought about wide-ranging societal reform, and in the years immediately following the revolution the Bolsheviks attempted to mould their Marxist, deterministic approach to the environment and human behaviour onto the penal system they had inherited from the imperial regime. In Britain, the Labour Party had, almost since its own inception, protested vociferously against the tsarist system of justice and

[138] Davis, 'Left Out in the Cold', 84-5.
[139] *New Statesman*, 6 March 1920.

its treatment of prisoners; its indiscriminate terror, torture and executions made it the most culpable tyranny in Europe in the eyes of many on the left.[140] Yet, while the barbarities of the imperial Russian regime were clear, more nuanced analyses have shown that, by October 1917, the Bolsheviks inherited a tsarist legacy on crime that was somewhat more contradictory. The Imperial Russian Criminal Code handed down to Lenin's regime was, according to William Butler, in fact one of the most advanced in Europe, in spite of the authorities' utilisation of arbitrary forms of repression.[141] Moreover, the ability of the Tsar's regime in its final years to enforce its laws and enact policy, particularly in the countryside, was weak—so much so that one observer described the regime as being 'quite humane' as a result, a land where prison acted as a 'storage space for literature' and a 'leave of absence'.[142]

In the last two decades of the Russian Empire, those at its apex were conscious of the accumulation of vice and criminality within the population that threatened to destroy its moral and social order, and, as a result, they 'lent a particular urgency to the battle with crime'.[143] To this end, a great many liberal-progressive professionals furthered the disciplines of the human sciences, with many fields coming to closely resemble their professional counterparts in western Europe.[144] The 'existence of unenlightened and disruptive constituencies in Russian society', however, represented for liberals a significant obstacle on the path to reform.

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[140] See for instance *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 22 July 1909, vol. 8, cc641-6.
[141] William E. Butler, *Soviet Law* (London, 1983), 258.
[142] Neil Weissman, 'Policing the NEP Countryside', in Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (eds), *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington, 1991), 175; Weissman, 'Regular Police in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914', *Russian Review*, 44 (1985), 45-68; Sorokin, cited in Sakwa, *Communism in Russia*, 20.
[143] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 10-11. On the rising crime between the February and October revolutions see Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment in the Russian Revolution: Mob Justice and Police in Petrograd* (London, 2017), 37-108.
[144] See Harley Balzer, 'The Problem of Professions in Imperial Russia', in Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (eds), *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1991), 183-98; Martin A. Miller, 'Psychiatric Diagnosis as Political Critique: Russia in War and Revolution', in Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks and Melissa K. Stockdale (eds), *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22. Book Two: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory* (Bloomington, 2014), 248.

Moreover, despite their own concerns, the authorities also provided an obstinate barrier, often blocking the reforms on penal policy that were promoted by Russian penologists.[145] The tsarist system had remained a police state, but when the Bolsheviks seized power they had no hesitation in drawing upon the framework of earlier liberal proposals, and implemented wide-ranging reforms in their approach to criminality, in no small part to distinguish themselves from the temporising Provisional Government.

In doing so, Lenin's party combined, on the one hand, the liberal progressive criminological ideas that had, over the *longue durée* of the past two centuries, circulated between Russia and the West (and had, moreover, ensured that the neoclassical ideas on criminality that were gaining popularity in the West were also well-known in Russia), with, on the other hand, the Bolsheviks' own early attitudes to crime, in which deviance was understood as the result of the exploitative social relations that were an inevitable consequence of a capitalist economy, and which purported that, through the manipulation of the environment, a 'new' form of human behaviour could be fashioned.[146] This mixed approach, it is argued, was one aspect of the new Soviet Russia that appeared to have the potential to offer the improvement to British institutions that the *New Statesman* had hoped for.

Creating a new socialist order required, in the view of the Bolshevik leaders, a distinct approach to dealing with criminals. The ultimate goal, of course, was to create a pathologically pure socialist state, and the eradication of crime was a pivotal element in their revolutionary

[145] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 3; Solomon, Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy', 197. On tsarist authorities surrendering reforms in order to maintain power see Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917* (Princeton, 1993).
[146] On the circulation of Western and Russian ideas see Susan Gross Solomon, 'Circulation of Knowledge and the Russian Locale', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 9, 1 (2008), 13; and Alessandro Stanziani, 'Free Labor—Forced Labor: An Uncertain Boundary? The Circulation of Economic Ideas between Russia from the 18th to the Mid-19th Century', *Kritika*, 9, 1 (2008), 27-52.

programme (the first professional criminological research center was founded in 1918 in Petrograd).[147] Like the pre-revolutionary liberals before them, the Bolsheviks placed great stock in the human sciences of medicine, biology, criminology, psychiatry and anthropology. Unlike those liberals, however, Lenin and his followers were armed with a Marxist diagnosis of society that required, in their eyes, a set of tools with which to engineer a new and improved Russia. Subjected to distinct periods of instability through revolution, civil war and economic catastrophe, the Bolsheviks' self-styled 'socialist' approach to crime came to play an instrumental role in their attempt to remould Russia's human material into a new Soviet socialist society.

In analysing how the Bolsheviks' approach to criminality changed in correlation with the fluctuating outlooks of the periods of revolution and civil war, war communism and NEP, it becomes possible in the following chapters to accurately examine the influence that the Soviet system had on the British labour movement's own understandings of criminality. The incongruous mix of progressive penal policy and authoritarianism that was developed by the Bolsheviks, it is argued, demonstrates that, contrary to claims of the inevitable evolution of the Bolshevism of Lenin and the NEP into a repressive and totalitarian Stalinism, the Soviets did in fact cultivate institutional practices in their early years that would satisfy the criteria of 'western progressives' and could impress both sympathisers and critics. Indeed, from 1919 onwards, as foreign delegations began to visit Soviet Russia for the first time, this became the Soviets' principal diplomatic objective. Progressive penal practices became the face of the Soviets' cultural-diplomatic apparatus in its attempts to shore up its support on an international level, and the development of these elements would, it is contended here, in the years following

[147] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 166; Louise I. Shelley, 'Soviet Criminology after the Revolution', *Journal of Law and Criminology*, 70, 3 (1979), 391-405.

the revolution leave an already ambiguous British Labour Party at the mercy of a developing Soviet propaganda machine. As a consequence, the role of the Soviet approach to criminality is far more significant to the Labour Party's own understandings of the issue, its relations with the USSR, and the development of its own ideological path than has previously been acknowledged.

Revolution to Civil War

Following the October Revolution, criminal activity in Russia swelled and the regime was challenged by civilian disorder. The indiscipline of the closing months of 1917 fostered what Lenin described as 'a mess, not a dictatorship'.[148] This turmoil required tempering, but the Bolsheviks had nothing like a majority in terms of support across the country and their hold on power was so precarious that even the civil crimes occupying the new authorities provided a stern and dangerous threat.[149] In response, the Bolsheviks sought to overhaul their approach to criminality. With regards to the law, Lenin took an 'instrumentalist' or 'anti-formalist' approach, using a new legal apparatus, 'people's courts' and a revolutionary vocabulary to cast aside tsarist laws and to foster support among the Russian proletariat for his notion of 'socialist legality'.[150] Bourgeois codified law was condemned,[151] and a flexible administration of justice was installed that left open the possibility for direct violence and a 'legalised lawlessness'.[152]

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[148] Peter H. Juviler, *Revolutionary Law and Order: Politics and Social Change in the USSR* (London, 1976), 18-19; Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 55; Lennard D. Gerson, *The Secret Police in Lenin's Russia* (Philadelphia, 1976), 18-19; Leon Trotsky, *Lenin: Notes for a Biographer* (trans.), Tamara Deutscher (New York, 1971), 124; Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment*, 192-206.
[149] Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police: Muscovite, Imperial Russian and Soviet Political Security Operations, 1565-1970* (London, 1970), 117-18.
[150] Matthew Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland: The Tsarist Elite in Revolutionary Russia* (Oxford, 2010), 203; See Eugene Huskey, 'A Framework for the Analysis of Soviet Law', *Russian Review*, 50, 1 (1991), 53-70; Jane Burbank, 'Lenin and the Law in Revolutionary Russia', *Slavic Review*, 54, 1 (1995), 23-44; Piers Beirne and Alan Hunt, 'Lenin, Crime, and Penal Politics, 1917-1924', in Piers Beirne (ed.), *Revolution in Law: Contributions to the Development of Soviet Legal Theory, 1917-1938* (New York, 1990), 103-4; Peter H. Solomon Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin* (Cambridge, 1996), 17.
[151] See Michael Jaworskyj (ed.), *Soviet Political Thought: An Anthology* (Baltimore, 1967), 69-71.
[152] Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (Cambridge, 1990), 144; Vladimir I. Lenin, *Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia* (Moskva, 1945), 21; Richard Pipes, *Legalised Lawlessness: Soviet*

The Bolsheviks also restructured the police. Lenin recognised and according to some planned that the destruction of the old social order would lead to chaos, 'crime, hooliganism, corruption, profiteering and outrages of every kind'.[153] His means for dealing with these problems lay with the secret police, or the Cheka, established officially on 7 December 1917.[154] In its original form, the Cheka was 'envisaged as the proactive arm of the tribunals', with the prescribed functions of 'handing over all saboteurs and counter-revolutionaries to a Revolutionary Tribunal' and 'carrying out preliminary investigations only'.[155] But the organisation quickly came to acquire powers far wider in scope than merely investigation and preventive action.[156] Under its purview, non-socialist opposition was soon forbidden, printing presses shut down, and as early as 15 December 1917 the attempts by the People's Commissariat of Justice (NKIu) to install safeguards equivalent to *habeas corpus* had been stifled.[157]

In the same period, however, the Bolsheviks were beginning to implement a number of progressive penal reforms. Early revolutionary policies concerning the treatment of common crime were often guided by the humanitarian and progressive notions that were being popularised in contemporary western Europe, and in 1918, for example, in a progressive

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Revolutionary Justice (London, 1986), 10; Ivo Lapenna, 'Lenin, Law and Legality', in Leonard Schapiro and Peter Reddaway (eds), *Lenin: The Man, The Theorist, The Leader: A Reappraisal* (New York, 1967), 262.

[153] Vladimir I. Lenin, 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government', in *Lenin, Collected Works* (Moscow, 1965), XXVII, 264. On Lenin's anticipation of chaos and his preference for violence as the solution see George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police. The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (December 1917 to February 1922)* (Oxford, 1981); Gerson, *Secret Police*, 4.

[154] Hingley, *Russian Secret Police*, 119. Cheka is the Russian acronym for *Vserossiiskaia chrezvychainaia komissiia po bor'be s kontrrevoliutsiei i sabotazhem* (The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter-Revolution and Sabotage). The GPU (*Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*—'State Political Administration') superseded the Cheka in 1922 and was established under the authority of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD—*Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del*). With the establishment of the USSR in December 1922, the GPU became the OGPU, or the 'Joint State Political Administration' (*Obedinënnoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*).

[155] Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland*, 204; Simon Wolin and Robert M. Slusser, *The Soviet Secret Police* (New York, 1957), 4.

[156] Leggett, *The Cheka*, 30-2.

[157] Ibid, 31; 47; Matthew Rendle, 'Revolutionary Tribunals and the Origins of Terror in Early Soviet Russia', *Historical Research*, 84, 226 (2011), 695-6; Farber, *Before Stalinism*, 92-9; NKIu—*Narodnyi komissariat iustitsii*.

development away from tsarist law, a *Sovnarkom* decree proclaimed that 'there shall be no courts or prisons for children' and raised the minimum age for criminal liability from ten to seventeen.[158] Bolshevik enthusiasm for progressive reform sought to bring a more moderate and rational approach to the problem of crime, and images of leniency were promulgated through decrees that prohibited sentences of execution in revolutionary tribunals, allowed the presence of defence counsels and instigated a review system for the courts.[159]

Indeed, these are just some of the actions that Beirne and Hunt call 'the forgotten normal strategies of Bolshevik penality', and move them to suggest that the authoritarian practices of later Soviet penality were not necessarily intrinsic to the early Bolshevik project.[160] Rather, the Bolsheviks subscribed to—or in Beirne and Hunt's estimation, were even in the vanguard of—the neoclassical movement in their treatment of crime, emphasising the positivist assumption that the causes of crime were to be found in exploitative, capitalist social relations, and the voluntaristic assumption that, through rehabilitation, criminals could be reformed on an individual basis. Lenin's authoritarianism, they suggest, was countenanced by his legal informalism and his determination to unleash 'the creative energies of mass popular initiative unfettered by bureaucratic and legalistic restraints'.[161]

The Civil War

Soon after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks faced civil war. The fight against their enemies raged in all corners of the country, as well as against foreign intervention, and the party's hold on state power was imperiled as Russia was propelled into an economic

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[158] Farber, *Before Stalinism*, 145.
[159] Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy', 195; Rendle, 'Revolutionary tribunals', 696; Rex Wade (ed.), *Documents of Soviet History*, 5 vols (Gulf Breeze, Fl., 1991), I, 73-5; Eugene Huskey, *Russian Lawyers and the Soviet State: The Origins and Development of the Soviet Bar, 1917-1939* (Princeton, 1986), 63-71.
[160] Beirne and Hunt, 'Lenin, Crime, and Penal Politics', 100; 106.
[161] Ibid, 107.

cataclysm.[162] In its battle to keep the Bolshevik state afloat, the party established a programme that was to be retrospectively labelled 'War Communism'. Principally, war communism involved the extensive nationalisation of industry, state distribution, the prohibition of private trade, the requisitioning of grain from the peasantry and the conscription of labour.[163] As Richard Pipes notes, war communism was designed to place the entire economy of Russia under the exclusive management of the state, thereby undercutting the economic base of the opposition to the Bolshevik regime.[164] The party that eventually emerged from the civil war under Lenin's leadership was both heavily centralised and militarised, promoting an unreserved intolerance of dissent.

The decentralised vision of Soviet socialism associated with 1917 was eroded through the civil war, and in its place, '[s]tate, party and army came to be seen as the bearers of revolution'.[165] In examining their approach to issues of correction and punishment during this period, both authoritarian and progressive measures were developed simultaneously by the Bolsheviks, though, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the context of civil war the repression carried out by the

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[162] Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, I.
[163] Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'The Civil War as a Formative Experience', in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1989), 64; Suny, *Soviet Experiment*, 62.
[164] Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899-1919* (London, 1992), 72-3. For the debates over the grounds for these devlopments, see Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald G. Suny (eds), *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History* (Bloomington, 1989); Stephen F. Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (Oxford, 1985), 57; idem, 'Bolshevism and Stalinism', in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New Jersey, 1999), 15-16; Robert C. Tucker, 'Stalinism as Revolution from Above', in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (Toronto, 1977), 91-2; Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development since 1917* (London, 1978), 120-4; Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, 15-16; Fitzpatrick, 'The Civil War as a Formative Experience', 59; 74; idem, *Russian Revolution*, 70-2; M. K. Dziewanowski, *A History of Soviet Russia*, 2nd edn (New Jersey, 1985), 133; Paul Craig Roberts, *Alienation and the Soviet Economy: Toward a General Theory of Marxian Alienation, Organizational Principles, and the Soviet Econom*y (Albuquerque, 1971), 20-47; idem, '"War Communism": A Reexamination', *Slavic Review*, 29 (1970), 238-61; Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organization of War Communism, 1918-1921* (Cambridge, 1985), 1-23; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1972), 207-8; Israel Getzler, 'Lenin's Conception of Revolution as Civil War', in Ian D. Thatcher (ed.), *Regime and Society in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Basingstoke, 1999), 107-17; Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society*, 63-4.
[165] Stephen Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002), 97.

regime intensified. The death penalty, for instance, was restored by the Bolsheviks in June 1918 (though in reality the Cheka had been executing enemies, bandits and speculators for months already),[166] while a number of events in the same year encouraged the Bolsheviks to bolster the authority of the Cheka and to instigate the 'Red Terror'.[167] Violence and terror proved a formative experience for the Bolsheviks during the civil war, and the Cheka emerged as the 'most effective and visible institution'.[168] Significantly, the embryo of the Gulag was also formed in this period, as peasant revolts were suppressed and their victims deported to the 'Northern Camps of Special Designation' (SLON), located in the extreme north and evolving out of the brutal concentration camps that had functioned on the Solovetsky Islands in the White Sea.[169]

At the same time that such violence was being committed, however, the progressive measures of Soviet penal policy continued to be developed. In debates in 1919, for example, Lenin urged a reduction in the use of incarceration and encouraged the extensive use of conditional convictions and an increased use of public censure. Further, he rallied for the replacement of

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[166] Leggett, *The Cheka*, 60-3.
[167] Suny, *Soviet Experiment*, 69-70.
[168] Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland*, 207; Smith, *Russian Revolution*, 63-4; Fitzpatrick, 'The Civil War as a Formative Experience', 66-7; Hingley, *Russian Secret Police*, 128-9; Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 135-6; Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, 1997), 284-5.
[169] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (trans.), T. P. Whitney, 3 vols (New York, 2007), II, 17; Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London, 2004), 31. See also the official decrees of 1919 establishing forced labour camps in James Bunyan, T*he Origin of Forced Labor in the Soviet State, 1917-1921: Documents and Materials* (Baltimore, 1967), 72-5. For accounts stressing the discontinuities between the civil war camps and those of the 1930s within the contexts of Leninism and Stalinism, see Cohen, 'Bolshevism and Stalinism'; Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'New Perspectives on Stalinism', *Russian Review*, 45, 4 (1986), 372-3; idem, 'Introduction', in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London, 2000), 4; Cynthia Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal* (Gainesville, 1998), 3; and Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy'. For accounts emphasising continuities, see Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, II, 9-24; Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), 50; Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled*, rev. edn (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 59; Robert H. McNeal, *The Bolshevik Tradition: Lenin-Stalin-Khrushchev* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1963), 136-7; Naum Jasny, *The Socialized Agriculture of the USSR* (Stanford, 1949), 18; Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (New York, 1952), 5; 39; 42; 216. Peter Holquist, 'State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism', in Amir Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, 2003), 20.

imprisonment by compulsory labour at home, the complete replacement of prisons with educational institutions, and the use of comrades' courts to manage less serious categories of crime.[170] According to Solomon, already in 1919 Soviet judges were empowered to award non-custodial sanctions (in the form of fines, suspended sentences and compulsory labour), and they did so extensively throughout the civil war. Educational programmes were established in some prisons, and prisoners worked for pay or in civilian-type jobs outside their institution, with a heavy emphasis placed upon rehabilitation.[171] Elizabeth Wood points out, too, that in 1919 'agitation trials' began to be staged, in which civilians would act out mock court sessions. In the early years of these trials, aimed at fostering support for the Bolsheviks, emphasis was placed upon the state's role of 'enlightening' the public through mass participation; and it is significant that, in these early stages, decisions reached by the trials often led to the defendant's acquittal.[172]

In a further development in 1919, the 'Guiding Principles on Criminal Law of the RSFSR' introduced the concept of the 'material determination of crime'. In essence, this meant that during the civil war the state could repress any act directed against the Soviet state or its economic, political or social system that was considered 'socially dangerous'. While this later effectively legalised arbitrariness in both civil and criminal legislation, degenerating into what Farber calls a 'primitive workerism', it did for a short time have the progressive effect of ensuring that mitigating factors, admittedly on a class basis, were taken into account in court trials.[173] On top of this, the granting of general amnesties for political and minor criminals and

[170] Beirne and Hunt, 'Lenin, Crime, and Penal Politics', 190.
[171] Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy', 197; 199-200; Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, II, 15-16; 20.
[172] Elizabeth A. Wood, *Performing Justice: Agitation Trials in Early Soviet Russia* (Ithaca, 2005), 2; 8-11.
[173] Farber, *Before Stalinism*, 153; 166; Lapenna, 'Lenin, Law and Legality', 261-2.

the open criticisms of the secret police in the ranks of the Bolsheviks signaled an expansion in the progressive policies of the party in their approach towards criminality.[174]

Given the nature and effects of the Bolsheviks' more repressive policies in this period, their softer progressive approaches received far less attention within contemporary analyses, and a similar pattern has emerged within subsequent historical analyses. By focusing here, though, on the policies of the Bolsheviks that were, in fact, generally in line with the progressive trends in contemporary western penal discourse, it becomes evident that, on the surface at least, 'two contradictory concepts underlay the development of Soviet penal policy' throughout the civil war. The first, in adherence to the Marxist notion that man is conditioned by his economic environment, envisaged that through corrective labour, rather than punishment, and the abolition of the deleterious influences of capitalist society, criminals could be reformed. As foreign visitors began to travel to the Soviet Union from 1919, this was the approach that guests were fed, and the development of foreign visits as an effective method of Soviet cultural diplomacy provided the regime with an additional incentive to maintain some semblance of a progressive penal apparatus in the future. The second concept, by contrast, was borne of the 'Leninist doctrine of the proletarian dictatorship repressing its class enemies', and sought the 'the stern punishment of these enemies' by forced labour, isolation in concentration camps, torture and execution.[175]

The NEP

A central task of the party during the years of the New Economic Policy (1921-1928) was to reconcile these apparently contradictory approaches to penality. As Russia entered peacetime

[174] Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power: The First Year of Bolshevik Rule in Petrograd* (Bloomington, 2007), 222; Sakwa, *Communism in Russia*, 46; Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 100.
[175] Leggett, *The Cheka*, 175.

after an extended period of war and crisis (1914-1921), NEP had three major objectives.[176] First, it sought to reduce tensions in the countryside by ending grain requisitioning and imposing in its place a fixed tax in kind—measures that party leaders anticipated would increase production and more efficient distribution through the creation of limited private trade. Second, more open markets replaced the highly centralised system of war communism and labour regulations were relaxed in the hope of kick-starting a recovery in agriculture and industry. And third, the Bolsheviks sought to unify their party. To this end, limited concessions were made with regards to free discussion and criticism.[177]

NEP is often considered a golden age in Soviet society in comparison to the events by which it was both preceded and followed, and in many ways it can be seen as such. For the Bolshevik state, however, NEP was a period stricken with anxiety for a host of reasons. To begin with, the social class in whose name the Bolsheviks had instigated and ostensibly consolidated the revolution had all but disappeared. Much of the working class had fallen in the brutalities of war; those who returned from demobilised forces tended either to be reabsorbed into the peasantry, remained in the army or took up managerial or administrative positions in new state institutions.[178] The 'proletarian dictatorship', as Isaac Deutscher wrote, 'was triumphant, but the proletariat had nearly vanished'. The Bolsheviks' principal constituency had been 'declassed', and the state's borders were menaced by a capitalist encirclement.[179]

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[176] On Russia's 'continuum of crisis', see Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA., 2002).
[177] See William G. Rosenberg, 'Introduction', in Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (eds), *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington, 1991), 1-3.
[178] Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society', in Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (eds), *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington, 1991), 13; Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald. G. Suny, 'Class Backwards? In Search of the Soviet Working Class', in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald G. Suny (eds), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity* (London, 1994), 14. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, 1992), 16-36.
[179] Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929* (New York, 1959), 7; Fitzpatrick, 'The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society', 14.

Perhaps most significantly, though, NEP represented a contradiction in itself. In the long run, it 'was part of the progression from capitalism to communism … [but] in the short run, it was a transition *back* from impracticable, relatively pure communism to a more realistic, quasi-capitalist economy'.[180] In essence, NEP was a strategic and temporary retreat from Bolshevik values that distressed many party members. The party was faced with the challenges of creating a new Soviet society along Marxist lines, of 'ascribing class' and inculcating new behaviours, but it was forced to do so within the parameters of the cultural and economic dynamics that it feared to be 'incubating the very social instincts' it was seeking to eliminate.[181] The failure of revolutionary uprisings in Europe, particularly in Germany, saw the party reluctantly reach out to the peasantry for support, and calls for increased adherence to NEP laws and codes reflected what Naiman describes as a 'distressing ideological fall from grace'.[182]

The issue of criminality was of vital importance to the Bolsheviks during NEP. On the most basic level, the bedlam of wartime and revolution fuelled an explosion of crime and hooliganism that required addressing and which piqued the interests of both Bolsheviks and professional criminologists from the pre-revolutionary era.[183] Criminal policy offered the Bolsheviks a solution in their crusade to remake life under Soviet order, and the significance of the issue of criminality for the Bolsheviks is attested to by the creation of professional centres of criminological science across the state in the 1920s.[184] The 'conviction that human

[180] Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 135.
[181] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 189; Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia', *Journal of Modern History*, 65, 4 (1993), 745-70.
[182] Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 116; Naiman, *Sex in Public*, 279.
[183] Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 56. For a discussion of hooliganism as a challenge to cultural authority see Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, 2000), 167-76; Naiman, *Sex in Public*,126; 270-1.
[184] For another approach to re-forging life under Soviet communism involving the issue of criminality see Wood, *Performing Justice*, 10-11; 64. Wood demonstrates how participation by the masses in agitation trials fostered (illusory) faith in Soviet methods, legality and democracy, and taught workers not only to 'speak Bolshevik, to borrow Stephen Kotkin's term, but also to 'act Bolshevik'. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1997), 198-237.

material could be significantly reworked through a rationalization of the environment' was an intrinsic facet of the Soviet Marxism that underlay the revolution. The Bolsheviks were convinced that deviance was, in essence, a manifestation of backwardness and the defects of pre-revolutionary capitalist society. But this same Marxism, which espoused class struggle as an engine of social change, was far less apt at explaining 'the threat posed by the "dying classes" once Bolshevik victory … had been secured and … counterrevolution crushed'.[185] In its efforts to overcome its ideological contortion, the party looked, ironically, to the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia against whom it had earlier been so resolutely opposed.

As Daniel Beer has emphasised, by the turn of the twentieth century Russian liberals and criminologists were turning away from the idea of the rational offender as being deterred by punishment. In its place, the sociological school of criminology, particularly its left-wing factions, focused on the sociological factors behind crime.[186] Other liberal intellectuals, while rejecting the 'atavism' of Cesare Lombroso's notions of heredity and the 'born criminal', turned towards the anthropological-psychiatric and biological arguments behind degeneration theory, at the very least sublimating atavistic elements 'into a wider spectrum of psychopathologies' that had 'environmental causes as their origin'.[187] A contemporary trend in degeneration theory, too, saw, in the place of fixed prison sentences, the rise of the concept of 'social defense'—based originally on a utilitarian idea of protecting society—where individual punishments, or a system whereby the punishment fits the criminal rather than the crime, are applied. As Beer demonstrates, Russian psychiatrists and jurists who had embraced degeneration theory contributed to the discussion on penal policy a 'medicalized understanding of criminal deviance' that 'logically invoked a medical language of prophylactics' when

[185] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 169; 203; Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 9.
[186] Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 30-40.
[187] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 35-41; 102; 104-10.

considering appropriate penal measures for the protection of society from the criminal.[188] Liberal intellectuals' appropriations of these western biomedical theories had delivered stinging critiques of the oppressed nature of society under tsardom, but the inclination of the liberals to associate with radicalism, yet ultimately eschew revolutionary measures, left them as no more than theorists, trapped in what Beer calls an 'intellectual Catch-22'.[189]

Despite their many differences, then, the Bolsheviks and the intelligentsia had good reasons to cooperate. By 1921, NEP represented an 'intersection of the Enlightenment ideals of tsarist-era educators' and the 'anxieties and insecurities of early Soviet administrators' that was potentially dangerous for both parties.[190] But the Bolsheviks' early interest in the study of social problems found expression in contemporary criminologists' interpretations of crime.[191] The intellectuals found a munificent, if ideologically inflexible, patron in the Soviet regime, and their interests in preserving science tended to coincide with the state's ambitions to modernise Russia (even if they were destined to be conscripted as agents of the state).[192] And in turn, the Bolsheviks shared the intelligentsia's veneration for science and found, in the intellectuals' proclivity for degeneration theory, a means for positing deviance as a 'conjunction of both hereditary and environmental forces, a failure on the part of the individual to adapt' to the new revolutionary condition, thus opening the way for increasingly authoritative measures of social defence.[193]

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[188] Ibid, 124-6.
[189] Ibid, 34; 95.
[190] Wood, *Performing Justice*, 14.
[191] Kowalsky, *Deviant Women*, 49.
[192] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 14; Peter H. Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Criminology: Its Demise and Rebirth, 1928-1965', *Soviet Union*, 1, 2 (1974), 122-40; Dan Healey, 'Russian and Soviet Forensic Psychiatry: Troubled and Troubling', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 37 (2014), 76; Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh, 2015), 58; 140; Miller, 'Psychiatric Diagnosis as Political Critique', 254. For a discussion of alternative motivations for the intelligentsia cooperating with the Soviet system under NEP see Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917-1941* (Princeton, 1978), 72-4.
[193] Healey, 'Russian and Soviet Forensic Psychiatry', 76; Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 168.

This implicit 'biologization of the social' allowed the Bolsheviks to conflate the roles of biology and the environment in their explanations of the causes of criminality. Science lent a medical discourse of criminal deviance 'to all expressions of opposition, real and potential', and these violations of the law became 'biosocial illnesses' that required treatment by the coercive power of the state.[194] In dealing repressively with its class enemies, Soviet Marxism could compatibly invoke both the irrevocably instilled pathological heredity of the pre-revolutionary and NEP environments, and the regime's incapacity to restore health amid the pressing threats of counter-revolution.[195] Class war and criminality were to pave the way for the social engineering of Stalin's Russia, and this was reflected in the development throughout the NEP of the increasingly repressive actions of the state: the increased use of the death penalty, the revocation of the rights of political prisoners, their torture and extra-judicial execution, the blurring of the jurisdictions of the ordinary and secret police, the growth of concentration camps and the growing tendency to look not for evidence of crime, but instead to the perpetrator's origins, education and profession—to his 'internal inventory'.[196]

Despite these increasingly repressive developments, however, the progressive arm of Soviet penal policy also continued to develop. Removed from the chaos of wartime, calls to curb police power and to adhere to legality came from within the party. In the early 1920s, the Marxist and neoclassical assumption that the causes of crime lay in the exploitative capitalist environment still retained much force, and a heavy emphasis continued to be placed upon the

[194] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 170; 195; 200-1.
[195] Ibid, 200-1.
[196] Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 157; Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution*, 96-8; Applebaum, *Gulag*, 43; 46. On camp and later Gulag proliferation see Juviler, *Revolutionary Law and Order*, 33-6; Nick Baron, 'Conflict and Complicity: The expansion of the Karelian Gulag, 1923-1933', *Cahiers du Monde russe,* 42, 2-3-4 (2001), 615-48; Michael Jakobson, *Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917-1934* (Lexington, 1993); James. R. Harris, 'The Growth of the Gulag: Forced Labor in the Urals Region, 1929-31', *Russian Review*, 56, 2 (1997), 265-80; Louise I. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control* (London, 1996), 30; Gerson, *Secret Police*, 35; Rendle, *Defenders of the Motherland*, 208; Igal Halfin, *Intimate Enemies: Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918-1928* (Pittsburgh, 2007), 19-20.

notion that the amelioration of socioeconomic factors, not the punishment of the individual criminal, should be the focus of Soviet penal practice.[197] While qualifications often need to be made and gross violations of these aims clearly occurred on a very frequent basis, especially in light of the Bolsheviks' adoption of a biomedical discourse of prophylaxis, a progressive sentiment clearly existed throughout the years of the NEP.

In part, by the early 1920s, this sentiment still appeared to be an organic and genuine aspiration of the Bolsheviks, even if it was deemed far less important than the defence of Soviet society by repressive means in times of fear. Increasingly, though, as foreign visits to the Soviet state, including those made by the British labour movement in 1920 and 1924, increased in frequency and expediency, the incentives for progressive reforms—even if superficial, and particularly in relation to prisons and the 'model' institutions that were being established throughout Moscow—had their provenance in the desire to foster a humane image among useful political partners. In this light, the Bolsheviks focused on the connected issues of the development of their sentencing practices and the need for prison reform in these years. In 1922, a new Criminal Code entrenched the prominent use of non-custodial sanctions, such that in 1923 only one-fifth of those convicted in a criminal court were sent to prison. One quarter received compulsory work—the most 'socialist punishment'—while others received significantly shorter sentences as a result of judicial discretion and the employment of mitigating and background factors.[198] Parole was also instituted as an incentive for rehabilitation, and the application of the death sentence was significantly diminished.[199]

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[197] Hingley, *The Russian Secret Police*, 130; 132; Beirne and Hunt, 'Lenin, Crime, and Penal Politics', 107.
[198] See Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy', 198.
[199] Ibid, 199.

Inside the prisons themselves, educational institutions were established under the aegis of the People's Commissariat for Education (*Narkompros*)[200] and 'work communes' taught prisoners basic labouring skills that enabled them to perform socially useful work. This educative and rehabilitative sentiment even extended to the sex trade, which remained decriminalised, as the authorities sought to treat sex workers in 'labour prophylactoria', where 'industrial training was combined with venereal-disease therapy'.[201] And in further developments, divorce was secularised and legalised, as were abortion and most juvenile crimes, while numerous amnesties were granted. The Soviet state became a forerunner in its decriminalisation of male homosexuality.[202]

In light of these developments, and as Peter H. Solomon Jr. has argued, it would be wrong to treat the horrors of the Cheka-run Solovetsky concentration camps as a typical example of Soviet penal practice as a whole under NEP.[203] Indeed, it is contended that the primary obstacles in preventing the execution of progressive penal practices on a far wider scale throughout the 1920s were often the compounding issues of inadequate prison budgets, overcrowding, and a homogenised leniency in judicial and penal practice that failed to distinguish at all between prisoners.[204] Even with these obstacles, the practices employed by the Bolsheviks were significant, and brought Soviet Russia within the domain of western European penal practice.[205] As Anne Applebaum has noted, however, it is important to recognise the duality of the prison system that had developed in early Soviet Russia and was

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[200] *Narodnyi komissariat prosveshcheniia.*
[201] Solomon, 'Soviet Penal Policy', 199-201; Juviler, 'Contradictions of Revolution', 268; Dan Healey, 'Sexual and Gender Dissent: Homosexuality as Resistance in Stalin's Russia', in Lynne Viola (ed.), *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca, 2002), 152.
[202] Dan Healey, 'Love and Death: Transforming Sexualities in Russia, 1914-22', in Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks and Melissa K. Stockdale (eds), *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22. Book Two: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory* (Bloomington, 2014), 175; Beirne and Hunt, 'Lenin, Crime, and Penal Politics', 108-9.
[203] Solomon Jr., 'Soviet Penal Policy', 202.
[204] Ibid, 205.
[205] Solomon Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin*, 30.

maintained through the years of NEP. On one hand, a 'regular' prison system housed 'traditional' criminals under the jurisdiction, until 1922, of the NKIu; while on the other, a second system controlled by the secret police oversaw the incarceration of class enemies and political prisoners.[206] While the very existence of such a dual system necessarily limited the progressive traits of Soviet penal policy, the objectives of the 'regular' system would have been 'perfectly comprehensible in "bourgeois" countries: to reform the criminal through corrective labour'. The early Bolshevik criminal codes would, Applebaum argues, have 'warmed the hearts of the most radical, progressive criminal reformers in the West'.[207]

The Bolshevik approach to criminality, correction and punishment, then, played a significant role in Soviet attempts to re-forge a new society in the 1920s. In the period from the revolution to the end of NEP, the Bolsheviks employed both authoritarian and progressive strands, and the extent to which each strand was drawn upon tended to fluctuate with regards to its correlate political situation. The Bolsheviks' appropriation of pre-revolutionary liberal theories of criminology gave the party enormous scope to pursue its more authoritarian ambitions within the nexus of a changing ideological taxonomy of crime. As the class struggle appeared to intensify towards the end of the 1920s, progressive penal policies nevertheless remained, but their use and their visibility became shrouded by increasingly authoritarian actions. By now though, as the prospects of European revolution crumbled, international cultural diplomacy was more important to the Bolsheviks than ever, and methods had to be found to 'sell' a humane and 'favourable image' (*blagopriiatnuiu kartinu*) of the socialist state to western powers.[208] As the regime sought to utilise 'exhibitions of culture', or *kul'tpokaz*, in its diplomatic endeavours, the lengths to which it would go to scrutinise its guests, surveil their

[206] Applebaum, *Gulag*, 29; 35.
[207] Ibid.
[208] *Krasnaia zvezda*, 25 February 1925.

domestic institutions and sanitise its own prisons would have few limits. The Labour Party, as will be seen below, was to be a key target of these practices.

2.5 Conclusion

By the time of the armistice in November 1918, the Labour Party possessed a new constitution and a new party programme. In the form of Soviet Russia, it had a new 'socialist' state to look towards and to examine. And in its changing party composition, it had long-held Liberal influences jostling for position with the party's objective of establishing a new ideological base. While, on the surface, the most significant feature of the constitution—Clause IV—suggested that Labour had made, or at least intended to make, great strides towards socialism, its effect at this time should not be exaggerated.[209] By 1918 the party was indeed seeking to establish some ideological distance between itself and the Liberals as it anticipated a changing political landscape through the 1920s, but its political basis remained broad and gradualist, and certainly not transformed. The labour movement's approach to penal policy reflected this, as attitudes towards penality remained relatively unchanged in detail since the late 1800s. Indeed, scant attention had been given to the issue in the intervening years. Occasionally idealistic sentiments were aired as to the role of a future conscientious public opinion, rather than any legal apparatus, in conditioning citizens' behavior, but the specific details of penal reform or any new ideas remained elusive.

This chapter has demonstrated how the First World War affected this situation. The war, and most significantly the experience of conscientious objectors, was a pivotal factor in forcing the labour movement to engage with the issues of prisons and penal reform, as objectors were subjected to severe and degrading treatment in prisons and Home Office camps. The plight of

[209] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 12.

resistors at the mercy of the Military Service Act stimulated the establishment of a number of anti-war and anti-conscription organisations which, through exhaustive efforts in campaigning and resistance, shed a spotlight on the undermining of liberal-democratic values in Britain. Moreover, as objectors were released from prison, many began to write eloquent and powerful accounts of their experiences of the inner workings of the penal system; and many were drawn to the labour movement in their search for an alternative to the failings of the Liberals. As a result, the labour movement now possessed members who had experienced the problematic nature of the penal system first-hand, and could, in theory, through the likes of Fenner Brockway and E. D. Morel, begin to form a coherent party policy on issues of crime, punishment and prison reform. While the Labour Party's ideas on the issue were still limited to vague calls for systemic reform in this period, the experience of conscientious objectors was vital in piquing the interest of the party; it was, it is argued, the most formative experience and the engine which drove Labour's newfound concern. As the party entered a period of reconstruction, penal reformers strove to weave their objectives into the party programme.

The chapter has also shown how, despite the Labour Party's aversion to a Bolshevism it considered alien to its own brand of socialism, a set of specific historical circumstances allowed a political space to be carved out within which a broad sense of hope and enthusiasm became attached to the Russian revolutions. Growing fatigue with the war, the Labour Party's changing ideas about its own ideological objectives, and the difficulties in obtaining accurate information on Soviet Russia meant that the revolutionary state came to be seen—in some party factions with much hesitation, and in others with a great deal of enthusiasm—as a socialist exemplar to which the labour movement was open to learning from. And by examining the Soviet state's new approach to criminality and penal politics, the chapter has demonstrated that, despite its better known and more widely studied authoritarian repressions, the Bolsheviks also

established a progressive arm of penal policy from 1917 which closely resembled the policies of contemporary western democracies. As the Bolshevik regime passed through phases of revolution, war and the self-imposed ideological compromises of the NEP, its approaches to deviance fluctuated and its incentives to maintain progressive practices diminished. Yet, as interaction with western states increased through the first half of the decade, these 'forgotten' strategies remained a part of the Bolshevik programme and, it is argued here, began to form an invaluable part of the development of the new practice of Soviet cultural diplomacy.

As a distinct approach to criminality and penal reform that drew on pre-revolutionary liberal theories and a Marxist socioeconomic framework was implemented in Soviet Russia, a labour movement with its own liberal heritage and a newly gathered Liberal intake began to visit and examine the Soviet regime.[210] By analysing these visits and the Labour Party's development of a domestic penal policy in tandem in the following chapters, the complexities and changes over time in Labour's own expectations as to its socialism and its relationship with Soviet Russia are both re-evaluated from a novel perspective.

[210] See David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, 104-32; Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Introduction' and 'Cultural Revolution as Class War', in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington, 1978).

CHAPTER THREE

In Russia and in Government: Labour's Penal Politics

1917-1929

3.1 Introduction

According to George Lansbury, Labour MP and Soviet Russia enthusiast, the Russian Revolution was the greatest event in his lifetime.[1] Certainly, the significance of the revolution for the British labour movement should not be understated; Paul Ward goes so far as to claim that the left's response to Bolshevism—to what it could, or should, represent for them—dominated the years between the revolution and 1921.[2] The attitudes of the left towards the situation in Russia changed and fluctuated over time, but the early years of the revolution were crucial in shaping perceptions that would endure, affecting in particular the labour movement's understandings of criminality, justice and penal reform. In the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution, however, the labour movement also faced pressing domestic concerns. With war coming to an end in 1918, the Labour Party focused its efforts on post-war reconstruction and party reorganisation. Following a disappointing result at the 1918 election, at which the party won, in the face of a wave of patriotism, only 57 seats to the Lloyd George-Conservative coalition's 473, the party was soon confronted with its new role of His Majesty's Opposition in 1922, as J. R. Clynes led Labour to an election result of 142 seats in parliament. MacDonald, who had regained his parliamentary seat in 1922, challenged Clynes for the leadership soon after the election and won, and for the first time it could be argued that Labour was the second party in the state, 'with a leader who looked like a potential Prime Minister'.[3]

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[1] Holman, *Good Old George*, 91.
[2] Ward, *Red Flag*, 160.
[3] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 50-2; 57-8.

As noted in chapter two, at its February Conference in 1918 the party had adopted a new constitution which, in theory, proclaimed its socialist intentions with the inclusion of Clause IV. This commitment to socialism and party re-organisation was reinforced by an accompanying policy statement entitled *Labour and the New Social Order*, and the official adoption at a second conference in June of the resolutions involved. Indeed, *Labour and the New Social Order*, written chiefly by the Fabian Sidney Webb, boldly claimed the 'end of a civilisation' and the necessity for vigilance against 'patchwork' reform. 'The view of the Labour Party', it stated assuredly, 'is that what has to be reconstructed after the war is not this or that Government Department, or this or that piece of social machinery; but, so far as Britain is concerned, society itself'.[4] Leading figures in the labour movement, however, and particularly those in the Labour Party, were also mindful of the need to establish the party on a wider scale than had hitherto been the case, and thus the concurrent need to act as a party of moderation. As Pelling noted, to prove itself ready for the responsibilities of government, the party had to develop 'a practical programme which in domestic affairs was a compromise between Marxian Socialism on the one hand and the piecemeal social reform of the Chamberlain-Lloyd George type on the other'.[5]

In the tempestuous years following the Russian Revolution, and in the search for this practical programme between radical socialism and moderation, the temptation of different factions and individuals in the labour movement to look to Soviet Russia as a formative model was to prove a constant source of tension. From 1919 onwards, individuals from the labour movement began to visit the new Soviet state to study the new political, economic and social institutions that were being constructed; and as the Soviet reception of foreign delegations peaked between

[4] Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order*, 3.
[5] Pelling, *A Short History*, 45.

1925 and 1927, the aspect of the new society that was reported most positively by British (and, indeed, continental European) visitors was the Soviet penal system. The experience of Soviet prisons as presented by the Bolsheviks, and the admiration that developed among the left for the Soviet system was to have, it is argued here, a significant influence on the Labour Party's understanding of prisons and penal reform.

According to Edmund Dell, the Secretary of State for Trade in James Callaghan's government (1976 to 1979), the inter-war years were the high point of British socialism. Socialists were 'at their most cogent about the validity, and even nobility, of their vision'; 'It was the time of highest hopes, though paradoxically of least achievements'.[6] On issues of the urgency for penal reform, prisons and the problem of criminality hopes also appeared high, both within the party and penal reform groups, and sentiment was strong, if still sporadic. While these matters seldom took centre stage at party conferences or within manifesto literature, concerns and debates rumbled on beneath the surface, largely buried by the movement's more immediate and penetrable proclamations and political actions.

In hindsight, the left's increased interest in penal affairs should not come as a surprise. As noted in chapter one, the English penal system had, since the Gladstone Committee (1895), been undergoing changes that have variously been described as a dramatic transformation towards a new penal philosophy, a set of slow-burning reforms, and the reflection of an emergent liberalism and humanitarianism.[7] Strict adherence to classical principles of penality, which had been the hallmark of Sir Edmund Du Cane's administration as Chairman of the Prison Commission (1877-1895), was now being challenged by his successor, Sir Evelyn Ruggles-

[6] Edmund Dell, *A Strange Eventful History: Democratic Socialism in Britain* (London, 2000), 1. Dell of course joined the Social Democratic Party in his disillusionment with Labour's continued attachment to socialism.
[7] Brown, *English Society*, 109-11; Tim Newburn, *Crime and Criminal Justice Policy*, 2nd edn (London, 2003), 11-15.

Brise. Gradually, from 1895, Ruggles-Brise oversaw the emergence (though by no means the triumph) of a penal theory that instead encouraged positivist methodologies, the goal of reformation over punishment, and an enhanced system of classification of convicts. Furthermore, many conscientious objectors remained incarcerated following the war and Labour would soon become involved in the imprisonment and release of several members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). As early as 1918, in *The Aims of Labour*, Henderson, who would oversee issues of this very nature as Home Secretary in 1924, relayed his own convictions as to the necessity of reforming Britain's post-war penal and legal systems.[8] As the party moved closer to governmental office, as its excitement about Soviet Russia peaked, and as it was subjected to an increasingly thorough and rigorous Soviet propaganda machine, its development of a distinct penal understanding requires examination.

Through a continued examination of the labour movement's approach to deviance and criminality from 1917 to 1929, this chapter reinforces a central argument of the thesis which demonstrates that while Labour's engagement with and attitudes towards penal reform changed over distinct periods of time, a coherent and cohesive penal philosophy, socialist or otherwise, was never established. The chapter contends that, because of both the experiences of conscientious objectors and the establishment of Soviet Russia, the Labour Party as a whole was far more engaged with the issues of prison and penal reform throughout the 1920s than it had hitherto been. The party's engagement, though, failed at any time in this period to be translated into concrete action in terms of party policy. In part, the failure of the party to act on issues of penal reform was due to its unexpected assumption to office, its minority status and its lack of preparation. Such failure, though, was also due to the party's increasingly problematic relationship with Russia, which seemed, by the fall of the Labour government in

[8] Henderson, *Aims of Labour*, 75; 78.

late 1924, to be at the heart of all Labour's problems. Through visits to the Soviet Union, the labour movement had gained a great many ideas on penal reform and demonstrated strong admiration for the Soviet system; but the risks that 'Bolshevik associations' brought to a party under constant attack from a Conservative press were too great to consider any form of emulation. Failing to form or enact any policy, or to meet the standards on penal reform set down by the broader labour movement, the Labour Party failed throughout the 1920s to live up to its own expectations.

The chapter also demonstrates the development by the Soviets of a new style of cultural diplomacy known as *kul'tpokaz*, or the exhibition of culture, and the increasing importance that the role of prisons came to play within this diplomacy. Utilising previously unexplored material from the Russian state archives, it argues that the British left were a key target of increasingly sophisticated Soviet propaganda, as rigorous research was compiled upon British guests and elaborately managed visits to 'model' prisons became a key feature of visitor experiences. Unlike in tsarist Russia, where liberal professionals could interact with their western counterparts through established international epistemic communities, the isolation of Soviet scientists and criminologists fostered the use of more surreptitious methods by the regime. International developments in the fields of penology and prison reform were surveilled by the Soviets in order that the latest ideas, theories and practices could be 'sold back' to visitors to the Soviet Union. Often these ideas had little relation to socialism and were even known previously to foreign visitors; but in dressing up these ideas in the language of Soviet socialism, the Bolsheviks achieved enormous success in establishing in the minds of their visitors (and, moreover, their visitors' own audiences) the image of a humane and progressive Soviet state.

In particular, British socialists were very taken with the Soviet penal system, and the examination of this new aspect of the relationship between the Labour Party and the Soviet Union demonstrates the continued need for much more nuanced analyses. On occasions 'duped', at other times witnessing accurate depictions of the Soviet system, and at all times subjected to intense and impressive Soviet propaganda, the casting of Labour figures as 'naïve British idiots' is both misleading and shortsighted.[9] Furthermore, the claim that the labour movement rejected all aspects of Soviet socialism other than its centrally planned economy and its later foreign policy requires reconsideration, as the chapter shows how, from as early as 1919, the labour movement began to show great admiration for the Soviet penal system. In just a few years Russia had moved from that great 'Chamber of Horrors' to an example for the Labour Party to follow, and, in examining the labour movement's perceptions of Soviet Russia through the lens of penal politics, a re-evaluation of the Labour-Soviet relationship is undertaken.[10]

Finally, the chapter argues that throughout much of the 1920s the Labour Party was, to quote Skidelsky, 'a parliamentary party with a Utopian ethic'.[11] Exposed through Soviet Russia to a host of idealistic designs on the reformation of penal systems and the treatment of criminals—reinforced by Labour's attraction to the alleged 'moderation' of the NEP it perceived as emerging—the Labour Party was not short of ideas in its penal politics. It still retained, moreover, the 'utopian' ideas of its early socialist canon of Owen, Morris and Hardie. Yet the

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[9] See for instance Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*; Margulies, *Pilgrimage to Russia*, 208; Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers*, 116; Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford, 2007), 243.
[10] For example, *Labour Leader*, 29 June 1906; 6 July 1906; 13 July 1906. See also *Socialist Review*, I, March-August (London, 1908), 335-7; 340-2.
[11] Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, xii. Skidelsky's economic arguments have of course been dismantled in more recent literature. See Ross McKibbin, 'The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government, 1929-1931', *Past and Present*, 68 (1975), 95-123, reproduced as chapter 7 in McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950* (Oxford, 1990), 197-227; Duncan Tanner, 'Political leadership, intellectual debate and economic policy during the second Labour government, 1929-1931', in E. H. H. Green and D. M. Tanner (eds), *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate* (Cambridge, 2007), 113-50.

party's reluctance to implement any sort of socialist or idealist agenda on a topic as bipartisan as penal politics highlights its ideological uncertainty in this period. At the end of the war, MacDonald and the party still retained idealistic notions on the role of public opinion in policing behavior; and through the 1920s the party was flooded with 'socialist' ideas it experienced in Soviet Russia. These two elements were never fused, though, and as Labour's leaders resigned themselves to patching up the capitalist system, electoral pragmatism ensured that idealism was suspended in favour of a more conservative agenda.

3.2 Labour and Penality in Britain, 1918-1920

Often more in theory than in action, Soviet Russia did offer the prospect of improvement for Britain with regards to penal practice; as demonstrated in chapter two, for a number of years following the Bolshevik Revolution progressive measures in line with a burgeoning neoclassical approach to the problem of criminality were utilised in Russia. Until the first Labour delegation actually visited Russia in 1920, though, little could accurately be known by the labour movement about these areas of Bolshevik progress, and the party's focus remained on domestic British affairs.

On penal affairs, the Gladstone Committee of 1895 had indeed set the foundations to effect great change in Britain's penal system, but the pace of reform had been laboured through to 1914 and war had understandably halted its further progression. Nevertheless, by 1917 a number of ameliorations had occurred that suggested an indelible challenge to the old Victorian system was at last in motion. While Ruggles-Brise was unwilling to abandon the universal practice of solitary confinement for convicts upon their incarceration, over time the period of confinement was reduced to one month for less serious offenders and three months for recidivists. Increased classification of prisoners, too, was undermining uniformity of

punishment and forcing internal debate over the individualisation of punishments.[12] The most progressive reforms came as a result of a number of acts passed from 1907-1914. The Probation of Offenders Act (1907), the Prevention of Crime Act (1908), the Children Act (1908), the Mental Deficiency Act (1913) and the Criminal Justice Administration Act (1914) acted as 'constructive remedial measures', collectively introducing borstal training for young offenders, prohibiting capital punishment for persons under sixteen, extending the range of mitigating factors taken into consideration in sentencing, and allowing further time for paying fines, thus reducing overall imprisonment.[13] As a result, by the end of the First World War the British penal system had at its heart two competing theories: an obstinate and rather dominant reliance on fundamental classical principles of punishment and uniformity, 'which related the level of punishment principally to the seriousness of the offence'; and an emerging reformism pushing individualisation, rehabilitation, and alternatives to prison.[14]

Rather surprisingly, there was no recorded increase in overall crime rates following the war, though this was often explained as an effect of the outlet of the conflict. A sharp rise in juvenile crime, however, required further investigation and explanation,[15] and ensured that 'scepticism about the efficacy of prison' was nevertheless 'carried over into the inter-war period'.[16] For the labour movement in particular, this scepticism had much to do with the role of wartime political prisoners, who were posing moral conundrums in a liberal society and challenging the classical association between the level of punishment and the seriousness of the offence.[17] As noted in chapter two, conscientious objectors were frequently subjected to cycles of imprisonment, and

[12] Newburn, *Crime and Criminal Justice Policy*, 12-13.
[13] Radzinowicz, 'Introduction', in *English Local Government*, VI; Pritchard, *A History of Capital Punishment*, 17-18.
[14] Brown, *English Society*, 137.
[15] Charles E. B. Russell, *The Problem of Juvenile Crime* (London, 1917), 3-6.
[16] Newburn, *Crime and Criminal Justice Policy*, 15-16.
[17] Brown, *English Society*, 137.

their striving to gain recognition of their 'political' status as well as their poor treatment was crucial in ensuring the issue of penal reform was kept on the labour movement's agenda through these years.[18]

The *Herald*, for instance, reported widely on the state of imprisoned conscientious objectors through to 1919, ensuring that their situation and the alleged atrocities they suffered reached a wider audience.[19] The issue was also raised at the Labour Party conferences in 1918 and 1919, where, along with dismay at reported cases of forcible feeding, a resolution was unanimously passed calling for the release of all conscientious objectors. The ILP, at their annual conference in 1919, protested against the harsh punishments inflicted upon political prisoners and the repeated incarceration of conscientious objectors, and through a series of correspondences in 1917 even established the 'ILP Dartmoor Prison Branch'.[20] This correspondence provided a channel of dialogue through which information on conscientious objectors in Dartmoor and other British institutions could be passed to the ILP, and appears to have given additional impetus to the party's efforts regarding penality and those who resisted conscription. In March 1918, two years before she would visit a Soviet prison in 1920, plans were made for Ethel Snowden to visit Dartmoor to address ILP members and to see how their time in prison was utilised. Three prisoners in Dartmoor even ran for election to the ILP National Administrative Council in the same year.[21]

Such scrutiny of the plight of conscientious objectors not only raised the profile of issues relating to prison reform within the labour movement; it also contributed to a fundamental

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[18] See Brown, *English Society*, 147; 150-4; Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 207; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 93.
[19] See *Herald*, 3 February 1917; 10 March; 26 January 1918; 2 February; 16 February; 2 March.
[20] *LPACR, 1919*, 173-4; *ILPACR, 1919*, 20; BLPES, Independent Labour Party papers, ILP/4/1917/85; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 120.
[21] See the letters held in BLPES, ILP/4/1917/52; ILP/4/1917/85; ILP/4/1918/3; ILP/4/1918/6; ILP/4/1918/23; ILP/4/1918/28(i); ILP/4/1918/39; ILP/4/1918/47.

dilemma facing prison authorities. According to Brown, the Home Office feared that 'if political prisoners were able to determine the terms of their own imprisonment', it 'would cause disobedience among ordinary prisoners and undermine discipline generally'. The role of the prison was at risk under such pressures.[22] Within the context of the steady currents of reform that were moving through the penal system, prison officers also faced increasing challenges in reconciling their principal duties of control and security with emerging ideas around reform. As James Thomas notes, resentment on the part of officers at being excluded from reformative efforts, receiving negligible training and being forced to meet increasing demands for unchanging pay had been building since the early 1900s.[23] The unionisation of prison officers in 1915 through the Prison Officers' Federation, and their later amalgamation with the National Union of Prison and Police Officers (NUPPO) in 1918 was another key factor in ensuring that the labour movement would become inextricably tied to the issue of prison reform.

Much has been written on the action taken by NUPPO that led to the police strikes of 1918 and 1919. For the purposes of this study, the police strikes are most significant in their successfully relating to the broader labour movement the underlying issues of penal reform. That the Labour Party was opposed to strike action by a large majority, and that the lone figures of George Lansbury, Walter Citrine and the *Herald* came out in favour, is in a sense less significant.[24] More importantly, the strikes brought to their apogee the long-running reform efforts of the

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[22] Brown, *English Society*, 155.

[23] James E. Thomas, *The English Prison Officer since 1850: A Study in Conflict* (London, 1972), 42; 50; ch. 7. See also Newburn, *Crime and Criminal Justice Policy*, 16-17, and Brown, *English Society*, 114-16; Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1899*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1987), II, 195.

[24] It has been suggested elsewhere, though, that the failure of the strike played a significant role in turning the labour movement away from 'Bolshevist' ideas of direct action. See Gerald W. Reynolds and Anthony Judge, *The Night the Police Went on Strike* (London, 1968), 131; 149; Ron Bean, 'Police Unrest, Unionization and the 1919 Strike in Liverpool', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15, 4 (1980), 634; Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London, 2009), 106-7; Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions,* II, 195; 286; Clive Emsley, *The Great British Bobby: A History of British Policing from the 18th Century to the Present* (London, 2010), 192-3; 198; *Herald*, 30 November 1918; Stanley Salvidge, *Salvidge of Liverpool* (London, 1934), 177; National Union of Police and Prison Officers, *An Appeal for the Police and Prison Officers' Trade Union* (London, 1919), 1-2.

Prison Officer's Magazine, the agitation for the re-instatement of ex-Inspector John Syme following his dismissal from the force, and, in light of Labour Party statements pledging to reinstate those officers dismissed for their participation in industrial action, ensured the subject would remain on Labour's radar as it entered governmental office five years later.

Conscientious objectors' accounts and illiberal penal politics

Through the turbulent years of 1918 to 1920, official party statements on penality increased as first-hand reports of conscientious objectors began to appear in the press. Hobhouse, Brockway and Morel all played prominent roles, and with each new publication the effects of different aspects of the contemporary British penal system were revealed candidly to the public for the first time in over twenty years. Hobhouse, for instance, in 1918 and 1919, attacked the comprehensive use of the silence system in British prisons, citing solitude as 'the worst part of punishment' and highlighting the deaths recorded in Home Office camps as a result of hard labour and solitary confinement.[25] Morel questioned explicitly the aims of the prison system, claiming its failure either to punish or deter prisoners. Taking issue with prison uniformity, he stated:

> 'where is the sense, let alone the justice of meting out the same treatment … to the man who has stolen three bottles of whiskey, to the man who has raped the virgin child, or for that matter to the man held to have committed an "act preparatory" to the transmission of publications, read by tens of thousands of his fellow-countrymen, to Switzerland?'

[25] Hobhouse, *The Silence System*, 1; idem, *An English Prison from Within*, 15.

The system, he claimed, was designed only for 'brute beasts', and contained nothing that was 'calculated to strike sparks from the anvil of hope, to point the way to a cleaner, saner outlook, to revive self-respect … On the contrary. Everything in the system militates against these things'.[26]

Brockway continued the stream of agitation. His *Prisons as Crime Factories* (1919) condemned the contemporary state of British penal institutions, focusing on the stringent regulations and their effect in creating criminals rather than reforming them. Brockway described how the impossibility of the silence system's enforcement made it worthless, in that it fostered deception as a means of surviving, while its punitive nature inculcated within prisoners a burning antagonism towards the general community, who went out 'at war with society'.[27] The contemporary system, he claimed, failed both the 'short-timer' and 'long-timer'. Instead, in a rare attempt by the labour movement to provide constructive proposals for reform, Brockway suggested that association between prisoners should be encouraged, the 'ideal of service to the community … be inculcated in prisoners by means of the work they do', and inmates be trusted 'to the fullest extent possible' while incarcerated in order to prepare them for their return to the outside world. Brockway also called for more frequent inspections of prisons and greater efforts on the part of magistrates to learn about the inner workings of the prison system.[28]

Aside from Brockway's brief but important proposals, these indictments of the prison system generally produced little in the way of programmes or suggested reforms, and were reflective of the labour movement's dealings with penal politics. Even Brockway, despite his vague ideas

[26] Morel, *Thoughts on the War*, 66-8.
[27] Fenner Brockway, *Prisons as Crime Factories*, ILP Pamphlet. New Series 21 (London, 1919), 4-5; 7-8; idem, *Inside the Left*, 105; 107.
[28] Ibid, 8-14.

on the direction of reform, made clear that this was not his principal intention. (Further work on constructive proposals, he claimed, was forthcoming in a series being published by the ILP under Philip Snowden's editorship.[29]) Two inter-related views can be ascribed to this approach. On the one hand, on a broader scale than in the past decade and certainly among more 'high-profile' socialist figures than previously, the left was beginning to understand the importance of penal politics and was increasingly committed to real, substantive discussions on the issue. On the other hand, the movement's contemporary ideas around penal reform, beneath its public arraignments of the present system, remained more hollow. Given the relatively embryonic form of penal reform groups at this point and the very contemporary nature of the issue of conscientious objection, this was, in part, understandable; the emphasis of campaigners was often restricted to the practical considerations behind the publication of the plight of war resistors and the prison conditions to which they were subjected. Away from conscientious objection, though, and because of the historical expectation of many socialists that issues surrounding criminality would resolve themselves under a move to socialism, far more work was required if a cohesive Labour approach to penal reform was to be achieved.

In 1919, it appeared that this problem was finally recognised. As a result of the treatment of prisoners during wartime and the revelations of Hobhouse, Morel and Brockway, the Executive of the Labour Research Department (LRD) established the Prison System Enquiry Committee, which would publish its findings in 1922 as Hobhouse and Brockway's *English Prisons To-Day*.[30] The No-Conscription Fellowship saw the potential for great strides in the reform movement as a result of the enquiry. 'Since COs have been released from prison', the Fellowship wrote, 'they have done so much to expose the evils of the prison system', and as a

[29] This work only materialised in 1928. See Fenner Brockway, *A New Way with Crime* (London, 1928), discussed in chapter four.
[30] 'Labour's Prison Enquiry', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 1 (1921), 35; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 122.

result of the enquiry both 'prisoners and prison officers … would expect great changes … We intend to realise that expectation'.[31] The LRD, too, claimed that the moment 'was opportune for a detailed investigation of the working and effects of the English Prison System', and 'to bring new points of view to bear upon the problem'.[32] Until the committee reported, though, the labour movement's approach was to remain somewhat intermittent. Prompted by increasing suggestions for reform and the 'radical alteration' of Britain's penal system by reform groups, sporadic attacks by the labour movement upon the prison system and the government's approach to crime and punishment continued through to 1920.[33] The Labour Party continued to call at its annual conferences in 1919 and 1920 for the release of conscientious objectors, as well as the 'complete transformation' of the 'whole structure of society'. The issue of penal reform, however, failed to feature in any of Labour's election material in 1918, highlighting the chasm that remained between the relative importance ascribed to penality and electoral reality.[34]

The ILP, too, was forceful in its repudiation of Britain's 'soul-destroying penal system' and, in an early and progressive move, demanded the abolition of the death penalty.[35] The *Labour Leader*, meanwhile, on the back of increasingly publicised reform proposals by the Society of Friends' Penal Reform Committee, made clear that it expected the first Labour government, whenever it materialised, to begin to reform the British penal codes and those of the Empire. This was an achievement, it claimed, of utmost importance and well within the reach of a first

[31] LRSFB, TEMP MS 62/PRI/PAM/1-5, Cornelius Barritt papers, *The No-Conscription Fellowship: A Souvenir of its Work During the Years 1914-1919* (London, 1920), 60.
[32] Stephen Hobhouse and A. Fenner Brockway (eds), *English Prisons To-Day: Being the Report of the Prison System Enquiry Committee* (London, 1922), v.
[33] LRSFB, YMS/Mfs/PRC (1920-1926), Penal Reform Committee Minutes, 'Yearly Meeting Proceedings (1919), 111.
[34] *LPACR, 1919*, 165; 173-4; *LPACR, 1920*, 116; Iain Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997* (London, 2000), 16-17.
[35] *ILPACR, 1919*, 15-16; 20.

administration.[36] The *Herald* pushed for investigations into the causes of crime, condemned the use of the death penalty on the war front, and recounted stories of citizens suffering miscarriages of justice at the hands of the penal system, asking what the labour movement would do 'to substitute kindness for coercion, reason for violence'.[37] Further to the left, the anarchist-communist newspaper *The Spur* decried the prison system for being no better than a nineteenth-century regime and questioned the aims of the LRD. 'A Prison Inquiry is ordered and we all fall asleep again. So much for prison-reform Socialism and the ballot-box. Why not come out for Communism and the Revolution?'[38]

By 1919, then, an official, party-approved process of information-gathering and examination of the penal system was underway within the labour movement. A defined and cohesive approach to penality was still elusive, but the importance of the issue appeared to be gathering momentum. Perhaps most significantly, in anticipation of a first Labour government, a marker had been set down by the ILP under which penal reform was pushed as a realistic and necessary objective. In other words, though optimistic and seemingly increasingly ambitious, the left was still forming questions and searching for answers in its penal politics. The labour movement's approach at this point was perhaps best summed up by the Penal Reform Committee of the Society of Friends, which claimed in 1920 that:

> We cannot feel satisfied with any process of tinkering with the Prison System as it is, but feel that revolutionary changes are needed not only in the spirit of the law, but also

[36] LRSFB, YMS/Mfs/PRC (1920-1926), Penal Reform Committee Minutes, 'Yearly Report of the Penal Reform Committee (1920)'; *Labour Leader*, 6 May 1920. See also Lansbury, *The Persecution and Internment of Mrs Besant*. Home Rule for India League: British Auxiliary, No. 10 (London, 1917).
[37] *Herald*, 21 April 1917; 9 March 1918; 15 June 1918.
[38] *The Spur*, 1, 11 (1919).

in the practice of treating prisoners … [W]e … ought not to wait for a perfect order of society nor yet to neglect the question of reform while working for the new order.[39]

Within the next five years, the labour movement and the TUC would make their first official visits to Soviet Russia, and seeing 'socialism in action' would expose them to a plethora of novel social institutions. With ongoing enquiries into prison reform at home, and under the 1918 party programme of the construction of a 'new social order', Soviet Russia appeared an apposite place to begin the search for answers.

3.3 Labour Visits Russia, 1920

In May 1920, a joint Labour Party-TUC delegation was sent to Russia. Ostensibly the trip was an impartial fact-finding mission, inquiring into the political, industrial and economic conditions in Soviet Russia. The Soviet state, however, remained the most explosive issue in British politics, and the delegation arrived at a time of heightened tensions. Allied intervention in Russia was ongoing—even after the armistice—and for more than two years Britain had been in a state of undeclared war with the Bolshevik regime, with the deployment of British troops and military material amassing over time.[40]

In 1918, the left formed councils of action under the slogan 'Hands off Russia' in order to bolster its opposition to intervention. In 1919 this movement was organised on a national basis and, in 1920, as the Polish premier sought eastward expansion into Soviet territory and the British government considered both further intervention and arming Poland, union support saw

[39] LRSFB, YMS/Mfs/PRC (1920-1926), Penal Reform Committee Minutes, 'Yearly Report of the Penal Reform Committee (1920)'.
[40] Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, I; Paul Anderson and Kevin Davey, *Moscow Gold? The Soviet Union and the British Left* (Suffolk, 2014), 23-8; Ian C. D. Moffat, *The Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1920: The Diplomacy of Chaos* (Basingstoke, 2015).

calls for mass strike action in order to prevent war. At its apogee in August 1920, the Dockers' Union refused to load the *S.S. Jolly George* with munitions bound for Poland and threatened further embargoes and direct action. The threat of a general strike, Jones suggests, as well as the 'idea that united working-class action had foiled a capitalist attack upon the first workers' State', became 'a potent element in Labour mythology which nourished the emotional identification' that Labour was beginning to feel with Russia.[41]

Even beyond these events, curiosity as to Soviet Russia was being roused. The Bolsheviks had banned foreign correspondents during the war, and uncertainty as to real events in Russia saw rumours circulate and contentious reports appear. According to White, the British government encouraged many of these rumours through right-wing propaganda and its *Collection of Reports on Bolshevism* (1919)—a document of 'transparently political purpose'.[42] While its intention was to condemn the Bolshevik regime, the collection itself was made up of a host of contradictory reports, especially regarding the treatment of prisoners. Those imprisoned in Russia were apparently at the same time treated very well and also tortured, while prisons were worse than in the tsarist era.[43] As a result, by the time of the first official travels to Russia there was great anticipation in the labour movement as to what would be found. Early returnees from Russia—that is, those who travelled before the official Labour-TUC delegation—wrote books and articles, and gave lectures and interviews across the country as people flocked to hear first-hand accounts.[44]

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[41] White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia', 621-40; W. P. and Zelda K. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (London, 1945), 135-52; Gabriel Gorodetsky, 'The Formulation of Soviet Foreign Policy—Ideology and *Realpolitik*', in Gabriel Gorodetsky (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1991: A Retrospective* (Oxford, 2013), 30-44; Daniel F. Calhoun, *The United Front: The TUC and the Russians, 1923-1928* (Cambridge, 1976), 32-3; L. J Macfarlane, 'Hands off Russia: British Labour and the Russo-Polish War, 1920', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 126-52; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 6.
[42] Anderson and Davey, *Moscow Gold?*, 25-7; White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia', 624.
[43] See for instance, *A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia* (London, 1919), reports 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 18, and 22.
[44] Anderson and Davey, *Moscow Gold?*, 26; Coates and Coates, *A History*, 146-9.

Perhaps surprisingly, prisons were a rather prominent issue in the reports of these early Liberal and Labour visitors. Rumours of Bolshevik atrocities evidently set the tone for expectations, but the likes of Arthur Ransome, M. Phillips Price, William T. Goode, Cecil Malone, H. G. Wells and George Lansbury produced favourable accounts of their Russian findings in 1919 and early 1920. Ransome, journalist and sympathetic witness to the Russian Revolution, for instance, described the prisons in Yaroslavl as 'astonishingly clean' and the best places to eat—so much so that Executive Committee officials chose to dine in them. British prisoners of war in the *Butyrka* were also seen to be well treated.[45] Goode, a university professor and *Manchester Guardian* correspondent, became an early advocate of Bolshevik penal methods, citing the use of suspended sentences for first offenders, the implementation of the 1919 Bolshevik guidelines on criminal law, and the use of maximum sentences of three years. The very worst Russian offenders, he claimed simplistically, were merely taught to work, while prostitution had all but disappeared and the police seemed invisible.[46] Malone, a Liberal MP who converted to the communist cause following his Soviet visit, also noted positively the apparent frequency with which minor criminals were released. He looked favourably, too, upon the granting of liberty to prisoners in Moscow for employment purposes, providing they returned to quarters by their evening curfew.[47]

The reports of Lansbury were the most effusive. Persuaded by the Soviet idea that current levels of crime were a hangover from the tsarist epoch, Lansbury claimed that prisoners now had a much 'better chance' than under the previous regime. The restructured court system, the predominate use of fines or labour over prison sentences, and stories of pardons being granted

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[45] Arthur Ransome, *The Crisis in Russia, 1920* (London, 1992 [1920]), 48-9; 53; 127.
[46] W. T. Goode, *Bolshevism at Work* (New York, 1920), 94-7; 134-5; idem, *In Russia: Splendid Order, Wonderful Organisation and Good Conditions for Everybody* (Melbourne, 1920), 23-4.
[47] Colonel Cecil Malone, M. P., *The Russian Republic* (New York, 1920), 73; 82-3. See White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia', 625-6 for an overview.

for those found guilty of murder impressed Lansbury—almost as much as the Bolsheviks' apparent 'rigid' adherence to the abolition of the death penalty.[48] Most impressive, however, was the prison system itself:

> The prisons themselves and internment camps were not prisons in the ordinary sense … I spent one evening in the so-called prison of … sixty "prisoners" … I found them complete masters of their surroundings. They were in excellent spirits … I have tried to find a new word for such prisons and prisoners, for certain it is that these men enjoyed a better life than the Commissar in whose charge they were placed … I can only call them free prisoners … It was difficult to see where the prison came in.[49]

Lansbury enthused about the new approach to criminals in Russia: 'There is a kind of allowance made for the causes which bring them there, which appears to me to affect their whole treatment … There was no such thing as vengeance or punishment'. The Bolshevik emphasis on the deterministic role of environment meant that '[w]hat prisons are now used are reformative in their character, but all are based on the principle that prisons ought to have no place in modern society'.[50] Lansbury's conclusions were clear: the 'Bolsheviks have led the way in being more humane, more considerate in their treatment' of prisoners 'than any other Government'; they are unlike any other country and have 'set the world an example as to the methods of dealing with prisoners'. 'Western civilization has something to learn from Soviet Russia'.[51]

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[48] George Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia* (London, 1920), 114-15; 118-20.
[49] Ibid, 122-6. See also Lansbury, *Red Russia in 1920* (Melbourne, 1920), 9.
[50] Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia*, 126-9.
[51] Ibid, 133; Lansbury, *Red Russia*, 9; *Bednota*, 16 May 1920.

As Davis notes, overlooking elements of the Soviet system that sat uncomfortably with British socialism was 'a common trait among many visitors to the USSR between the wars'.[52] Early visitors were no exception. Ransome, Goode, Malone and Wells all ignored the atrocities alleged to have been committed in Russia. Each even described the purported executions and terror variably as 'necessary', 'honest', or as bringing 'order'. The Cheka's role, too, was generally diminished, while Iakov Peters and Felix Dzerzhinsky, founders of the secret police, were considered 'docile' and 'gentle' men.[53] It is significant, too, to note that at the time of these first visits the Soviet authorities had at their disposal a relatively limited cultural-diplomatic apparatus with which to impress foreign delegations—especially when compared to the *kul'tpokaz* methods that would come to dominate the Soviet foreign policy of the mid-1920s and 1930s (the 'mass production of delegations', according to Profintern General Secretary, Solomon Lozovsky).[54]

The priorities of Moscow were also fractured. By 1919 and the creation of the Comintern, the Soviets were seeking to export socialist revolution to the West and the East; but to ensure the survival of their own nascent state they had increasingly to contend with foreign states on diplomatic lines, in the hope of nurturing international relations and signing much-needed trade deals. Aware of the need to distance themselves where possible from the aggressive line of the Comintern, Moscow's principal task soon became 'winning the Western masses through the creation of a large movement of public opinion favourable to the USSR'.[55] Attempting to tread

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[52] Davis, 'Left Out in the Cold', 73.
[53] Arthur Ransome, *Six Weeks in Russia in 1919* (London, 1919), vii-viii; Malone, *Russian Republic*, 59; 112-13; H. G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (New York, 1921), 77-8; 174; Goode, *Bolshevism at Work*, 68; 125; idem, *In Russia*, 9; Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia*, 112-15.
[54] Cited in David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 103.
[55] Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union*, 37. Moscow's need to distance themselves from the rhetoric of the Comintern would become an increasingly important issue in 1924, during the diplomatic and trade negotiations with the first Labour government. See 'Nota poverennogo v delakh SSSR v velikobritanii prem'er-ministru i ministru inostrannykh del velikobritanii Makdonaldu, 27 oktiabria 1924 g.', in *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moskva, 1963), VII, 513-14.

this line carefully, Soviet capabilities were improving all the time, but bungled visits and diplomatic blunders still occurred.[56] As a result, while the Soviets unambiguously sought to impress their guests with increasingly stage-managed tours of emerging Soviet institutions and prisons, a great deal of what early British visitors saw was relatively accurate, if not necessarily the entire picture of Soviet penal politics.

None of the visitors, though, returned to Britain claiming to have seen the new millennium (although Lansbury was certainly captivated, and often too 'willing to accept intention for result'[57]). Perhaps more than any other guest, Wells realised that the worst Russian conditions were almost certainly camouflaged from the visitors. His disappointment at being escorted round a Potemkin 'show' school, where schoolchildren parroted exclusively his own books as their favoured literature, is evidence that his critical analysis was not wholly distorted by what was laid on before him.[58] The overall tendency, however, to chalk up atrocities to the Soviet 'experiment' and the difficulties facing the regime shows that these visitors were undoubtedly susceptible to Soviet influence. In contrast to defending or justifying the terror, it was an easy (and evocative) victory to claim improved prison conditions and progressive Bolshevik approaches to penal reform as proof of positive socialist steps in Russia that could act as inspiration for the British movement.

The first rosy glow of 'socialist' Soviet prisons had minimal impact in British Labour circles, though. Despite the effect of the experiences of conscientious objectors in bringing penal reform on to Labour's policy radar, penal-related schema had little chance of forming any part of a party agenda. This was due, in large part, to the arrested international development of

[56] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 103.
[57] Leventhal, 'Seeing the Future', 213.
[58] Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, 16; 119.

criminology as a social science through the First World War, felt most keenly through the fifteen-year delay between the convocation of the eighth (1910) and ninth (1925) International Prison Congresses (usually of a quinquennial calendar). As a consequence, there was little established criminological enterprise or research being undertaken in Britain, and a receptive audience was lacking.[59] At party level, the veneration expressed by the likes of Lansbury and his fellow visitors to Russia was consistently tempered by the emergence from the Soviet state of reports of inhumane conditions in prisons and the use of torture and terror.[60] Among Labour Party moderates and the leadership in particular, ambiguity and contradiction did much to dampen enthusiasm for the Soviet project and to cast doubt upon the veracity of Soviet communism. More significantly, rash policy overhauls were anathema to a party that had matured under the gradualist politics and electoral pragmatism of its leader and architect, Ramsay MacDonald. For MacDonald, socialism would transpire of capitalism's success, and there was, as a result, no need to rush developments on the basis of new, flashy ideas espoused by mercurial visitors to Soviet Russia.[61]

Admiration for the Soviet penal system was clear among early visitors to Russia. While these guests mainly included figures that remained outside the party leadership, the opinions of those like Lansbury, who would serve in MacDonald's Cabinet in 1929 and assume the party leadership in 1932, carried significant influence. The earliest visits to Soviet Russia were already causing sections of the labour movement to reassess their understandings of crime, punishment and penal policy.

[59] Seán McConville, 'Hearing, Not Listening: Penal Policy and the Political Prisoners of 1906-1921', in Lucia Zedner and Andrew Ashworth (eds), *The Criminological Foundations of Penal Policy: Essays in Honour of Roger Hood* (Oxford, 2003), 260.
[60] See *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF), Moscow, f. R-8419, op. 1, d. 16, l. 2; Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, 16, 119; Leventhal, 'Seeing the Future', 213.
[61] MacDonald, *Socialism and Society*; idem, *Socialism and Government* (London, 1909); idem, *A Policy for the Labour Party* (London, 1920).

First official visits

In May 1920, the official Labour and TUC delegation reached Russia. The delegation has been relayed in numerous works, although, as Morgan points out, a number of trade union histories have either disregarded internationalist themes or omitted them altogether.[62] This period is particularly important, however, when examining the potential for Soviet influence on the labour movement. Since 1918, the British had assumed the leading role in the Second International and, despite its internal differences, the 'Labour Party was capable of speaking with a powerful voice and exerting great influence on the behavior of the parties in other countries', as well as the broader movement in Britain. For their part, the Bolsheviks knew this very well.[63] Prepared to impress, the Soviet newspaper *Krasnaia gazeta* proffered impassioned greetings to the guests 'from all our hearts' (*ot vsego serdtsa*), while *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* welcomed the delegation with headlines in both Russian and English.[64] The composition of the delegation was varied and somewhat nebulous in terms of ideology, and broadly pro-Bolshevik, centrist, and sceptical factions could be recognised.[65]

Overall the visit ran relatively smoothly.[66] Upon its return, the delegation produced an official report that reflected its own composition and which has been described, in lieu of outright

[62] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 107; Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions,* II; Newton, *British Labour, European Socialism and the Struggle for Peace*; Ross M. Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group, 1868-1976* (Oxford, 1980), 154; Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics* (Oxford, 1993), 77-81; idem, 'Labour and International Affairs', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), 127; Lewis L. Lorwin, *Labour and Internationalism* (New York, 1929), 113-14. For detailed accounts of the visits see White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia', 621-40, and P. Gurovich, *Pod'em angliiskogo rabochego dvizheniia v 1918-21 gg.* (Moskva, 1956).
[63] Bruno Naarden, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia: Perception and Prejudice, 1848-1923* (Cambridge, 1992), 324; 387.
[64] *Krasnaia gazeta*, 12 May 1920; *Pravda*, 11 May 1920; *Izvestiia*, 11 May 1920; *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moskva, 1958), II, 473.
[65] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 116-17; Calhoun, *United Front*, 33-4; White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia', 634-5.
[66] Aside from a controversial meeting of the Moscow Printers' Union, at which the Menshevik fugitive Victor Chernov addressed the audience before slipping away from the Bolshevik authorities. See *Krasnaia gazeta*, 25 May 1920. See also Hoover Institution Archives (Hoover), Stanford University, California, Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 692, Folder 6 (reel 619), G. Aronson, 'The English Workers' Delegation in Moscow', 11-12.

enthusiasm, as ‘an appeal to “fair play”’, ‘enlightening’, ‘impartial’, and a dispassionate evaluation.[67] The defects of the new Soviet Russia were presented with as much force as its achievements, with particular emphasis on the lack of personal freedom and the arbitrary nature of the Cheka.[68] In contrast to the proclamations of earlier visitors, the report contained no comment on prisons, crime or penal policy, while only four members of the delegation—Ethel Snowden, ILPer and wife of Philip, Margaret Bondfield of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, Charles Roden Buxton, the delegation’s secretary, and George Young, a former Etonian, diplomat and now Labour member acting as one of three special advisors to the delegation—visited Soviet prisons.[69]

Following the publication of the official report, a number of delegates also published individual accounts of a more subjective nature. These, however, also showed little concern for, or interest in, Bolshevik ideas on penality (likely due to the fact that only a few delegates visited a Soviet prison). Many individual accounts were indeed positive—some even saw features in Russia to be emulated—yet it was the delegation’s only female members, Snowden and Bondfield, who made note of Russian prisons.[70] Snowden’s comments were fleeting and somewhat facetious, though she documented the ‘splendid’ efforts of Russian scientists in following America’s lead in ‘the treatment of the morally defective as sick and not wicked people’; and on a visit to the old tsarist prison in the Peter and Paul fortress, she curiously picked out for appreciation the

[67] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 8; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 116; Calhoun, *United Front*, 34; Coates and Coates, *A History*, 29-30; Leventhal, ‘Seeing the Future’, 214.
[68] See *Report of the British Labour Delegation to Russia, 1920* (London, 1920), 6-9.
[69] See Tania Rose and John Saville, ‘Harold Grenfell (1870-1948)’, in Joyce M. Bellamy, David E. Martin and John Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (Basingstoke, 1993), IX, 102-24.
[70] For the generally positive accounts, see Robert Williams, *The Soviet System at Work* (London, 1920); H. N. Brailsford, *The Russian Workers’ Republic* (London, 1921); Clifford Allen, *Plough My Own Furrow* (London, 1965), 146-7. Even Bertrand Russell noted the positive progressions in Soviet Russia, though he despaired of the prisons and penal settlements. Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (London, 1962 [1920]), 59. See also Purcell’s positive impressions in the NAFTA *Monthly Reports*, July-September 1920, cited in Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 122; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 23.

'large, damp, gloomy cells, twice as big as the cells of an English prison'.[71] Bondfield was slightly more rigorous in her analysis (though she recorded her experience in her diary only, and not in her published autobiography, suggesting a lack of importance attributed to the issue). Her visit to a contemporary Soviet prison saw inmates with 'much more freedom' than their British equivalents, with solitary confinement abandoned and association encouraged. Speaking to prisoners as they took exercise, Bondfield and her colleagues agreed that the inmates 'were probably better off than outside'.[72] Overall, Bondfield failed to offer much critical analysis of her brief visit, concerned as she was with the effect on her own health of the sour odour of the prison bakery.

Favourable reports that appeared in Britain were often swiftly countered with the charge that the delegation was hopelessly subject to Bolshevik propaganda. Indeed, a number of the delegates admitted difficulty in escaping their omnipresent Bolshevik hosts.[73] Most, however, were adamant that they retained maximum freedom of movement and were in control of events in Russia.[74] The issue of prisons was certainly not raised in as much detail as it had been by earlier visitors, probably due to the varied motivations of the delegates and their crowded schedule, but there remained enthusiasm for Soviet projects, if in far more measured doses.

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[71] Ethel Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia* (London, 2012 [1920]), 97; 105. Snowden would later be aggressively attacked by Leon Trotsky in his *Where is Britain Going?* (London, 1926), 26; 40; 44; 67-8; 112.
[72] See Bondfield's diary, 19 May-15 June 1920, held at the Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Margaret Bondfield papers, Folder F, C6/1. Parts of her diary are recorded in Bondfield, *A Life's Work* (London, 1948), 189-240.
[73] Snowden, *Through Bolshevik Russia*, 48; 50; Sylvia Pankhurst, *Soviet Russia as I Saw It* (London, 1921), 162. See also Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York, 1923), 92; idem, *Living My Life*, 2 vols (New York, 1970 [1931]), II, 795; Fedor Dan, *Dva goda skitanii: vospominaniia lidera rossiiskogo men'shevizma, 1919-1921* (Berlin, 1922), 14; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 118-19; Hollander, *Political Pilgrims,* 153.
[74] See for instance, Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, 234; Charles Roden Buxton, *In a Russian Village* (London, 1922), 64; 71; White, 'British Labour in Soviet Russia', 621; *Daily Herald*, 22 May 1920; *Labour Leader*, 17 June 1920; *Daily News*, 20 May 1920.

Lansbury's bitter review in the *Labour Leader* of Bertrand Russell's own report is telling of the differences between the earliest visitors and the first official delegation. 'It is difficult', he wrote, 'to know just what it was Russell hoped to find when he went to Russia'.[75] Unlike Lansbury (who was certain of what he wanted to find), many other delegates were unwilling, quite so rapidly, to push Soviet Russia as a blueprint for British socialism on the basis of a transient visit. A number of visitors, particularly those travelling before the official delegation, were unquestionably taken with Bolshevik approaches to criminality and their new prison systems, seeing much for Britain to emulate. Others were more ambivalent to the situation in Russia as a whole and called for more time to be given to the Soviet state. Still others, like Ramsay MacDonald, who visited Menshevik Georgia in September 1920 with the Second International, only had their negative impressions of Bolshevism reinforced.[76]

A number of positive ideas were certainly gleaned Labour's early Russian journeys.[77] And although these issues were more commonly raised and discussed by individual dissenters than leadership figures, the first visits to Soviet Russia had provided much to reflect on for the labour movement regarding its own domestic problems on crime and punishment. Following the delegation, Bondfield addressed the inaugural conference of the Howard League for Penal Reform in 1921, stressing in her speech her view of prisons as 'utterly unnecessary'. Britain had, she declared, to 'sweep away entirely the old style of prison, and … humanis[e] … our institutions' so that 'we may … see the day when there will be no prisons left in this country'.[78] Bondfield, though, failed to mention her experience of Soviet prisons.

[75] *Labour Leader*, 18 November 1920.
[76] See Davis, 'Left Out in the Cold', 83-5; Stephen F. Jones, 'Introduction', in Stephen F. Jones (ed.), *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and its Successors* (London, 2014), 1-2; The National Archives (TNA), Kew, PRO 30/69/1753/1, Diary of J. R. MacDonald, entry 10 October 1920.
[77] See, for instance, the positive (though tentative) discussions about the potential for socialist reconstruction upon Soviet ideas in the ILP's *Policy Committee. Draft Report on the Soviet System* (1920). BLPES, ILP/3/60 (103) and (134).
[78] Margaret Bondfield, 'Prisons and the Public', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 1 (1921), 32–5.

Labour's associations with the Soviet Union went no further at this point. The party's strategy through the 1920s of maximising 'support through … broad areas of consensus' and 'playing down distinctive policies' soon began to foster electoral success. At the 1922 general election, under the leadership of J. R. Clynes, Labour gained 85 seats to become the official party of opposition. Seeking to displace the Liberals and to prove Labour's own fitness to govern, radical ideas were suffocated under MacDonald, who beat Clynes to the leadership in a contest one month after the election, and the orthodox reign of the 'Big Five' took hold. The effect was to shore up the gradualist, social democratic foundations of the party, to close out the Communists and to engage with the Soviet Union on exclusively pragmatic lines.[79] As a consequence, positive ideas gleaned from the Soviets had little chance of making an impact in the upper echelons of the party, even on an issue of a relatively non-partisan nature like penal reform. Officially, 'there was already a great distance between Labour and the USSR', but a sense of admiration lingered among both those who had visited the Soviet state and pockets of the rank-and-file membership.[80]

It is interesting to note that, aside from Snowden, no British guest in 1920 who had previously been inside a prison visited a Russian penal institution. The practice of comparing domestic prison experiences and 'new' Soviet methods was a tactic that the Russians would employ effectively throughout the 1920s to convince foreigners of the superiority of the Soviet system; the fact that this ploy was not utilised in 1920 is evidence that the Soviet cultural-diplomatic machine was still in its infancy. There were signs, however, that the Soviets were quickly becoming aware of how beneficial the positive reports of foreigners could be both at home and

[79] Andrew Thorpe, 'The 1929 general election and the second Labour government', and John Callaghan, '"Bolshevism Run Mad": Labour and Socialism', in John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Reappraisal* (Manchester, 2011), 20; 33; 172. Labour's 'Big Five' included MacDonald, Snowden, Henderson, Clynes and J. H. Thomas.
[80] Thorpe, 'Stalinism and British Politics', 618.

abroad. *Krasnaia gazeta* revealed to the Soviet Russian public the 'special delight' (*osobennym vostorgom*) of the British delegation and their 'unanimous conclusion' (*edinodushnomu zakliucheniiu*) about the advancement of Soviet institutions,[81] while other Soviet newspapers began to monitor the telegrams sent back to Britain by the visitors.[82] Soviet officials went even further, actively seeking to 'teach' the delegation exactly what to see and what to learn.[83] All these methods, developed intensively throughout the 1920s, helped to imbue within Soviet citizens and interested foreigners the belief that the Soviet experiment was successfully yielding the desired revolutionary advances.[84] Unbeknown to many in the labour movement, especially those who craved success for the Soviet project, the British left were only beginning to feel the effects of the Soviets' *kul'tpokaz*.

3.4 Penal Politics in Government, 1920-1924

Between the return of the delegation from Russia and the Labour Party's formation of a minority government in early 1924, a number of pressures related to penal reform intensified. As Tuttle notes, while the Great War was largely 'devoid of humanitarian efforts' on behalf of penal reform, from 1920 the crusade began to pick up steam. Indicative of this, she states, was the amalgamation in 1921 of the Howard Association and the Penal Reform League to form the Howard League for Penal Reform, and the proposal by the Liberal Home Secretary, Edward Shortt, to abolish penal servitude and institute, when feasible, the use of indeterminate sentences.[85] Increasingly, too, calls were made for an official review of the English prison system, which had remained somewhat opaque in the 25 years since the Gladstone Committee,

[81] *Krasnaia gazeta*, 16 May 1920; 8 June; 17 July.
[82] See *Bednota*, 14 May 1920; 16 May.
[83] The Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin allegedly implored the British delegation to be 'more alert' than they were presently. Hoover, Nicolaevsky Collection, Aronson, 'The English Workers' Delegation in Moscow'.
[84] The Menshevik Georgian authorities were also aware of these potential benefits, monitoring the reports of Ramsay MacDonald in the *Labour Leader* following his visit to the state in 1920. *Bor'ba*, 4 December 1920.
[85] Tuttle, *Crusade Against Capital Punishment*, 28; 'Should Penal Servitude be Abolished?', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 1 (1921), 40-1.

and which in 1921 had appointed a new chairman, M. L. Waller, to take over from Ruggles-Brise.[86] International pressures were also intensifying, from the Amritsar massacre in India and the 'barbarity' of British rule abroad, to the Socialist Revolutionaries imprisoned in Soviet Russia who appealed to the labour movement for aid.[87] Objectively, these were issues of justice that Labour had been engaging with at different levels for many years. Yet, aside from a few responses to the letters of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, there appears to have been little internal party discussion on penal politics through 1920 to 1921.[88] A bill was attempted in parliament in 1921 to prohibit sentences of death for persons under twenty-one years of age, but it was quickly dispatched with little resistance.[89]

In 1922, the report of the LRD's Prison System Enquiry Committee was published, with Sidney and Beatrice Webb's account, *English Prisons under Local Government*, printed as a historical accompaniment. As a report that the labour movement initiated (though from 1921 the report was 'unconnected' with the LRD), they were forced to engage with the findings.[90] Much of *English Prisons To-Day* was an extension of the work of Hobhouse and Brockway from 1918 and 1919. Its focus was on the problems facing Britain's penal system, with few constructive proposals. Nevertheless, it provides as good an overview of the ideas within the progressive movement in Britain as was available, and is the best contemporary estimation of any cohesive understanding of penality on the part of the British left. Principally, the report took issue with what it saw as the continuing tendency of courts to 'measure out … punishment in a crude relation to the offence, and allow much too little for the fact that many prisoners are more the

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[86] 'A Departmental Committee on Prisons?', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 2 (1922), 4.
[87] BLPES, ILP/6/12/10, 'Letter from the Socialist Revolutionary Party to the ILP', 31 December 1920; *The International: The Organ of the Left Wing of the ILP*, 3 July 1920.
[88] Hoover, Mel'gunov Collection, Box 11, Folder 64.
[89] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 15 March 1921, vol. 139, c.1255; 'Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 2 (1922), 14.
[90] Brockway suggests that the split occurred over the issue of whether the LRD was to accept money from Soviet Russia in return for the provision of information. Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 122.

victims of society than offenders against it'.[91] The centralisation of the prison system since 1895 had stifled opportunities for reform, it claimed, while the use of the silence system and solitary confinement had achieved nothing regarding rehabilitation. The principle of punishment remained erroneous.[92] The report recognised improvements, however: alternatives to imprisonment that had been instituted since 1900; the reformatory acts passed between 1907 and 1914; and experiments across the country had done much to improve the British penal system—it was just that much work remained.[93]

According to the report there remained too many authorities of the opinion that certain prisoners, in particular habituals and recidivists, were 'incorrigible'—a fundamental rationale that Hobhouse and Brockway, as editors of the report, felt had been refuted by the results of preventive detention since 1908. The report stated:

> It is strange and tragic that the authorities should have so long held to the view that this incorrigibility was due to some inherent characteristic of the offender rather than in large part, at least, to the penal servitude and ticket-of-leave systems to which he was subjected.

Prison character, it claimed, was learned, and the door should be open for much greater experimentation.[94] The American prison system was much vaunted as an example to draw inspiration from; indeed, the idea of preventive detention and the Prevention of Crime Act (1908) itself was borrowed from the American Penal Reformatory System, and was described as 'representing the latest development in the official attitude of mind towards the problem of

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[91] Hobhouse and Brockway, *English Prisons To-Day*, 46-7.
[92] Ibid, 46; 67; 76; 590-4.
[93] Ibid, 49-53.
[94] Ibid, 462-3; 501.

penal reform'. American emphasis on principles of individualisation, probation, reformation, self-government, the entry of science into the prison system and the movement for efficient organisation of prison industry was seen to be leading the rest of the world.[95] The Home Secretary in Britain had taken some positive steps in these directions in recent years, and in their report for 1920 to 1921 the Prison Commissioners had announced agreement with Edward Shortt on improvements in the facilitation of preventive detention treatment.[96] In spite of these ameliorations, though, Hobhouse and Brockway concluded that even if all the defects they had revealed were remedied, 'such reform would be rather a palliative than a cure. The whole existing treatment of crime and of criminals rests upon a theory, or theories, which modern thought and experience are showing to be both confused and erroneous'. Perhaps tellingly, the investigation ended on the note: 'No one can judge how much residue of crime there might be in a society more just than ours, where opportunity was more equal'. More revealing, Russia, mentioned just once in the 729-page report, was noted as having much for Britain to learn from.[97]

The Webbs' *English Prisons under Local Government* did little to further Hobhouse and Brockway's analysis—its main objective was to 'provide a convenient historical introduction' to their work. It did, however, reaffirm the failures of the British penal system, attacking its uniformity, secrecy, and use of hard labour, and pointed to Hobhouse and Brockway's report as a hopeful start for reform.[98] Given the prominence of the Webbs in the labour movement, their work no doubt increased interest in the topic of penal reform. Their conclusions that 'it is probably quite impossible to make a good job of the deliberate incarceration of a human being

[95] Ibid, 76; 85; 441-2; 517; 651-99.
[96] Evelyn Ruggles-Brise, *The English Prison System* (London, 1921), 12-13; Rupert Cross, *Punishment, Prisons and the Public: An Assessment of Penal Reform in Twentieth Century England by an Armchair Penologist* (London, 1971), 19.
[97] Hobhouse and Brockway, *English Prisons To-Day*, 464-5; 590; 594; 606.
[98] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, VI, lxxv; 204-6; 217.

in the most enlightened of dungeons'; and that '[w]e suspect it passes the wit of man to contrive a prison which shall not be gravely injurious to the minds of the vast majority of the prisoners, if not also to their bodies', accentuated their view of the contemporary British penal system and indicates a strong sense of caution among the left with regard to penality.[99] A decade later, during their own trip to the Soviet Union, they would discover prisons that appeared to counter their claims.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the Webbs' report was its preface, written by George Bernard Shaw. As noted in chapter one, although Shaw's genuine commitment to a policy of eugenics has been questioned by social commentators, he certainly had an appetite in the early 1900s for propounding his extreme points of view. His preface to the Webbs' account was not wholly unlike his earlier discussions on crime, though he appears to have had an understanding of modern, neoclassical approaches. In a number of ways, for instance, Shaw's preface was more balanced than his other writings on crime. He reiterated the shame felt by the left at Britain's modern prison system, questioning the aims of 'punishment' as understood by the prison commissioners; and he decried the practice of solitary confinement and silence, bemoaning how philanthropists concerned with penal reform had, since John Howard's time, 'out-Howarded Howard' in their terrible infliction of 'silence, separation and the wearing of masks'. Shaw also condemned the institution for failing to prepare men for life outside prison, claiming that 'the thief who is in prison is not necessarily more dishonest than his fellows at large', but is rather conditioned by his environment into committing crime; and called for the use of indeterminate sentences.[100] At one point he even took a position close to that of William

[99] Ibid, 247-8.
[100] George Bernard Shaw, 'Preface', in Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, VI, vii; xiv; xviii; xxviii; xxxix-xl; xlvii-xlix; lx; lxxii.

Morris in his own utopia, claiming of punishment: ‘People who feel guilty are apt to inflict it on themselves if nobody will take the job off their hands’. ‘[P]unishment is expiation’.[101]

Shaw’s seemingly reasoned and progressive analysis, though, was quickly overwhelmed by his more extreme views. ‘Crime’, he declared, ‘cannot be killed by kindness’. For the ‘ungovernable savages’ in society, the ‘most obvious course’ is to assume their guilt and ‘to kill them’.[102] What Shaw termed ‘higher civilization’ should not, in his opinion, ‘make sacrifices’. Instead, what was required was the categorisation of convicts: ‘First, the small number of dangerous or incorrigibly mischievous human animals … hopeless defectives’ and ‘idiots’; ‘Second, a body of people who cannot provide for or order their lives for themselves, but who, under discipline and tutelage … are normally happy, well-behaved, useful citizens’; and ‘[t]hird, all normal persons who have trespassed in some way during one of those lapses of self-discipline which are as common as colds’.[103]

> The difficulty lies … in devising a means of dealing with the second class. The first is easy: too easy, in fact. You kill or you cage: that is all. In the third class, summoning and finding and admonishing are easy and not mischievous: you may worry a man considerably by badgering him about his conduct and dunning him for money in a police court occasionally; but you do not permanently disable him morally and physically thereby. It is the offender of the second class, too good to be killed or caged, and not good enough for normal liberty, whose treatment bothers us.[104]

[101] Ibid, lii.
[102] Ibid, xvi; xviii; xxix.
[103] Ibid; xxxvii; xliii-xliv.
[104] Ibid, xliv.

In his discussion of how to deal with this second class, Shaw extolled the idea—as argued for many years by Brockway and Hobhouse—that convicts generally enter prison as 'normal men', before being made into criminals institutionally.[105] Once more, this demonstrates Shaw's awareness of the views of the left with regards to Britain's prisons, their want of reform and the role attributed to the environment in shaping man's behaviour. But the speed with which he declared, somewhat paradoxically, that in spite of there being no congenital criminal type, natural selection cannot induce changes in man in less than a million years, led him to conclude 'that the criminal is a natural species, and therefore incorrigible'. 'Is it any wonder that some of us are led to prescribe the lethal chambers as the solution'?[106] Shaw's views, and their inclusion within a publication by mainstream figures of the left, demonstrate that the diversity of Labour's understanding of penality in the early 1900s continued to persist twenty years later. Indeed, Shaw originally wanted his preface to feature in the LRD-instigated report, but, as editors, Brockway and Hobhouse refused to include his endorsement of killing and euthanasia.[107] As the Howard League noted, in his recommendation of such 'easy "solutions"' as extermination, Shaw was in 'danger of not having this preface taken seriously'.[108]

In government

These broadly fashioned views were tested in the next two years. In parliament in 1922 the Infanticide Act was passed, reducing the punishment from murder to manslaughter for mothers found guilty of the death of their newborn—a measure which the Labour Party had rallied for.[109] In the same year, though, permission for a bill addressing the abolition of capital punishment was denied in the Commons by a vote of 234 to 86.[110] As Tuttle notes, it appeared

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[105] Ibid, lxii-lxiii.
[106] Ibid, xxxii; lxi-lxii; lxxi. See also George Bernard Shaw, *The Crime of Imprisonment* (London, 1922).
[107] See Stephen Hobhouse, *Forty Years On* (London, 1951), 177; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, 126-7.
[108] 'Review of English Prisons Under Local Government', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 2 (1922), 98-100.
[109] *LPACR, 1922*, 106.
[110] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 1 March 1922, vol. 151, cc393-396.

that public sentiment at this time was slowly turning against capital punishment, though a proposal in 1923 for a Royal Commission to address the matter was flatly refused by the Conservative Home Secretary William C. Bridgeman.[111]

Outside parliament, movements for reform intensified. In 1922, Cecil Malone, who had by now left the CPGB and joined the ILP, and who spent six months in prison for charges of sedition following his return from Russia, wrote a series of articles for the *Daily Express* on the state of British prisons, outlining his views on reform.[112] Continuing the line of Brockway and Hobhouse, Malone decried the secrecy of the prison system and called for the views of prisoners to be heard in reformist efforts.[113] He also called for an end to solitary confinement and the silence system, far greater employment assistance upon release, greater educational schemes and more self-governance of prisons.[114] In 1923, the hanging of Edith Thompson (and the Home Secretary's breaking of seventeen years of tradition by refusing a reprieve) further stirred public sentiment.[115] As a result, over 100 members of parliament declared in a Howard League survey that they were in favour of abolition.[116] At the Labour Party conference in June of the same year, a resolution was once more put forward for the comprehensive reform of the penal system and the abolition of capital punishment; and while the resolution on reform was eventually carried, dissenting party voices opposed it as being 'not comprehensive enough'.[117] Letters from local Labour Party branches were soon pouring in to the Home Office urging

[111] *The Spectator*, 13 January 1923, cited in Tuttle, *Crusade Against Capital Punishment*, 29; 'Capital Punishment' and 'The Pros and Cons of Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 2 (1922), 14; 19-24.
[112] James Klugman, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 2 vols (London, 1968), I, 182.
[113] *Daily Express*, 17 April 1922.
[114] Ibid, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25 and 26 April 1922.
[115] Potter, *Hanging in Judgement*, 121; 123-4; Victor Bailey, 'The Shadow of the Gallows: The Death Penalty and the British labour Government, 1945-51', *Law and History Review*, 18, 2 (2000), 313.
[116] 'The Abolition of Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 3 (1924), 114.
[117] *LPACR, 1923*, 250.

action on abolition, while, at their own annual conference, ILP resolutions on abolition and penal reform were easily passed and became official party policy.[118]

A year earlier, too, letters from Socialist Revolutionaries imprisoned in Russia had begun to arrive at the offices of the Labour Party imploring their help. Mass shootings following the alleged abolition of the death penalty, staged trials and murders were on the list of pleas from Martov and Kerensky to MacDonald and Henderson, with some questioning the perceived 'silence' of the Labour Party on the issue. Belated Labour responses eventually increased the pressure on Moscow, and trials were eventually postponed.[119] Still, while the plight of Russian socialists raised issues of penal politics among the left in Britain, Russia itself remained a volatile topic in British politics, so much so that Labour felt the need in its 1922 election manifesto to state explicitly that it was against revolution and for 'neither Bolshevism nor Communism, but common sense and justice'.[120] In 1923, the party pledged to seek 'free economic and diplomatic relations with Russia' if it was elected to government, following constant pressure from the party's left wing.[121]

Thus, while hopes were being raised over improved relations with Russia, so penal reformers were optimistic with the advent of an idealistic minority Labour government in January 1924. The Howard League noted early in the year that, while the government had not yet the time to include penal reform and abolition in their legislative agenda, 'the Home Secretary [Henderson] has promised to receive a deputation on the subject' and other governmental

[118] 'The ILP and Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 3 (1924), 114-15; Bailey, 'The Shadow of the Gallows', 313.
[119] See the correspondence held at Cardiff University in the Labour Party Archive. For example, General Correspondence and Political Records, Part 11, The Labour Party and the Soviet Union, 1919-1939, RUS/SRP/1, 2-5; 15-20; 23-30; 39; 44; 47-8; 92-3. See also *Daily Herald*, 9 and 10 January 1922; Hoover, Mel'gunov Collection, Box 11, Folder 64.
[120] Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997*, 21-2.
[121] Gorodetsky, *Precarious Truth*, 6-7.

figures had declared themselves in favour of abolition.[122] The religious side of Labour, it was hoped, would see a radical Christianity 'influence them in power to implement the policies they had hitherto espoused' and, at some point in their tenure, embody their resolutions in legislation.[123] The hopes of penal reformers, though, were misplaced. For a variety of reasons—a limited period in government, a lack of preparation, the perceived need for caution and moderation, and an ideological disorientation—the Labour government set itself a modest domestic programme based on limited reform, and certainly not socialist reconstruction.[124] Issues of criminality, prisons and penal reform featured fairly regularly during Labour's brief spell in office, but little was achieved. The Cabinet, for instance, discussed issues concerning a new Criminal Justice Bill and an Administration of Justice Bill, noting that the Lord Chancellor should have the authority to introduce these into the House of Lords;[125] and issues relating to lunacy laws and police pay also arose, but with little movement resulting from debates.[126]

A number of questions were raised through the year in parliament on issues relating to capital punishment and penal reform; some requested statistics relating to foreign experiences, while others addressed capital punishment in its entirety or sought to regulate the publication of reports by those who had witnessed executions. The responses of Henderson, as Home

[122] 'The Abolition of Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 3 (1924), 114.
[123] Potter, *Hanging in Judgement*, 124. The idealism of Labour was already being tempered, though, as indicated by MacDonald's statement at the 1923 party conference that: 'If we state our principles we are told "That is not practicable." When we recite our programme the objection is, "That is not socialism." But why, because we are idealists, should we be supposed to be idiots?' *LPACR, 1923*, 178-9.
[124] Shepherd and Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government*, 68.
[125] TNA, CAB 23/47/Cabinet 12(24), Cabinet Conclusions, 13 February 1924. See also *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 14 February 1924, vol. 56, c.157; 26 February 1924, vol. 56, cc303-16; 18 March 1924, vol. 56, cc778-98; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 18 February 1924, vol. 169, c.1298; 28 February 1924, vol. 170, cc711-2W; 7 May 1924, vol. 173, c.463W; 19 May 1924, vol. 173, cc1925-74; 6 August 1924, vol. 176, c.2955W; 7 August 1924, vol. 176, cc3202-9.
[126] TNA, CAB 23/47/Cabinet 18(24), Cabinet Conclusions, 5 March 1924; CAB 23/47/Cabinet 21(24), Cabinet Conclusions, 17 March 1924.

Secretary, were generally reflective of his lack of answers.[127] A private members' bill for the abolition of the death penalty was also drawn up, but no action was taken, while an attempt to abolish the death penalty in court martial cases gained support but was defeated in the House.[128] The Society of Friends also prepared and sent petitions to the Labour government, 'asking for the Abolition of Capital Punishment and the Humanising of our Penal Code' in the hope that, with the ear of a sympathetic administration, the petitions' 'introduction … [might] create a demand for information on the whole subject of Penal Reform'.[129] And in organising and sending a deputation on capital punishment to Henderson, the Howard League was disappointed that the Home Secretary remained 'non-committal', despite his advice to 'agitate' opinion both in the Commons and in public. The government, it was regretted, 'had not yet allotted one day to the discussion of the subject', and with what 'appeared to be a steadily growing feeling in favour of abolition', it was their duty to set reform in motion.[130] On MacDonald's insistence, though, the government towed the line that abolition had never commanded a majority, there was little evidence of public desire, and there existed no feasible substitute.[131]

Labour also wrestled with a steady stream of letters and reports to Henderson that focused on the need for penal reform,[132] while, following the 1924 International Conference on Prison

[127] See *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 3 March 1924, vol. 170, c.1007; 6 March 1924, vol. 170, c.1576; 15 May 1924, vol. 173, cc1583-631; 22 May 1924, vol. 173, cc2386-7 and 2430-1; 29 May 1924, vol. 174, c.577; 30 June 1924, vol. 175, cc950-1W; 4 August 1924, vol. 176, cc2516-18 and 2549-50.
[128] *A Bill to Provide for the Abolition of Capital Punishment* (London, 1924); *The Times*, 5 March 1924.
[129] LRSFB, YMS/MfS/PRC (1920-26), Penal Reform Committee Minutes, Society of Friends Penal Reform Committee Pamphlet, 19 February 1924.
[130] 'Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 1, 4 (1925), 191.
[131] Bailey, 'The Shadow of the Gallows', 313.
[132] See the extended correspondence on women police at the TNA, PRO 30/69/69, 'MacDonald and Snowden to Margaret Wintringham'; Modern Records Centre (MRC), University of Warwick, Trades Union Congress papers, MSS.292/865.3/1—Prison Labour, *Joint Research and Information Department. Advisory Committee on the Home Office* (London, 1924); Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC), Manchester, Arthur Henderson papers, HEN/1/93, 'A. Susan Lawrence to Arthur Henderson', n.d; Howard League Annual Report, 1923-24.

Labour, the advisory committee at the Home Office recommended several reforms in the terms of remuneration for prison work, with little success as a result.[133] As Pethick-Lawrence, Labour MP for Leicester West and future Financial Secretary to the Treasury, was to state in 1926 of the real prospects for penal reform, little could be hoped of the Home Office in this area, since it 'was primarily an administrative body and could hardly be expected to make experiments'.[134] Indeed, Labour's most explicit dealings with the issues of crime and punishment during 1924 had little to do with penal reform. Rather, the government was forced to deal with industrial strike action almost as soon as it entered office, and it quickly revealed, to the horror of trade union officials, its willingness to invoke the Emergency Powers Act (1920), despite Labour's own violent denunciations of the Act introduced under Lloyd George, under which troops would be deployed to ensure civil order remained.[135] Furthermore, the party soon reneged on its promise to reinstate officers who had been dismissed for their role in the police strikes of 1918-19.

The government was also far less radical than was feared by Whitehall on security issues, particularly regarding communist influence. Despite his aversion to Bolshevism, MacDonald had 'established a policy of neutrality towards the Lenin government', and at first took some convincing of the need to fight the 'Bolshevik menace' of the CPGB through the government-established Special Branch.[136] (In contrast, Henderson and a number of other Labour members were much easier to persuade.) The intelligence gathering services of Special Branch—or what

[133] MRC, MSS.292/865.3/1, *Joint Research and Information Department. Advisory Committee on the Home Office* (1924).
[134] F. Pethick Lawrence, 'Penal Reform in Parliament', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 1 (1926), 1.
[135] Keith Jeffery and Peter Hennessey, *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking since 1919* (London, 1983), 79-86; Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions,* II, 369-73; Trevor Barnes, 'Special Branch and the First Labour Government', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), 945; Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, 147; Allan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: A Biography* (London, 2002), 61; 64; David Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 318-19.
[136] Lilleker, *Against the Cold War*, 51.

others had called Britain's secret police—on far-left organisations might have sat uncomfortably with reformers had its existence and operations been known outside the Cabinet.[137] Indeed, the MacDonald administration's commitment to establishing trade and diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, through a pro-Soviet policy that had less to do with any shared beliefs than with trade, pragmatism and the pursuit of international peace, intensified the pressure of Special Branch on the Prime Minister (and Foreign Secretary) himself; though this was not enough to prevent MacDonald from suspending the prosecution of the Communist, J. R. Campbell, for alleged incitement to mutiny.[138] The government's involvement in issues of criminal justice appeared to be of an expedient nature, and there was certainly not an established, practical commitment to penal reform.

The first Labour government, then, achieved little with regard to penal politics, and there is little evidence that ideas on criminality gained through trips to Russia in the early 1920s had travelled further up the party hierarchy by this time. The pragmatism of the party leadership, and especially of MacDonald, prevented the opportunity for any radical approach to the issue of penal reform to develop. Henderson, according to Shepherd and Laybourn, had a rather unproductive time at the Home Office and showed marginal interest in the issues of prisons and penal reform.[139] In fact, Labour achieved little on any issue other than foreign relations.[140] In a bid to win the British electorate's trust, the government had promised no extreme legislation, and spent its time 'patching up' the capitalist system it inherited, rather than

[137] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, 146-7; Barnes, 'Special Branch and the First Labour Government', 950.
[138] Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 151.
[139] Shepherd and Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government*, 91. Chris Wrigley also describes Henderson's time at the Home Office as 'at best … undistinguished'. Chris Wrigley, *Arthur Henderson* (Cardiff, 1990), 144.
[140] The Wheatley Housing Act (1924) is generally seen to be Labour's greatest domestic success, 'allocating subsidies to local authorities in order to build houses for rent, stipulating improved housing standards, and removing the provision that local authorities could only supply accommodation to fill the "gaps" in the private market'. Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 79.

experimenting with socialism.[141] According to Richard Lyman, in areas of education, defence and imperial policy there were no concessions to the party's radical transition. There were no bold policies, nor even enquiries as to socialism's application to key industries. On the whole, Labour's time in office was marked by uncertainty and a lack of assurance, showing little purpose, direction, clarity or coherence; its record lay in the party's seeking to inspire confidence through caution.[142] In 1925, as a direct result of reformists' frustrations with Labour's inchoate penal philosophy, the National Council for the Abolition of the Death Penalty (NCADP) was established to form a centralised body to take up the issue on a permanent basis.[143]

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During the government's negotiations to normalise trade relations with Soviet Russia in April 1924, MacDonald was eventually swayed by those considered to be of a 'pro-Soviet' persuasion and brought in Lansbury, Morel, Purcell and Dick Wallhead to settle the negotiations when their pace appeared to be slowing.[144] In its most successful arena of foreign policy, Labour had worked hard during its time in office to forge a new relationship with the Soviet Union, and its efforts were recognised by the Bolshevik authorities.[145] The Soviets hailed collaboration with Labour as presenting a 'great responsibility before history'

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[141] Shepherd and Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government*, 20; 96.
[142] Lyman, *First Labour Government*, 211; 213; 215-16; 277; 280.
[143] Bailey, 'The Shadow of the Gallows', 313-14.
[144] Lyman, *First Labour Government*, 187-8; 194. See also TNA, FO 371/10469/2753, 'George Lansbury, R. C. Wallhead, Ben Turner and Robert Smillie to Ramsay MacDonald', 28 March 1924, cited in Shepherd, *George Lansbury*, 217.
[145] See 'Pis'mo ofitsial'nogo predstavitelia SSSR v velikobritanii lideru Leiboristskoi partii velikobritanii Makdonaldu, 16 ianvaria 1924 g.'; 'Obmen notami mezhdu pravitel'stvom SSSR i pravitel'stvom velikobritanii o priznanii SSSR de-iure velikobritaniei, 1 fevralia 1924 g.'; and 'Zaiavlenie narodnogo komissara vneshnei torgovli SSSR l.b. krasina dlia sovetskoi pechati ob ekonomicheskom znachenii priznaniia SSSR angliei, 6 fevralia 1924 g.', in *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moskva, 1963), VII, 27; 53–5; 62–5; Harvey Wish, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations during Labour's First Ministry (1924)', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 17 (1939), 400–3.

(*ogromnaia otvetstvennost' pered istoriei*) and a 'one of a kind opportunity' (*edinstvennaia v svoem rode vozmozhnost'*) for two socialist governments to work for humanity.[146] Citing Bismark, official Soviet communiques enthused about '"The Elephant and the Whale" [*Slon i Kit*], jointly striving for the establishment of peace in the world, what a sight!'[147]

MacDonald, in the dual roles of Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, prided himself on his diplomatic abilities in foreign affairs, even when dealing with a Bolshevism to which he was so averse. The requirement, therefore, to involve British 'left-wingers' in the Soviet negotiations was a significant concession, for it demonstrated that those considered to be on the margins of the movement because of their views on Soviet Russia could still hold great influence over the party leadership.[148] But by the time the government fell in November 1924, MacDonald's distaste for Bolshevism had only intensified; Russia appeared to be involved in all of MacDonald's problems, its most significant effects caused by the Zinoviev letter and the 'red scare' it was believed to have caused at the 1924 election, at which Labour fared so badly.[149]

Meanwhile, the second official delegation to Soviet Russia, headed by the TUC, had since arrived in Petrograd for a six-week tour of the USSR. Despite the unease with which MacDonald and other leadership figures approached the Soviet issue, there remained, as in 1920, divisions of opinion among the party more broadly. For those who saw neither utility, democracy or socialism in the Bolshevik state, it appeared that any receptivity to Soviet ideas

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[146] *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, VII, 27; 53–5.
[147] The full quotation is *'"Slon i Kit", sovmestno stremiashchiesia k ustanovlenniu vseobshchego mira, kakoe eto zrelishche!*', cited in 'Pis'mo narodnogo komissara inostrannykh del SSSR prem'er-ministru i ministru inostrannykh del velikobritanii Makdonaldu, 13 fevralia 1924 g.', in *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, VII, 98-9.
[148] Lyman, *First Labour Government*, 205.
[149] *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, VII, 513-14.

would decrease in the coming months and years. For others, many of whom were still willing to admit extenuation to the Soviet experiment, their critical faculties would be put to the test as the Soviets, from 1924 onwards, intensified their novel methods of propagandistic cultural diplomacy and laid down a canvas upon which a great variety of people could project their hopes. For Labour figures already romanced by the Soviet state, the Bolsheviks' mass engineering of the exhibition of culture would only confirm their desires, and would in particular present Soviet prisons as an enticing, world-leading example from which the Labour Party could learn a great deal.

3.5 Returning to Russia, 1924-1929

Lyman notes that, throughout Labour's first period in office, the party leadership attempted carefully to manage perceptions of its relationship with Russia.[150] The Soviet Union remained a particularly volatile issue in British politics, and being seen to be too close to the Russians was easy political ammunition for right-wing attacks.[151] Yet 1924 had opened a Pandora's box, and the task for Labour, according to Williams, soon became how to ensure that they still benefited from the experience.[152] The second delegation to Soviet Russia provided the first such opportunity. Responding to Mikhail Tomsky's 1924 invitation to establish permanent connections between British and Russian unions, seven trade unionists and three interpreters set out to determine 'whether the Russian workmen have the same elementary rights of combination as the workers of other countries'.[153]

[150] Lyman, *First Labour Government*, 205. For Soviet accounts, unsurprisingly critical of MacDonald's administration, see F. D. Volkov, *Krakh angliiskoi politiki interventsii i diplomaticheskoi isolatsii sovetskogo gosudarstva, 1917-1924 gg.* (Moskva, 1954), and I. M. Lemin, *Vneshniaia politika Velikobritanii ot Versalia do Lokarno* (Moskva, 1947).
[151] Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the Challenge of Labour*, 296.
[152] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 30.
[153] *Daily Herald*, 6 November 1924.

Like the delegation of 1920, visitors in 1924 were exposed to a host of political, cultural and social establishments in Soviet Russia, with particular emphasis on the progress made since the initial visit. Unlike in 1920, though, war communism and the civil war had ended, Lenin had passed, and Soviet Russia had expanded into the Soviet Union. The NEP had also replaced large-scale nationalisation with a system that permitted a measure of private trade. The TUC delegation was indeed visiting a very different country, and this affected the perceptions of the more moderate Labour figures. Their pleasure, for instance, at witnessing economic improvements under a less severe regime was made clear in their report that NEP 'was not only viable, but has real vitality and stimulates economic recovery that peace has now made possible'.[154] Under an economy that appeared more like the product of left-wing social democrats, the delegation was immediately receptive to Soviet influence.[155]

As in 1920, though, Soviet prisons and penal systems were not at the top of the delegates' agenda. The Labour government achieved little with regard to penal reform in its nine months in office, so the issue lingered, and there were no figures within the delegation who had previously displayed interest in the subject. Purcell was the only delegate who had also made the trip in 1920, and he had failed to visit a Soviet prison on that occasion. Furthermore, details as to prisons and criminality in Russia had only trickled through to Britain since 1920, direct visits being the most expedient method of establishing information.[156] Yet, as was the case with the first visitors to Russia in 1919 and 1920, the 1924 delegation gave much detail—and approbation—to Soviet prisons as they experienced them.

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[154] TUC, *Russia: The Official Report of the British Trades Union Delegation to Russia and Caucasia in November and December, 1924* (London, 1925), 59.
[155] Davis, 'Altered Images', 121.
[156] For example see *Russian Information and Review*, 15 June 1922; 2 June 1923; 1 September 1923.

Kul'tpokaz and the TUC delegation

As Paul Hollander notes in his *Political Pilgrims*, audiences are often 'startled' to learn that among the Soviet institutions which were considered most impressive by foreign guests in the inter-war period, 'prisons … ranked high'. 'Western visitors, and especially intellectuals', he claimed, 'found Soviet penal institutions among the outstanding accomplishments of the regime', a perception that continues to form one of the 'most fascinating aspects of the pilgrimages' to the USSR.[157] As noted above, in some of the earliest visits of British Labour figures it was frequently the case that the Soviet penal system was considered *the* outstanding Bolshevik achievement. Yet, within the established literature on early 'fellow-travellers', there is a consistent tendency to attribute the admiration of visitors wholly to a naïveté which, in conjunction with their contemporary enthusiasm for all things Soviet, had the effect of misleading foreigners on every aspect of Soviet life. Hollander, Sylvia Margulies and David Caute, for instance, each lament early visitors for variously lacking 'the tools necessary to probe beneath the Soviet façade',[158] while Patrick Wright attributes British reactions to a specifically 'British idiocy'.[159] In many instances, visitors were indeed too easily convinced of a Soviet paradise; but a more nuanced analysis of British perceptions and a better understanding of the role of Soviet machinations is required in order to accurately examine the reactions of the British travellers.

In more recent work, these previously reputable exegeses of the 'blindness of Western intellectuals' have been repudiated, based as they were on ideas of a faith impervious to rational explanation, a championing of the experimental limits of rationality and science, or the alienation and estrangement of visitors which underlay their search for utopia. Michael David-

[157] Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 142.
[158] Ibid; Margulies, *Pilgrimage to Russia*, 208; Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers*, 116.
[159] Wright, *Iron Curtain*, 243.

Fox has noted that, since the opening of the Russian archives, single master narratives like these have lost credibility, not least because it is now ‘increasingly clear that far from all intellectual observers’ of the Soviet Union ‘sought or found utopia’.[160] David-Fox’s work concentrates specifically on the role of the Soviet practice of *kul’tpokaz* in the Bolsheviks’ attempts to convince foreigners of Soviet superiority. Developed intensively throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a key feature of *kul’tpokaz* was the exhibition of ‘model’ Soviet institutions, be they factories, farms, hospitals, schools or prisons, that appeared to showcase the developments in Russia that were considered most amenable to western visitors. In many cases, these institutions were in fact genuine ‘models’, if wholly anomalous within the broader Soviet system.

The function of these models was to ‘prompt foreigners to generalize from unrepresentative samples’ and to foster a ‘favourable picture’ (*blagopriiatnuiu kartinu*) of the USSR among its guests, which would then be disseminated through the reports that the delegations produced.[161] British and European delegations to the USSR generally committed to publishing reports following their visits to the Soviet state, and the Bolsheviks quickly utilised this knowledge as a key facet of the *kul’tpokaz* agenda. Aware, for instance, of the significance of diffusing knowledge of (or indeed misconceptions about) the USSR through key foreign states, Lenin personally thanked the first British delegation in 1920 for ‘having become acquainted with the Soviet system … despite their extraordinary subjection to bourgeois prejudices’.[162] As David-Fox points out, the Russian word *kul’tpokaz* contains the noun *pokaz*, meaning ‘display’, as well as the stem of the adjective *pokazatel’nyi*, or ‘demonstration’, as ‘used in the term “show

[160] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 244-6.
[161] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 98–101; 116; *Krasnaia zvezda*, 25 February 1925.
[162] ‘Lenin to the British workers’, 30 May 1920, in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Harold H. Fisher (eds), *Soviet Russia and the West, 1920-1927: A Documentary* Survey (Stanford, 1957), 54.

trial" to denote a staged political lesson'. Demonstrative political lessons were thus deliberately at the heart of Soviet political and cultural diplomacy.[163]

Increasingly, the Soviets analysed their foreign guests and tailored increasingly programmatic visitor schedules to their interests, in attempts to evoke the most praiseworthy reports. Cognisant of the effect that impressive 'show prisons' had already had on British guests, by 1924 the number of model prisons in Moscow had soared in order that the veracity of the institution be affirmed by visitors.[164] This tactic had by this time taken on even greater importance, since, in the years between the first delegation to Russia in 1920 and the arrival of the TUC delegates, Soviet prisons had been gaining international notoriety, especially with regard to the alleged treatment of non-Bolshevik socialists. In particular, rumours of hunger strikes, atrocities, torture and extra-judicial killings in the prisons on the Solovetsky Islands had shocked international labour movements.[165] Given the Labour Party's own responses to these allegations, as well as the unease and frustration of the Labour leadership with the Soviets (which would only increase in late 1924 with the apparent role of the Soviets in the Zinoviev letter and the red scare), it is unsurprising that the Soviet authorities were greatly concerned by the 'strong confusion' (*sil'noe zameshatel'stvo*) they sensed among the labour movement.[166]

In response, as Politburo documents reveal, the Soviets discussed at great length how to react to the international outcry. In early April 1924, the Politburo debated whether to make a public statement with regard to the alleged events on Solovki, ordering Georgy Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and Valerian Kuibyshev, People's Commissar of the Workers'

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[163] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 98.
[164] GARF, f. R-8419, op. 1, d. 122, l. 1, '*Spisok mest zakliucheniia goroda moskvy*'.
[165] *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii* (RGANI), Moscow, f. 89, op. 73, d. 25, ll. 1-2; d. 26, l. 28; d. 27, ll. 1-2.
[166] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 34, l. 5.

and Peasants' Inspectorate, to come to a decision.[167] By the end of the month it was agreed that a commission would be sent to Solovki to investigate, before a report would be made available to the public.[168] Yet by October, no account had been published, and the Soviet authorities' anxiety over how this might affect the impending British delegation was clear. A Politburo meeting on 9 October sought more information from those who had visited Solovki, and Tomsky, leader of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, alongside Zinoviev, was entrusted with answering the rigorous enquiries that were expected from John Bromley, founding member of the General Council of the TUC and leader of the forthcoming delegation.[169] The following day, Chicherin issued a circular worried about the British reaction, with particular anxiety over the effects on the already precarious state of trade negotiations with Britain.[170]

Despite these concerns, the Soviets remained convinced that with the appropriate guidance and stage-management, the delegation would produce a 'tremendous and useful [*gromadnuiu i poleznuiu*] work for us'.[171] Moreover, the Soviets' own analysis of the Labour Party as possessing the power to command the loyalty of the British working classes for a long time to come added even greater impetus for making a positive impression upon the visitors.[172] As a result, the Soviet authorities increased their efforts and the British were one of the first delegations to be subjected to an intensified Soviet programme of *kul'tpokaz*, with an elaborately stage-managed itinerary of a Moscow 'show prison' being conducted with machine-like precision.

[167] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 32, l. 1.
[168] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 33, l. 1.
[169] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 34, l. 1.
[170] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 34, l. 5.
[171] *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii* (RGASPI), Moscow, f. 17, op. 2, d. 164, l. 217.
[172] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 120, l. 34.

As Morgan notes, compared with 1920 'the delegation was conducted on lines of collective responsibility'.[173] (Ben Tillett was the only delegate to eventually publish an individual account.) So, when the report was published in February 1925, an eager audience was introduced to some updated aspects of Soviet Russia. The delegation was received ecstatically everywhere it went, set a strenuous schedule and demonstrated an 'eagerness to get the facts'.[174] In its attention to prisons and the penal system, the report was certainly more thorough than any previous account. 'We visited political prisons', the introduction stated, and 'were pleased to see that prisoners in what were once the worst prisons in Europe … are treated with a very great humanity, and get good opportunities for a fresh start'.[175] Emphasis was placed upon the delegation's freedom to converse with prisoners unrestricted, including those Socialist Revolutionaries condemned to death, and upon the testimony of those incarcerated that their treatment was as good as anywhere in the West, particularly in the socialist *Butyrka* in Moscow.[176]

In contrast to the centralised and secretive British penal system described in Hobhouse and Brockway's 1922 report, the delegation praised the early 'revolutionary judicature' in Soviet Russia, its 'best feature' being its 'decentralisation'. Furthermore, the GPU was considered 'nothing more than an organisation like our own detective service'.[177] On the prisons themselves, the report was glowing:

[173] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 129-30. See also TUC Library, Fred Bramley papers, Box 1, B1/22, signed agreement of delegates (n. d.).
[174] Calhoun, *United Front*, 97-8.
[175] TUC, *Russia: The Official Report*, xvi. In an analysis of the delegation's report in *The Labour Magazine* in 1925, however, prisons were given only one paragraph's attention, and described as 'satisfactory', once more suggesting a lack of importance attributed to the issue. See 'The Real Soviet Russia: Report of the British Trade Union Delegation Analysed, I', *The Labour Magazine: Incorporating The British Trades Union Review and the Labour Party Bulletin*, 3, 11 (March 1925), 501.
[176] TUC, *Russia: The Official Report*, 16-17.
[177] Ibid, 90; 94-5.

> The whole system of prison administration and the treatment of non-political prisoners in Soviet Russia is based on the latest theories of criminal psychology. The humanising of prison life is a striking feature of the Russian administration. The ordinary criminal is detained in prison not for the purpose of punishment, but with the view to educating him to become a useful citizen and worker. This is perhaps one of the most remarkable changes in Russia, and is apparently working with the most excellent results. The atmosphere of a Russian prison is now more that of a workshop of free workers than of a house of detention or jail.[178]

With an air of esteem, detailed descriptions were given in the report of socialist prison workshops, the 'self-supporting' nature of the administration, the prisoners' roles in its functioning, prison diets and communal dormitories. 'The most systematic measures are taken', the delegation claimed, 'to eliminate all signs of the old prison system', and an apparently weapon-free, guard-free environment had been constructed, in which trades were learned by inmates and a sense of collective responsibility had been established.

> It is indeed a remarkable sight to witness a large carpenter's shop of over 100 prisoners working with ordinary implements, such as hammers, chisels, and saws, with only two, apparently unarmed, militia men strolling among them and six working warders. These prisoners consisted of burglars, bandits, and men convicted of robbery with violence.[179]

There was no segregation of male and female prisoners, and each prison maintained a co-operative shop, stocked according to the requirements of the inmates, with prisoners able to

[178] Ibid, 132.
[179] Ibid, 132-4.

purchase items with their trade union-rate wages.[180] According to a draft copy of the report, the delegation sampled the prison food, 'examined the menus, and were satisfied that no prisoners in our own country … would be permitted to enjoy the same standard of comfort and have the same opportunities of being trained to earn their living on their release'.[181] And according to the official report, political prisoners neither followed a trade nor earned a wage, and while 'their accommodation in most cases is of a higher standard, their lot, generally speaking, is more severe than the ordinary criminal'. 'Political prisoners are looked upon as being incarcerated as a danger to the public safety, whereas the ordinary civilian criminal is looked upon as a delinquent who, by education and humane treatment, can eventually be guided into the paths of useful citizenship'.[182] Solitary confinement was occasionally incorporated into the sentences of political prisoners (though where it was not, association with other prisoners was permitted), and those in the Caucasus appeared to be treated worse than in Russia. Nevertheless, the delegation visited the Tiflis citadel in Georgia—a political prison where daily terror and executions were rumoured to take place—and, 'unaccompanied and without notice … [i]t will be enough to say that the sensational stories circulating in Tiflis were clearly untrue'.[183]

According to Calhoun, of all the delegates only John Turner was 'refreshingly blunt' in his criticisms of the Soviet system. Calhoun claims that Turner, an anarchist who became closely involved in the campaigns of Emma Goldman, the American anarchist deported to Russia, against the Bolsheviks' treatment of political prisoners and the repression of freedoms, praised the Russians' efforts to build houses, asylums and hospitals, but was impressed by little else:

[180] Ibid, 132; 134.
[181] TUC Library, Bramley papers, Box 1, B1/23, Draft Official Report.
[182] TUC, *Russia: The Official Report*, 135.
[183] Ibid.

‘He thought prison conditions were wretched’.[184] This is only partly true. Turner gave a number of interviews in which he described the horrors suffered by political prisoners and the rumoured conditions of those held at the concentration camps on the Solovetsky Islands in the White Sea. While in Russia, he also ‘sought to have representations made on behalf’ of political prisoners.[185] But he also noted the ‘humane’ treatment of civilian prisoners and the absolute freedom of access during his visits.[186] Indeed, Turner’s own protestations against the Bolsheviks are significant in highlighting the compelling reach of the Soviets’ *kul’tpokaz*, for, despite his own doubts, Turner still fell in line with his fellow delegates and espoused the official view that prisons in general were much more humane than even four years before.[187] The official conclusions reached by the delegation in respect of the prison system were that:

> the Soviet Government was achieving most remarkable results. Although Russia in these matters was, before the Revolution, perhaps the most backward of European communities, yet it has in many respects already been brought up to the level of European standards; at the present rate of progress it may be expected before long to set an example that, if it is to be followed, will require a fairly radical reorganisation in States that are at present leading Europe in these matters.[188]

That the delegation noted a Soviet-European equivalency in prison and penal standards is not insignificant; as will be shown below, the Soviets had already begun to make concerted efforts to present a veneer that combined European standards with a specifically Soviet supremacy.

[184] Calhoun, *United Front*, 96.
[185] Calhoun, *United Front*, 96; 125; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 169.
[186] See *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1925; 6 February.
[187] Calhoun, *United Front*, 125; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 161-73.
[188] TUC, *Russia: Official Report*, 135.

The individual reports and interviews of other delegates like Ben Tillett, a Labour agitator of the Transport and General Workers' Union, added little to the official report, though were certainly without much criticism of the USSR. The 'whole administration of the law', Tillett claimed, 'is humane and administered with a view to prevention rather than cure'. The 'exactitudes of the law appear … at all times to be more charitable then penal'. On the prisons themselves, they were 'more like a hospital than a place of detention'.[189] Prior to the delegation, Purcell had lent his name to a pamphlet that claimed Russia had 'great things to offer us who are struggling';[190] and upon his return from Petrograd and Moscow John Bromley went even further, demonstrating the success of the Politburo's and Tomsky's reassuring overtures when he noted, in a bizarre *Manchester Guardian* interview, that if he ever had to go to prison, he hoped it would be a Russian prison.[191]

Compared to the reports on the British penal system of Hobhouse, Brockway and the Webbs in 1922, these descriptions paint a stark contrast. If any of the delegates in 1924 were familiar with the British reports, it is easy to see why they were impressed by the model Soviet institutions they visited. Others, however, were not so impressed with the delegation's report. As Calhoun notes, whether the delegation 'advanced the cause of unvarnished truth is questionable'. Delegates were 'clearly a bit naïve, too reluctant to criticize what was amiss in Soviet society, too anxious to justify mistakes, too eager to locate and praise anything that seemed to have gone well'.[192] (In the case of Bromley, such naivety and the treatment that the British received played havoc with his own perceptions. In a *Guardian* interview, for instance, he claimed that it must not be believed that Russia was experiencing food shortages, for he put

[189] Ben Tillett, *Some Russian Impressions. With a Foreword by George Hicks* (London, 1925), 12.
[190] W. P. Coates, *Russia's Counter-Claims. With a Preface by A. A. Purcell* (London, 1924), 4-5.
[191] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 34, l. 1; *Manchester Guardian*, 6 February 1925.
[192] Calhoun, *United Front*, 124.

on over a stone in weight while he was there.[193]) Morgan, too, highlights that those ostensibly trying to penetrate below the surface in Russia might well have tried harder. Instead of remaining objective, the report was 'an exercise in historical extenuation', presenting the broader situation in Russia of NEP as 'the achievement of stability on a new social basis', and attempting to assimilate the 'revolution to the rhythms and values of the British labour movement'.[194]

A host of contemporary bodies took issue with the report, especially its reliance on 'official' Bolshevik statistics.[195] (The Soviet regime, it was recognised, was becoming 'rather successful' in its handling of delegations, 'combining the appearance of spontaneity with a maximum of surveillance'.[196]) In particular, the delegation was attacked for its failure to inquire further into the conditions faced by political prisoners, and for failing, after Tomsky's reassurances, to investigate prisons in Solovki, Susdal, the Taganka, Spalerna, or Ukraine. Emma Goldman noted how the delegates were duped by the 'carefully chosen and specially prepared material', which ensured they saw everything in 'glowing colours'. That they were chaperoned by 'Chekists' only appeared to compound the notion that they had been led astray from the real conditions in Russia.[197]

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[193] *Manchester Guardian*, 2 February 1925.
[194] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 131; 133.
[195] See *New Leader*, 16 January 1925; Social Democratic Labour Party of Georgia, *The British Trade Union Delegation and Georgia* (Paris, 1925); *Trade Union Unity*, April 1925, 11-12; *Le Peuple*, 19 March 1925; Lt.-Col. Assheton Pownall, *The Plain Truth About Russia To-day: An up-to-date account* (Westminster, 1925), 4; Andre Liebich, *From the Other Shore: Russian Social Democracy after 1921* (Cambridge, MA., 1997), 170-1; 390-1. See also the press cuttings in TUC Library, Bramley papers, Box 1, B1/22; *The Patriot*, 25 December, 1924.
[196] Frederick Charles Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 1960), 44.
[197] British Committee for the Defence of Political Prisoners in Russia (BCDPPR), *Russia and the British Labour Delegation's Report. A Reply* (London, 1925), 1; 4; 20-7; 31.

For their part, the delegation barely broached the issue of political prisoners, concluding that it was in no position to 'press for the release of these irreconcilables'.[198] According to Morgan, regarding Solovki the delegates 'pharasaically urged the disadvantages of locations lending credence to hostile reports'.[199] Interested observers also found it difficult to accept the delegation's conclusion that the treatment of criminality in Russia was based on humanisation and modern criminal psychology when Soviet Russia's code of laws comprised, '*among two hundred articles on punishment, forty-two crimes punishable by death*'. The comparisons of the GPU with Scotland Yard were just as problematic.[200] Equally, if not more damning was the response of the Labour and Socialist International (LSI). As part of a broader attack on what Morgan labels the 'incapacity' of the British labour movement for 'theoretical insight', LSI secretary Friedrich Adler condemned the delegation's work as less of a critical report and more of an '*interview with the Soviet Authorities*'.[201] In its treatment of the prison system and political prisoners, the delegation 'gracefully evade[d] the discussion of all painful questions' and was given only a meticulously staged tour of Moscow's 'show prison'.[202] In Britain, too, the delegation's report was roundly condemned by the right-wing press.[203]

Despite, or perhaps because of, these reactions, the Soviets continued in their attempts to convince the delegates of the sanitisation of Soviet prisons, even after the delegation had returned to Britain. Politburo discussions in January 1925 reveal continued debates over whether to close the prisons on Solovki and on the possibilities for expelling prisoners from

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[198] TUC, *Russia: Official Report*, 16-17.
[199] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 134.
[200] BCDPPR, *Russia and the British Labour Delegation's Report*, 26-7.
[201] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, III, 138; Friedrich Adler, *The Anglo-Russian Report. A Criticism of the Report of the British Trades Union Delegation to Russia from the Point of View of International Socialism* (London, 1925), 15.
[202] Adler, *Anglo-Russian Report*, 19; 29-30.
[203] For reports in the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily Express*, *The Times* and in the House of Commons see Calhoun, *United Front*, 123.

the state;[204] while discussions at the end of the month suggest that, before making a final decision, the Soviets were waiting for Tomsky to 'feel out' the attitudes of the Second International towards their proposals.[205] By early February, the decision to close the political section of Solovki and to 'transfer the most active elements' (*perevod naibolee aktivnykh elementov*) to other prisons had been formalised: the first subsequent order was for Tomsky to inform the British delegation.[206]

On 27 March, after the decision on Solovki had been announced publicly, Tomsky was ordered to make contact with the British, extending the arm of the *kul'tpokaz* machine and fortifying the British perception that the moderation being augmented in the Soviet Union under NEP was reaching deep into Soviet social policy.[207] The Soviets were self-congratulatory in asserting that the 'English delegation is extremely pleased [*chrezvychaino dovol'na*] with the results of its trip'. There was some disappointment in the apparent decision by the British not to write up a special report on Soviet prisons, but Khristian Rakovsky, the Soviet Trade Representative to England, boasted nonetheless to the Politburo of his certainty that the British delegates found Soviet prisons 'exemplary' (*obraztsovymi*).[208] Rakovsky was, with good reason, increasingly assured that the Soviets could 'find sympathy' (*mozhno naiti sochuvstvie*) for their ideas among the English working classes, and Soviet prisons under the *kul'tpokaz* programme had played a significant part in this.[209]

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[204] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 35, l. 1.
[205] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 35, l. 1, '*Zasedaniia komissii politbiuro Tsk po voprosu o solovkakh*, 23 ianvaria 1925 g.'.
[206] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 37, ll. 1-2.
[207] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 38, ll. 1-3.
[208] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 164, ll. 217; 219.
[209] RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 164, l. 218; *Leningradskaia pravda*, 4 December 1924.

Soviet mimicry and Walter Citrine's first Russian visit

As a result of the TUC's 'free-wheeling representatives' in the USSR, who at times, according to Calhoun, appeared out of control with revolutionary proclamations, TUC Assistant Secretary Walter Citrine met the delegation as they returned to Britain and imposed upon them a strict silence.[210] Citrine was the next high-profile member of the labour movement to travel to Soviet Russia in 1925, and he admitted to a great enthusiasm for the delegations to the USSR. Finding it 'rather baffling' to obtain specific information, of his own admission his 'enthusiasm brushed aside such considerations' and he accepted 'almost at its face value, without critical reservations, practically everything which emanated from Russian official sources. I entirely disbelieved the stories … attributed … to the biassed [*sic*] capitalist press'.[211]

Despite this sentiment, recent scholarship has attributed particular importance to Citrine's visits to the USSR (which would eventually total six). According to Davis, despite a number of historians' neglect of Citrine, his willingness to highlight both the positives and negatives of his visits makes his reports significant sources when considering perceptions and understandings of the Soviet system—even more so in light of the less-than-impartial report of the 1924 delegation.[212] In fact, Citrine made clear the difficulties he saw with the role of Russian trade unions, the role of women as workers, and the poverty and apparent indifference of Soviet politicians. As Davis notes, contrary to Gorodetsky's conclusion, Citrine's first account showed a good understanding of the Soviet system, was balanced and realistic, and provides a useful contribution to the discussions 'about Soviet socialism that shaped British Labour's ideas about the USSR'.[213]

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[210] Calhoun, *United Front*, 105-6.
[211] Walter Citrine, *Men and Work* (London, 1964), 88; *Bednota*, 26 September 1925.
[212] Davis, 'An Outsider Looks in', 148-50.
[213] Ibid, 152; 155-6; 159-60; Gorodetsky, *Precarious Truth*, 124.

Citrine's visit, however, came at a time when the Soviets were intensifying their drive to connect foreign delegations to 'the current political tasks of the moment' in order to make their 'political lessons' most explicit.[214] In particular, Citrine's tour of a Moscow show prison (relayed in his unpublished diary) was the culmination of an extensive Soviet effort to monitor and appropriate contemporary developments in western European penal theory and practice. In August 1925, one month before Citrine's visit, the ninth International Prison and Penitentiary Congress was held in London, the first of its kind since before the First World War. As early as March 1925, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel)[215] received an invitation from the British government to participate in the congress. Immediately, a request was made to the Politburo to report on the USSR's 'desire to participate' (*zhelatel'nosti uchastiia*) and, if necessary, to collect information on the Soviet prison system that could be presented at the congress—primarily that which would illustrate the implementation of the principles of the 're-education' (*perevospitaniia*) of prisoners in the USSR, which was achieved not through retribution (*vozmezdie*), but through the 'cultural-educational work' (*kul'turno-prosvetitel'noi rabotoi*) undertaken by inmates.[216]

Despite scepticism as to the veracity of the invitation and the date of the conference itself, subsequent Politburo debates, marked 'urgent' (*srochno*), considered the advantages and disadvantages of attending the congress.[217] Attendance would, it was argued, provide the Soviets a prominent platform upon which to address the 'spread of information' (*rasprostranialis' svedeniia*) abroad on the 'colossal quantity of prisoners' (*kolossal'nom kolichestve zakliuchennykh*) in the USSR, as well as their alleged 'inhuman'

[214] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 103.
[215] *Narodnyi komissariat po inostrannym delam*.
[216] GARF f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, l. 1, '*Ob uchastii v mezhdunarodnoi tiuremnoi konferentsii*', 9 March 1925.
[217] GARF f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, ll. 3; 6, 'V. Polovtseva to O. Kameneva', 13 March 1925, and 'Polovtseva to Kameneva', 11 March 1925.

(*nechelovecheskom*) treatment.[218] The Bolsheviks could also refute the material that had been spreading in the West on the increased use of forced labour in the Soviet Union, and, importantly, the congress would provide the opportunity to showcase their own 'reform' (*reformu*) of their prison system, far behind which the West was thought to be 'lagging' (*otstaet*). In acknowledgement of the importance of the role that the Soviet penal system was coming to play in Soviet diplomacy, Politburo documents noted that the failure to demonstrate these points at the congress could not but have 'serious significance for the international position of the USSR' (*ser'eznogo znacheniia dlia mezhdunarodnogo polozheniia SSSR*).[219]

The Soviets also placed stock in the fact that the Prison Congress was an international institution of which Russia had always been a part (the fourth congress had been held in St Petersburg in 1890), and that it provided a theoretical and practical interest for the USSR in terms of 'familiarisation' (*oznakomleniia*) with the state of penal affairs in other countries.[220] Evsei Shirvindt, the Commissar for Justice, made clear his view that it was very desirable in particular to make foreigners aware of the 'actual situation in our prisons' (*deistvitel'nym polozheniem dela v nashikh tiur'makh*).[221] As a result, translated programmes and congress agendas were pored over in great detail, with the aspects most applicable to the exhibition of the Soviet system highlighted;[222] but on 1 May, a Narkomindel circular, signed off by the Politburo, finally rejected the idea of attending the congress.[223]

Despite the Soviets' surety of the confidence they had inspired in the earlier British delegations, they remained aware of the damage that could be done to their international position if events

[218] GARF f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, l. 2.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] GARF f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, l. 3, 'Kameneva to Rothstein', 29 March 1925.
[222] GARF, f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, ll. 7-9.
[223] GARF, f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, l. 11.

at the congress somehow unfolded negatively. The prospect of 'hostile demonstrations' (*vrazhdebnykh demonstratsii*) was considered too great a risk, and it was decided instead to surveil the congress closely from Russia.[224] In particular, in their analysis of the congress the Soviets focused on reports that were provided by the organs of the British left. From the *Daily News*, for instance, the Soviets noted the praise for modern prisons that fostered an 'atmosphere of hope', abolished solitary confinement and utilised 'cells without bars'.[225] From the *Manchester Guardian*, the increasingly scientific nature of criminology was highlighted, while the rejection of Lombrosianism and the understanding of crime as the outcome of bad social conditions were taken into account.[226] In the *Daily Herald*, the role of the environment in causing and preventing crime was noted, as were positive experimentations with 'conditional release' and the need to prevent corrupting influences from subsuming 'less experienced prisoners'.[227] The *Guardian* even published a detailed piece from the congress on the 'limitations of the English system' (*nedostatki angliiskoi sistemy*), while the Soviets attempted, on top of this, to make contact with the Howard League about the conference proceedings.[228] Even without attending, the Soviets were able, through surveillance of the congress and foreign penal systems, to extend the reach of their *kul'tpokaz* programme.

The Soviets' focus on Britain and the organs of the British left could have been born out of coincidence and the hosting of the congress in London. Given, though, the extensive scope of *kul'tpokaz* diplomacy, the frequency with which the British had been visiting and praising Russia up until 1925, and the upcoming visit of Citrine (who, as TUC Assistant General

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[224] GARF, f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, l. 2. Conscious of the need to regulate Soviet organisations' international contact, a Narkomindel circular issued in 1926 prohibited any exchanges with foreign establishments before certain fixed informational criteria were met. GARF, f. R-393, op. 60, d. 170, ll. 1-3.
[225] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 2-5.
[226] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 6-8.
[227] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 10; 17-18.
[228] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 32, ll. 8; f. R-393, op. 1a, d. 167, l. 6.

Secretary, held a prominent position in a nation that still led the Second International), it is much more likely that the Soviet-British axis being built around penal politics was being deliberately augmented. Indeed, the Bolsheviks were already forging other analogous axes, between, for example, Moscow and Berlin in the fields of medicine and public health, as Susan Solomon has demonstrated.[229] But the Soviet-German axis was both deliberate and official, while the Soviet-British axis was, for the moment at least, being played out much more furtively. European penal theories and methods were effectively being appropriated by the Soviets in advance of them being 'sold back' to western visitors. Dressing these ideas up in 'Soviet socialist garb', the effects of the Soviets' methods on Citrine, a figure unafraid to express his views, were impressive.

Citrine's unpublished diary reveals his (until now neglected) trips to Soviet prisons with his travel companion, George Hicks. On their final day in Russia, and on being asked by their guide, Iarotsky, which type of prison—civil or political—they would like to see, Citrine made clear to emphasise that 'no opportunity for preparation was given to the authorities for our visit … we made up our minds that we would disclose our intentions as to whether we should go at very short notice … to avoid being shown only what the authorities might have desired for us to see'.[230] Nevertheless, unaware of the elaborate propagandist machine to which he was being subjected, Citrine's visit around the Sokolniky prison in Moscow proceeded along lines identical to the trips of other delegations that were now fully subjected to the *kul'tpokaz* style, seeing in a very similar order the workshops, dormitories, library, co-operative store, kitchen, theatre, courtyard and visitor rooms.[231]

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[229] Susan Gross Solomon (ed.), *Doing Medicine Together: Germany and Russia Between the Wars* (Buffalo, N.Y., 2006).
[230] BLPES, Walter Citrine Papers, 1/4, Diary of Visit to the Soviet Union, 235.
[231] Ibid, 238; 241; 247; 251; 253-4; 257; 259.

Citrine was, though, impressed with the prison, or the ‘educational institutions for criminals’, as he was informed they were called. The open dormitories, with no hint of solitary confinement, the opportunity to learn a trade and improve one’s skill set, the well-stocked library, the role of prisoner education, and the prisoner-run theatre all induced him to ask Hicks: ‘“What sort of place is this we have come to? … Is it a Fred Karno gaol or a pantomime show?”’ Hicks replied that he did not know, ‘“but I cannot imagine anyone wanting to run away”’.[232] Significantly, each of the aspects that Citrine and Hicks praised had been highlighted by the Soviets in their analysis of the ‘European’ standards of prisons at the London congress. In a more serious vain, the visit forced Citrine to consider ‘how complex a thing is crime’, and following discussions with a number of prisoners he mused that there ‘did not appear to be a criminal among the lot’.[233]

In March 1926, extracts of Citrine’s account of his prison visit were published in the communist publication, *Labour Monthly* (edited by Rajani Palme Dutt, Executive Committee member of the CPGB), in which he stated clearly that it was not his purpose ‘to give an analysis of the system by which it is sought to reduce, and possibly to eliminate crime, but rather to describe … the incidents we encountered’. And while Citrine’s objectivity comes through in both his diary and the *Labour Monthly* piece, his admiration for the progressive measures in place, in particular the reductions in sentences in proportion to days worked at a trade in prison, was clear.[234] Pragmatically he stated: ‘I am not able to verify as to whether the institution we visited is typical of the Russian system, but we were assured that such was the case’. However, ‘if there is such a thing as reformative treatment for crime, the Russians are making a whole-

[232] Ibid, 239; 247; 251; 253. See also Citrine, *Men and Work*, 120-1.
[233] Citrine, Diary, 255.
[234] *Labour Monthly*, 8, 3 (1926), 178; Citrine, Diary, 237; 257-9.

hearted attempt to exploit it to the full'. Overall, he and Hicks thought that 'the experiment … being carried on was remarkably interesting and educative'.[235]

That Citrine gave only two pages to his prison visit in his own published account, *Men and Work*, compared to almost thirty in his diary, appears to have followed a pattern within accounts written by the moderate left. While many figures enthused in private reports over Soviet experiments in penality and prisons, they seemed less willing to declare their thoughts so unequivocally in official publications. This may well have been the result of scepticism as to whether Soviet methods would continue to produce such apparently positive results. Added to this, the Soviet attraction was still littered with the dangers of being perceived as lining up behind extremists. For figures displaying a greater degree of objectivity in their accounts, like Citrine, these explanations are certainly feasible. More likely, though, for other members of the left, the issues of penal politics and prison reform in Britain (and Russia) were considered, not unexpectedly, of lesser importance than the grander topics of economics, security, peace, and the business of re-election, warranting far less coverage as a result.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union and the issue of prisons both presented a broader problem for Labour. As far as visitors could discern, the Soviet system appeared to offer comprehensive socialist reconstruction—a revolution—in the area of prisons, crime and punishment, and with apparently remarkable results. As noted above, Labour now understood the importance of, and urgency for, tackling the problems of crime and prison reform in Britain, and many in the movement clearly admired the Soviet approach as they had seen and understood it (or as it had been relayed to them). Yet the party's ideological configuration complicated its approach to these issues. Contrary to the CPGB, which often saw the Soviet Union as providing 'off the

[235] *Labour Monthly*, 8, 3, 185; Citrine, Diary, 255; 260.

peg' solutions to Britain's problems, Labour's attachment to gradualism, the idea of measured, constitutional reform, and its leadership's electoral pragmatism meant that, in power, it spent much of its time patching up the capitalist system, rather than experimenting with socialist ideas.

In spite of its gradualism, though, palliatives and piecemeal reform were also often disparaged by Labour. Even at its own party conferences, measures for penal reform were frequently voted down because the changes they offered were not considered comprehensive enough. The movement, both at its base and in its leadership, appeared trapped in an ideological paradox. The attractions and excitement of what seemed to be happening in Soviet Russia were clear, especially to individual dissenting party members, whose theoretical understandings of criminality and prison reform were certainly being influenced by the Soviet exemplar. But the party's inability to commit to a policy revolution, coupled with its refusal to implement partial reform that solved particular problems but failed to comprehensively resolve issues, left the movement paralysed, unwilling and seemingly unable to move. Throughout its years in both opposition and government between 1920 and 1926, the Labour Party was, to a greater or lesser extent in different factions, attracted to and influenced by the transformations in Soviet penal politics that the 'moderation' of NEP appeared to be fostering. Because of its pragmatism, though, the party had little inclination to act upon its idealistic urges. Demonstrating that 'a commitment to sweeping change may co-exist with a deep resistance to piecemeal change here and now', the party was, on this particular issue, a 'parliamentary party with a Utopian ethic'.[236]

[236] David Marquand, *The Progressive Dilemma: From Lloyd George to Kinnock* (London, 1992), 65; Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, xii.

Labour movement visits, 1925-29

Between 1925 and 1929, the elaborate stagings of foreign delegations to the USSR reached their apex. The numbers of visitors to the Soviet state also peaked during this period.[237] Detailed programmes of places to visit were 'treated as important political decisions' for the Soviets, ratified far in advance of guests' arrivals, while lavish displays and dinners, specially-approved trains and meetings with significant dignitaries ensured visitors were subjected to the best hospitality. The convenient planting of English, German or French-speaking inmates during tours of model prisons also safeguarded guests' isolation from ordinary citizens and conditions. While certain visitors publically praised the USSR in pursuit of their own political agenda, the delegations were a 'laboratory for the Soviet mission of transforming negative perceptions into positive testimonials'.[238]

And positive testimonials were certainly forthcoming; as the number of delegations soared, endorsements of the Soviet system flooded in. With regard to the Soviet penal system, the authorities beamed at the support they appeared to be gathering in their prison guest books and through the reports of delegations. Between 1925 and 1927, delegations arrived from Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria, with prisons described as educational and 'comradely' (*tovarishcheskoe*);[239] Spanish, Swedish and Italian visitors claimed that Soviet progress in penal reform would 'benefit all mankind' (*pol'zu vsemu chelovechestvu*);[240] and French and German delegations noted the 'humane' (*gumannoe*) care for prisoners and the 'justice and

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[237] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 103.
[238] Ibid, 103-9; 115.
[239] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 36, l. 36; f. R-4042, op. 2, d. 384, ll. 37-8; 42-4.
[240] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 16; 20; f. R-4042, op. 2, d. 384, ll. 20-5; *Vecherniaia radio*, 26 November 1927.

kindness' (*spravedlivosti i dobroty*) of the penitentiary system, while picking out the educational elements and the communal cells (*obshchikh kamerakh*) for particular praise.[241]

The Soviets, of course, reported the majority of these instances back to their own domestic audiences in their continued efforts to maintain the appearance of Soviet superiority over the West. *Pravda* often took to explaining in depth the principles behind the 'correctional labour' policy of the USSR, while *Izvestiia* attempted to focus Soviet citizens' attention on the reformist nature of the penal system and its eschewing of punitive policies.[242] Other newspapers relayed stories of the aspects of the penal system that the Soviet authorities sought to exhibit, like 'Prisons Without Bars' (*tiur'ma bez reshetok*), or made positive comparisons with levels of recidivism in England and France to justify 'the softness of our penal policy'.[243] When the authorities were particularly worried about what a high profile figure, like the French novelist and communist Henri Barbusse, might report about Soviet conditions, they were quick to step in. Barbusse, for instance, had attended the Congress of Friends of the Soviet Union in Moscow in 1927, and wanted to publish a report on the Soviet prison system. The Soviets, though, felt they had yet better propagandist material to provide him, and ordered Barbusse to delay any publications before further contact was made.[244]

For the Labour Party during this period, its time in opposition between 1925 and 1929 gave it plenty of scope to further explore theoretical socialism, while the broader labour movement

[241] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 31, l. 37; f. R-4042, op. 2, d. 384, ll. 5-6; 8-9; 14-18; 36; 40-1; 48; f. R-4042, op. 10, d. 53, ll. 66-7.
[242] *Pravda*, 30 June 1927; *Izvestiia*, 6 March 1927; GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 31, l. 36; David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 115.
[243] *Vecherniaia moskva*, 21 August 1927; *Krasnaia gazeta*, 3 October 1927. See also *Krasnyi sever*, 4 November, 1927.
[244] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 10, d. 53, ll. 86-7.

continued to visit the Soviet Union, reporting just as positively on the Soviet penal system.[245] Indeed, the only criticism of the Soviet prison system during this period came from Brockway, who, in an open letter in the *New Leader* to Alexei Rykov (*Sovnarkom* Chairman), refused an invitation to take part in the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the revolution on the grounds that the Soviets continued to imprison non-Bolshevik socialists.[246] Criticism from Brockway, the foremost thinker on penal politics on the left, was significant, but this single letter appears to have had little effect on general impressions of the Soviet system. (Only a year later, Brockway would review Evsei Shirvindt's *Russian Prisons* in a favourable light).

George Lansbury also returned to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1926, and during his trip began to form a personal relationship with Stalin. Lansbury met with the Soviet General Secretary for four hours and set out Labour's gradualist approach to socialism, attempting to convince Stalin that English socialism was 'not far away' (*ne za gorami*).[247] Travelling with his son and CPGB member, Edgar, Lansbury once more visited Soviet prisons and his views from 1919 were unchanged. The Soviet system, he claimed, was wholly reformative and would never treat its inmates as the British prison system did.[248] Lansbury's approbation for all things Soviet clearly influenced his views—his daughter, Violet, studied and worked in Moscow for a number of years in the 1920s and, when Lansbury's wife, Bessie, fell ill, he asked Stalin personally for his help in easing Violet's travels home, to which Stalin obliged[249]—and while it is difficult to assess his capacity for objectivity, his views are indicative of the excitement

[245] For the visits in this period see British Women Trade Unionist Delegation, *Soviet Russia: An Investigation by British Women Trade Unionists, April to July 1925* (London, 1925), 1; 49-50; 54; 87-8; *Youth in Red Russia: Official Report of First British Young Workers' Delegation to Soviet Russia* (London, 1926), 12-13; 16; 24; *Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 April 1925; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 164, l. 217; and GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 29; 34-5; 49; 129; 135; f. R-4042, op. 10, d. 53, ll. 76-8; 81-3.
[246] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 61, l. 202.
[247] RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 760, l. 42.
[248] GARF, f. R-4042, op. 1, d. 31, l. 137.
[249] RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 760, ll. 47-8; 61; 63. On Violet's time in Russia see Violet Lansbury, *An Englishwoman in the USSR* (London, 1940).

that the Soviet Union continued to generate throughout the late 1920s, and the potential it provided for a wide range of people to project their own hopes onto the Soviet experiment. In August 1926, Lansbury wrote an article for *Izvestiia* in which he noted that conditions were consistently improving in Russia and that it was not difficult to see why the Russian case remained so interesting to the British working classes on everyday issues.[250] Socialism, according to the accounts of all these visitors, really appeared able to bring improvements to working lives.[251]

Impressions of Soviet experiments and progress, then, remained positive for large sections of the labour movement. Yet, by the end of 1925 the Labour Party had once more demonstrated its cravenness in the area of domestic penal politics. At its annual conference in October, the party finally called for a change in the law, but its passing expression of 'regret' at its own failure to do more in government on penal reform and the abolition of capital punishment highlighted that the issues had, to all intents and purposes, been dismissed, the party's electoral pragmatism suffocating any causes that carried links to either Soviet or British communism.[252]

3.6 Conclusion

In 1918, in *Labour and the New Social Order*, the Labour Party had warned of the need, following the armistice, to avoid 'patchwork' reform. Instead, the reconstruction of society itself was required.[253] Nine years later, however, Labour had failed to make inroads on issues of prisons and penal reform. Throughout this period the Labour Party and the broader labour movement had, for the most part, engaged relatively constructively with issues of criminality, prisons and penality. The roles of conscientious objectors, the police strikes and the continued

[250] *Izvestiia*, 29 August 1925.
[251] Davis, 'Altered Images', 124.
[252] *LPACR, 1925*, 299-301.
[253] Labour Party, *Labour and the New Social Order*, 3.

attempts for reform under Prison Commissioner Sir Evelyn Ruggles-Brise ensured these issues remained on Labour's radar. The Labour-instigated committee of 1919 and its report on the English prison system in 1922 only confirmed the movement's understanding of the need to engage with these issues, as well as its ostensible willingness to do so. However, despite this and Labour's predominantly progressive views and criticisms, the period is also noted for a lack of constructive proposals for reform. With growing momentum, the movement appeared increasingly committed to reform, but its ideas on how to achieve this remained more uncertain and the party's commitment to electoral pragmatism suffocated more radical thinking.

Simultaneously, Labour was being introduced to new perspectives on social and political organisation in Soviet Russia, and in spite of pressing concerns on security, economy and peace, a surprising amount of examination was granted to criminality and penal reform in early trips to the revolutionary state. The ways in which the labour movement perceived and understood revolutionary Russia played a pivotal role in shaping the movement through these years, and, particularly on the part of individual dissenting party members, an enthusiasm and excitement for Soviet Russia developed between 1917 and 1927, extending into impressions on Soviet prisons and their own understandings of criminality: the increasingly effective role of Soviet *kul'tpokaz* played a significant role in this. Labour Party leaders, on the other hand, were rarely so eulogistic; but a diplomatic line was walked in their overall support for the 'socialism' that was purported to be being developed in Russia, leaving space for admiration of the Soviet penal system.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate a number of arguments. First, in its analysis of Labour's approach to penal politics through the 1920s, it has shown how, despite a continuation in the party's engagement with prisons and penal reform that had emerged during the war, it failed to

form any sort of coherent penal policy. With greater frequency, calls for reform were made by individuals and party factions, but little detail was provided as to the specific ideas of the movement. This vacuum was revealed most conspicuously during the first Labour government, when no progress was made with regards to penal reform. Ostensibly, however, or at least according to the party's proclamations on penal politics since the end of the war, the topic was on its agenda. Indeed, in its first period in office the party's progress was beset with difficulties, and in its precarious position as a minority government it was forced to set a modest programme that fell short of any socialist reconstruction. Its increasingly soured relations with Soviet Russia, too, and the stoking in Britain of fears of a red menace prevented the party from associating with the Bolsheviks in any way other than the need for pragmatic trade, suffocating the chance for any ideas it had gleaned on Soviet prisons to arise, even without reference to Russia. The party in office gave a respectable account of itself, but according to the standards laid down by the labour movement on penal reform, it failed to meet its own expectations.

The chapter has also demonstrated that, as the propaganda machine of the Soviets developed throughout the 1920s, the labour movement became a key target of its operations. Furthermore, Soviet prisons formed an increasingly important part of the *kul'tpokaz* progamme. As the Soviets tailored foreign visits to their guests' interests and perfected their methods for isolating foreigners from the worst of the Soviet experiment, Labour delegations and individuals were guided through model Soviet prisons that were based on the latest developments in western penal theory. Delegates were, as a result, almost always greatly impressed. In contrast to Davis' suggestion that, in using the USSR through the late 1920s and early 1930s as a key definer of its own brand of socialism, Soviet economics and foreign policy were all that the British Labour Party admired,[254] by examining the left's early visits to Soviet Russia it is clear that with respect

[254] Davis, 'Labour's Political Thought', 64-85.

to issues of criminality, prisons and penal reform, many in the labour movement displayed a great deal of admiration for Soviet progress. From 1919 to 1927, many visitors became early advocates of Bolshevik penal methods at a time when questions were being asked of Britain's own prison system.

The chapter's demonstration of the far-reaching and rigorous role of the Soviets' *kul'tpokaz* also has consequences for our understanding of the relationship between the Labour Party and Soviet Russia. Labour figures were not always 'duped' by the Soviets, and not everything they were shown was a misrepresentation of Soviet society. The effect of *kul'tpokaz*, however, was often subliminally oppressive. While Potemkin style shows had been a feature of Russian diplomacy for centuries, the lengths to which the Soviets worked to research their guests and the latest international penal developments, to mould itineraries to visitors' interests, and to physically construct model prison institutions was enough to convince even the most discerning of guests that the Soviets had established a humane and novel socialist penal system. Nevertheless, even while many Soviet ideas on penal reform were not inherently 'communist', but rather western ideas disguised by Soviet surroundings, many figures within the British labour movement demonstrated a revealing capacity for tolerating and even emulating ostensibly 'communist' ideas in Britain. A more nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the period highlights the significant role of trips to Soviet Russia in 'cutting across cleavages and skewing the normative boundaries that dictated what was acceptable' to British social democrats.[255]

[255] Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933* (London, 1986), 47-60; Max Hodgson, '"If I Ever Have to Go to Prison, I Hope it's a Russian Prison": British Labour, Social Democracy and Soviet Communism, 1919-25', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28, 3 (2017), 344-66.

Finally, the chapter has argued that, through an analysis of the issue of penality in conjunction with Labour's relation to the Soviet Union, a broader ideological flux within the Labour Party is uncovered. Labour was not short of ideas on penal politics, and by 1926 the party had reached the culmination of its most actively engaged period with the issue of penal reform through the First World War, its association with conscientious objectors and its visits to the Soviet Union. The party's reluctance, though, to attempt to implement any sort of socialist agenda or programme of penal reform highlights its ideological uncertainty and its commitment to a safe electoral pragmatism. In the early twentieth century, the party rarely engaged with penal politics as a result of an overriding 'utopian' assumption that crime would inevitably decrease on the path to socialism. Following the war and through the 1920s, the movement engaged far more constructively with penal politics, and while it did not lose its utopian ideas altogether, it failed at its most opportune moment to implement even modest reform on the grounds that modest reform was not enough. In this sense, the party's conservatism in office was rooted in its own idealism.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Second Labour Government and Penal Reform

1929-1931

4.1 Introduction

In 1928, Fenner Brockway published his latest book, *A New Way with Crime*, in which he set out his proposals for reforming the English penal system. Brockway's previous work, *English Prisons To-Day*, was, according to its author, a 'destructive' work: it sought to give a detailed account of the contemporary prison system and its effects, but made little attempt to outline constructive alternatives.[1] Now, as the Labour Party readied itself for an approaching election, Brockway presented his alternative vision for the development of prison reform and penal politics in Britain. Within the labour movement, Brockway was certainly one of the people best placed to construct and advance such a programme, having experienced prison as a conscientious objector in the First World War, having published numerous accounts on the issue, and acting, in essence, as the sole Labour figure to have taken an enduring interest in penal affairs. That Brockway held at various times the roles of ILP political secretary and editor of the *New Leader*—organisations which were becoming increasingly critical of the Labour Party's gradualism—perhaps restricted the sweep of his political message, but he nevertheless commanded authority on the issue of penal reform by this time.

In *A New Way with Crime*, Brockway advocated no less than a revolution in penal policy in order to redeem the English system. Limited reforms through the 1920s and a softening of attitudes among the new cohort of Prison Commissioners had been encouraging, he claimed, but had failed to attack the core issues. Unemployment and the unsatisfactory distribution of

[1] Brockway, *A New Way with Crime*, 154.

material wealth were the chief contributory factors to both crime and the prison population, as 'man becomes gradually more demoralised by prolonged idleness and is more likely to drift into prison'. The solution, for Brockway, was to end the crime-producing conditions and to revise the whole existing theory of penal treatment.[2] Principally, two of the three official objectives of the penal system, deterrence and retribution—both hangovers from the Victorian age—had to be abolished, leaving only reformation as the core function. The treatment of criminality had to be made both scientific and individualised according to the prisoner at hand. Palliatives, he claimed, would only fail to fundamentally change the system from a punitive to a rehabilitative basis.[3]

As to practical suggestions, Brockway urged the complete scrapping of the prison system and its replacement with alternatives along the lines of warnings, fines, probation, Borstal and colonies. Capital punishment, a 'barbarity' in the twentieth century, had also to be abolished, while free legal aid for poor prisoners had to be provided in order to counter the inherent class bias of the justice system. If these ideas were translated into action, Brockway believed Britain's contemporary prison population of 10,000 could be reduced to a residual 1,000.[4] These ideas were not, he insisted, 'Utopian'; they were merely a calculated channelling of the scientific direction of the process of reform. In fact, Brockway made sure to state that criminal acts would undoubtedly persist even after that 'state of doubtful bliss' is reached 'when there is so much wealth that the community need not concern itself about such things'. Citing Clara Meijer Weichmann, a contemporary Dutch authority, Brockway even invoked the utopia of William Morris' *News from Nowhere* to reinforce his point. This is significant, for Brockway's

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[2] Ibid, 4; 7; 12.
[3] Ibid, 23; 124.
[4] Ibid, 106-9; 114; 141; 143-53; 156-61.

was the first statement on penal reform in Britain to be cast in a socialist framework since Morris' own interpretation in the late nineteenth century.[5]

Overall, Brockway's work was received warmly by the labour movement. Indeed, there were few suggestions within his programme that were likely to have offended the sensibilities of Labourites or ILPers; and in the same year the TUC had called for the ending of punitive punishments in prisons and the application of trades union conditions and pay.[6] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the work's warmest reception came in a *New Leader* article in November 1928, under the headline 'What a Labour Home Secretary Should do with Prisons and Criminals'. The article's author, H. N. Brailsford, praised Brockway's proposals as the necessary next stage in the reformation of Britain's penal system, commending his 'intellectual courage' in daring to propose the abolition of prisons. Reinforcing the notion that the 'present system stands condemned by its results', Brailsford looked to quell the concerns of those who thought such reform might prove too arduous. 'Here', he wrote, 'one hopes is the programme which the Home Secretary in the next Labour Ministry will make his own', and who above all 'must end the class system' which has failed all those who enter the penal system.[7] In the absence of any Labour Party expressions, statements or commitments, Brockway and Brailsford had established in explicit terms the aims and methods with which a Labour government could set about its programme of penal political reform. A yardstick for the administration had been fixed.

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[5] Ibid, 10; 141-2; 160.
[6] MRC, MSS.292/865.3/1—Prison Labour, Trades Union Congress General Council. Finance and General Purposes Committee (1928).
[7] See H. N. Brailsford, 'What a Labour Home Secretary Should do with Prisons and Criminals', *New Leader*, 9 November 1928.

Labour entered the 1929 election with a manifesto (*Labour's Appeal to the Nation*) based on its *Labour and the Nation* programme of a year earlier. While the term 'socialism' had been deliberately avoided in party programmes throughout much of the 1920s, *Labour and the Nation* nevertheless aimed high, and has variously been described as an 'aspirational wish list' and a 'glittering forest of Christmas trees, with presents for everyone'.[8] Penal reform, it must be noted, was not marked out as a gift to the electorate—a fact of political expediency reluctantly understood by contemporary reformist groups.[9] At face value, the prospective programme of Brockway and Brailsford had little chance, it seemed, of gaining any traction. Nevertheless, *Labour and the Nation* promised—as had *Labour and the New Social Order* in 1918—the transformation of society in an era of 'reconstruction', and, echoing MacDonald's earlier drives towards 'drastic readjustment', the party programme urged against the insufficiency of palliatives in Labour's historic mission to transform Britain into a twentieth-century state.[10]

In hindsight, few institutions continued to bear the Victorian hallmarks of nineteenth-century Britain more viscerally than the nation's prison system.[11] And despite the party's somewhat heedless treatment of this issue, penal reformers still had high hopes for the political group that had by now firmly established itself as the 'progressive' element within British politics.[12] Moreover, the burgeoning 'myth' of Labour's historic 'forward march' was reaching its apotheosis at this time, and the party built on this momentum by offering itself exclusively as

[8] Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 150; Thorpe, 'The 1929 general election and the second Labour government', 20-3; R. H. Tawney, 'The choice before the Labour Party', *Political Quarterly*, 2 (1932), 323-45.
[9] 'Editorial', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 4 (1929), 283.
[10] Labour Party, *Labour and the Nation* (London, 1928), 10; 13; 15; 18. See MacDonald, *A Policy for the Labour Party*, 60.
[11] McConville, 'Hearing, Not Listening', 260; idem, 'The Victorian Prison: England, 1865-1965', in N. Morris and D. J. Rothman (eds), *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society* (Oxford, 1998).
[12] Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, 58.

the party possessing the capacity to save Britain. As unemployment continued to climb and international economic conditions worsened, Labour presented itself boldly—with a quieter emphasis on its 'socialist' solutions—as the only party with a plan to deal with unemployment and the 'intractable million'. Expectations were high, and the wave of enthusiasm upon which Labour rode into office as a second minority government was felt as keenly by penal reformers as any other supporters.[13]

The focus of this chapter is on Labour's treatment of penal reform, prisons and criminality during its second period in office. The peripheral nature of these issues with regard to Labour Party policy makes it difficult once more to determine a single and clarified party philosophy. Furthermore, the broadly held view that there was no perceived crisis in the criminal justice system made any reformation of penal policy increasingly unlikely: in the post-war era of reconstruction, the issue simply did not demand urgent attention.[14] Nevertheless, certain developments and key figures can be examined closely in order to produce as detailed a picture as possible with regard to these issues. As noted above, Brockway's work is one such development, and his programme provides a yardstick against which to measure both Labour's aspirations and their progress in office.

A second key figure is J. R. Clynes, who entered government in 1929 as the Home Secretary. While the jurisdiction of the Home Office reached into a wide milieu of areas and concerns, the justice system, prisons and penal reform held a prominent role within the Home Office's remit. Clynes, a conscientious trade unionist whose opposition to the death penalty was well known when he assumed office, took an avid, if only recent and expedient, interest in prison

[13] 'Editorial', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 4 (1929), 283; Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 221.
[14] McConville, 'Hearing, Not Listening', 266.

reform and penal affairs, despite the criticism he was to face retrospectively; and while power was never solely in his hands, he had the opportunity to shape and effect great change in penal reform, especially as it became an increasingly bipartisan issue.[15] His tenure at the Home Office is examined to determine the progress that was made in lieu of a formalised penal philosophy, and how this measured up against Brockway's proposals.

Several events and relationships are also crucial in analysing Labour's approach to penal reform between 1929 and 1931. The first is the establishment by the Labour government of a network of labour camps across Britain, known as Transfer Instructional Centres (TICs). These camps sought to 'recondition human material' that had, through long-term unemployment, allegedly become 'soft' and incompatible with the work ethic required for the labour market. Unemployment was, as noted above, generally held to be one of the chief contributory factors to crime and the prison population; but as both unemployment and the borrowing required through the Unemployment Insurance Fund soared after 1929, the Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, was granted permission to induce a measure of compulsion upon those long-term unemployed who were offered a reconditioning course at a TIC. At risk of losing unemployment benefit if failing to attend, the phenomenon of long-term unemployment became, in the eyes of many, a criminal equivalent that brought with it penalisation. By examining the attitudes of Labour to the camps and the historical position of labour colonies in earlier socialist understandings, evidence is provided of a waning socialist objective, a pragmatism that at times trampled over entrenched Labour ideology and, in a period of crisis

[15] The best account of Clynes' political career to date is Robert Taylor's 'John Robert Clynes and the Making of Labour Socialism, 1890-1918', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Surrey, 2009), though its analysis ends in 1918.

and reconstruction, a capacity to utilise methods that bore a distant 'family resemblance' to Britain's colonial camp methods and those that were emerging in the Soviet Union.[16]

Labour's continued relationship with Soviet Russia is another key aspect in the examination of the party's penal politics. Labour campaigned in 1929 on the pledge to renew commercial and diplomatic relations with the Soviets, yet still felt it necessary to reassure the public that the party was not, in fact, furtively comprised of Bolsheviks.[17] Its dealings with Russia were thus framed in purely pragmatic terms. On a number of issues concerning the Soviets, however, the party was forced to compromise on its long-held values and freedoms. The USSR remained the only example of 'socialism in action' that many Labourites could look towards, and, as shown in chapter three, had already provided positive experiences of alleged 'socialist' penal policy to a good number of Labour visitors through the 1920s. The state's continued influence is therefore especially significant to Labour's return to office.

A final development to be examined is the progress made in the campaign for the abolition of the death penalty. In 1927, twenty-seven Labour members, including 17 MPs, some of whom would come to head up ministries in 1929, had signed an NCADP memorandum calling for the abolition of capital punishment;[18] and in October 1929, W. J. Brown, Labour member for Wolverhampton West, introduced a private member's bill advocating abolition. The party's

[16] Aidan Forth, 'Britain's Archipelago of Camps: Labor and Detention in a Liberal Empire, 1871-1903', *Kritika*, 16, 3 (2015), 653.
[17] See 'Labour's Appeal to the Nation', in Iain Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997* (London, 2000), 33; 35.
[18] British Library, London, Gerald Gardiner papers, Add MS 56463 B, Labour Party, *Manifesto on Capital Punishment* (1927). The signatories to the memorandum were Eleanor Barton, Ernest Bevin, Margaret Bondfield, H. N. Brailsford, Fenner Brockway, Charles Roden Buxton, Noel Buxton, Rhys J. Davies, Harry Gosling, George Hicks, James H. Hudson, A. Creech Jones, Morgan Jones, F. W. Jowett, George Lansbury, A. Susan Lawrence, H. B. Lees Smith, J. S. Middleton, Herbert Morrison, Arthur Ponsonby, F. O. Roberts, Alfred Salter, John Scurr, Robert Smille, Ben Turner, Frances Evelyn Warwick and Ellen C. Wilkinson.

role in and reaction to the subsequent Commons debate, as well as to the parliamentary enquiry then undertaken, highlights a progressive motive undercut by a cautious party in the face of impending financial meltdown. The party's position on the death penalty is utilised to highlight Labour's uncertainty over penal policy, despite its by now long years of engagement with the issue.

Analysed together within the context of the development of penal policy, these figures and events of the second Labour government are used to advance several principal contentions of this thesis. First, the chapter continues to analyse Labour's failure to form a coherent penal philosophy. This is not to suggest, however, that the second Labour government failed altogether on the issue of penal reform. In fact, the party (and especially Clynes) was forced to engage with the issue in an official capacity throughout its tenure, and despite entering the 1929 election with no proposals on penal reform, it achieved a number of advances in areas of solitary confinement of prisoners, state assistance for those attending magistrates' court, and the abolition of capital punishment. Clynes arrived at the Home Office with an established set of progressive principles, if not a binding penal philosophy, and his tenure was in many ways a good reflection of the party's approach to penal policy: despite the experience that the labour movement had gained through the First World War and its visits to Soviet Russia, the echelons of the party leadership were less engaged with these ideas. 'Socialist' ideals remained in the party lexicon but diminished as governmental responsibility approached, and both Clynes and the leadership very much learned the issue on the job. A cautious, pragmatic approach was therefore espoused, and issues were dealt with on a case-by-case basis in lieu of an overarching party philosophy.

Secondly, the chapter argues that Labour's dealings in penal politics during its time in office continued to demonstrate the party's ideological uncertainty and its changing ambitions for the society it sought to fashion. In a number of ways, between 1929 and 1931 Labour displayed the same uncertainties as to the type of socialism it wished to achieve as it had in the 1920s; older, long-standing ideals often met with, and were suppressed by, an orthodoxy inspired by looming governmental responsibility. And the circumstances against which the party came up were also similar in consequence; the lack of time and the perceived need for caution in 1924 were mirrored in 1929 by the restrictive effects of Labour's continued minority status and impending economic catastrophe. The principle effect was to moderate the actions of the Labour government, to inspire a more conservative outlook and to defer any transformational programmes. But despite the party's moderation, its approach to penal policy and issues of justice while under the pressures of governmental office also highlights its vulnerability to more extreme ideas. Moves towards labour conscription under a network of British labour camps; attempts at soft social engineering practices under the emergency conditions of mass unemployment; and compromises on issues of unemployment insurance, asylum, forced labour and religious persecution saw the party's ideological compass swing wildly. In government and under the intense pressures of financial meltdown, Labour's ambitions for the society it sought to create changed quickly, and the methods it contemplated also fluctuated. Having disagreed heavily with the use of inadequate palliatives throughout the 1920s, the party's introduction of partial measures of penal reform between 1929 and 1931 demonstrate a decided move away from a 'utopian ethic'.

Finally, it is argued that the influence of the Soviet Union on the Labour Party and its approach to issues of justice and penality remained steady during its second period in office. As MacDonald and Labour sought to rejuvenate Anglo-Soviet relations in a fashion similar to

1924, enthusiasm for the Soviet state and its penal system was strong among the labour movement. With improved diplomatic relations, it might have been expected that ideas gleaned from visits to the Soviet Union through the 1920s would work their way up the party hierarchy. Soviet publications on prisons certainly received warm receptions in this period, but the 'big five' of the Labour leadership remained in place, relations between Britain and the USSR took an increasingly pragmatic form, and the ability of members of a minority government to journey to Russia while parliament sat was weak. Instead, Soviet Russia's influence can be seen in the Labour government's willingness to ignore repression and slave labour in the Soviet state, and to attempt to contrive excuses for its actions. As it had demonstrated its capacity for indulging 'communist' ideas on penal reform in the 1920s, so Labour socialists tolerated terrible Soviet conditions and even drew on ideas that had a 'family resemblance' to authoritarian programmes of conscription during its second period in government, once more suggesting the need for a re-evaluation of Labour-Soviet relations.

4.2 1931 Historiography

The historiography that has emerged since the fall of the government in 1931 is by now well-known, but more recent research has sought to re-evaluate the 'myths' of betrayal and failure surrounding the acrimonious fall of the Labour government in 1931, by focusing in greater detail on the period prior to the August crisis.[19] This chapter seeks to further this research, showing how, through a number of developments in penal politics, the Labour government exceeded its stated ambitions despite its ideological disorientation. Balancing high expectations against a total lack of party commitments, penal reformers in all likelihood

[19] See the collection of essays in Shepherd, Davis and Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government*, in particular the introduction by Shepherd and Davis, 1-15.

emerged from 1931 with a mixture of disappointment and a feeling of limited, but measured, progress.

A thorough analysis of Labour's penal politics while in office requires engagement with theses that sit on either side of the division over whether 1931 represented a 'temporary recession' in Labour's 'forward march', or rather proof of a less successful rule in light of the exception of Labour's 1945 majority government.[20] Focusing on the complexities of the period, the historiography is utilised here in the following ways. First, the chapter is based on the understanding that the emotionally charged, yet superficial dichotomy that grew out of the crisis of 1931 is too simplistic a heuristic device to critically analyse the record of the government. Following the formation by Ramsay MacDonald of a National Government in August 1931, an 'orthodox Labour account of the debacle emerged' in which those considered as the principal actors in Labour's downfall were variously described in terms of 'betrayal', 'tragedy', disillusionment and 'evil'.[21] Even in the post-1945 years, the second Labour government was still considered a 'blip', in no small measure due to the great betrayal of those alleged cloaked antagonists, a conspiratorial capitalist establishment and a bankers' ramp.[22] Revisionist historiography has since nullified the emotive force of these accounts, but even these more recent understandings also contain analytical problems.

[20] Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, 6.
[21] See, for example, Sidney Webb, 'What Happened in 1931: A Record', *Political Quarterly* (Jan-Mar, 1932); Clement R. Attlee, *As It Happened* (London, 1945), 74; L. M. Weir, *The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald* (London, 1938); Howard Spring, *Fame Is the Spur* (London, 1940); Shepherd, *George Lansbury*, 276-7; 298; *Daily Herald*, 11 November 1937; Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 255. As Jon Lawrence has shown, though, these 'myths' have often been reworked and reinterpreted 'to draw contemporary lessons that support the ideological perspective of the myth-maker'. A number of accounts sympathetic to MacDonald and the leadership were also published. See Jon Lawrence, 'Labour—the myths it has lived by', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), 342; 344; 352-3.
[22] Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 4.

Second, the flaws of these revisionist understandings also need to be noted—principally their tendency to reduce the analysis of the government to a battle between a conservative leadership and a more radical rank and file membership. Even in the more sympathetic readings of the administration, most historians have been concerned principally with the reputation of Ramsay MacDonald himself.[23] Where Miliband, for instance, relates Labour's paralysis to MacDonald's now famous call for a bipartisan 'Council of State' and the lifting of political problems above the party struggle, Skidelsky relies too heavily on the conservatism of the party leadership, with little consideration of the more moderate views of the rank and file.[24]

More recently, at least, accounts have begun to take a broader view, focusing on the idea of a crisis encompassing all three political parties and the nation, and on the actions of a far broader swathe of the labour movement.[25] This trend will be developed here, as the highest echelons of the party leadership—MacDonald and Chancellor Philip Snowden—failed to consult on penal policy and were thus somewhat extricated from its development. Figures like Clynes of course played a significant role, but the issue of penal politics was sufficiently peripheral that developments often spawned from lower levels within the party. This does not ignore the complexity of the issues involved, but rather ensures that policy development and failure alike are examined at *both* leadership and lower party levels, preventing an unbalanced account that focuses unevenly on the party leadership. Just as at times both the government *and* the party failed in their efforts, so in other instances the government made (limited) progress and the

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[23] John Shepherd and Jonathan Davis, 'Britain's Second Labour government, 1929-31: an introduction', in John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Reappraisal* (Manchester, 2011), 8; Reginald Bassett, *Nineteen thirty-one: Political Crisis* (London, 1958). See also R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties: The Distribution of Power Within the Conservative and Labour Parties*, 2nd edn (London, 1963), 412-567, and R. Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (London, 1915).

[24] Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, 162; Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*; Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 228.

[25] See Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government*; Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*; Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 121-68.

party, at backbencher level, also made headway. As David Marquand notes, despite its limitations and contrary to much of the established historiography, the party was not always wholly defensive.[26]

Viewing 1929 to 1931, on the one hand, as the most significant moment to date in the historical development of the labour movement, but also, on the other, in its own isolated context, helps to unearth the complications of the Labour government's actions. Most importantly, this approach enables the analysis to locate itself within the shifting perspectives best encapsulated by Marquand's 1977 biography of Ramsay MacDonald, in which the performance of the 1929 administration was more sympathetically recognised, in light of the struggles of the Labour governments of the sixties and seventies, as the rule rather than the exception.[27]

4.3 Labour Camps and Compulsion

In the aftermath of the 1926 General Strike, as the number of unemployed miners surged to an estimated 200,000, the Industrial Transference Board (ITB) was established to ameliorate the miners' plight. Through the ITB, the Ministry of Labour aimed to expedite the transfer of the unemployed away from the depressed regions of Britain in order to provide training and alternative employment. Several work centres were set up. First, Government Training Centres (GTCs) were established with the aim of providing skills training for the unemployed, and not long before the 1929 election the Ministry of Labour, under Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government, opened five of what it termed Transfer Instructional Centres (TICs), aimed at 'physically reconditioning' the unemployed in order to equip them for transfer away from the depressed areas.[28] The TICs had their roots in the actions of Ministry of Labour civil servants.

[26] Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, 70.
[27] Idem, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 489-638.
[28] Field, *Working Men's Bodies*, 128-9.

In December 1928, Frederick G. Bowers, accountant general in the Ministry, wrote to the Treasury with a proposal concerning a:

> class of men to whom the existing training schemes do not apply, especially those among the younger men who, through prolonged unemployment, have become so 'soft' and temporarily demoralised that it would not be practicable to introduce more than a very small number of them into one of the ordinary training centres without danger to the morals of the centre on which the effect of training depends.

These men, Bowers determined, had to be 'hardened',[29] and after an encouraging reply from the Treasury, the Labour Emergency Expenditure Committee agreed to commence a scheme of 'Reconditioning Centres'.[30] Men undertaking 'reconditioning' courses would be placed at centres for 12 week periods, away from the distressed areas, where they would reside under 'strict discipline' and engage in 'work of sufficient utility to have some interest' for them. The physical condition of the unemployed and their motivation to work would, it was hoped, be restored through the provision of physical labour, regular meals and a disciplined environment. By the end of 1928, it had been agreed that the camps would operate for an experimental period of twelve months, and that the men would continue to receive their unemployment benefit while attending the centres.[31]

In June of the next year MacDonald's second Labour government took office. Almost immediately the issue of the reconditioning centres was raised, as Margaret Bondfield, the new Minister for Labour, sought approval to increase the number of TICs and the men who passed

[29] TNA, T 161/902, 'F. G. Bowers to A. W. Hurst', 12 December 1928.
[30] TNA, T 161/902, correspondence of 12, 19, 21 and 28 December 1928.
[31] TNA, T 161/902; LAB 2/1266/TFM133/1929.

through them to around 18,000 per annum.[32] Unemployment was to become the defining issue for MacDonald's government, rising inexorably from 1,163,000 in 1929 to almost 3,000,000 in September 1931.[33] The problem hit Labour with full force as the international financial situation deteriorated and old imperialist methods of dealing with unemployment, became increasingly obfuscated.[34] Though they never operated on a grand scale, the reconditioning centres quickly became a key programme of the Ministry of Labour under the Labour government.

In principle, the scheme should have been amenable to most Labourites. The centres were indeed a product of Baldwin's Tory government, but, as demonstrated in chapter one, the wider labour movement had long-established links with labour colonies and land settlement schemes for dealing with the problems of surplus and long-term unemployment. The Social Democratic Federation had believed strongly in the notion of 'Home Colonisation' and underconsumptionist economics as the solution to long-term unemployment, while many Fabians sought to utilise labour exchanges and the unoccupied countryside. In 1907 MacDonald himself, channelling Keir Hardie, had called for a 'new mechanism of exchange' which would render 'Capitalism … an island in the midst of a sea washing its coasts away'.[35] These types of schemes, it was purported, held within them the nucleus of a new socialist order.

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[32] TNA, CAB 24/204, 20 June 1929.

[33] Robert Taylor, 'A "reef of granite" or "damp cement": conflicting loyalties inside the Parliamentary Labour Party, June 1929-September 1931', in John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds), *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Reappraisal* (Manchester, 2011), 92; Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 234.

[34] Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain*, 115.

[35] Besant, 'Industry Under Socialism', 139-40; Ramsay MacDonald, *The New Unemployed Bill of the Labour Party* (London, 1907), 4; idem, 'The New Charter: A Programme of Working Class Politics' (1892); *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 7 February 1895, vol. 30, c.248. See Edward Gordon Crompton Ashbee, 'The British Left, "Home Colonisation", Underconsumption Theory and Unemployment, 1880-1929', Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Southampton (1980).

The more 'revolutionary' aspects of the ideas of the SDF on Home Colonisation had certainly dissipated by the late 1920s, but as recently as 1928 Ben Turner had called for the utilisation of the empty countryside for schemes that sought to deal with unemployment. George Lansbury, who had played a central role in the establishment of labour colonies at the beginning of the century, also agreed in the *New Leader* that the centres proposed by Baldwin's Ministry of Labour were exactly what he had hoped to achieve, while Clynes sympathised with the view that the involuntary idler was inevitably subjected to a moral deterioration of character and efficiency through the prolonged unemployment that had hit British workers.[36] Had the Labour Party been prepared enough to offer detailed policy proposals, there might, perhaps, have been scope for coordinating the role of the TICs with the party's pledge in *Labour and the Nation* to create 'new satellite towns' as a method of attempting to avert the effects of trade and employment depressions.[37] Yet, as Griffiths points out, just as the issue of the land question and its socialisation came to occupy an apologetic place in Labour's electoral platform, any radical ideas about a new social order were never bound up with the reconditioning centres.[38] They were from the start an emergency palliative, with the distinct and limited aim of improving the physical condition and employability of trainees for re-integration into what it was hoped would soon again be a thriving capitalist labour market.

The reconditioning centres were unsuccessful.[39] Criticism was frequently levelled at the centres for their 'punitive' features and use of hard labour: the digging and filling in of pits, it was

[36] *Report of the Annual Trades Union Congress, 1928* (London, 1928), 67; *The Times*, 7 December 1928; *New Leader*, 27 January 1928; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 24 April 1929, vol. 227, cc893-7.
[37] *Labour and the Nation*, 22.
[38] According to Griffiths, it remained a 'statement of political faith rather than a practical element of the programme'. Clare Griffiths, 'Socialism and the Land Question: Public Ownership and Control in Labour Party Policy, 1918-1950s', in Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (eds), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke, 2010), 238; 252-3.
[39] John Field and William Heard, '"To Recondition Human Material…": An Account of a British Labour Camp in the 1930s. An Interview with William Heard', *History Workshop*, 15, (1983), 153.

alleged, was a ubiquitous feature of the system, while inadequate food, isolation, poor living conditions and suicide attempts were noted as being relatively commonplace.[40] Increasingly, too, the centres took on the label of 'slave colonies' or 'slave camps' in the press, propagated in no small part by the work of Wal Hannington, communist organiser and leader of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM);[41] and as early as September 1929, Bondfield sought approval to deny unemployment benefit to those unemployed who refused unreasonably to move away from an area of no employment. Re-issuing her plea to the Cabinet in December, Bondfield was told to consult the TUC on the issue.[42] The camp formula, as Bondfield recalled a parliamentary colleague explaining, was like 'trying to fill a great lake by throwing small stones into it'.[43]

By February 1930, an increasingly frustrated Bondfield won Cabinet approval to introduce a measure of compulsion with regard to the TICs. The stage had been reached, she claimed, when 'men … who are very unlikely to obtain work either locally or elsewhere without some course of reconditioning or training, but who refuse to avail themselves of the offer of training … should have their benefit disallowed if they refuse without good reason to take a course of instruction when it is offered to them'. The Cabinet still had some anxiety regarding the term 'reconditioning', but it nevertheless approved Bondfield's proposal and the necessary legislative amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Acts were passed through Parliament.[44] The belief that the long-term unemployed were 'probably responsible' for a great

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[40] TNA, T 161/902; LAB 2/1266/TFM322/19/1929; Dave Colledge, *Labour Camps: The British Experience* (Sheffield, 1989), 34; Kate Skipper and Tom Williamson, *Thetford Forest: Making a Landscape, 1922-1997* (Norwich, 1997), 41-2.
[41] See TNA, HO 144/12143; Wal Hannington, *Achievements of the Hunger March Against the Labour Government* (London, 1930); idem, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (London, 1937), ch. 7; idem, *An Exposure of the Unemployment Social Service Schemes* (London 1933), 10.
[42] Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/206, 20 September 1929; CAB 23/62, 23 December 1929.
[43] TNA, LAB 2/1278/ET4603/1931; LAB 2/1278/ET5247/1931; LAB 2/1278/ET3860/1930; LAB 2/1384/7; LAB 2/1278/ET3840/1930; Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, 299.
[44] Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/209, 3 February 1930; CAB 23/63, 5 February 1930.

deal of contemporary crime still reigned, and now those suffering from prolonged unemployment could be penalised in the form of lost benefit.[45]

Clearly, the reconditioning centres are not a direct reflection of Labour's attitude towards criminality or penal politics; at no point were ordinary criminals sent to the labour camps. Yet the experiences of the camps offer some important insights into aspects of Labour's conduct in power that speaks to both the party's disorderliness as well as to the vulnerability of their own deeply-held values to a perceived need for pragmatism. First, examination of the camps provides a good indication of the sacrifices the party was willing to make while in office, often at the expense of long-held principles. The chief issue of compulsion, for instance, in the form of military or industrial conscription, had always proven difficult for Labour; though as Kevin Morgan notes, among the broader labour movement it certainly did not produce a 'straightforward cleavage of left and right'.[46] In fact, Labour's attitude towards forcible attendance at the reconditioning centres helps to elicit the ambiguities of its socialism that were felt most keenly between 1929 and 1931.

Labour's leaders, many of whom had held steadfast to their anti-conscription values during the First World War, often at great personal and political expense, now approved of the effective use of compulsion in their approach to labour management.[47] Others in the labour movement, including many former guild socialists (who were increasingly being drawn towards Soviet Russia and its more authoritarian approaches to labour management), now 'stressed the distinction between public works', which 'respect[ed] agreed wages and conditions, and

[45] Colledge, *Labour Camps*, 12.
[46] Morgan, 'British Guild Socialists', 138.
[47] Both Clynes and Dr Drummond Sheils, Labour MP for Edinburgh East, had previously voiced support for ideas of compulsion with regards to training and reconditioning. See *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 14 April 1927, vol. 205, cc567-640.

"relief" schemes which did not'. Further to the left, communists like Hannington now urged the necessity of the 'once despised "wage"', as they simultaneously attached wholly negative connotations to the idea of labour 'discipline'. That communists also failed to criticise the 'authentic "slave" conditions' in Soviet Russia highlights both the confused understandings of the contemporary situation and the opportunistic nature of the political players of the time.[48] Rapidly, Labour were overcome by a 'complete uncertainty about what the government should be doing' with regards to unemployment.[49] The reconditioning centres were, of course, an idea born of the civil service before June 1929; and as Desmond King demonstrates, they were born not of any expertise or research, but relied merely on an 'intimation', without evidence, in the face of a deteriorating labour market.[50] The government's preoccupation with mass unemployment was the factor that most encouraged a more 'authoritarian' approach to labour management, and MacDonald's administration had an 'austere' and 'unsympathetic' advocate in Bondfield.[51]

Bondfield retrospectively justified her actions from a 'human perspective'. In her view, 'the men who were compelled to remain in the … distressed areas … were given a life sentence' without hope of finding work; but the government was, equally, spending far too much time and money on palliatives.[52] MacDonald was well aware of the propensity for inexperienced ministers to be dominated by established civil servants, and he also thought Bondfield

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[48] Morgan, 'British Guild Socialists', 125; 154-5. In G. D. H. Cole's *The Next Ten Years in British Social and Economic Policy* (London, 1929) he proposed a National Labour Corps to be charged with emergency public works, 48-67. See chapter five of this thesis.
[49] Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, 239.
[50] Desmond King, *In the Name of Liberalism: Illiberal Social Policy in the USA and Britain* (Oxford, 1999), 156; 158; 178.
[51] Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, 332-3. Skidelsky provides a similar portrait of Bondfield, while Rodney Lowe gives a more sympathetic account of her character and actions. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, 71-2; Rodney Lowe, *Adjusting to Democracy: The Role of the Ministry of Labour in British Politics, 1916-1939* (Oxford, 1986).
[52] Morgan, 'British Guild Socialists', 155; Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, 332-3; Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, 298-300.

incapable and that the Ministry of Labour required urgent re-staffing.[53] Yet MacDonald himself quickly became 'pessimistic about what, in the real world, the state could achieve', and Bondfield's urging of further 'experiments' fell on deaf ears.[54] Despite a party history littered with idealistic plans for dealing with unemployment and the countryside, the party failed to combine the two while in office and lacked any kind of concrete plan in the face of intensifying external pressure.

Camp continuums and social engineering

More recent research has questioned whether the reconditioning centres were, in fact, as severe as both contemporary and more modern representations have suggested.[55] The overwhelming academic conclusion is that they were not. As Walsh and Kenefick note, a number of historians writing on the labour camps in the 1980s, particularly those who stressed their punitive function and were unshrinking in their use of authoritarian equivalencies, were making contemporary political arguments. In their own study of camp trainees, Walsh and Kenefick found largely positive views on the reconditioning centres.[56] King, too, demonstrates that although there was a disciplinary aspect to the camps, this role was modest at best, and the overriding voluntary character of the camps ensured their compatibility with a liberal framework.[57] The conditions in the camps almost certainly differed according to location, but given the relatively strong bias in the small historiography of the camps that has developed, there remains a need to caution

[53] MacDonald, cited in Tanner, 'Political leadership', 132-3; Taylor, 'A "reef of granite"', 94.
[54] Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*, 537; Lowe, *Adjusting to Democracy*, 24.
[55] See L. Walsh and W. Kenefick, 'Bread, Water and Hard Labour? New Perspectives on 1930s Labour Camps', *Scottish Labour History*, 34 (1999), 14-33. A flurry of articles also appeared in 1998. See *The Guardian*, 12 August 1998; *The Times*, 9 August 1998; *The Scotsman*, 18, 22 and 23 July 1998; and the *Yorkshire Evening Press*, 14 August 1998, each with headlines addressing some variation of 'slave camps', 'Jobless "Hardening"' and the 'Secret agony of thousands sent to Britain's labour camps'.
[56] Walsh and Kenefick, 'Bread, Water and Hard Labour?', 14-33. The authors were referring principally to the accounts provided by Dave Colledge and John Field in the 1980s. See also M. Krafchik, 'The Treatment of the Long-Term Unemployed: Public Policies and Practices in the 1930s and the 1980s in Great Britain', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol (1986).
[57] King, *In the Name of Liberalism*, 179.

against any 'false or facile equivalency' between British camps and their far more authoritarian counterparts that were being developed in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.[58]

Nevertheless, as Aidan Forth highlights, when viewed as part of a broader historical development, the camps do represent Labour's participation in the utilisation of 'softer' social engineering practices which, while far removed from the more severe techniques of contemporary authoritarian states, certainly bore a 'distant family resemblance'.[59] Totalitarian states in the 1920s and 1930s sought frequently to map and classify their own populations in attempts to create an idealised image of the sociopolitical body, often eliciting violent techniques in the process. An '[e]nlightenment impulse to classify and rationalize large populations on a macro scale, rooting out potential "weeds" in the name of order, prosperity, and social purity' directed repressive regimes to the task of reshaping reality.[60] The language of population management became both more severe and medicalised in this period, invoking imagery of 'contagion', 'infection', dangers to the people and 'excision'. In liberal and illiberal states alike, camps came to embody this ameliorative impulse, through which 'human clay' was provided for the social engineer.[61]

Reconditioning centres in Britain occupied a more liberal position on a continuum of modern discipline and punishment that reached back to the more repressive colonial encampment practices. The camps of 1929 to 1931 under Labour had a far greater emphasis upon the practice

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[58] See Noel Whiteside, *Bad Times: Unemployment in British Social and Political History* (London, 1991), 102; Forth, 'Britain's Archipelago', 653.
[59] Forth, 'Britain's Archipelago', 653.
[60] Ibid, 652; Amir Weiner, 'Introduction: Landscaping the Human Garden', in Amir Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, 2003), 4; Holquist, 'State Violence as Technique', 32; Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (New York, 2000), 70.
[61] Weiner, 'Introduction', 13; Gordon H. Chang, 'Social Darwinism Versus Social Engineering: The "Education" of Japanese Americans During World War II', in Amir Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, 2003), 195-6.

of rehabilitation, but they were nevertheless one instrument within a toolkit of policies employed to address potential or actual population maladies—a toolkit that both the Nazis and the Soviets later invoked as inspiring their own measures for moulding their populaces.[62] The language of 'reconditioning human material', of 'toughening the fibre of men' and of removing the 'dry rot' was not wholly dissimilar to the contemporary vernacular on the continent, nor to the language that had been utilised by some in the British left in the early twentieth century.[63] Britain's open and active civil society checked the rise of potentially illiberal practices, but the idea of encampment and 'reconditioning' as a social corrective was mirrored in the language surrounding penal policies of the time. Improving human material in the face of dangers to national security emerged as a 'softer gardening polic[y]' which curtailed radical social engineering on the one hand, but preserved a larger role for the state on the other.[64]

Labour's willingness to agree with, promote and implement modest social engineering practices that had been developed under a Conservative government highlights the party's uncertainty in the face of crisis. Obversely, it also demonstrates Labour's pragmatism in office, as well as its inclination to sacrifice long-held principles—although these principles, as

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[62] Forth, 'Britain's Archipelago', 654; John Field, 'Able Bodies: Work camps and the training of the unemployed in Britain before 1939', Conference on The Significance of the Historical Perspective in Adult Education Research, University of Cambridge, Institute of Continuing Education, July 2009, 2. On the German use of British referents see Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin 1937–1939* (New York, 1940), 21; and Paul Moore, '"And What Concentration Camps Those Were!" Foreign Concentration Camps in Nazi Propaganda, 1933–9', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45, 3 (2010), 672. For references to British camps in the Soviet Union see Peter Holquist, 'Violent Russia, Deadly Marxism? Russia in the Epoch of Violence, 1905-21', *Kritika*, 4, 3 (2003), 635-6; 'Inostrannoe obozrenie', *Vestnik Evropy*, 9 (1901), 398-9; ibid, 1 (1902), 379-81; ibid, 7 (1902), 364-72; and Jonathan Hyslop, 'The Invention of the Concentration Camp: Cuba, Southern Africa and the Philippines, 1896–1907', *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 2 (2011), 251-76. Into the 1940s the Soviets still justified their own encampment practices as part of the Gulag with reference to French and British punitive (*karatel'nye*) and colonization (*kolonizatsionnye*) goals. See GARF, f. R-9414, op. 1, d. 76, ll. 1-147, especially '*Spravka o katorge*' and '*Kratkaia istoricheskaia spravka o katorge*'.

[63] *The Times*, 12 April 1929; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 30 April 1928, vol. 216, cc1461-70; Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, 1-22; 62-3; 118-51. See also chapter one.

[64] Weiner, 'Introduction', 16-17; Field and Heard, '"To Recondition Human Material…"', 162; Raymond Gard, *Rehabilitation and Probation in England and Wales, 1876-1962* (London, 2014), 82-3.

evidenced by the role of (and differing reactions to) compulsion in the camps, were not, perhaps, as clear-cut as is currently understood. The implications of the camps for Labour's approach to criminality should thus be neither stretched nor exaggerated. But the experience nevertheless highlights the party's continued uncertainty and its vulnerability to more radical ideas that had, in the past, seen its members lend support, directly or obliquely, to the development of eugenics programmes, and which were by 1929 fostering a consistent support for the Soviet Union, despite its own repressive actions.

4.4 Labour and the Soviet Union

Since the party had campaigned in 1929 on the promise of restoring diplomatic and commercial relations with the USSR, the Soviet Union remained a key concern for Labour in its second period in office.[65] The period was a formative one for both sets of actors, since Labour's position on the Soviet Union was developing as Stalin's 'Great Break' or 'revolution from above' saw the USSR launch headlong into the paroxysm of its first Five-Year Plan. The relative moderation of the NEP was brought to an end as Stalin sought to force the pace on state industrialisation and modernisation, often with catastrophic social consequences. Labourites remained of the opinion that they were, at least for the time being, dealing with a moderate force in Stalin (as opposed to Trotsky), but for a number of reasons their approach to and relationship with the Soviets was to take on an enduringly ambiguous character.[66] As Keeble notes, Anglo-Soviet relations in this period maintained their historically cyclical nature;[67] following the raid on the Arcos Trade Delegation in London in 1927, diplomatic relations between Britain and the USSR were severed, and Stalin, fearing intensified capitalist

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[65] *Labour and the Nation*, 47; 'Labour's Appeal to the Nation', in Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos,* 35.
[66] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 82; 141.
[67] Curtis Keeble, 'The historical perspective', in Alex Pravda and Peter J. S. Duncan (eds), *Soviet-British Relations since the 1970s* (Cambridge, 1990), 23-4.

encirclement, anticipated war with the West.[68] Labour's return to office in 1929 looked to galvanise relations between the two states—a step recognised and appreciated by the Soviets[69]—but the USSR remained a problematic issue for Labour, with the party needing to resolve a number of antagonisms.

Russian relations were made a priority, yet Labour was also forced to distance itself from persistent Tory calumny, especially on the issue of its own alleged 'dangerous' and 'radical' socialism.[70] Although there remained much Labour sympathy for the defence of socialism in Soviet Russia, British communists were simultaneously being closed out of Labour ranks, and Labour's conscience was tested by the emergence of illiberal Soviet practices.[71] As the depth of the international financial downturn was laid bare, Russia's untapped markets assumed greater significance for MacDonald's government, but this meant closer diplomatic relations with a state that many felt needed to be kept at arm's length.[72] Pragmatism thus became the order of the day.

Labour were relieved at the moderation and relative success of the NEP, the apparent move away from extremism in Russia and the increasingly insular approach of Stalin, epitomised by the growth of the idea of 'Socialism in One Country'.[73] Moreover, following the sixth world

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[68] On the Arcos raid see Coates and Coates, *A History*, 267-90, and L. Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs* (New York, 1960), 504-7. For the Soviets' account of the raid see *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moskva, 1965), X, 245-88. See also Jane Degras (ed.), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, 3 vols (London, 1952), II, 236; idem (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, 3 vols (London, 1971), II, 267-9.
[69] See the statement by Grigory Sokol'nikov, made Russian Ambassador in London on 5 November 1929, in *The Times*, 21 December 1929; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 85-6.
[70] Laura Beers, *Your Britain: Media and the making of the Labour Party* (London, 2010), 56; idem, 'Counter-Toryism: Labour's Response to Anti-Socialist Propaganda, 1918-39', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900-39* (Surrey, 2009), 234-7.
[71] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 82; Thorpe, 'The 1929 general election and the second Labour government', 20; idem, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 117-22; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 11.
[72] D. N. Lammers, 'The Second Labour Government and the Restoration of Relations with Soviet Russia (1929)', *Historical Research*, 37, 95 (1964), 65; Michael Jabara Carley, '"A fearful concatenation of circumstances": the Anglo-Soviet rapprochement, 1934-36', *Contemporary European History*, 5, 1 (1996), 31.
[73] Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 154-5; idem, 'Altered Images', 76.

congress of the Communist International in 1928, which had seen the Executive Committee of the Comintern take a 'left turn' and institute a 'class against class' line, the Communist Party in Britain was plunged into civil war, its obsession with unveiling the 'right[ist] danger' impinging on its 'more productive communist activity' and its attempts to infiltrate the Labour Party.[74] Labour remained worried, though, at the prospect of being brought to ruin again by the Bolsheviks, as Labourites felt they had been in 1924. Equally, the Soviets were cautious about developments in their own relations with Britain.[75] A perceived policy of class-based enmity on the part of the British had frustrated the Bolsheviks since 1917, and the 'bourgeois' tendencies of the Labour leadership failed to inspire great confidence in Soviet circles. Stalin, however, was aware of the influence that the Soviets had over certain sections of the Labour Party, and the hope remained that Labour would act as realists rather than hardliners when negotiations developed.[76] As Henderson's authority as Foreign Secretary was quickly undercut by MacDonald's insistence that ambassadors only be exchanged after parliamentary approval, the Soviets used Labour's weakness to strengthen their own negotiating position.[77]

The positive report of a group of British industrialists to the Soviet Union in early 1929 ensured it would be difficult for any government to avoid the issue of the renewal of diplomatic relations, even if lacking a parliamentary majority. On top of earlier Soviet suggestions that they needed to invest in up to £30 million worth of foreign goods per year through their industrialisation drive, Georgy Piatakov, chairman of the Soviet State Bank, told the delegation

[74] Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Great Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2002), 108-9; 116-21.
[75] *Daily Herald*, 6 July 1929.
[76] I. M. Maisky, *Vospominaniia sovetskogo posla*, 2 vols (Moskva, 1964), II, 35, cited in A. Lebedev, *Ocherki britanskoi vneshnei politiki (60-80-e gg.)* (Moskva, 1988), 188; 'Stalin to Molotov', 9 September 1929, in Lars T. Lih, Oleg V. Naumov and Oleg V. Khlevniuk (eds), *Stalin's letters to Molotov, 1925-1936*, (New Haven, 1995), 177-8.
[77] *Pravda*, 24 July 1929; Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 159; Sir Curtis Keeble*, Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917-89* (Basingstoke, 1990), 108-9.

that with the resumption of diplomatic relations Anglo-Soviet trade could reach figures up to £200 million.[78] Such temptations only reinforced Labour's pragmatic will to deal with the Soviets, and once in office negotiations began. Sluggish progress on issues regarding Comintern propaganda and pre-revolutionary financial claims delayed the signing of a temporary commercial agreement until April 1930, and the scepticism with which many Britons viewed these problems and the veracity of Soviet trade claims eventually caused Ernest Remnant, the leader of the trade delegation, to resign.[79] Suspicion on the part of the British only enhanced similar feelings on the Soviet side, where the Bolsheviks were concerned that Labour's own policies in office would be scaled back.[80]

Nevertheless, diplomatic and commercial relations were entered into and, as Williams notes, it subsequently became difficult to 'divide Russia into a "domestic" and "foreign" problem'.[81] Despite the ambiguous nature of the relationship, no other state had quite such an impact upon Labour as the Soviet Union. Even on domestic issues 'Labour was influenced by the apparent construction of socialism in the USSR'; but 'this meant that it was often forced to deal with Soviet-inspired problems'.[82] Through a range of issues, the role of the Soviet Union continued to affect Labour's will and ability to uphold its principles and long-held values. Penal policy once more assumed an important role, as the Soviets looked to build on the exposure that their revolutionary penal system had garnered through the 1920s.

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[78] TNA, PRO 30/69/266; FO 371/14029; Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 159; Michael Kaser, 'Trade relations: patterns and prospects', in Alex Pravda and Peter J. S. Duncan (eds), *Soviet-British Relations since the 1970s* (Cambridge, 1990), 195.
[79] See TNA, FO 371/14030 and FO 371/14032.
[80] V. G. Trukhanovsky and N. K. Kapitonova, *Sovetsko-angliiskie otnosheniia, 1945-78* (Moskva, 1979), 243-6.
[81] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 77.
[82] Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 152.

Trotsky's asylum application

The issue of Leon Trotsky's application for asylum shows how the USSR continued to influence Labour policy, 'even without exerting specific pressures'.[83] In the summer of 1929, after his expulsion from the Soviet Communist Party and then the Soviet Union, and upon the advice of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Trotsky applied to Britain for asylum in the hope of a sympathetic hearing from the new Labour government. Previously a stern critic of MacDonald and the Labour Party, as well as Stalin's chief political antagonist, Trotsky's admission to Britain would, it was held, almost certainly have been interpreted internationally as an 'unfriendly act' and would obfuscate the current negotiations with the Soviet government.[84] In both the Commons and the Cabinet, Clynes asserted that the arguments against Trotsky's application were overwhelming: his claim to illness and the exclusive availability of medical treatment in Britain were unfounded; his admission would cause embarrassment to the country in the current international situation; he would assuredly cause mischief during his stay, or mischief would be caused by the CPGB and the Tories on his behalf; and the Labour government's negotiations for better diplomatic and trade relations with Russia would, it was claimed, inevitably be hampered.[85] In time, the Cabinet agreed to reject Trotsky's plea.[86]

The judgement angered many socialists in the labour movement, with the likes of George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Harold Laski and Ellen Wilkinson appealing to the government to reconsider their decision.[87] Unexpectedly for the Webbs, who had warned Trotsky of the

[83] Ibid, 159.
[84] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/61, 21 June 1929; CAB 24/204, 24 June 1929. Trotsky had, for instance, delivered a searing polemic on Britain, in which MacDonald and Ethel Snowden in particular were subjected to insulting statements and accused of merely 'aping' the bourgeoisie. See Trotsky, *Where is Britain Going?*, 26; 40; 44; 67-8; 112.
[85] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 24 July 1929, vol. 230, cc1427-8; 1441-4.
[86] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/61, 26 June 1929; 10 July 1929.
[87] Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929-1940* (Oxford, 1970), 17. See also Robert Service, *Trotsky: A Biography* (Basingstoke, 2009), 466.

likelihood of the Liberals blocking Labour's attempts to bring him to Britain, it was in fact the Liberals who protested against the attitude of the Labour ministers, claiming Britain as the home of freedom—a haven that had provided sanctuary to many left-wing intellectuals and revolutionaries in the past.[88] As Davis notes, getting 'orders for British business … took precedence over long-held values' of the party, and added to the potential for allegations of hypocrisy. Simultaneously highlighting Labour's pragmatism in the face of political reality, in May 1930 Clynes expressed his concern over the pending deportation from Britain of Russian subjects who might be subject to 'drastic treatment' at the hands of the Soviet government.[89] Again, in July, Russian stowaways from Arkhangelsk in northern Russia were, on Clynes' request and with Cabinet approval, granted leave to remain temporarily in Britain on the belief that they would face serious consequences by returning to Russia.[90] Political realities thus heavily shaped Labour's priorities in office, and made it vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy regarding the party's core beliefs and values.

Religious persecution

At the same time that the Cabinet was considering Trotsky's asylum request, reports began to surface of the alleged persecution in Soviet Russia of religious communities, in particular the Orthodox Church. Accounts of 'anti-God' campaigns appeared in the press, but, as Andrew Williams states, Labour largely ignored the reports and the left-wing press minimised the attention given to the issue.[91] Such evasion was not wholly alien to Labour; in the past, pro-Soviet Labourites had excused instances of Soviet violence as necessary means for achieving

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[88] None of these émigré left-wing intellectuals, though, had come from left-wing governments. Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 98; Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 158-9; *New Leader*, 14 June 1929; Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, 16-18. See Fenner Brockway's objections in *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 24 July 1929, vol. 230, cc1423-9.
[89] Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 159; *Manchester Guardian*, 8 May 1930.
[90] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/63, 11 July 1930.
[91] *The Times*, 12 June 1929; 18 July 1929; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 102-4.

a greater end, and this trend continued as Liberal and Conservative MPs who voiced concerns in the Commons were shouted down by Labour. A number of Labour figures also expressed their general opposition to the institution of the Church, despite the party's largely Nonconformist composition.[92] Coupled with Labour's desire for political pragmatism, it was perhaps unsurprising that the issue of Soviet persecution was quickly buried by the left-wing press.

The party's Christian conscience was tested more vigorously in February 1930, when the diehard Tory press erupted on the issue of religious persecution. The *Morning Post*, in alliance with Alfred Gough, a London Anglican Clergyman, had launched a campaign to 'highlight the plight of Russian religious believers' that gained popular support and threw intense pressure upon the government.[93] This time the Labour press reacted with greater zeal, and pro-Soviet Labourites condemned the politicised nature of the allegations being made, while dismissing their substance. Hugh Dalton, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, went so far as to dismiss the negative content of official reports on the Soviet situation sent by the British Ambassador in Berlin.[94] Labour's refusal to accept the stories only fuelled the Tory press antagonism, which itself eventually burned out through overkill. The campaign had, in fact, caused much consternation at Cabinet level, but the incessant caterwaul of the press—combined with the exposure of some reports as inaccurate—led to its attenuation. Its principal effect, conversely, was to grant the USSR the benefit of the doubt in future controversies.[95]

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[92] See for instance Lansbury, *My Life*, 231; 251; 260; Giles Udy, 'The Christian Protest Movement, the Labour Government and Soviet Religious Repression, 1929-1931', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 66, 1 (2015), 119. Sidney Webb, 'The basis of Socialism (historic)', in *Fabian Essays* (London, 1889), 36; *New Leader*, 21 February 1930.
[93] Udy, 'The Christian Protest Movement', 125-6; MRC, MSS.292.947/6, *Persecution of Religion in Russia Must Cease* (Westminster, 1930).
[94] Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), University of Reading, Nancy Astor Papers, MS 1416/1/1/789, Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, Weekly Bulletin, 19 (April 1930); Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 105-6; *New Leader*, 21 February 1930; 6 March 1930; *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1930; 16 March, 1930. TNA, FO 371/1443, N 2273/23/38, cited in Udy, 'The Christian Protest Movement', 128.
[95] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 110.

The Cabinet insisted that it could not interfere in the issue.[96] Sokolnikov, the Soviet Ambassador recently arrived from Moscow, echoed the government's denials of any knowledge of persecution, and MacDonald himself claimed that although the history of religion in Russia was 'unfortunately full of the records of persecution', further corroboration was required in this instance.[97] He was, of course, aware of the implications of any rash action while the government was negotiating a trade deal with the Soviets. As Davis demonstrates, however, Labour figures *were* aware of official reports that documented Soviet persecution. Indeed, in December 1929 Henderson had received copies of the Norwegian Ambassador's despatch to his Foreign Minister, which detailed a 'New Period of Terror' for groups ranging from counter-revolutionaries and the religious to 'old and infirm ladies'.[98] Similar reports were also sent by Sir Esmond Ovey, Henderson's choice as British Ambassador in Moscow. Ovey, himself a 'pragmatic' choice given his role as an 'experienced diplomat, rather than an ideologically sound Labour man', relayed news of party purges (*chistki*) and his judgement that there was 'no doubt' that the Orthodox Church was to be forcibly replaced by a Marxian atheism in the Soviet Union.[99] In early March 1930, Henderson circulated a report from Ovey to the Cabinet that noted the 'anti-religious' and 'anti-clerical' attitude of the Soviet Communist Party, but pressed the Cabinet to avoid publishing the report. The Cabinet agreed, claiming, in spite of Labour's long history of pursuing international justice and the security of freedom from persecution, that it was none of their business.[100]

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[96] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/63, 12 February 1930.
[97] TNA, PRO 30/69/266/3; *Daily Herald*, 25 February 1930. See also 'Russia and Religion', *The Labour Magazine: Incorporating the British Trades Union Review and the Labour Party Bulletin*, 8, 11 (March 1930), 518.
[98] Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 163-6; TNA, FO 418/71.
[99] Davis, 'Labour and the Kremlin', 163-6; TNA, FO 418/73; FO 371/14840. In the established literature Ovey is generally understood to have been a practical and tactful appointment, though Udy notes accounts of the expatriate community in Moscow that brandished him as 'disgustingly pro-Soviet'. Given the difficulties, even for Moscow-based reporters, in obtaining accurate information on the contemporary situation, it is more likely that Ovey was merely working with the information he had it his disposal. The anti-Labour bias inherent in Udy's work clouds this. Udy, 'The Christian Protest Movement', 127.
[100] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/63, 12 February 1930; 19 February 1930; 5 March 1930; 12 March 1930; CAB 24/210, 3 March 1930; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 108.

The Cabinet was, then, aware of both the distasteful nature of allegations of persecution in the Soviet Union and the instances of corroboration by the diplomatic corps, even if they were less confident about the full extent of the repression extant in the USSR. Despite their public refutations, many Labour figures 'probably agreed that religious persecution was widespread'.[101] The statements of MacDonald and Henderson certainly hinted at their uneasiness over the issue, but the task of dealing first and foremost with domestic issues often eclipsed the issue of persecution itself, even when those allegations were actually believed by Labour figures.

Forced labour

Allegations of the use of slave labour in the Soviet Union also dogged MacDonald's government throughout 1929 to 1931. Stalin's drive for industrialisation and the collectivisation of the Soviet countryside was, by the time Labour assumed office, creating enormous social chaos across the USSR, brutally uprooting rural communities and peasant populations. Through the mass deportation of *kulaks* ('rich' peasants) to the barren lands of the North and the Asian Steppe, the peasantry was effectively destroyed and surplus populations were established in the form of the victims of the nascent Gulag camps.[102] From its beginning the Gulag was a product of unclear aims, mismanagement and improvisation (planning '*na khodu*'); its development was often 'organic' as it responded to 'the shifts and pressures of time, place and creator'.[103] Political calculations spawned the phenomenon, but economic expediency in the utilisation of forced labour (or at least the perception of its economic

[101] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 108.
[102] Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford, 1996), 40.
[103] Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (Oxford, 2007), 9; 58; idem, 'The Other Archipelago: Kulak Deportations to the North in 1930', *Slavic Review*, 60, 4 (2001), 733; Cynthia Ruder, *Making History for Stalin*; Jakobson, *Origins of the Gulag*, 53-70.

propitiousness) provided an ancillary motive.[104] A great many peasants and 'undesirables' were soon deported to the timber camps of the North, an industry of great contemporary economic importance to the Soviets in their search for foreign currency.[105] By 1930 Britain was a major importer of Russian timber, and it was this industry which sparked further controversy for MacDonald's party.

Following agitations of 'dumping' and the entry of cheap Soviet grain onto world markets, rumours alleging the abuse of convict labour appeared in the British press in 1929. The Conservatives were soon publishing prisoner testimonies, emphasising the negative effects of dumping for British trade and campaigning aggressively for a boycott of Soviet goods.[106] The Tory MP for the Maidstone division of Kent, Carlyon Bellairs, also raised the issue of Soviet timber camps in the Commons in March 1930.[107] The Labour press responded in kind, emphasising Tory failure to raise the issue in years past and the use of forged testimonies in the 'baseless' campaign. Aiming to discredit the Conservative reliance on suspicious and unreliable Riga sources, Labour asserted that only official Soviet statements would be contemplated by the government.[108] Yet, when the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society of Great Britain commissioned an investigation into labour conditions in the USSR and produced a damning report, Labour's defences appeared to collapse. Civil servants, Ovey

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[104] Robert Conquest, 'Foreword', in S. V. Mironenko and N. Werth (eds), *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga. Konets 1920-kh-pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov. Tom 1: Massovye repressii v SSSR* (Moskva, 2004), 30; M. M. Gorinov, 'Sovetskaia strana v kontse 20-kh-nachale 30-kh godov', *Voprosy istorii*, 11 (1990), 38-40; N. G. Okhotin and A. B. Roginsky (eds), *Sistema ispravitel'no-trudovykh lagerei v SSSR, 1923-1960: spravochnik* (Moskva, 1998), 34.
[105] S. A. Krasil'nikov (ed.), 'Rozhdenie Gulaga: diskussii v verkhnikh eshelonakh vlasti', *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 4 (1997), 145.
[106] Coates and Coates, *A History*, 357-62; *The Times*, 4 November 1929; 5 December 1929; 9 April 1930; *Manchester Guardian*, 23 September 1929; 9 February 1931; *Out of the Deep: Letters from Soviet Timber Camps* (London, 1931); K. M. S-M. Atholl, *The Conscription of a People* (London, 1931), 149; 178-81; 190; Ben Tillett, 'Preface', in W. P. Coates, *Is Soviet Trade a Menace?* (London, 1931), 5.
[107] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 26 March 1930, vol. 237, cc526-69.
[108] Coates, *Soviet Trade*, 43-8; 58-9; Tillett, 'Preface', 5; Coates and Coates, *A History*, 369; *The Times*, 25 April 1931; *Anglo-Russian News*, 14 March 1931; *Parliamentary Debates* (Lords), 24 June 1931, vol. 81, cc348-50.

and left-wing newspapers each began to admit to some knowledge, or at least a strong belief in the likelihood, of Soviet forced labour.[109]

At Henderson's request, however, the Cabinet had already rejected pleas for an enquiry into Soviet conditions, and Henderson now pledged to ignore the report of the Anti-Slavery Society, which called for a boycott of Soviet goods.[110] Despite the Foreign Secretary's belief that there was 'little doubt' that 'Russian timber was handled by forced labour', it was decided that any investigation would subject the government unnecessarily to a 'very large' and difficult question. Without comprehensive and accurate information, the government could feign ignorance to the effect that 'the labour camps might be found to be such as to resemble a prison'.[111] In light of the Labour Party's own implementation of labour camps across Britain, this statement is especially revealing of the compromises the party was willing to make in office regarding the general conditions in both Soviet prisons and camps, in return for political expediency.

Labour figures and the left-wing press had, prior to this time, occasionally circulated statements that chimed with the authoritarianism of the Soviet authorities on these issues. As Williams notes, *kulaks* were sometimes depicted in the *Daily Herald* as a kind of 'weird sub-breed',

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[109] See A. Pim and E. Bateson, Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society Great Britain, *Report on Russian Timber Camps* (London, 1931), 83; 131-2. TNA, FO 371/15589, N 1291/1/38; FO 371/15589, N 1635/1/38; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 March 1931; Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/210, 3 March 1930.

[110] Udy, 'The Christian Protest Movement', 135; 137; Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/66, 11 February 1931; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 2 June 1931, vol. 253, cc25-6; Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/217, 9 December 1930; CAB 23/65, 17 December 1930; TNA, FO 371/15587, N 105/1/38. United States Congress, *Embargo on Soviet products: hearings before the Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, Seventy-first Congress, third session, on H. R. 16035, a bill to prohibit the importation of any article or merchandise from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Indexed. February 19, 20, and 21, 1931* (Washington, 1931), 38; Section 307 of the *Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act* of 1930 (19 U. S. C. 1307); David J. Dallin and Boris I. Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia* (New York, 1947), 219; *Timber Trades Journal*, March 13, 1931, 711; 767; Coates, *Soviet Trade*, 91. For the Soviet response see *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, (Moskva, 1968), XIV, 699.

[111] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/66, 11 February 1931. Even the Howard League admitted its inability to judge the Russian situation accurately. 'Russian Timber Camps', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 2 (1931), 11-12.

while Brailsford praised the ‘rashness and severity’ of the Soviet collectivisation drive as merely enthusiastic expressions of proletarian roughness. Sidney Olivier, in the *New Statesman*, hailed the Soviets’ severity in punishing the ‘immoral life of a small farmer or agricultural produce dealer’.[112] In reality, the Labour government was attempting to tread a fine diplomatic line amid its weak domestic position, but to many in the labour movement these claims were execrable. The consequences of Labour’s reactions to these issues were two-fold. On the one hand, the British protests were discussed at the highest levels in the Soviet Union, and Stalin sought to suppress all public knowledge of forced labour as a result.[113] Both the fifth and sixth Congresses of Soviets and the *Sovnarkom* quickly considered reactive measures against all states imposing restrictions on Soviet exports,[114] and newspapers even warned of impending armed confrontation as a result.[115] On a more practical level, cosmetic changes were made to the camps in order to improve the public and international perception of labour conditions (this had been a concern of the Soviets since the Yanson Commission of 1928), and, at their most duplicitous, Soviet authorities forcibly altered government contracts in the Karelia region in order to effect the bureaucratic ‘removal’ (*snimaetsia*) of over 12,000 prisoners from the convict labour figures in the timber industry, when in reality those prisoners continued to toil.[116]

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[112] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 137; *New Leader*, 7 February 1930; *New Statesman*, 13 June 1931.
[113] ‘Stalin to Molotov’, before March 1931, in Lih, Naumov and Khlevniuk (eds), *Stalin’s letters to Molotov*, 228; ‘Stalin to Kaganovich’, later than 11 August 1931, 25 August 1931 and 7 September 1931, in R. W. Davies, O. V. Khlevniuk and E. A. Rees (eds), *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence, 1931-36* (New Haven, 2003), 54; 65; 78-9.
[114] Degras (ed.), *Soviet Documents*, II, 380; 465-7; M. Litvinov, ‘Declaration’, in British Russian Gazette and Trade Outlook Ltd., *Forced Labour in Russia? Facts and Documents* (London, 1931), 9; A. V. Sabanin (ed.), *Mezhdunarodnaia politika: dogovory, deklaratsii i diplomaticheskaia perepiska* (Moskva, 1932), 250.
[115] ‘Kak podgotovliaetsia voina protiv SSSR’, *Izvestiia*, 1 May 1930; 22 October 1930.
[116] See GARF, f. R-9414, op. 1, d. 2920, l. 2, ‘*Zamestiteliu predsedatelia OGPU. Tov. Iagoda. Raport*’; Applebaum, *Gulag*, 65; 75; Victor Chernavin, ‘Life in Concentration Camps in the USSR’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 12, 35 (1934), 395; idem, *I Speak for the Silent Prisoners of the Soviets* (New York, 1935), 251-3; Nick Baron, ‘Conflict and Complicity’, 625-9. Applebaum does note Soviet sensitivity to the language used abroad to describe the camps, claiming that the leadership was ‘worried about the impact on Western socialists, particularly, *for some reason*, the British Labour Party’ (Applebaum, *Gulag*, 58; 73-6, emphasis added). Yet the role of the British in the protests and the tentative relationship between the Soviets and the Labour Party were certainly a major factor in this rationale.

On the other hand, however, there were some real and tangible, if ultimately limited, effects of the British protests. Particularly cruel Soviet camp guards were removed from their posts, while Soviet authorities sought to quell their policy of extermination while under the intense scrutiny of the international community.[117] A limited religious tolerance was displayed in some camps, demands by striking prisoners were met in others, and the OGPU permitted improved living conditions, periods of increased rest and better medical treatment.[118] The camps remained inhumane and abhorrent; but the period of Gulag stabilisation of 1934 to 1936, as denoted by Oleg Khlevniuk, can be argued to have taken its embryonic form instead between 1930 and 1931, as a result of international and especially British pressure. If the Labour government had stood firm in its values and traditions while engaging with the Soviet Union over these issues, perhaps more far-reaching and enduring reforms could have been successfully imposed upon the Soviets. The 'fund of goodwill' that had been built through the 1920s *kul'tpokaz* distorted Labour's perceptions, and their actions highlight their precarious domestic political position and their tendency once more to sacrifice their long-held party values.

Soviet prisons

Each of the preceding matters have demonstrated the ways in which Labour's dealings with the Soviet Union impacted its own approaches to issues of liberty, justice and repression, without directly considering penal policy. But the USSR was still able to influence the labour movement in this area throughout Labour's years in office. Given the government's minority standing, few visits to the Soviet Union could be made while parliament sat, but the publication

[117] See Chernavin, 'Life in Concentration Camps', 393; the cases and OGPU circulars in Viola, *Unknown Gulag*, 108-9; and Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror* (New Haven, 2004), 82.
[118] 'Gulag Circular Letter', 30 November 1930; 20 September 1931; and 'OGPU Resolution', after 27 June 1931, in Khlevniuk, *History of the Gulag*, 42-4; 47; 51-3; 82; 108-9; Andrei Sokolov, 'Forced Labor in Soviet Industry: The End of the 1930s to the Mid-1950s', in Paul R. Gregory and V. V. Lazarev (eds), *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag* (Stanford, 2004), 23.

of Evsei Shirvindt's *Russian Prisons* (1928) ensured the subject still garnered interest among the movement. Principally, it appears that enthusiastic British communists and the labour movement's leading figure on penal reform, Fenner Brockway, seriously considered Shirvindt's work. In many ways, *Russian Prisons* provided a vicarious literary expedition in place of the *kul'tpokaz* tours usually undertaken by foreign delegations visiting the USSR. It presented an idealised representation of the model prisons that had enthused British visitors through the 1920s, based on the latest ideas in progressive penal theory found in the West and dressed up in socialist language. It thus perpetuated the feedback loop that the Bolsheviks had established in the 1920s, whereby western progressive ideals were tracked, analysed and appropriated, before being sold back to western visitors as a socialist vision of the future, embodied in the Soviet present.

Russian Prisons was well-received by its British socialist audience. J. T. Murphy, British communist and member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, provided the introduction to the work and described it as 'amazing reading'.[119] Brockway, reviewing the book for the Howard League, was more reserved in his praise, making clear the difficulty of separating the propagandist content of Shirvindt's work from the truth. There was, nevertheless, 'much to learn from the Russian penal code'.[120] Brockway praised the 'profoundly different' correctional labour code in the USSR, noting that crime against property—the most common offence in Britain—had been all but extinguished under socialism.[121] While those propertied classes in Britain that failed to work for society were generally considered a privileged 'success', Russia, Brockway claimed, treated the idle as thieves.[122] Shirvindt's work attacked principles and practices that Brockway had much personal

[119] J. T. Murphy, 'Introduction', in Evsei Shirvindt, *Russian Prisons* (London, 1928).
[120] Fenner Brockway, 'Review of E. Shirvindt, Russian Prisons (1928)', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 3 (1928), 256.
[121] Ibid, 257; Shirvindt, *Russian Prisons*, 1.
[122] Brockway, 'Review of E. Shirvindt', 257

experience of: the isolation and silencing of prisoners, the use of corporal punishment and meaningless, inefficient labour. Proclaiming an individualised approach to prisoners that stressed the role of rehabilitation through literacy, culture and the acquisition of professional skills, Shirvindt appealed to Brockway's progressive ideals.[123] The work leaned heavily on Brockway and Hobhouse's *English Prisons To-Day*, but the Briton extolled the principles, even if he cautioned against the facts provided by Shirvindt. The Soviet system, he claimed, should certainly be investigated further by British penal reformers.[124]

That Brockway's review was published in the Howard League's journal was something of a statement in itself. Britain's leading penal reform organisation was open to inspecting and examining Soviet ideas, and, throughout Labour's time in office, positive articles about the Soviet penal system began to appear in its publications. A visit to the Gorky colony for juvenile delinquents, for instance, produced an impressive review of the practices being used to teach the habits of 'socialist civilisation'. The wages received by labouring inmates, the holidays they were granted and the possibility for marrying in the colony was, according to the report, 'delightful'.[125] And in 1931 a report on Soviet law and justice praised the increasing leniency of the criminal code and the advances towards semi-free, self-governing prison colonies.[126]

Soviet socialism, then, still exercised a good deal of influence over many Labourites, and the issue of penal reform was no exception to this tendency; building on the positive impressions they had created through the 1920s, the Soviets continued to impress progressive representations of their own contrived advances upon Labour. While a minority administration

[123] Shirvindt, *Russian Prisons*, 1; 8-9; 17.
[124] Brockway, 'Review of E. Shirvindt', 256; 258.
[125] M. Drake, 'The Gorki Colony for Delinquent Children and Adolescents in Russia', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 1 (1930), 79-80.
[126] Norman Bentwich, 'Law and Justice in Russia', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 1 (1930), 63.

beleaguered by financial crisis, inexperience and uncertainty was never likely to overhaul Britain's penal system according to idealistic notions of 'socialism', it is not as improbable that the party—or at least its leading exponents of progressive penal politics—would have drawn upon its own experiences of Soviet prisons in the 1920s (even if it publicly circumvented any Russian associations). With Clynes at the Home Office even this remained unlikely, but his conscientious and thorough style of politics nevertheless gave promise to the prospect of genuine penal reform.

4.5 Clynes and Labour at the Home Office

Even with a minority administration in 1929, the PLP experienced a huge increase in size; jumping from 151 MPs in 1924 to 287 in 1929 put great responsibility upon party whips and the leadership. As a result, party discipline was more difficult than ever to maintain. Nevertheless, hopes for socialist progress within the party remained considerable, and in penal reform circles optimism also escalated.[127] Between 1929 and 1931, several left-wing figures joined the ranks of the Howard League, while, as noted above, twenty-seven Labour MPs, three of whom now sat in the Cabinet, had in 1927 committed to a manifesto calling for the abolition of capital punishment.[128] 'Urgent' prison reform had been demanded at the National Conference of Labour Women in April 1929, and with Labour's ascent the Howard League's cross-party parliamentary penal reform group claimed its biggest ever membership with 100 MPs—a large majority were Labour. Hopes were raised that with a Labour government the pace of penal reform would be accelerated.[129]

[127] Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 26.
[128] These figures included Leah L'Estrange Malone, wife of Cecil (who, having previously been a Coalition and Communist MP, was in 1929 elected Labour MP for Northampton), and D. N. Pritt, who became chairman in 1931. Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 98-102. See also Gardiner papers, Add MS 56463 B, Labour Party, *Manifesto on Capital Punishment* (1927).
[129] Labour Party Archive (hereafter LPA), NEC Minutes, 23-5 April 1929; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 204; 269; 284.

For a number of reasons, though, and even before party political considerations were taken into account, a Labour administration was always going to be hard placed to deliver a bold package of reform (which it had in any case not promised). In the first instance, despite rising crime figures in the late 1920s, scrutiny of Britain's penal system had declined, especially among the political classes. This was in no small part due to the fact that prison populations in Britain had fallen as a result of the increased use of alternative sentencing measures and probationary initiatives that had been introduced from 1908. It was not, as was often thought, attributable to an overall decrease in crime itself. Yet a misunderstanding of this trend was significant for the prospects of penal reform. As Rose notes, the trenchant criticisms of the penal system that had been disseminated by the *Howard Journal* upon its emergence in the early 1920s had by now greatly dissipated.[130] In August 1929, the *Manchester Guardian* noted how the criminal population in England was decreasing annually, with the result that the government was troubled by the 'odd embarrassment of having empty prisons to sell which no one will buy'. That the prison population was decreasing was correct, but its attribution to a decrease in criminal activity—an inference made by Labour's Ernest Bevin in a public lecture in London—was facile.[131]

As a result, beneath a public perception that Britain was dealing competently and inexorably with the problem of crime, penal policy 'retreated into the shadowy wings of public concern', and was left in the hands of prison officials and those reformers with whom they enjoyed a close and confidential relationship. As McConville notes, there was no perceived crisis in criminal justice, and both the public and the professional political classes were largely unreceptive to the cause of penal reform.[132] All the momentum which had, somewhat

[130] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 113.
[131] *Manchester Guardian*, 21 August 1929; 28 February 1930. This point had been made clearly by the socialist William Douglas Morrison as early 1895. See McConville, *English Local Prisons*, 560.
[132] McConville, 'Hearing, Not Listening', 265-6.

transiently, uncovered the issue in the early 1920s had by now disappeared. Politicians were, unsurprisingly, preoccupied with the financial slump and the economic difficulties crashing towards Britain's shores, and even if they had not been absorbed by so burdensome an issue, reformers still faced the establishment might of the conservative-minded police, senior judges and the Lords. Even in some Labour publications like the Birmingham *Town Crier*, the view that prison life was now 'so easy' was being aired.[133]

Nevertheless, interested parties still attempted to set down a marker for MacDonald's administration. As noted above, Brockway set out perhaps the most detailed and reform-heavy programme, with the ultimate aim of reducing Britain's prison population to one-tenth of its contemporary size. Brailsford pressed the Labour Party to adopt Brockway's proposals, urging the 'assault of the rationalists' on a system that remained backwards and, in essence, a relic of Victorian Britain.[134] Other organs also backed Brockway's measures, *The Observer* noting that the 'New Way' should not be far off the ILPer's recommendations and the Howard League pushing for reforms.[135] Whether these ideas percolated through the higher party ranks, though, is less certain. Riddell notes that, since 1918, Labour had largely been governed by a 'leadership-induced ideological dogmatism' that stifled the fluidity of the pre-war years. Debate had become restricted, as had access to the party leadership for local and district party cells, especially on local and peripheral issues.[136] And while a suspicion of 'experts' (a category through which Brockway, alongside his ILP radicalism, found himself in a double-bind) remained among the leadership, this lack of consideration of the issue of criminality was to

[133] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 210-11; 272; *The Town Crier: Birmingham's Labour Weekly*, 21 June 1929.
[134] Brailsford, 'What a Labour Home Secretary Should do with Prisons and Criminals', *New Leader*, 9 November 1928.
[135] *The Observer*, 19 May 1929; 'Penal Reform—A Challenge to the Next Home Secretary', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 4 (1929), 283-5.
[136] Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 26; 105.

change when the party entered office.[137] Engagement at governmental and ministerial levels, in fact, ensured that the party discussed the issue of criminality while in office with far greater frequency than it had done in the five years since its last occupancy. Unprepared, the issue of criminality and penal reform was very much learned on the job, and Clynes as Home Secretary is the best example of this.

Clynes' approach

According to Chris Wrigley, Clynes took a great deal of interest in the issue of prison reform while Home Secretary. Wrigley's interpretation, however, is a rather anomalous view among wider assessments of Clynes' time at the Home Office.[138] Clynes entered office at a time when crime rates were rising and, while he was certainly aware of this trend, he was, despite his previous government experience, relatively unprepared on penal reform, with little prior engagement with the issue. He was also aware of the damage to political reputations that a stretch at the Home Office could inflict.[139] Nevertheless, Clynes had visited Labour colleagues when they had been imprisoned in the past and, with Alfred Short, who had a background in legal training, appointed as a junior minister and Under-Secretary to Clynes, he had some expertise upon which to rely when his decisions required justification.[140]

Given the 'omnibus' nature of the Home Office, in which a great range of functions falls under the departmental umbrella, the importance with which the issue of penal reform is regarded

[137] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 124.
[138] Chris Wrigley, 'John Robert Clynes', in Greg Rosen (ed.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (London, 2001), 125.
[139] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 172; J. R. Clynes, *Memoirs*, 2 vols (London, 1937), II, 162. Clynes had served as Minister of Food Control during the First World War in Lloyd George's coalition government and Lord Privy Seal in MacDonald's 1924 administration. Tony Judge, *J. R. Clynes: A Political Life* (London, 2016), 170.
[140] See *New Leader*, 10 February 1928 and Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 157 for Clynes' visit to Lansbury in prison. See also David E. Martin, 'Alfred Short', in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, IX (Basingstoke, 1993), 257.

can often depend on the individual interests of the Home Secretary. Few Home Secretaries, Rose notes, have a real and solid interest in penal matters. Gladstone and Sir Samuel Hoare stood out as exceptions, while others, like Churchill and Edward Shortt, exhibited a temporary interest but were nevertheless very competent. Clynes, according to Rose, 'never seemed to know, or to care, about the subject'—an assessment which the Howard League would also eventually settle on.[141] This, it is argued here, is an unfair evaluation. Clynes was a conscientious public servant who, though inexperienced in this area, held a principled and progressive set of core values which have historically been overlooked. His enduring party loyalty, though, coupled with the gradualist hold over the party of both MacDonald and Snowden, and the particular political and economic circumstances of the second Labour government, meant that Clynes' principles often lost out to party pragmatism.

Early on in Labour's tenure, Alfred Short gave an interview in which he declared that the Home Office 'wanted to attack the problem [of punishment] in a new way and had new methods they believed would work'.[142] Clynes agreed, and made clear that it was his aim to lead the charge to 'humanise prisons'.[143] Such talk was clearly promising to penal reformers, especially in light of their impatience over whether any attempts at reform had even begun.[144] Clynes came to the Home Office with an established set of principles, if not a binding penal philosophy, and was first and foremost convinced of the need for prison and penal reform. He was firmly against corporal punishment, the practice of flogging and the use of the birch and the cat, and was, most significantly, the first openly abolitionist Home Secretary.[145] He was committed to the notion that reformative and rehabilitative treatments, based on individualised approaches to

[141] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 268-9.
[142] *Manchester Guardian*, 1 November 1929.
[143] Ibid, 8 May 1930.
[144] Ibid, 14 December 1929.
[145] See *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 6 February 1930, vol. 234, cc2059-61.

prisoners, were the key to a successful prison system, and that ideas of discipline were too easily equated with, and enacted as, revenge. He believed much more contact with prisoners was required, and the draconian practices of solitary confinement and imposed silence had to end.[146] His views were certainly progressive and, ostensibly, in line with those of organisations like the Howard League.[147]

Clynes was, however, an inherently pragmatic figure. It would, he insisted in the manner of early Labour idealists, be 'a fine thing … to abolish prisons altogether', but it was simply not feasible. He understood his duty as being to implement the law efficiently and sensibly, rather than to effect great change, and his cherished ideas of duty and constitutionalism guaranteed that he would act always within the parameters of accepted opinion among parliament, reform groups and the public, and ensured his compatibility with the ethos of MacDonald and Snowden.[148] Where the Prime Minister and the Chancellor courted the orthodoxy of the Treasury and the financial elite while in office, Clynes yielded to the authority of public opinion. As a result, there were two main implications for penal reform. First, Clynes was never likely to respond to pressure from radical groups to force the pace on socialism. Consequently, any socialist ideas that the party—or, more precisely, Brockway—had on penal reform were unlikely to be prioritised. And second, Clynes' caution at times veiled his progressive ideas on reform, to the extent that he was to receive a great deal of criticism from contemporary penal reformers. In fact, Clynes came under fire as early as October 1929, as W. J. Brown, having been fortunate in the ballot for motions in the Commons, put down a resolution for the abolition of capital punishment. After a long debate, Clynes 'sidestepped the issue' and instituted a

[146] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 153; 155-6; 163; 166.
[147] Ibid, 158.
[148] Ibid, 153; 167.

Select Committee enquiry.[149] The criticisms flew in and, somewhat unfairly, seldom relented throughout his time at the Home Office.

Despite Clynes' active and progressive approach to penal affairs—he spent a great deal of time visiting Dartmoor, Pentonville, Wormwood Scrubs, Strangeways, boys' and girls' Borstals and Home Office Schools, where he examined all aspects of prison life ('a record which the hardiest of my criminal critics could scarcely equal!')—he was effectively fighting for penal reform in the face of a number of impediments.[150] The first obstacle was the Labour Party itself. The party was not particularly interested in the issue and it certainly was not a priority, the Home Affairs Committee of 3 July 1929 ignoring it altogether. Furthermore, Clynes was wedded to the idea that decisions should always be taken collectively, rather than on individualist lines.[151] When it came to dealing with issues of penal reform, the Cabinet often engaged somewhat reluctantly, and generally only as a result of the rationale that 'we shall be subjected to pressure from many quarters if we show no sign of moving in the matter'.[152] Clynes' own approach was far more thorough and personal, as indicated by his dedication to resolving the protracted dispute between the government and ex-inspector John Syme (who was still challenging his alleged unfair dismissal from the police force), and Clynes' intervention in cases where corporal punishment had been sanctioned.[153] The party, itself under intense pressures, in this sense inhibited Clynes' aspirations for reform.

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[149] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 268-9. The debate is discussed below.
[150] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 154.
[151] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/61, 3 July 1929; National Union of General and Municipal Workers, *Congress Reports*, 9 June 1930. This was an issue which W. J. Brown, who put down the resolution of the abolition of capital punishment, took great issue with. 'W. J. Brown to MacDonald', TNA, PRO 30/69/1310. See also Taylor, 'A "reef of granite"', 86-91.
[152] Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/205, 23 July 1929.
[153] For the issues surrounding the government's lengthy correspondence with John Syme, see John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, Ramsay MacDonald papers, RMD 1/8/10, 'Syme to MacDonald', 23 July 1930; RMD 1/8/11, 'Syme to MacDonald on Clynes' offer', 25 July 1930; LPA, PLP minutes, 23 July 1930; LPA, NEC minutes, 20 August 1931; Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/64, 28 May 1930; CAB 23/65, 22 October 1930; CAB 24/212, 26 May 1930; *New Leader*, 9 January 1931; TNA, HO 144/14903.

The second obstacle was the Home Office. Clynes was often criticised for a lack of action, which itself stemmed from Labour's restrictive and economically-focused programme. The impetus for penal reform thus came most often from officials, but the Home Office retained its conservative style in many instances. Clynes, for instance, approved of an increasingly educationally-oriented prison and penal system, but his department regularly blocked attempts to fashion such reform. The Board of Education's efforts to assume responsibility for the treatment of delinquent children 'as an entirely educational and not a penal problem' were regularly rebuffed by the Home Office, which replied that 'neglect and delinquency go hand in hand and that is … why … children are properly dealt with by the Juvenile Courts'. Despite his interest and enthusiasm, the absence of an overriding penal philosophy binding Clynes' and the Labour Party's approach to penal reform gave reform groups and a conservative Home Office little to grasp on to, creating a cycle of inaction.[154] These two obstacles, in combination with the economic difficulties under which the government was toiling, had the relatively consistent effect of neutralising Clynes' attempts to reform the penal system; but it was certainly not the case, as levelled by the Howard League, that he failed to take any interest in the issue of penal reform.

Navigating the Royal Prerogative of Mercy

One of the first issues Clynes faced at the Home Office was particularly controversial, and regarded the Home Secretary's role in recommending to the King the expediency of implementing the Royal Prerogative of Mercy in cases where a sentence of death had been passed upon a prisoner. As noted, Clynes was the first openly abolitionist Home Secretary, and his views, jarring against his legal duties, caused him considerable anxiety when he was faced with clemency appeals. He was also aware that, because of his well-known advocacy of

[154] See the correspondence in TNA, HO 45/21804; McConville, 'Hearing, Not Listening', 262; 264-5.

abolition, there would inevitably be great outcry when he refrained from intervening in such cases.[155] The years 1929 to 1930 saw several notorious murder trials that ended with guilty verdicts, thrusting both Clynes and the issue of capital punishment into the heart of a galvanised public debate. Appeals for clemency came thick and fast in Labour's first year, but Clynes was steadfast in his resolve not to be influenced by mass appeals, petitions or resolutions.[156] Indeed, it was the frequency and intensity of the pressure from his parliamentary and Labour colleagues that most surprised Clynes. The ill-treatment he received, though, failed to deter him.[157]

In July 1929, Clynes was issued with a petition for the commutation of the death sentence passed on Arthur Leslie Raveney, but found no cause for interference and the sentence was upheld.[158] In November, he was faced with the same task on the death sentence passed upon John Maguire, and was pressured by fellow MPs to recommend the Royal Prerogative. The *Daily Herald* noted Clynes' agonies over these decisions, and many more were to follow over the next two years.[159] Perhaps the most problematic case for Clynes came in April 1930, in which William Podmore was sentenced to death. The case, in which the local Southampton agent for the Wolf's Head Oil Company was murdered, and which succeeded a hunt for Podmore that lasted for over a year, garnered an enormous amount of press coverage, and Clynes was subjected to petitions, thousands of letters and the substantial pressures of his own party. When he eventually failed to recommend a reprieve, the *New Leader* admonished him and denounced his decision.[160]

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[155] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 134; Judge, *Clynes*, 170.
[156] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 135.
[157] Ibid, 135; 137.
[158] TNA, HO 144/11366, 8 July and 10 August 1929.
[159] TNA, HO 144/11385, 28 November 1929; see also HO 144/12028; *Daily Herald*, 21 October 1929.
[160] TNA, HO 144/12273; *New Leader*, 14 April March 1930; *The Times*, 16 April 1930; *News of the World*, 20 April 1930.

In a remarkable act, the April Conference of the ILP passed an emergency resolution that rebuked Clynes for his decision, especially 'where an exceptionally large volume of public opinion had urged such action'.[161] The resolution drew upon Clynes' own stance that reform should be passed in line with acceptable public opinion, but Clynes was scathing about the statement and was provoked into a response. Such a resolution, he replied, 'requires me to ignore the solemn decision of Courts, Judges and Jury, and to act on a personal opinion of capital punishment. I hope that no Secretary of State will ever be influenced by such an indefensible doctrine'. Clynes did indeed search for many days and nights in the hope of finding a reason for recommending a reprieve, but ultimately in vain. Drawing on his staunch constitutionalism, he ended: 'I am not prepared to make a mock of the law, however strong my desire to change it may be'.[162]

Clynes was called several more times throughout his period in office to assess the sagacity of recommending reprieves, and was regularly forced to reject petitions and approaches made by both his own Labour colleagues and the Howard League.[163] His experience only confirmed his view that capital punishment and the process of appealing for mercy were both wrong and in urgent need of replacement. Although he struggled deeply with his role at the Home Office, bound as he was, no matter how humane a character, to act within the law, Clynes stood by his principles despite the pressures he faced. He was certainly restricted by his party's caution in office and was always unlikely to implement radical overhauls. On leaving office, Clynes recommended the establishment of a new small court of appeal which would take the final decision on the issue of reprieves. The pressures on the Home Secretary to decide the fate of

[161] *ILPACR, 1930* (London, 1930), 100; *Daily News*, 23 April 1930.
[162] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 138; 142; TNA, HO 144/12277.
[163] TNA, HO 144/12121, 4 June 1930; 11 June 1930; HO 144/11357, 26 July 1931; 7 August 1931.

his fellow citizen were too great, he insisted, and he was confident that all previous Home Secretaries who had seen men die by the rope would welcome systemic change.[164]

On the issue of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy, Clynes has been described as both a 'gentle and sensitive' figure and a 'merciless' prosecutor. In his criticisms of Clynes, Rose notes that when Herbert Samuel, Liberal MP, replaced him at the Home Office under MacDonald's National Government in August 1931, there was thankfully now 'a progressive Home Secretary'.[165] This, it is argued here, is once more an unfair censure, failing to take into account the complex pressures Clynes faced—pressures made even greater by his willingness to express openly his desire to abolish entirely the system of capital punishment.[166] James Maxton, the ILP radical, paid Clynes a rare, if indirect, compliment at the ILP's summer school in late 1929, when, during his attack on the general progress of the Labour government, he asked: 'Has any human being benefited by the fact that there has been a Labour Government in office in the last two months? I can think of nobody except two murderers who were reprieved'.[167]

Labour's reforms

The economic difficulties that subsumed MacDonald's administration at times muted the demands of penal reformers, and Labourites were often concerned that the government's minority status was being invoked 'as the excuse for a policy which will fail because it lacks courage, and does not go far enough to be effective'.[168] Yet Clynes and the government were

[164] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 144-5.
[165] Ibid, 142; 152; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 173.
[166] Home Secretaries had generally declared their conversion to the cause of abolition only once they had left office. See James B. Christoph, *Capital Punishment and British Politics* (London, 1962), 20.
[167] *The Morning Post*, 5 August 1929, cited in Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, 90.
[168] 'The Old Year and the New', *New Statesman*, 34 (1929-30), 409, cited in Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 190.

nevertheless successful with a number of reforms.[169] One of the first issues they tackled was the embargo on the appointment of conscientious objectors in the civil service that had been in place since 1922. In June 1929, the Cabinet agreed that this ban be ended.[170] The Cabinet had discussed the issue when Labour took office in 1924, but had resisted action on the basis that they were likely to have been defeated without Liberal support. Now it was agreed, despite opposition in the House, that Liberal support would be forthcoming and that, given the number of conscientious objectors within the Labour ranks, it was expedient to remove the ban in order to employ the most capable candidates for civil service positions.[171]

A more significant development was made with the passing of the Sentence of Death (Expectant Mothers) Act, 1931. On 5 March 1931, Clynes circulated a memo to the Cabinet that made the case for reforming the method by which women who were tried on a capital charge and sentenced to death, but who were in fact pregnant, had their sentence commuted to life imprisonment. By law, the contemporary practice involved the examination of the convicted woman by a jury of twelve matrons, generally preceded by a period of confinement in prison. The bill aimed to 'prevent a pregnant woman going through the ordeal of having sentence of death passed upon her'—an action that was, in fact, rarely exercised by 1931 anyway.[172] Edith Picton-Turbervill, Labour MP for The Wrekin, had introduced a bill on this subject in February 1931, and it had since been forwarded to Standing Committee stage. Clynes had consulted Picton-Turbervill as well as the Lord Chief Justice, and it was his opinion that, since there remained thirteen bills ahead of it, the bill should be adopted as a government measure in order to ensure its swift passage.[173]

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[169] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 13 February 1930, vol. 235, cc635-6W.
[170] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/61, 26 June 1929.
[171] Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/205, 19 July 1929; *Parliamentary Debates*, 31 March 1930, vol. 237, cc917-83.
[172] Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/220, 5 March 1931.
[173] Ibid; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 4 February 1931, vol. 247, cc1815-91.

In correspondence with MacDonald, Picton-Turbervill stressed that the bill had already passed a second reading and would take up little House time. Most importantly, appealing to MacDonald's caution, she emphasised that the bill had no opposition in the House,[174] while Clynes also underlined for MacDonald the non-controversial nature of the bill and its cross-party status.[175] The Prime Minister, however, remained sceptical. He accepted the 'humane and necessary reform' that the bill would effect, but was principally concerned by the fact that adopting it as 'a Government measure would create a somewhat embarrassing precedent, as he was being pressed to give facilities for a number of other useful Bills that had been introduced by Private Members'.[176] Throughout 1929 to 1931, MacDonald made a habit of stressing the need to refuse parliamentary time to private members' bills, and in this instance he reluctantly submitted on the condition that Clynes at first re-draft the bill.[177] The bill eventually passed the Commons, but its journey is indicative of the government's, and especially MacDonald's, concern over etiquette, procedure and the perception of respectable governance. Even on bills that were considered essential and humane, political neutrality was the ultimate concern for the leadership and would often determine policy.

Labour's most important successes—their two 'big hits' on penal reform according to the Howard League—regarded solitary confinement for new prisoners and the passing of the Poor Prisoners Defence Act, 1930.[178] In 1931, the preliminary period of fourteen days' solitary confinement that all new prisoners were subjected to was finally abolished. In practice, the length of time in solitary confinement had been gradually reduced, but the legislation

[174] TNA, PRO 30/69/382, 'Picton-Turbervill to MacDonald', 6 March 1931; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 18 June 1931, vol. 81, cc292-4.
[175] TNA, PRO 30/69/382, 'Clynes to MacDonald', 11 March 1931.
[176] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/66, 11 March 1930.
[177] Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/206, 31 October 1929; CAB 23/66, 11 March 1930; TNA, PRO 30/69/382, 'MacDonald to Clynes', 13 March 1931.
[178] 'Mr Clynes. 0 Not out', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 2 (1931), 4.

represented a significant step in the revision of the penal code, even if it was more about codification than policy at this point.[179] Importantly, this was an instance in which Labour successfully achieved an objective set down by Brockway and Brailsford in their challenge to the Home Secretary. The measure failed to abolish the practice of solitary confinement altogether, and, as the Howard League pointed out, much of the legwork on this issue had been done prior to Labour's return to office, but it was nevertheless an important accomplishment in penal reform.[180]

According to Rose, Labour's least disappointing action regarded legal aid for those due to appear in magistrates' court.[181] The Poor Prisoners Defence Act provided free legal access to those unable to afford a solicitor, and went some way to redressing the inherent imbalance of the 'class system' of judicial procedure as marked out by Brockway and Brailsford. The Howard League had lobbied for a long time on this reform, with little success up to this point, and when the bill was passed into law the League made sure they took their fair share of the credit.[182] While the legislation was considered a success for the government, their own deliberations over the act highlight once more the importance of political expediency to MacDonald's administration. In November 1929, the Cabinet agreed that the Home Secretary should 'express general approval' of the bill, but this should be 'subject to his giving not the smallest indication that the Government could provide time for its passage'.[183] Even as the bill made its way encouragingly through the Commons and the Lords, the Prime Minister entered

[179] McConville, 'Hearing, Not Listening', 261-2; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 February 1930; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), vol. 235, c.1607W.
[180] 'Mr Clynes. 0 Not out', 4.
[181] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 270.
[182] See Howard League, *Counsel for the Defence: An Enquiry into the Question of Legal Aid for the Poor Prisoner* (London, 1926), 1-23; idem, *Everybody's Business* (London, 1931); 'Parliament and Penal Reform', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 2 (1927), 124. See the debate in the Commons in *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 8 November 1929, vol. 231, cc1415-50.
[183] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/62, 6 November 1929.

caveats against 'taking any action which would undermine the Government's policy of refusing … time to Private Members' Bills'.[184] Perceptions of the government's respectability appeared at times to outweigh its policy priorities, even in the few instances where legislative success was forthcoming.

Despite MacDonald's apprehension, then, a number of reforms were achieved by the Labour government on penal affairs. These were neither the grandest statements nor anything remotely close to a socialist transformation; but they were, in light of a dearth of campaign promises on the issue, welcome achievements, and ones that command recognition as the second Labour government continues to be re-appraised. Labour's successes, however, were still overshadowed by its caution, its lassitude and the defeats that it suffered. As was the wont of MacDonald's administration, Clynes established a number of committees in order to enquire into certain areas of reform; rising crime figures, for instance, eventually pushed Clynes to establish an enquiry into the problem of the persistent offender. The idea was floated by Clynes in October 1930 and officially announced in April 1931, with the result that the committee reported only after the fall of the Labour government.[185] Clynes also pushed for a further committee on the back of the Departmental Committee on Sexual Offences Against Young Persons, which had reported in 1926 but had had its recommendations ignored. Clynes had little success in his desire to amend the Children Act (1908), and the slow process of establishing a further committee only stirred the antagonism of penal reformers.[186]

[184] Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/64, 30 April 1930; 21 May.
[185] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 25 July 1929, vol. 230, cc1528-9W; 30 April 1930, vol. 251, cc1789-90; *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1930; 24 April 1931; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 173.
[186] The Committee was eventually established in 1932. Adrian Bingham, Lucy Delap, Louise Jackson and Louise Settle, 'Historical child sexual abuse in England and the role of historians', *History of Education*, 45, 4 (2016), 414; 428; Alyson Brown and David Barrett, *Knowledge of Evil: Child Prostitution and Child Sexual Abuse in Twentieth Century England* (Abingdon, 2013), 100-1; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 24 July 1929, vol. 230, cc1326-7W; 29 January 1930, vol. 234, cc1021-2W; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 209.

Finally, the Howard League and its all-party parliamentary group promoted a Children's Bill that was introduced by Rhys Davies, Labour MP for Westhoughton, in July 1930, and that sought to abolish capital and corporal punishment for all persons under twenty-one years of age, with a particular emphasis on the abolition of whipping.[187] This was a cause that Clynes felt strongly about, and his anger at the 'savage patricians' in the Lords who blocked the bill after it had passed the Commons was made clear. The bill's defeat was expected in most progressive circles; its passage would, the *Manchester Guardian* claimed, have represented a major victory for the 'educational method of dealing with young law-breakers' over 'retributive methods'. Like so many of the idealistic Labour designs throughout 1929 to 1931, it was a 'gesture … worth making', but amounted in reality to little more.[188]

Clynes left the Home Office in August 1931 knowing that, while he did what he could in his time, there remained a great deal of progress still to be made with regard to penal reform. He was disappointed that more had not been achieved on the issue of flogging and corporal punishment, and was convinced that with more time he could have made great progress.[189] He failed to match the Howard League's expectation that more opportunities for the industrial training of prisoners be made available, and was dissatisfied with the limited progress on the issues of state assistance for prisoners upon their release and the individualised approaches to treating prisoners while incarcerated.[190] Moreover, he fell far short of the marker laid down by Brockway and Brailsford in 1928. This was, of course, largely expected, given their respective views as to reform, revolution and socialism. Clynes never had any intention of abolishing prisons, nor of revising penal theory along the lines of socialist or revolutionary ideas, and a unified party policy on the issue still remained elusive. But the Labour Party did move the

[187] *Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1930.
[188] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 153; 163; *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1930.
[189] See for instance *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 30 January 1930, vol. 247, cc1400-21.
[190] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 153; 160; 166.

direction of penal politics, by degrees, closer to that of rehabilitation and reform, and greatly altered the class bias of the judicial system through the passing of the Poor Prisoners Act. These were significant steps, even if unrecognised at the time.

Clynes' admission, though, that while he pushed for progress as far as he believed public opinion would allow, his advances were not perfect, was not well-received by his critics. The Howard League, in particular, took issue with his time in office. In an editorial entitled 'Mr Clynes. 0 Not out', the League expressed the disillusion that arose from Clynes' continuous expressions of good intentions that were ultimately never acted upon. At a time, they claimed, 'when far reaching reforms, not controversial, were only waiting for a strong Home Secretary', Clynes had only to keep his promises as an alleged progressive. Yet, 'obsessed with the desire to be correct', he 'seemed to be paralyzed' in office.[191] The League, though, underestimated the difficulties that both Clynes and the Labour government faced as a minority administration, claiming their 'precarious majority' to be no such problem. The antagonism that was by now felt towards Clynes led the League to criticise the Home Secretary's entire approach to the prison regime in Britain and to evaluate his incumbency derisively. 'Mr Clynes', the *Howard Journal* wrote in 1931, 'stood at the wicket to the end, holding his bat straight … blocking every ball he hit'.[192]

4.6 The Abolition Movement

Labour's second period in office coincided with a noticeable rise in the campaigning presence of the NCADP. The failure of the Labour administration of 1924 to move on penal reform had demonstrated the need for a centralised abolitionist body 'capable of conducting a concerted

[191] 'Mr Clynes. 0 Not out', 3-4.
[192] Ibid, 3-5; 'Lessons from Dartmoor', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 3 (1932), 68.

campaign over an extended period'; and in 1925, as a result of the work of both the Howard League and the Penal Reform Committee of the Society of Friends, the NCADP was established. Spearheaded by the energetic and efficient Roy Calvert, the NCADP did much in a very short period to bring the issue of the death penalty to the forefront of parliamentary politics in Britain.[193] The NCADP was encouraged by the pressure exerted on the Conservative government by a number of Labour backbenchers throughout 1927 to 1929, with the result that a motion calling for abolition proposed by Lieutenant Commander Joseph Kenworthy, a recent recruit from the Liberals and now Labour MP for Central Hull, won a majority of one in the Commons, but was prevented from a second reading by parliamentary congestion.[194]

The NCADP was also optimistic about a new Labour government and Clynes' abolitionist position at the Home Office. As Neville Twitchell notes, the Labour Party was 'preponderantly', if not 'overwhelmingly', abolitionist in the inter-war years, although there was nothing intrinsically socialist or left-wing about their position. Rather, the party's extant abolitionism stemmed from its Christian and humanist origins, in conjunction with its self-identification as Britain's 'progressive' party. Abolition was, in many ways, the penal equivalent to pacifism, and there was certainly an exchange of views on these issues.[195] For all his caution, Clynes was the first incumbent Home Secretary to take definite steps towards abolition, though even his landmark approach was not enough to stifle his critics, who still questioned his commitment to the cause.[196]

[193] 'Campaign Against Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 2 (1927), 123; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 203. See the collection of campaign documents in MERL, Nancy Astor Papers, MS 1416/1/1/675; Bailey, 'The Shadow of the Gallows', 313-14.
[194] E. Roy Calvert, 'Against Capital Punishment', *The Howard Journal*, 2, 3 (1928), 237; Bailey, 'The Shadow of the Gallows', 314.
[195] Twitchell, *Politics of the Rope*, 14-15.
[196] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 134; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 204.

Nevertheless, on 30 October 1929 a three-hour parliamentary debate took place on a motion proposing the abolition of capital punishment. Historically, this has been regarded as something of a landmark in the abolitionist movement, and one that would begin the nascent steps towards complete abolition. Yet if this motion, proposed by W. J. Brown, had not been selected in the House ballot, the issue would almost certainly not have seen parliamentary daylight. In party politics, the 'hanging question', like penal policy more generally, remained 'tangential to the main arena of partisan conflict over economic and social questions'.[197] Despite Brown's fortune, however, and even before his motion was granted parliamentary time, a small group of Labour backbenchers were reaching the culmination of a decade-long, lesser-known campaign against capital punishment, in this instance its use in the military. As John McHugh notes, this campaign, 'which sought to abolish the military death penalty for a range of offences, notably desertion and cowardice', was a 'rare example of Labour Party success in shaping legislation in the interwar period', yet scarcely registers in histories of the time.[198] This campaign for abolition represents an important instance of Labour backbenchers forcing the issue and overcoming the caution of the party leadership.

Throughout the 1920s a cluster of Labour backbenchers fronted by Ernest Thurtle, Jack Lawson, Robert Morrison and Clement Attlee, each of whom had fought in the First World War, as well as Stephen Walsh, who served as Secretary of State for War in the first Labour government, Tom Shaw and Manny Shinwell, pressured incumbent governments over the issue of the military death penalty. The annual constitutional requirement to pass the Army Act in order to make lawful the existence of a standing army in peacetime granted backbenchers a regular opportunity to press for the repeal of what was, in the *Daily Herald*'s opinion, the

[197] Twitchell, *Politics of the Rope*, 14.
[198] McHugh, 'The Labour Party and the Parliamentary Campaign to Abolish the Military Death Penalty', 234.

survival of penal laws 'from a more barbarous age'.[199] Thurtle, Lawson and Morrison sought, in particular, to restrict the possibility of the death penalty to instances of mutiny and treachery, thereby abolishing the penalty for cases of cowardice and desertion. Such penalties were, they felt, no longer essential for ensuring army discipline. In both 1926 and 1928, Labour amendments to the Army Act were defeated by increasingly narrow margins, and the Conservative decision in 1928 to remove some offences previously punishable by death from the Act gave great encouragement to abolitionists.[200]

With Labour in office, the backbenchers pushed the government to enact their desired reforms, but MacDonald's administration resisted on the basis that the establishment force of the Army Committee opposed the move. In 1930, Tom Shaw, War Secretary, proposed that moves be made to 'remove cowardice from the list of capital offences and wait a year before moving on desertion'.[201] In response, the backbenchers requested that the question over desertion be left to a free House vote. To this MacDonald assented, and, following the defeat of a Conservative amendment to restore capital punishment for cowardice, Thurtle's amendment to abolish the penalty for desertion was carried by 221 votes to 137. Opposition was raised in the Lords, but a Conservative amendment that proposed a compromise was defeated.[202] As McHugh notes, Labour's victory was the culmination of over ten years of campaigning. The party, despite ostensibly supporting the reform while in opposition, sought to temporise when in office, reluctant to antagonise establishment powers, but the application of backbench pressure eventually overcame both the government's hesitation and the powerful interests of the

[199] *Daily Herald*, 17 April 1930. See also J. H. Brookshire, *Clement Attlee* (Manchester, 1995), 155; Christie Davies, 'The British State and the Power of Life and Death' in S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (eds), *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), 349-51.
[200] McHugh, 'The Labour Party and the Parliamentary Campaign to Abolish the Military Death Penalty', 233; 246; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 26 March 1929, vol. 226, cc2297-9; 2305-8.
[201] Ernest Thurtle, *Times Winged Chariot* (London, 1945), 110, cited in McHugh, 'The Labour Party and the Parliamentary Campaign to Abolish the Military Death Penalty', 247.
[202] McHugh, 'The Labour Party and the Parliamentary Campaign to Abolish the Military Death Penalty', 247-8.

military. That the free vote in the House was supported by the vast majority of Labour MPs and approximately 100 Conservatives demonstrated that, despite public reservations about abolition, the issue was becoming an increasingly bipartisan one.[203]

The party composition of this vote only increased penal reform groups' retrospective criticism of the Labour government with regards to the parliamentary debate on the abolition of capital punishment for civil crimes that took place in October 1929. In opening this debate, W. J. Brown, who moved the motion, gave a powerful speech against the irrevocable nature of capital punishment and its proven effect of inspiring further cases of capital crimes. The motion was seconded by Kenworthy.[204] When Clynes addressed the House, however, the zeal with which he had always proclaimed to have opposed capital punishment failed to appear. His principles were not in doubt, but his approach belied his Labourist caution. 'We are wandering', he claimed:

> partly in the region of opinion and partly in the region of disputed fact. We cannot be sure of our ground. It is risky, and, I think, un-helpful to dogmatise too much on this question, but that does not mean that the facts should not be ascertained and that we should definitely defer action on this question when the facts have been ascertained. During the last one-hundred years this subject has been debated in the House of Commons on, I believe, eighteen occasions, but on only one occasion was a majority recorded in favour of the introduction of a Bill, and then the majority was only one vote. How keen, then, has been the division of opinion![205]

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[203] Ibid, 247-9; Twitchell, *Politics of the Rope*, 14.
[204] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 30 October 1929, vol. 231, cc241-5; *Daily Herald*, 31 October 1931.
[205] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 30 October 1929, vol. 231, cc263-4.

Such division clearly piqued Clynes' commitment to understanding and respecting the limits of parliamentary and public approval. He was moved to ask exactly where Brown and Kenworthy wanted to travel with their motion. 'I believe', Clynes claimed, 'that those who put down the Motion want some practical results from their proposal. If they merely carry their Motion will they get them?' Clynes thought not, and that rather they would 'get a pious record of opinion that in the view of this House capital punishment should be abolished. There is no indication of any further steps that they desire the House or Government or community to take in relation to that Motion'.[206] Clynes rebutted a statement from Brown that questioned why, following the prospective passage of the motion, the government would not introduce a bill to give effect to the legislation, by claiming that a 'Committee would have to consider the facts presented by authority and brought through a channel that could be trusted'. Clearly Clynes favoured the option of establishing a Select Committee to investigate the matter, as moved in an amendment by Sir Herbert Samuel, and the amendment was subsequently carried.[207]

Critics have questioned Clynes' motive at this point, enquiring as to whether he did in fact desire more information, or actually intended to discourage reformers on such a controversial issue. Nancy Astor, Conservative MP and penal reformer, criticised Clynes for foregoing evidence that was readily available and supported Brown's motion, while Kingsley Griffiths was disappointed by the disobliging behaviour of the Home Secretary.[208] Roy Calvert claimed that, had Clynes been brave enough to support the bill, a majority could well have been gained

[206] Ibid, c.265.
[207] Ibid, cc265-7.
[208] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 204; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 30 October 1929, vol. 231, cc275-5; cc289-92. W. J. Brown would become increasingly disillusioned with the parliamentary process and the PLP's apparent torpor, eventually resigning from the parliamentary party. See Matthew Worley, *Oswald Mosley and the New Party* (Basingstoke, 2010), 74; 87.

with Liberal support.[209] Yet Clynes was acting according to his own principles, the gradualist approach bestowed upon the Labour Party by MacDonald, and within the constraints imposed on the government by external factors. To the objective observer Clynes' opposition to capital punishment was never in doubt, but, as was so often the case for Labour between 1929 and 1931, action was deferred, in this case for a more thorough and systematic investigation. That the process was delayed seems now inevitable, but it remains the case that Clynes was the first sitting Home Secretary to officially push for the abolition of capital punishment.

The Select Committee that was established contained seven Labourites, six Conservatives and two Liberals. Throughout the Committee's investigations the issue was split along party lines, with Labour and Liberal members favouring abolition. After collecting over forty witness statements and a thorough study of the status of abolition in other countries, the Committee recommended in 1930 the abolition of capital punishment for an experimental period of five years, with its replacement by a sentence of life imprisonment.[210] The recommendation was greeted positively by the Labour press, and it was claimed as a victory for the abolitionists that, if implemented, would lead inevitably to complete abolition.[211] The report of the Committee was marred, however, by the refusal of the six Conservative members to sign the report before its publication. The impact of the report was thus greatly reduced, and the wave of financial and economic problems that was engulfing the Labour government prevented any further

[209] E. Roy Calvert, *The Death Penalty Enquiry: being a review of the evidence before the select committee on capital punishment, 1930* (London, 1931), 4; TNA, HO 45/15739/546977/36, 'E. Roy Calvert to J. R. Clynes', 12 May 1931.
[210] See *Report of the Select Committee on Capital Punishment together with the proceedings of the committee, and the minutes of evidence, taken before the select committee on capital punishment in 1929-1930, together with appendices and index* (London, 1931), c.
[211] *New Leader*, 19 December 1930; *Manchester Guardian*, 16 December 1930. See also *The New Statesman*, 20 December and *The Spectator*, 3 January 1931. NCADP, *Public Opinion and the Report of the Select Committee on Capital Punishment* (London, 1931).

action. With the fall of the government in August 1931, the recommendations of the Select Committee also died.

The intentions of both Clynes and the Labour Party regarding abolition were genuine, acting as they were as the progressive political party of Britain. However, the government had not, as Brockway and Brailsford had wished in 1928, abolished capital punishment during their time in office. The political realities of Labour's second administration and the party's own caution and electoral pragmatism once more stymied radical and well-intentioned efforts. But the fact remains that, in difficult circumstances, reforms that had never been promised were nevertheless achieved. The restrictions placed upon the application of capital punishment in the military marked a significant victory for the Labour Party as a whole, if less so for MacDonald's government, and while capital punishment for civil crimes was not immediately curtailed, abolitionists and reformers owed a great deal to the party's progressive efforts and to Clynes' individual courage.

4.7 Conclusion

After the Labour government collapsed in acrimony in August 1931, the split that developed within the party, intensified by the dramatic political and financial crisis, cast a dark shadow over Labour's time in office. For a long period, assessments of 1929-31 accepted the idea that Labour submitted meekly to the intense external pressure it was under, and failed to live up to the expectations that it had itself cultivated. The idea of implementing socialism, it was claimed, was quickly abandoned by the party, which thought that very little could be achieved.[212] In one sense, this claim is accurate. The party leadership soon realised that given

[212] See for instance Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997), 58; Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, 394-5.

the restraints imposed upon a minority government due to economic and fiscal burdens, and the inexperience of the party in government, a rapid transformation to socialism was impossible. In addition, considering MacDonald's gradualism, the party's electoral pragmatism, and the suppression of the term 'socialism' within party debate and literature in the years up to 1929, this was not an unexpected outcome.

Yet such an assessment is short-sighted. Besides the leadership, there were indeed lower level groups that favoured a gradualist, cautious approach to governance. But there also remained idealistic and energetic factions of the party at lower levels that were committed to implementing socialist reforms, as well as figures in the government itself, like Lansbury, who maintained their commitment to the socialist cause. Greater nuance is therefore required when assessing the government's performance. The restrictions placed upon the Labour Party and the political realities it faced forced it to adopt a practical and pragmatic stance, often at the expense of its long-held values; and Labour needed to portray itself as a responsible party of government, while at the same time defending its reputation from the calumny of the Conservatives. The natural role of electoral competition thus always stood to reinforce Labour's moderation.[213]

This chapter has demonstrated that, within this context, an examination of Labour's approach to penal policy in office provides new understandings of the ideological uncertainty of the party; of the persistence of party members in their efforts to achieve progress; of the vulnerability of the party to more radical, and even authoritarian ideas; and of the sacrifice of its own values as a result. Viewed through a long-term historical perspective, the labour

[213] MacDonald's biographical reassessment is perhaps the best example of this. See Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald*; Beers, 'Counter-Toryism', 250; 254.

movement's idealistic visions for dealing with crime, embodied most prominently in William Morris' utopian fiction, were perceived as quixotic when Labour entered office. Radical figures like Brockway and Brailsford set high standards for the Labour government, but for party leaders there was no perceived crisis in the criminal justice system, and the issue remained tangential to the government's agenda. Idealistic designs for a *socialist* overhaul were displaced by pragmatism, and little action was taken as Labour failed to develop any unified penal policy.

Viewed in isolation, however, a different picture emerges. In government, Labour remained a party that was inexperienced, relatively unprepared and even surprised by its 1929 election success. Limited in its legislative scope by global economic disorder, perennially rising unemployment and a crippling financial crisis, penal politics had little chance of forming a part of Labour's agenda. Yet, despite this, as well as a continued failure to form a coherent penal philosophy, progress was nevertheless made. Advances were not transformational, but they constituted significant steps in penal reform, from the abolition of solitary confinement to the provision of state assistance for all those attending magistrates' court; from the humanisation of the administrative procedure for pregnant convicts, to taking the nascent steps on the road to the abolition of capital punishment. The abolition of the military death penalty for acts of cowardice and desertion displayed, in contrast to established images of Labour's weakness, the political muscle and adroitness of backbench Labour MPs in forcing reform. In lieu of any election manifesto commitments on the issue, with the benefit of a little luck and the courage and persistence of both backbenchers and Clynes at the Home Office, penal reform, approached

on a relatively ad-hoc basis, must be recognised as one of the more successful legacies of the second Labour government.[214]

In dealing with the Soviet Union, too, Labour demonstrated its prioritisation of pragmatism over principles. On the issues of Trotsky's application for asylum and the recognition of, but disregard for, instances of religious persecution and forced labour in the USSR, Labour compromised upon the values and ethics that had for almost three decades formed the backbone of its political philosophy. In this way, the socialism that was allegedly being built in the Soviet Union maintained its hold over a number of Labour figures; and the propaganda machine that had successfully impressed British visitors in the 1920s with its exposition of the Soviet penal system also continued to influence Labourites and ILPers. This influence was certainly not overwhelming, especially with regard to the party leadership, but it remained expedient for the government in its political dealings with the Soviet Union to have positive reports appearing in Britain that stressed the humane face of the Soviet state. With improved diplomatic relations with Russia, and Labour in its most powerful position to date, it might therefore have been expected that Soviet influence upon penal policy play a prominent role in the Labour agenda. That it did not was a result of the hold of the gradualists upon the party, its perceived need for caution and moderation, and the overwhelming issues it faced in the form of the financial crisis. Significantly, though, the Soviets continued their attempts to influence Labour, and the indulgence of communist ideas on penal reform would continue into the 1930s as a result.

[214] As such, it should be viewed in a more sympathetic light than is offered by the established historiography prior to the work of Reginald Bassett. See Webb, 'What Happened in 1931'; Attlee, *As It Happened*; and Weir, *The Tragedy of Ramsay MacDonald*; before Bassett's 1958 account, *Nineteen thirty-one*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Leftward to Russia?

The 1930s

5.1 Introduction

In October 1931, two months after the formation of Ramsay MacDonald's National Government, a general election was held. The Labour Party, in disarray following its dramatic fall from office in August, entered the election contest on a policy platform of rushed, aspirational and vague ideas. As relations had become irreparably soured between those former Labour members who had defected alongside MacDonald and those who remained in the party, Philip Snowden, now Chancellor in the National Government, described his former colleagues' programme as 'Bolshevism run mad'.[1] Labour suffered a drastic defeat at the election, with its representation in the Commons reduced from 287 seats to 46.

The party was in a state of flux. Its leadership was demoralised, its long-held gradualist philosophy appeared to be in ruins, and there was a clear lack of policy ideas within the party ranks. As John Callaghan has noted, between 1918 and the advent of the second minority Labour government in 1929, there was 'little evidence of a commitment to socialism in the Labour Party'.[2] Indeed, on the issue of unemployment, which had beleaguered the MacDonald administration between 1929 and 1931, there were no attempts to formulate a socialist response to the crisis. G. D. H. Cole, one of the party's most influential theorists, even related how, in 1929, British socialists appeared frightened by the 'growing difficulties of capitalism', rather than encouraged by them.[3] And as Clement Attlee explained after the 1929 government had

[1] BBC Radio Broadcast, 17 October 1931, cited in Pelling, *A Short History*, 74.
[2] Callaghan, 'British Labour's turn to Socialism in 1931', 119.
[3] Ibid, 119-24; Cole, *The Next Ten Years*, 7.

been formed: 'We do not believe in the capitalist system … [but] the country has not yet said that we shall end it. We have no mandate for that'.[4] On a fundamental and immediate level, Labour's lack of policy clearly presented a problem; but it also granted opportunity for change.[5]

In the election of October 1931, despite its rushed preparations, Labour attempted to engineer a bolder push for socialism. Its election manifesto, *Labour's Call to Action* (1931), proclaimed that 'Socialism provides the only solution for the evils resulting from unregulated competition and the domination of vested interests', and that 'Labour insists that we must plan our civilisation or perish'.[6] Despite the force of these statements, though, the leadership, through a reluctant Arthur Henderson (elected as party leader to replace MacDonald), was 'unwilling to be too radical and opposed … too strenuous a line against MacDonald'. As a result, the party's calls for socialism at this time lacked adequate detail and definition.[7] Nevertheless, Labour's emphasis upon socialism in *Labour's Call to Action* was greater than it had been at any time in the past decade and, despite its catastrophic 1931 election performance, the party was sliding into the most radical period of its short history.

Between 1931 and 1933, Labour's move to the left was more pronounced in certain quarters than others. At its conference in 1931, J. R. Clynes claimed that the party was 'no longer frightened of the term socialism', and a year later at the 1932 Leicester conference resolutions were passed, against the NEC's arguments, that called for the nationalisation of the Bank of England and commercial banks, and that confirmed as party policy the refusal to take office as a minority government.[8] The free-market economics of MacDonald and Snowden and the

[4] Cited in T. Cliff and D. Gluckstein, *The Labour Party: A Marxist Analysis* (London, 1988), 154.
[5] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 79.
[6] 'Labour's Call to Action: The Nation's Opportunity', in Iain Dale (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997* (London, 2000), 40.
[7] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 77.
[8] *LPACR, 1931*, 177; Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 279-80.

policy of 'gradualism' were thus officially rejected in an atmosphere that saw calls for the 'need' for socialism to intensify.[9] When Henderson spoke out against the resolution on minority governments, he was heckled and subsequently resigned the party leadership.[10] He was succeeded by Lansbury, with Stafford Cripps and Attlee 'joining him in a leftish leadership troika'.[11]

Labour's drift leftwards, though, was to prove both temporary and shallow; despite its rhetoric in these years, the party never really abandoned its gradualism, and by 1933 the forces that resisted the left-ward pull—in particular the revitalised, TUC-led National Joint Council (NJC)—had wrestled Labour back to its more moderate ground. Throughout the 1930s, the Soviet Union remained an exemplar for Labour to look towards, particularly in the early years of the decade, and the party's positive experiences of the Soviet penal system ensured that, as the system became a more perspicuous and acknowledged example to aspire towards, a 'fund of goodwill' could be drawn upon. As Toye notes, in the early 1930s Soviet Intourist packages began to bring the Russian experience within reach of ordinary party members for the first time, and the major Soviet successes in the areas of economy and employment now added an even shinier gloss to the social policies being practiced in the USSR.[12]

Simultaneously, though, the effect of the excitement of the Soviet experiment was diminishing; as the 1930s progressed and concerns grew over the repressive actions of the Soviet leadership and their increasingly dictatorial political system, the range of hopes that could be projected onto the revolutionary state was reduced, even for those who still remained favourably disposed

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[9] See for example the statements from George Lathan, Charles Trevelyan and Attlee. *LPACR, 1932*, 161; 204-5.
[10] *LPACR, 1932*, 204-5.
[11] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 79.
[12] Richard Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy: 1931-1951* (Suffolk, 2003), 56; Callaghan, 'British Labour's turn to Socialism in 1931', 115.

to the Soviets. Within the context of these competing forces impacting upon the Labour Party, this chapter examines the party's penal politics as it emerged from the failure of the 1931 election, through the 1930s until the outbreak of the Second World War. In particular, it demonstrates how an increasing awareness of Stalinist repression and the infamous Show Trials diminished British admiration for the Soviet system throughout the decade, and reinforced a less radical approach to domestic penal politics.

Having successfully implemented a number of reforms in the areas of penal policy and justice during its time in office between 1929 and 1931, Labour had been forced to confront the defects of the contemporary British system and contemplate potential alternatives. Nevertheless, in power the party failed to establish a distinctive (and certainly not a socialist) approach to penal affairs, despite the previous decade of positive experiences of the Soviet penal system. Throughout the 1930s, it is argued, a cohesive party approach to this issue still remained out of reach. Despite regret at the failure to do more while in government, the party continued in its erratic approach: it persisted in its support of the reconditioning camps it had established across the country—going so far as to praise them as 'concentration camps'[13]—but its electoral programmes throughout the decade continued to omit any mention of penal reform. In 1934, the party finally passed a resolution that officially committed it to the abolition of the death penalty, but it would be a long wait before the party even attempted to act upon its pledge. The problems with Britain's penal system, with which the party had been far more engaged during the 1920s, took a back seat in the 1930s. A more radical period in the party's history, however brief, did not foster a socialist penal philosophy.

[13] See for instance the *Daily Herald*, 15 March 1934; 16 March; 17 March; 19 March; 22 March.

The chapter also demonstrates the changing effects and attractions of the Soviet Union upon the Labour Party throughout this period. Building on the experience of the Soviets' 1920s *kul'tpokaz*, Labourites continued to visit the USSR through the 1930s as the phenomenon of 'fellow-travelling' grew to new heights. The allure of the Soviet Union, though, began to change in these years, and the Soviet propaganda machine was altered accordingly, in particular with regards to the Soviet penal system. The model prisons that had been paraded in Moscow in the 1920s began to play a lesser role in the *kul'tpokaz* programme, and in their place emerged the exhibition of 'correctional labour colonies' and grand proletarian labour projects that proclaimed the 'regeneration' of human beings (while retaining their base in a ruthless exploitation of forced labour). Seeking escape from the caustic 'betrayal' of their former party leaders and the morass of depression in British working life, it is argued that British visitors were now particularly drawn to the new system of morals and social values they perceived as having germinated in the USSR.[14] Unlike in the 1920s, the particular features of 'socialist' prison institutions were far less emphasised; instead it was the role of the justice system in the remaking of Soviet man that now most impressed the fellow-travellers—some even after the horrors of the Stalinist purges and the infamous show trials in the late 1930s.[15]

Many on the left remained susceptible to the propaganda of the *kul'tpokaz* programme through the 1930s, but the relation of the labour movement to the Soviet Union also became more complex in this period. The technocratic allure of the Soviets' planned economy was particularly strong in the years following the financial crash, and increasingly the Soviets'

[14] See for instance Beatrice Webb's description of MacDonald in Norman MacKenzie (ed.), *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1978), III, 239.
[15] Jones, *Russia Complex*, 20-1; 26; Paul Corthorn, 'Labour, the Left, and the Stalinist Purges of the Late 1930s', *The Historical Journal*, 48, 1 (2005), 181. Although Corthorn argues against the contention that the labour movement was ambivalent to the purges, he does note those figures who continued to support Stalin's regime throughout and beyond the terror.

claim to be forging a new set of social values attracted many on the left. Paradoxically, though, excitement about the Soviet experiment was also decreasing in some quarters. In general, the experiment was now much more familiar to the labour movement, and it was only natural that the enthusiasm which had pervaded so much of the movement in the 1920s would diminish. From 1917, revolutionary Russia existed as a blank slate upon which the British left could project a vast array of hopes and expectations; by the 1930s, the space within which to form ideas and ambitions had decreased in scope, as a proscriptive Stalinism had emerged in its place. Moreover, and particularly in relation to the Soviet penal system, Soviet ideas on crime were well known by the mid-1930s, and visitors were becoming increasingly aware of the choreographed nature of their Soviet sojourns. As a consequence, aside from a number of far-left figures in the CPGB who faithfully followed the Moscow line, the majority of the labour movement no longer perceived the Soviet state as providing conclusive, off-the-peg solutions for the problems faced in Britain; and as anxieties about Stalinist dictatorship and show trials increased in parallel with the rise of Hitler and the rule of Mussolini, the Soviet allure was further diminished. Its effect on Labour's penal politics was lessened as a result.

That the Soviet machine still managed to convince a number of the British left throughout the 1930s is testament to its thoroughness and its reach; but it was, overall, becoming harder to convince the British that *every* answer lay in Soviet Russia. As concerns over the rise of fascism on the continent grew and the threat of war subsumed national party politics, penal reform was of less concern from 1935 onwards. Labour failed to commit resources or research to the issue, and as a result the party continued in its stuttering approach to penal politics. The Soviet exemplar still impressed some British socialists, but its practical policy impact upon Labour's penal politics remained minimal. In its examination, the chapter continues to chart Labour's nebulous approach to penal affairs in relation to the USSR, demonstrating the party's

adaptation to the changing circumstances in which it found itself, and the diminishing effect of the Soviet project on penal politics.

5.2 The Domestic Front, 1931-32

In 1929, G. D. H. Cole had written that 'Pre-war Socialism could afford to seek after perfection, because it was not in a hurry; post-war Socialism needs practical results'.[16] At the same time, Fenner Brockway had put forward a practical plan for the reform, under vaguely socialist guidelines, of the English prison system. While some specific aspects of Brockway's plans were addressed by the second Labour government, far less progress was made with regard to issues including the individualisation of prisoner treatment, a movement away from the principles of deterrence and retribution, and an effective reduction in the prison population. A socialist overhaul was not forthcoming, and Brailsford's hope that Brockway's 'courageous' programme would be adopted by the Home Secretary was not realised.[17]

As the Howard League noted, the number of indictable crimes recorded by the police had been rising steadily since the end of the First World War, and the latest criminal statistics in 1931 detailed a rate of 3,694 offences per million of the population.[18] Concern over the justice and prison systems, especially at a time of mass unemployment, was appearing in other publications too. Most prominently, *The Unemployed Special*, the organ of the NUWM, made the case for overhauling the contemporary system and aired the views of sympathetic legal experts. Britain 'make[s] habitual criminals by our form of justice', it claimed. 'We turn criminals out on the streets and say "You must get a living", when it is impossible for honest people to get an honest living'. 'They are forced to commit crimes, and then we make them

[16] Cole, *The Next Ten Years*, viii.
[17] See Brockway, *A New Way with Crime*; and Brailsford, 'What a Labour Home Secretary Should do with Prisons and Criminals', *New Leader*, 9 November 1928.
[18] 'The Increase in Crime', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 3 (1932), 1.

habitual criminals'.[19] Leading figures of the NUWM, and occasionally entire branch committees, were regularly imprisoned between 1931 and 1932, and the publicising of their plight during the NUWM's national hunger marches ensured that penal politics remained a highly topical issue for British workers and the labour movement.[20] Through *The Unemployed Special* the NUWM demanded new 'preventative treatment' and 'adequate relief for all workers', and 'prisoners especially'.[21]

Clynes was aware of this trend in crime figures, and was disappointed at his failure to achieve more in the area of penal reform during his time as Home Secretary. Reflecting in his memoirs, he was convinced that the next steps in the reform movement had to address the issues raised by the NUWM, including state assistance for prisoners upon their release and a continued effort to change the styles of treatment within prisons. Clynes emphasised the need to lessen the rigidity surrounding conversation between prisoners, to increase the amounts of exercise, education and entertainment provided, and to abolish completely the punishment of solitary confinement.[22] He also advocated, in time, the payment of prisoners for the labour they performed. Aware that prisons had to 'move with the times', Clynes remained unwilling to push an agenda beyond what he perceived as the limit of current public acceptance, and was resigned to the fact that 'we learn very slowly' in the area of penal reform.[23] At the party conference in 1931, Labour's torpid approach to penal politics was epitomised by its lament over its inability in office to implement the recommendations of the Select Committee Enquiry on Capital Punishment of a recommended five-year experimental abolition of the death penalty. 'It is to be regretted', conference stated, in what was by this time something of a party

[19] *The Unemployed Special*, December 1932.
[20] Worley, *Class Against* Class, 284-5.
[21] *The Unemployed Special*, December 1932.
[22] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 166-7.
[23] Ibid, 167-9.

platitude, 'that nothing could be done this Session, but it is hoped that time and opportunity will be found in the next'.[24] At the 1932 conference, the issue of penal reform was not raised.

A radical overhaul?

Pimlott suggests that the left became increasingly marginalised during the 1930s, to the extent that it failed to have any impact on any major policies in the decade. Certainly in the two years following the departure of MacDonald from the party there was something of a policy lacuna, as contending factions vied for control over the party's future direction. As a result, and as a number of scholars have noted, the idea that Labour recovered quickly and efficiently from the debacle of 1931 through the swift creation of a dedicated socialist agenda takes on a somewhat whiggish aspect.[25] Between 1931 and 1932, Labour were fighting to replace the 'Big Five' of the MacDonald era; but they were also engaged in an increasingly militant stand-off with the ILP leadership, who, disillusioned with what they regarded as the continuation of an inherently flawed gradualism, persuaded the organisation to disaffiliate from Labour in July 1932.[26] Paradoxically, this severance with the ILP emboldened Labour's left wing. Perceiving capitalism to be in its death throes and finding its political antithesis in the rise of fascism, the left now felt that 'anything that sought to accommodate capitalism would … be doomed to failure because of the apparent power of financial institutions to sabotage efforts'.[27]

This 'lurch' to the left has been interpreted by historians in a number of ways. A. J. P. Taylor argued that, having attempted under MacDonald 'to make capitalism work', Labour had paid

[24] *LPACR, 1931*, 87.
[25] Pimlott, *Labour and the Left*, 1; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 211; Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, 47; Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 230; Richard W. Lyman, 'The British Labour Party: Conflict between Socialist Ideals and Practical Politics between the Wars', *Journal of British Studies*, 5, 1 (1965), 144.
[26] Gidon Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II* (London, 2007), 17.
[27] Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford, 1992), 27.

‘a bitter penalty’. Anger at the leadership’s betrayal of its socialism and the effect of a perceived establishment-led bankers’ ramp against the party led to the ‘natural reaction’ of Labour’s move leftwards.[28] Other scholars have suggested an inter-generational explanation, in which a new generation of socialists had grown up since the First World War and had begun to spread their desire for socialism at party conferences as the capitalist economic model appeared to be crumbling.[29] Indeed, ideas that had previously been ignored by the MacDonald leadership, like those espoused by Cole in *The Next Ten Years in British Social and Economic Policy* (1929), could now be pushed forward as these figures gained footholds at the apex of the party and in committees established to implement policy review. Organisations including the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda (SSIP) and the New Fabian Research Bureau (NFRB) were established in 1931 in order to research and propagate practical ideas for the construction of socialism. And following the disaffiliation of the ILP from Labour in 1932, those former ILPers who remained within the Labour Party combined with SSIP to form the Socialist League, in an endeavour to replicate the radical force of the ILP while remaining loyal to Labour.[30] Emerging intellectuals like Harold J. Laski and John Strachey, moreover, ensured, through media like the Left Book Club, that literature and a politics that was more sympathetic to left-wing ideas reached wider audiences.[31]

Away from the cluster of the PLP, party intellectuals and emotional conference delegates, though, this shift leftwards was less pronounced for a number of reasons. While it appeared that gradualism had been defeated at the 1932 conference, there was little to be seen in the way of emerging policy alternatives. In September 1931, the NJC had been revitalised in an attempt

[28] A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-45* (Oxford, 1965), 429-30.
[29] See Pimlott, *Labour and the Left*, 17; S. H. Beer, *Modern British Politics* (London, 1965), ch. 5, 126-53; Margaret Cole, *Growing Up Into Revolution* (London, 1949).
[30] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 282; Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 76.
[31] Callaghan, ‘British Labour’s turn to Socialism in 1931’, 128; Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 82; idem, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 227.

to obstruct any potential for the 'cult of… personality that had grown up around MacDonald';[32] and endeavouring to 'bind a future government more closely to the [TUC] general council', moves were made to secure an 'in-built trade union majority over the representatives of the NEC and the PLP'. The NJC was 'to become the leading arbiter within the party during the 1930s', in many respects offsetting the leftward swing of the PLP, as the principal unionists on the right of the party, like Walter Citrine and Ernest Bevin, 'in alliance with leading party figures, were able to steer the party generally in directions they liked'.[33]

The PLP and conference, then, tended to be more left-wing in this period, while the NEC, the NJC and the administrative sector grouped in Transport House 'cleaved much more closely to the Bevin-Citrine-Dalton axis' and increased their authority within the movement.[34] Despite the party's increasingly socialist rhetoric between 1931 and 1933, this split was borne out in the relative moderation in policy proposals during that period. Even if sections of the party (and especially certain members of the ILP) had reverted at times to 'disruptive', if not extra-parliamentary, tactics throughout the 1920s, a lack of alternative means of transformation after 1931 seemed to contain the left.[35] Martin Pugh even suggests that the party became *more* orthodox, focusing only on basic reforms as it shunned earlier proposals for electoral reform, devolution and the abolition of the Lords.[36] In foreign policy, too, the party provided little evidence of socialist intent or a radical alternative.[37] Despite the severity of the economic crisis,

[32] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 152.
[33] Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 82.
[34] Ibid; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 212-13.
[35] See Richard Toye, 'Perfectly Parliamentary? The Labour Party and the House of Commons in the Inter-war Years', *Twentieth Century British History*, 25, 1 (2014), 23. On the historical debate over whether Labour's reformist tactics could ever achieve socialist outcomes, see Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*; Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism*; Pimlott, *Labour and the Left*; Tim Bale, 'Crimes and Misdemeanours: Managing Dissent in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Labour Party', in Brian Brivati and Richard Heffernan (eds), *The Labour Party: A Centenary History* (Basingstoke, 2000), 270.
[36] Pugh, *Speak for Britain*, 223.
[37] Vickers, *The Labour Party and the Wider World*, 5.

the prevailing orthodoxy was only enhanced by the absence of any social democratic alternatives across Europe.[38]

As a result, any swing leftwards should not be overstated, being as it was relatively shallow and, by 1933, short-lived. Nevertheless, a temporary swing was certainly evident, and the financial crisis presented a favourable environment for the activities of organisations like the NFRB and SSIP, which scored some early and considerable successes at the party conference in 1932.[39] But the party was increasingly split between a left wing that was gravitating towards a mechanical type of socialism, and a trade union right that was flexing its political muscle.[40] The influence of Bevin and Citrine was utilised during this period, as the trade union leadership stepped into the void at the helm of the party. For figures like Beatrice Webb, who herself was even questioning her own belief in gradualism, the moves of union grandees fostered concerns that the party would be locked up in a right-wing status quo for the next twenty years.[41] The leftward swing of party members and conference delegates was not necessarily reflected in the leadership, the NEC and the TUC, and the party retained its overall gradualist edge. As Webb noted in her diary, although the party had 'got rid of the rotten stuff', 'it is not laying the foundations of a new civilization'.[42]

This is not to say, however, that there was no direction at all. The party agreed that the vagaries of its previous programmes had led to failure; there would be no more 'MacDonaldite slush and general phrases'.[43] Committees and sub-committees were established with the tasks of re-

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[38] Callaghan, 'British Labour's turn to Socialism in 1931', 123.
[39] Riddell, *Labour in Crisis*, 214.
[40] Marquand, *Progressive Dilemma*, 47.
[41] Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 71; 76-7; *Diary of Beatrice* Webb, IV, 333, entry 25 June 1934.
[42] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 282; *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 289-90, entry 3 October 1932.
[43] Williamson, *National Crisis*, 461.

organising the party and re-stating its major policies, and the concept of 'planning' began to evolve as experts focused on preparing 'every step of their proposed transition to socialism'.[44] Yet the left-right split produced conflicting outcomes. Dissonance was being bred between gradualist approaches to a planned socialist transition and more technocratic manifestations of a heavy-handed bureaucratic state socialism—at times described as 'crude and authoritarian', and as reminiscent of Trotsky's 'labour armies'—that were emerging from a growing disillusionment with democracy on the part of certain party intellectuals.[45] Calls were put out for party leaders and future ministers to engage more effectively with 'Members interested in, and having special knowledge of, the problems of particular departments';[46] but the splits in the party meant that, at times, particular experts would not be consulted. In relation to penal affairs, the only 'expert' in the movement was Brockway; yet his calls for revolutionary policy and action meant that he was largely side-lined within Labour circles.[47] In such a polemicised atmosphere, coordinated and coherent progress on an issue as tangential as penal politics was unlikely.

This was largely the story of this period. D. N. Pritt, who would soon travel to Russia and laud the Soviet justice system, was elected as chairman of the Howard League in 1931, and during his tenure a number of Borstals opened between the years 1930 and 1934, though this had little to do specifically with any Labour action. The enquiries set up by Clynes on persistent and sexual offenders failed to report before the fall of the Labour government in 1931 and had few

[44] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 278-9; Beers, 'Counter-Toryism', 251; Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 79. The concept of 'planning', though, was not restricted to socialist circles. See Daniel Ritschel, 'The non-socialist movement for a planned economy in Britain in the 1930s', Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford (1987), vi, and idem, *The Politics of Planning: the Debate on Economic Planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1997).
[45] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 169-70; 173; 175; *New Statesman*, 6 June 1914. LHASC, Henry Noel Brailsford papers, HNB/39/1.
[46] Cited in Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 289.
[47] See the Chairman's Address, *ILPACR, 1932*.

immediate results.[48] Intermittent attempts to translate the recommendations of the Select Committee Enquiry on Capital Punishment into law were attempted via private member's bills, but with little success.[49] The NJC made clear its protestations at the treatment of the prisoners of the Meerut Trial in India and of the imprisonment of Tom Mann and Emrhys Llewellyn of the NUWM,[50] and the economic crisis was sharpening the urgency with which reform groups viewed the issue of prisoner employment, but Labour appeared disinterested in taking up the topic.[51]

In 1933, the *Labour Magazine*, the organ of the Socialist League, attacked the Police Bill (eventually passed as the Metropolitan Police Act) which was introduced by the National Government. The bill sought, in particular, to prohibit police officers of higher rank from membership of the Police Federation union, to establish new procedures for drafting in university-educated (varsity) men to the echelons of the force, and to press deliberately for an increase in the number of arrests and summonses per annum. Such aims were described in the *Labour Magazine* as 'fascist'.[52] With the acknowledged increase in crime, Labourites claimed, the National Government was seeking to form an upper-class force ('a class of spies') in opposition to the poor. 'In a society such as ours', Attlee noted during the bill's second reading, 'which is based on private property and a very wide inequality of individual fortunes, the mass of crime is almost necessarily likely to come from the poorer classes of the community'. In dealing with criminals, '[y]ou want the practical psychology of the man who knows and

[48] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 101-2; 170; 173; 187.
[49] LPA, NEC Minutes, 23 June 1931 on Capital Punishment; Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations, 9 July 1931; and the Report of the National Conference of Labour Women.
[50] *LPACR, 1933*, 19; 21.
[51] Twitchell, *Politics of the Rope*, 21; Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 178.
[52] The *Magazine*'s parent organisation was by this time taking a line on the causes of fascism that was not far removed from the CPGB approach. *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 23 May 1933, vol. 278, cc947-9; Jack Hayes, 'Fascism in the Police Force', *The Labour Magazine: Incorporating the British Trades Union Review and the Labour Party Bulletin*, 12, 2 (June 1933), 67-8. See Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 297-8; Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate*, 157; Thorpe, *History of the British Labour Party*, 88-9.

understands the people with whom he has to work'. '[Y]ou do not want one who has studied philosophy'.[53]

These views were echoed in the Commons by Lansbury, James Maxton and Seymour Cocks, but the bill was eventually passed.[54] In response, the *Labour Magazine* called on the next Labour government to fully reform the British legal system. Proposing a number of resolutions for the upcoming party conference at Hastings, the magazine urged the conference to declare 'that the law of England is in urgent need of fundamental reform and simplification', including, in particular: the establishment of a Ministry of Justice; the reconstitution of the legal profession as a public service; the treatment of crime 'not upon a punitive basis, but rather with a view to cure and prevention'; and the drastic reform of the police and criminal courts.[55] The system, it argued, could not merely be tinkered with; the 'social disease' that embodied the prison system had to be dealt with at its root.[56] At Hastings, the Horsham and Worthing branch proposed a resolution on the reform of the treatment of criminals, but in lieu of a detailed proposal it simply parroted the magazine's phrase, which was subsequently agreed to. At the 'High-water mark of leftism' in 1933, this single sentence was all that the party could muster on penal reform.[57]

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[53] L. Macneill Wier, 'The Trenchard Touch: Police Victims of Vicious Reaction', *The Labour Magazine*, 12, 4 (August 1933), 182-3; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 23 May 1933, vol. 278, cc1055-6. Attlee's own private education was not lost on Conservative members in the chamber. See *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 23 May 1933, vol. 278, cc1057-8.
[54] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 23 May 1933, vol. 278, cc959; 962-3; 968; 987; 999-1000; 1002-5; 1058-9.
[55] Hector Hughes, K. C., 'Labour and Law Reform', *The Labour Magazine*, 12, 4, (August 1933), 157-8.
[56] Ibid, 158.
[57] *LPACR, 1933*, 238-9; Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s*, 28.

Dartmoor and labour camps

In early 1932, a riot at Dartmoor prison occurred as inmates briefly overran the institution. The riot caused much public consternation and garnered a great deal of media coverage. Most significantly, it provided a stern test of the strength of the prevailing direction of penal policy in Britain.[58] Following the suppression of the riot, an enquiry was ordered and reported its findings after just five days of work; charges were brought against thirty-one defendants, with a total of ninety-nine years meted out in sentences.[59] Historians have posited a number of explanations for the riot. Some suggest it occurred as a result of prisoner grievances coupled with the outnumbering of prisoners to prison officers,[60] while others attribute the event to an escape attempt that simply went wrong.[61] According to Robert Adams, following an earlier period of liberal prison governorship at Dartmoor, the re-introduction by the new governor of 'older' forms of discipline had caused the riot. It was noted in the official enquiry that prison governors were almost always external appointments, and generally of upper-class status. As a result, it was argued, externally appointed governors were often out of touch with modern trends in penal reform, as well as with prison officers (a criticism also aimed by the Labour Party at the elitist measures proposed in the Police Bill, as noted above).[62] In a controversial account, J. E. Thomas attributed the riot to the recent reforms of the penal system which had allowed prisoner association, communication and the creation of an intimate community, each of which was alleged to have fostered the furtive scheming of inmates.[63]

[58] Alyson Brown, *Inter-War Crime and Penal Policy in England: The Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot, 1932* (Basingstoke, 2013), 1.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Christopher Harding, Bill Hines, Richard Ireland and Philip Rawlings, *Imprisonment in England and Wales: A Concise History* (London, 1985), 223.
[61] Robert Adams, *Prison Riots in Britain and the USA* (Basingstoke, 1994), 105; 115.
[62] Priestly, *Jail Journeys*, 180; Brown, *Inter-War Crime*, 3.
[63] James E. Thomas, *The English Prison Officer since 1850: A Study in Conflict* (London, 1972), 159.

For Clynes, who had vacated his position at the Home Office by this time, the riot at Dartmoor was certainly not a result of the increasingly humane treatment of prisoners that he had attempted to oversee, nor of overcrowding. Rather, in his opinion the mutiny was the result of a 'denial of human consideration'. In essence, 'dissatisfaction inside certain prisons came to a head' because of the effects of the (re-)introduction of 'new and sterner regimes' that Clynes had always lobbied against.[64] Clynes' successor as Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, agreed with him, but worried that the riot had sharpened the tone of the debate 'between those who thought that the courts and the prison authorities were being too soft with offenders, and those who believed in constructive training'. Rose notes that the former were in the minority, and the official line was against them via a succession of progressive Home Secretaries.[65] The Howard League, however, continued its earlier invective against Clynes, who had always been aware that 'any words of praise' he might utter of English prisons were likely to be 'twisted into a maudlin approval' of the prison system as a whole.[66] In an article entitled 'Lessons from Dartmoor', the League claimed that Clynes had 'paid a flying visit to Dartmoor last summer, and afterwards stated that "Dartmoor presents far more of an educational nature than most people imagine"'. 'If Mr Clynes was referring to the official system at present in vogue', it argued, 'then he was never more mistaken in his life. At Dartmoor one may learn to be a good prisoner or a better burglar, but not a better citizen'.[67]

The Labour press was also less than complimentary of Clynes. The *New Leader* endorsed the *Daily Herald*'s demand for a public enquiry immediately after the riot, but also called for an enquiry into the entire prison system. It criticised Clynes for maintaining that, 'so far as prisons

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[64] Clynes had visited Dartmoor during his time as Home Secretary and claimed 'there was room for twice as many prisoners'. Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 157.
[65] Rose, *The Struggle for Penal Reform*, 173.
[66] Clynes, *Memoirs*, II, 164.
[67] 'Lessons from Dartmoor', *The Howard League*, 3, 3 (1932), 68.

can be made tolerable and physically satisfactory, even Dartmoor will pass the test of the severely critical'. 'The truth', the newspaper claimed, 'is that none of these prisons can be made tolerable. They were built for a repressive regime and cannot be the instruments of a reformative regime'.[68] Echoing the criticisms of the prison system made by the Webbs in their 1922 investigation of prisons under local government, the ILP organ appeared to gloss over the fact that one of its leaders had, ten years prior, implemented a thorough investigation of the prison system and advocated a number of reforms in 1928, to which the party had paid little attention.[69] A later edition of the newspaper noted that the poor conditions exposed at Dartmoor had in fact been revealed by Hobhouse and Brockway's Prison System Enquiry Committee of 1922, but its analysis of the situation ended with the conclusion that the mutiny 'must have arisen from the cruel repression of the Prison System itself'.[70] Despite a surge of discussion in parliament of the prison system in England, the Dartmoor uprising failed to inspire more detailed proposals for reform among the labour movement.[71]

By 1932, unemployment in Britain had risen to 3,730,000, and while Clynes retained his hopes that prisoners would at some point soon be paid for the labour they performed in prison, the TUC was principally concerned with the use of prisoners to 'perform work for which unemployed men, payable at full wages, were available'.[72] This concern was also raised in relation to the reconditioning camps in Britain.[73] The activities of the NUWM, highlighting in

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[68] 'The Dartmoor Inquiry', *New Leader*, 29 January 1932.
[69] In their study, the Webbs had claimed: 'We suspect that it passes the wit of man to contrive a prison which shall not be gravely injurious to the minds of the vast majority of prisoners, if not also to their bodies. So far as can be seen at present, the most practical and hopeful of "prison reforms" is to keep people out of prison altogether!' Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government*, VI, 247-8. See chapter three of this thesis.
[70] 'The Dartmoor Report', *New Leader*, 5 February 1932; 'Dartmoor from the Inside', *New Leader*, 29 January 1932.
[71] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 2 February 1932, vol. 261, cc29-30; 4 February 1932, vol. 261, cc235-7; 8 February 1932, vol. 261, cc500-5; 507-8; 547; 11 February 1932, vol. 261, c.1056W; 18 February 1932, vol. 261, c.1837W; 25 February 1932, vol. 262, cc533-4. See also LHASC, Parliamentary Labour Party Minutes, 27 January 1932.
[72] King, *In the Name of Liberalism*, 173.
[73] MRC, MSS.292//131/3/3; 131.3 (1).

particular the plight of the long-term unemployed and the fight against the Means Test, focused much of its energies on a persistent indictment of the camps. The work of the NUWM was brought to the public's attention most vividly through its organisation of a series of hunger marches to London, the largest of which took place in March 1932 and ended in outbreaks of violence across the capital.[74]

Through *The Unemployed Special*, the NUWM's communist founders attempted to expose what they perceived as the 'spirit of fascism' under which the reconditioning camps, the numbers of which were increasing under the National Government, were being coordinated.[75] While the NUWM conceded that the idea of 'physical training of the unemployed' was acceptable, they warned the unemployed worker of the dangers of being organised into 'drill battalions' and of having a fascist ethic instilled in them, especially within the context of 'the headlong race which is now going on towards war'.[76] The unemployed were, moreover, being treated 'like Criminals' under 'Prison Rule' in 'slave colonies' where conditions were 'indescribable'.[77] 'It is very difficult', the *Special* claimed, to distinguish between prisons and residential labour colonies'.[78]

This distinction was made even murkier with the announcement by the National Government that, 'as an experiment', a 'number of selected prisoners from Wakefield prison are to be taken out of the prison daily to widen and deepen a river bed in the neighbourhood'. The Home Secretary had satisfied himself that this was a particular type of labour that would 'never have

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[74] Dell Gillette Hitchner, *Civil Liberties in England from 1914 to 1940* (Madison, 1940), 144; Matt Perry, *Bread and Work: Social Policy and the Experience of Unemployment, 1918-39* (London, 2000), 104; Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 274.
[75] *The Unemployed Special*, July 1932. See also LHASC, Wal Hannington papers, CP/IND/HANN/02/03.
[76] *The Unemployed Special*, July 1932.
[77] Ibid, August 1932.
[78] Ibid, September 1932.

been carried out by ordinary paid labour'; so, 'since ordinary labour would prove profitless to the Government in such an enterprise, they are openly and blatantly exploiting the slave labour of the convicts'.[79] As communists in both the NUWM and the CPGB continued to hail Russia as an example of full employment, Philip Snowden's comment that, while '[t]there is no unemployment in Russia … Neither is there unemployment in Dartmoor', was regurgitated in the *Special* to demonstrate the hypocrisy of leading governmental figures. In the communist journal *Labour Monthly*, the camps were denounced as 'fascist' institutions, though the denunciation, by implication, of the Soviet Union went unacknowledged.[80]

In contrast to the incendiary attacks on the camps by the communists and the NUWM, figures from the Labour Party took a decidedly positive approach. Cole, in fact, saw the current network of camps as merely an initial attempt to deal with the more than three million unemployed workers.[81] The current problem with the reconditioning centres, Cole stated, was that training was inadequate and there were no jobs for trainees following their course of reconditioning.[82] Instead, in *The Next Ten Years*, Cole advocated the establishment of a National Labour Corps under a socialist Britain. Under this organisation, every unemployed worker would be available for 'any useful form of national service' as part of a 'disciplined, but in no sense a military body'. Acting as a 'great body of civil engineers, with the task of making the country as a whole both a pleasanter place to inhabit, and a more efficient

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid; *Parliamentary Debates*, (Lords), 22 June 1932, vol. 85, c.347; Fred Douglas, 'Organising "Slave Labour" in Britain, *Labour Monthly: A Magazine of International Labour*, 13, 4 (1931), 226. Douglas stated: 'In fine, "labour, detention and penal colonies" are the corner stone on which British Capitalism seeks to reconstruct its shattered fortunes. Small wonder that the filth which our bourgeoisie throws at Soviet Russia stinks so vilely when it is in fact their own excrement!'.
[81] *The Unemployed Special*, October 1932.
[82] Cole, *The Next Ten Years*, 51; 53.

productive concern', the corps would resemble an organised body of workers such as that which built the Panama Canal.[83]

While Cole stressed the voluntary nature of his Labour Corps, Kevin Morgan notes that he also drew on a 'pre-war Webbian vocabulary of waste and degeneration' (much like the language of 'hardening' that surrounded Labour's implementation of the reconditioning centres). Cole's use of the example of the Panama Canal, which, Morgan points out, had been 'advertised as an embryonic form of guilds organisation in the founding charter of guild socialism', and was constructed by the US Army under the strictest martial law, suggested close parallels with Trotsky's labour armies and the Bolsheviks' own militarisation of labour.[84] Sidney Webb once described the construction of the Panama Canal as the 'crudest and most authoritarian State Socialism … the world has yet seen', and the jump from a 'labour army' to a militarised command economy was one that had already been witnessed in Soviet Russia.[85] Cole thus provided a platform for an alternative and much more radical approach to the issues of unemployment and the conscription of industrial labour (the *New Leader*, in 1929, had already run the headline 'Gosplan Wanted'[86]); and the Labour Party drew on this at times, with the *Daily Herald* openly lauding the 'concentration camps' it had helped to establish through the mid-1930s.[87] Its messages on compulsion, reform and criminality remained disjointed.

Throughout this period, the Soviet exemplar still remained uncertain for many Labour figures, despite its apparent economic success.[88] Yet the party agreed that 'the necessary corollary of

[83] Ibid, 51-2. In his reference to the canal, Cole conveniently ignored the alarming number of deaths recorded during its construction.
[84] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 172-3.
[85] Webb, cited in Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 173.
[86] *New Leader*, 8 November 1929. Gosplan was the abbreviated title of *Gosudarstvennyi Planovyi Komitet*, the State Planning Committee of the USSR.
[87] See *Daily Herald*, 15 March 1934; 16 March; 17 March; 19 March; 22 March, discussed below.
[88] *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 289-90, entry 3 October and 5 October 1932.

any new attempt for power lay in searching for new ideas'; and Russia 'provided the best experiment testbed around … because it was far from Britain and could be examined without too much harm'.[89] Without wanting to overcommit to the Soviet example, the USSR could still act as a 'midwife for new ideas and attitudes that went far beyond the framework of Anglo-Soviet relations'.[90] In this vein, calls from all areas of the labour movement for the reform of the British justice and penal systems meant that, as the phenomenon of fellow-travelling began to boom through the 1930s, the corresponding Soviet systems could once more be studied and evaluated in light of the labour movement's search for new, and in certain party factions, radical ideas.

5.3 Return to Russia: Fellow-travellers and Soviet Justice

Unlike in the 1920s, when visitors to the Soviet Union were often on the fringes of the labour movement, the fellow-travellers of the 1930s attracted far greater publicity, and the visitors themselves often acted, as Williams puts it, as 'opinion leaders'.[91] Though the practical influence of fellow-travellers upon the Labour Party in this decade is disputed, it is undeniable that many of those who made the pilgrimage were established and reputable characters within the labour movement.[92] As capitalism appeared to be breaking down, the attraction of the Soviet Union and its apparent economic achievements only increased, confirming it as the only existing example of socialism that Labour could look towards. The benefits of transnational and inter-cultural comparative study in improving the condition of Britain were thus openly

[89] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 162; Callaghan, 'British Labour's turn to Socialism in 1931'.
[90] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 162; 221.
[91] Ibid, 142.
[92] See for example Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (Stanford, 1961), 251, and Neil Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (London, 1959), 42-50.

espoused,[93] but, as Toye has argued, the influence of the USSR upon the Labour Party in this area has rarely been acknowledged in detail.[94]

Recent research has made clear that the economic prosperity and innovation of centralised Soviet planning was certainly not the only attraction for fellow-travellers. Nor, in many cases, was it the most influential aspect. The technocratic allure of the Soviets' organisation of economic life was certainly part of the appeal (especially for those figures whose embrace of the Soviet experiment had been prohibited in the 1920s because of the bloody consequences of the Russian civil war), but the perceived social ideals on display in the USSR were also increasingly being emphasised.[95] Morgan notes that, frequently, planning was not 'the precise route' to enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment. Rather, non-statist social reform and the social patina of a new moral code that emphasised a 'regeneration' of the human spirit as part of a collective endeavour, went hand-in-hand with the economic spirit of the first Five-Year Plan (1928-32).[96] As Harold Laski wrote in 1935, Soviet Communism 'has redefined the canons of human behaviour as surely and as impressively as the Reformation or the French Revolution'.[97]

Morgan's reassessment has important implications for an examination of British investigations into the Soviet penal system. Less important in the 1930s were the institutional aspects of the Soviet prison regime that had impressed the British in the 1920s; instead, the broader moral values underlying the system were focused on. As a result, the Soviet prison represented an organisation that cut across the cleavages of social ideals and technocracy described by

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[93] Callaghan, 'British Labour's turn to Socialism in 1931', 119; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 600.
[94] Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy*, 35.
[95] Worley, *Oswald Mosley*, 30.
[96] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 162; 165-6; 184; 202.
[97] Harold J. Laski, 'Soviet Russia, the Structure and the Spirit, the Webbs' Survey', *Manchester Guardian*, 25 November 1935.

Morgan: a state-controlled institution that sought to refashion the human spirit via a new moralistic code. Toye correctly states that the temptation to read a 'mass commitment' on the part of British visitors to the Soviet vision must be resisted; excitement about the Soviet experiment as a source of ideas and inspiration persisted, but, as a move away from the admiration of the institutional or functional aspects of the Soviet prison suggests, the idea that the Soviet project could provide British socialists with bespoke, 'off the shelf' solutions to their problems had certainly diminished since the mid-1920s. The enthusiasm that was displayed, though, should not be precluded and requires further examination and explanation.[98] The priority of penal reform remained low on the British agenda, but its inclusion as part of an enthusiasm for a new Soviet social and moral code afforded it a greater role than might otherwise have been the case. A critical analysis of what visitors found and why their enthusiasm failed to penetrate further within the labour movement's policy-making is required.[99]

1928-1931 and George Bernard Shaw

Already in 1928, members of the British left had begun to visit the Russia of the Five-Year Plan era. John Strachey, a disciple of Oswald Mosley who would be elected Labour MP for Aston in 1929, had completed his first trip in 1928 and returned to write a series of complimentary articles for the *New Leader*. Acting as Mosely's parliamentary private secretary, Strachey soon claimed in the *Manchester Guardian* that the 'miracles' envisioned by Lenin were becoming a reality under Stalin.[100] In 1929, too, a factory workers' delegation visited Moscow. In the *kul'tpokaz* style, the delegation inspected a Moscow prison, where 'a citizen's social faults are rectified'. 'The idea of "punishment" or "prison discipline"', the

[98] Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy*, 60.
[99] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 181.
[100] *Manchester Guardian*, 27 February 1930.

visitors noted, 'is laughed at as an immaturity from the despotic type of mind'.[101] While the practical aspects of the daily functioning of the prison administration impressed the visitors, the inculcation of a new social ethic within the prisoners was emphasised most strongly in the delegation's report. '[U]sed to the essential vengefulness of so-called capitalist justice', the delegates 'were at first amused and astonished at the free and easy trustfulness of the Soviet "prison" system'. Quickly, though, 'they were powerfully impressed by the superb sanity of it', in making men 'mended … wholesome and restored to their right social stature as human beings'.[102]

Further positive reports were provided in 1930 as the distinguished Marxian economist Maurice Dobb, a CPGB member since 1922, recorded complimentary experiences of the Soviet experiment, before perhaps the most significant visits yet for the British left.[103] In 1930, Strachey returned to Russia for the second time in two years, accompanied this time by Aneurin Bevan, Jenny Lee and George Strauss. Influential figures in the labour movement, their itinerary was very much in the conducted *kul'tpokaz* style. Lee returned to report how strong a hold 'all things Russian' still had on socialists, while Strachey and Bevan found developments in the USSR 'astonishing and stimulating'. In their report (co-written with Strauss), *What We Saw in Russia* (1931), both figures claimed the experience in Soviet Russia to be most relevant to Britain.[104] Strauss was equally effusive in his praise for Soviet society, his visit prompting him to declare in the Commons in 1931 that the conditions in Soviet institutions were 'very much more favourable than in our English prisons'.[105]

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[101] *Russia To-day—Britain To-morrow. Report of the British Factory Workers' Delegation to Soviet Russia for the Twelfth Celebration of the Revolution, November, 1929* (London, 1929), 48.
[102] Ibid, 48-9.
[103] See Maurice Dobb, *In Soviet Russia* (London, 1930) and *Soviet Russia and the World* (London, 1932). E. J. E. Hobsbawm, 'Dobb, Maurice Herbert (1900–1976)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (London, 2004), XVI, 338-9.
[104] Aneurin Bevan, John Strachey and George Strauss, *What We Saw in Russia* (London, 1931), 29.
[105] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 25 March 1931, vol. 250, c.432.

Strauss, moreover, was not the only Labour figure to show admiration in the Commons. On 25 March 1931, a number of Conservatives accused the Labour government of ignoring a human catastrophe in the labour camps of Soviet Russia.[106] Speaking for the government, though, William Graham, MP for Edinburgh Central, rebuffed their criticisms on the premise of a lack of evidence (despite having been briefed by the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade, of which he was president, on the volume of evidence available).[107] Both Frank Wise, ILP member for Leicester East, and Morgan Philips Price, by now the Labour MP for Whitehaven, also defended the Soviet system, citing the apathy that the Conservatives had shown in the 1920s when an inquiry in to the conditions of Indian prisons was proposed.[108] Clearly, these visits had a strong enough effect to push fellow-travellers to publicly re-assess the utility they perceived in the Soviet Union as an exemplar for the British justice system.

In the same year that Strauss vaunted the Soviet prison system, a chief Labour Party theorist, R. H. Tawney, also travelled to the USSR. Tawney's socialism was directed in large part by his Christian faith, and he was known for his nuanced judgments of policies on the basis of their 'moral intentions'.[109] And while, following his visit in 1931, Tawney remained 'frightened at the lack of personal freedom' in the USSR, he had nevertheless been 'converted to the equalitarian state in practice as well as in theory'. His later drift towards the more moderate line of Ernest Bevin and Attlee, as well as their support for an Anglo-American alliance against Soviet communism, does not deny his approbation for the Soviet state, which carried a good deal of significance given Tawney's standing in the Labour ranks.[110] Yet his

[106] Ibid, cc423; 429; 460-1; 471.
[107] Ibid, cc479; 482.
[108] Ibid, c.463.
[109] Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R. H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), 177; R. H. Tawney, 'British Socialism Today', *Socialist Commentary*, June 1953, 339.
[110] See R. H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1964 [1931]); Udy, *Labour and the Gulag*, 519-20; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 184-5.

'cherishing [of] … political freedoms'—a tendency noted by the Soviets as uniquely inherent to the British perspective—meant that, like so much of the socialist movement, Tawney always harboured doubts, despite the attempts of other Labour Party members to convince him that Stalin was gradually permitting further freedoms.[111] Nevertheless, the praise of the Soviet system by these figures is significant, and demonstrates the development of an increasingly sympathetic view of the USSR. As the rate at which fellow-travellers visiting Russia began to increase, the depth of this sympathy would only be reinforced.

Tawney's approbation was certainly modest compared with that of George Bernard Shaw, who undertook the most publicised visit of 1931 in the company of Nancy Astor, Conservative MP, her husband Waldorf, and Lord Lothian, a Liberal and future ambassador to the United States. Shaw had been an early member of the Fabian Society and, while his disillusionment with the gradualism of the society had grown steadily since the early 1900s (while his enthusiasm for 'strong' dictators and the Soviet experiment had intensified in the 1920s), the literary and oratory powers of the famous Irish playwright ensured his status as an 'opinion leader' remained secure within the broader labour movement. As Michael-David Fox points out, Soviet preparations for Shaw's visit reached enormous scales, and the trip became one of the greatest success stories of Soviet cultural diplomacy in the 1930s.[112] In Britain, Shaw's visit was closely documented by various newspapers, and came at a time when reports of the increasingly personalised dictatorship of Stalin, as well as persistent rumours of the use of slave labour in Russia, were gaining traction.[113] But the Soviets were eager to impress Shaw, who evidently embarked upon his visit with ingrained predispositions about the USSR. The *Moscow*

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[111] I. E. Gorodetskaia, *Velikobritaniia: Izbirateli, vybory, partii, 1945-1970* (Moskva, 1974), 129; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 195.
[112] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 111-12; 212.
[113] *New Statesman and Nation*, 3 January 1931; *Slave Labour: The actual experiences of three escaped Russian Prisoners. A Sworn Statement* (Westminster, 1931) 4-6.

News proclaimed the Soviet Union's excitement at Shaw's decision to visit, and Anna Louise Strong, an American journalist and supporter of the USSR, did her utmost to welcome the Irishman through the English-language publication she had founded out of Moscow.[114] Rumours of slave labour were publicly denied for Shaw's benefit, as the Soviets tried fervently to demonstrate that the famous socialist had been pulled to 'our side'.[115]

The seriousness which Shaw's visit was afforded was made clear by the lavish committee that met his arrival in Russia, as well as his being granted a meeting with Stalin that lasted for over two hours.[116] Shaw embarked upon a number of orchestrated 'cultural events' that appealed to his egotistical nature, but his meeting with Stalin and his visit to the Bolshevo colony for delinquents are most pertinent to this analysis. Shaw's meeting with Stalin was covered closely by newspapers in Britain and the Soviet Union, and the reports of the meeting, as well as Shaw's own digressions, helped to impress upon the British the notion of Stalin as a 'goodhumoured' and 'charming' leader.[117] Shaw would, during his return journey to Britain, recall Stalin as a 'giant' (*gigant*), while labelling all Western leaders as 'pygmies' (*pigmen*).[118] Such commentary, in line with Shaw's descriptions of the Soviet Union's transformation from a 'lazy, drunken, dirty, superstitious, slavish' (*lenivaia*, *p'ianaia*, *griaznaia*, *suevernaia*, *rabskaia*) imperial state to an 'energetic, sober, clean … intellectual … selfless' (*energichnoi*, *trezvoi*, *chistoi … intellektual'noi … beskorystnoi*) polity helped to cast an extremely positive image of the USSR. Importantly, too, it helped to bury Shaw's underlying covetousness for a

[114] *Moscow News*, 13 July 1931; 23 July.
[115] *Moscow News*, 23 July 1931; David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 214.
[116] *Trud*, 21 July 1931; 30 July.
[117] *Moscow News*, 18 August 1931; *Trud*, 30 July 1931; *Pravda*, 30 July 1931; RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 831, l. 101.
[118] *Trud*, 3 August 1931.

centralised control of power and leaders who 'got things done' with little regard for the social or human costs—chiefly Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini.[119]

Shaw had almost nothing negative to report of his visit, and this was especially the case of his trip to the Bolshevo 'Correctional Colony for Delinquents', situated outside of Moscow. Established in 1924 and made world-famous by Maksim Gorky's 1928 visit, through the 1930s the Bolshevo Colony largely replaced the model show prisons that had acted as the external representation of the Soviet justice system in the 1920s. It quickly became an important site through which the Soviets could humanise the dreaded secret police and propagate the 'virtues of rehabilitation in the Soviet penal system'. Significantly, it could also demonstrate how an 'intense revolutionary focus on youth as the future of the new order was wedded to the principle of the environment shaping the new man'.[120] Shaw, given a guided tour by Litvinov (whom he had met previously), fell instantly for the Soviet demonstration and was induced to make comparisons between the 'humanistic socialization through the environment' that he witnessed in Russia, and the fact that 'in England a delinquent enters [prison] as an ordinary man and comes out as a "criminal type"'.[121] The Soviet colony was more 'like Battersea Park' than the 'villainous house[s] of torment spotted all over' England; and in its productive capacity it certainly did not yield the 'criminal type which our prisons produce'.[122] '[N]one of these [inmates] … would have been any better off as innocent persons earning their livings in an English factory'.[123]

[119] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 159-60; Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 169.
[120] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 158-60.
[121] Ibid, 163; George Bernard Shaw, *The Rationalization of Russia* (Bloomington, 1964), 91. Shaw was on good terms with Litvinov's Anglo-Russian wife, Ivy, having met her several times in the past. See John Carswell, *The Exile: A Life of Ivy Litvinov* (London, 1983), 42; 77; 127-8.
[122] Shaw, *Rationalization of Russia*, 90; 92.
[123] Ibid, 92.

Shaw's account of Bolshevo, like Gorky's own earlier propagandistic account, 'betrayed the tendency … to read social experience through a biological lens'. As Daniel Beer shows, early Soviet criminologists repudiated the existence of Lombroso's 'born criminal', but 'nevertheless in effect saw class consciousness and class instincts as something that could be … transmitted from parents to offspring'.[124] Comparing the Russian system with the West, as was the Soviets' desire for their visitors, and claiming for the Soviets a victory in 'civilizational norms' allowed for the conflation of social and biological categories that implicitly permitted figures like Gorky (and, in turn, Shaw) to turn 'so readily to a dehumanizing physical description' of Bolshevo inmates that was 'replete with the same language of eugenics that he [Gorky] condemned in the U.S. context'.[125] This language was unlikely anyway to deter Shaw, who had fairly consistently advocated for eugenicist solutions for 'the unfit', and who in any case did 'not reproach the Soviet Government … for shooting anarchists and syndicalists', nor for reserving the right to murder its people or for 'weeding the garden'. In statements that have been uncomfortably omitted in the accounts of Shaw's biographers, the playwright hoped openly that in Russia 'the untameable human wild beasts are … humanely liquidated, as they should be everywhere'.[126]

The importance of the Soviet penal system to the communist propaganda programme is emphasised by the fact that Shaw, the Astors and Lord Lothian were made to view, more than once during their visit, Nikolai Ekk's cinematic opus, *The Road to Life* (*Putevka v zhizn'*) (1931), which both popularised and sanitised the work of OGPU-controlled colonies across the Soviet Union. Like A. A. Cherkasov's 1928 film *Solovki* before it, and both Alexander Lemberg's *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii vodnyi put* (1933) and Gorky's narrative of the convict-built

[124] Beer, *Renovating Russia*, 72; 200.
[125] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 171.
[126] Shaw, *Rationalization of Russia*, 71-3; 92-3; idem, 'Preface to On the Rocks', 362. See Michael Holyrood, *George Bernard Shaw*, 4 vols (London, 1988-92), III, 339; Udy, *Labour and the Gulag*, 475-501.

White Sea-Baltic canal, *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina* (1934) that would follow it, *The Road to Life* reinforced all the positive aspects of the Soviet penal system, as well as of Stalin himself, that the visitors had been subjected to.[127] And such a propaganda surge clearly worked: Lord Lothian urged Britons to learn from Soviet Russia; and even Astor and her husband, in their diary of the trip, noted of Bolshevo that though the criminals 'live without restraint … [they] are taught trades and paid regular wages … Like so many things in this strange country it seems to be working'.[128]

Following his visit Shaw proclaimed that, in all the right ways, the USSR treats their criminals 'very leniently' (*Oni ochen' sniskhoditel'no otnosiatsia k svoim prestupnikam*).[129] He was by now convinced that socialism was being introduced upon Fabian gradualist lines in the USSR, and was unhappy to be returning to 'our Western countries of despair'.[130] From the Soviet perspective, the visit had been a resounding success,[131] and despite his cognisance of his lavish treatment, Shaw felt the same, encouraging young people to travel to and settle in Russia upon his return.[132] The influence among the British labour movement of this grand charade, however, was ultimately limited. While Shaw could be categorised as an 'opinion leader', it is difficult

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[127] See A. A. Cherkasov, *Solovki* (Moskva, 1927-28); Maksim Gorky, 'V Solovki', *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moskva, 1952), 201; Gorky et al., *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina: istoriia stroitel'stva* (Moskva, 1934); Ivan I. Chukhin, *Kanalo-armeitsy: istoriia stroitel'stva Belomorkanala v dokumentakh, tsifrakh, faktakh, fotografiiakh, svidetel'stvakh uchastnikov i ochevidtsev* (Petrozavodsk, 1990), 25; Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford, 2010), 125-47. The English-language publication of Gorky's volume is entitled *Belomor: Being An Account of the Construction of the New Canal Between the White Sea and the Baltic Sea* (London, 1935).

[128] MERL, Nancy Astor Papers, MS 1416/2/2—Visit to Russia, 1931 (A/3); *New Statesman and Nation*, 4 July 1931.

[129] RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 202, ll. 71-84, '*Rech Bernada Shou po radio v Ameriku o ego poezdke v SSSR, s resoliutsiei Stalina, I. V.*'.

[130] *The Times*, 6 August 1931; *Trud*, 7 August 1931; Shaw, *Rationalization of Russia*, 31.

[131] There did, however, appear a few anomalous but nuanced articles that saw through the Shavian veneer and branded the playwright nothing more than 'a chance guest', who was not 'a warrior in either [capitalist or communist] camp'. *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 16 June 1932; *Moscow News*, 23 July 1931.

[132] Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains: The Political Thought of Bernard Shaw* (London, 1933), 244; MERL, Nancy Astor Papers, MS 1416/2/1—Visit to Russia, 1931 (A/2), Ella Winter to G. B. Shaw, 13 August 1931; *Manchester Guardian*, 13 August 1931.

‘to ascertain to what extent … [he] was taken seriously within the Labour Party’.[133] Toye argues that Shaw’s relaying of his findings in Russia had little influence on the development of Labour policy, and this is in the main correct.[134] Morgan, too, suggests that even with regard to the Webbs, Shaw’s fellow Fabians and collaborators, the ‘suggestion that they were Shaw’s “converts” to Soviet Communism is misconceived’.[135] In the area of penal politics, his visit is unlikely to have changed the minds of those in the labour movement any more forcefully than the reports from the 1920s might have, despite his fervid accounts. Yet the vastness of Shaw’s corpus of followers may well have seen the issue brought to new audiences. His visit is proof of the extent to which Labour was ‘prepared to extend considerable indulgence towards its members’ utterances on Russia, no matter how extreme’.[136]

The Co-operative Union and the NFRB

Visitors to Russia through the years of the first Five-Year Plan were witnessing a transformational process, not a clear-cut, finished product. And as had been the case in the years of civil war following the October Revolution, as well as at the beginning of the NEP, the conceptualisation by British socialists of rapid industrialisation and rural collectivisation (1928 to 1932) as a sequential element of the Soviet ‘experiment’ afforded the USSR a temporal extenuation that often resulted in more forgiving assessments of Soviet conditions.[137] On their part, the Soviets were, by 1932, far more confident in their own assessment of their penal system, especially with regards to its appearance to foreign audiences and its packaging as a simplified, understandable and appealing concept. ‘Crime’, the *Moscow News* proclaimed:

[133] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 145-6.
[134] Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy*, 43.
[135] Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 160.
[136] Udy, *Labour and the Gulag*, 493.
[137] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 177; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 213.

is the result of social and economic conditions. That was the principle which promoted the organization of the Labour Commune. Remove the people from corrupting influences; give them the type of work which will make an appeal to them; offer them a means of subsistence—and they will not desire to lead a life of vagrancy on the streets.[138]

By now, the sense of superiority of the Soviet system over the West was at its apex. Soviet authorities proclaimed that:

> '[the] victorious development of socialism [*pobedonosnoe razvitie sotsializma*] in the USSR in the past three years, the elimination of the exploitative classes [*likvitdatsiia ekspluatatorskikh klassov*] and the growth of socialist relations [*rost sotsialisticheskikh otnoshenii*] have made significant changes in the dynamics and in the nature of crime'.[139]

Between 1929 and 1932, the Soviets claimed that, in England, the number of those convicted of crimes of violence against property (*prestupleniia protiv sobstvennosti s nasiliem*) had increased by 79.2 per cent. 'A comparison of the number of crimes per 100,000 population in a number of capitalist countries (Italy, Poland, England) with the Soviet Union shows that the "level" of crime in capitalist countries (*uroven' prestupnosti v kapitalisticheskikh stranakh*) is in total about two and a half times higher than in the Soviet Union'.[140] Bourgeois criminal statistics demonstrated quite clearly, it was argued, 'the impossibility of a real fight against

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[138] *Moscow News*, 2 August 1933.
[139] GARF, f. R-9474, op. 16, d. 79, l. 11, '*O dvizhenii i kharaktere prestupnosti i o sudebnoi bor'be s prestupnost'iu s 1933 goda po 1935 god*'.
[140] GARF, f. R-9474, op. 16, d. 80, ll. 3-4, '*Prestupnost' v SSSR. Materialy k dokladu na 54 plenume Verkhsuda SSSR*'.

crime [*nevozmozhnost' real'noi bor'by s prestupnost'iu*] in capitalist society'.[141] What needed to be continually demonstrated to foreign visitors was the growth of 'socialist consciousness' (*sotsialisticheskoe soznanie*) and the 'new attitude to public property' (*novoe otnoshenie k obshshestvennoi sobstvennosti*) that had led to such great reductions in crime across the Soviet Union.[142]

The Soviet approach continued to glean positive results with Western visitors. Ella Winter, the British-Australian journalist and Soviet sympathiser, repeated almost word-for-word for her international audience the Soviet theory on crime.[143] Anna Louise Strong vaunted the Soviet penal system as aiming 'to give the criminal a new environment in which he will begin to act … as a responsible Soviet citizen. The less confinement the better; the less he feels himself in prison the better'.[144] Even Sir Bernard Pares, the English historian who had publicly supported Kolchak's White Army during the civil war, hailed the Bolsheviks' use of 'correction' in place of punishment.[145] As Hollander usefully notes, in respect of non-political offenders in the early 1930s, 'the more enlightened penal policies' implemented by the Bolsheviks in 'the 1920s had not yet been completely wiped out', and influential British visitors continued to fawn over these aspects of the Soviet system.[146]

In the summer of 1932, two delegations from the Co-operative Union visited the Soviet Union upon long-standing invitations from *Tsentrosoiuz* (the Central Union of Russian Co-operatives).[147] Different figures within the Co-operative movement had taken an interest in the

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[141] GARF, f. R-9474, op. 16, d. 80, l. 4.
[142] GARF, f. R-9474, op. 16, d. 80, l. 24.
[143] Ella Winter, *Red Virtue* (London, 1933), 206.
[144] Anna Louise Strong, *This Soviet World* (New York, 1936), 254.
[145] Bernard Pares, *Moscow Admits a Critic* (London, 1936), 91.
[146] Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 150.
[147] *New Leader*, 7 March 1930.

society being sculpted in revolutionary Russia, and the movement itself included in its membership influential Labour figures like E. F. Wise. Yet the movement's broader interest in providing 'alternative models for the role of the consumer in the market', its stress on 'practices of mutual association' and its adaptation of its message over time meant that its interest in Bolshevism was never firmly entrenched.[148] In principle, though, the union was unconcerned with the apparatus of a centralised state, which allowed figures like Lansbury to conflate the aims of co-operation, socialism, Bolshevism and universal service in his own earlier trips to Soviet Russia.[149] Most significantly, though, co-operators assumed the role of 'moral reformers', and among their key traits were, in Morgan's words:

> a susceptibility to institutional indices of well-being … and a profound ambiguity as to the ends of co-operation that proved especially vulnerable to the Soviet symbiosis of state and society … [T]his was precisely the environment in which Russophilia seemed to flourish.[150]

Co-operators were, then, likely to constitute a receptive audience to choreographed Soviet demonstrations of how their penal system measured its 'socialist' results. They were, moreover, as a result of their own 'ambiguity', susceptible to accepting Soviet methods at face value, especially when foregrounded in a moralistic value system.[151] Once more, this turned out to be the case when the delegations visited Soviet prisons, their report lauding a penal

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[148] Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge, 2003), 106; Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England* (Manchester, 1996), 29; Nicole Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960: Minding Their Own Business* (Surrey, 2010), 47-9.

[149] This was especially the case following Lenin's declaration, shortly before his death, that co-operation was, in conjunction with Soviet power, identical to the growth of socialism. See Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 162; 183.

[150] Ibid, 183; 199.

[151] Thomas F. Carbery, *Consumers in Politics: A History and general Review of the Co-operative Party* (Manchester, 1969), 26.

system that had been most emphatically condemned under the tsarist regime. It was, upon visiting the Lefortovsky prison in Moscow, easy to see the difference between those who had been through a Soviet prison and 'the cowed and broken-spirited condition of a man who has been in an English prison'.[152] The humanity of this 'novel prison system' appealed greatly to the guests, its focus on 'correction' over 'punishment', the payment of wages for labour and the reduction of sentences in accordance with days worked instilling within prisoners a new set of values through positive, socially useful action.[153]

In its own search for new socialist ideas, the NFRB also visited the USSR in 1932. Prior to its trip, the NFRB had produced two documents relating to the visit. The first, a 'Memorandum on a Plan of Research into International Relations and Policy', took as its focus a foreign policy interest. The second, a 'Proposed Mission of Inquiry to Russia 1932', focused on the domestic interest of Soviet Russia for the Labour Party:

> While it is recognised that conditions in this country would require a policy very different from that at present pursued by the Soviets, it is obvious that over a very large range of subjects … valuable lessons can be learnt from the Russian experiment.

Labour and the NFRB remained so interested in the Soviet project because:

> in no instance has there been a thorough-going inquiry conducted by members of the Labour Party into Russian economic developments in the last few years with the definite objective of using the results to assist in the working out of a Socialist policy

[152] Co-operative Union, *Soviet Russia, 1932: Reports of Two Groups of Co-operators on a Visit to the USSR in the summer of 1932*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1933), 56-7.
[153] Ibid, 57-8.

> for Great Britain … [T]he … Labour movement is intensely alive to the importance of the Russian experiment, and anxious above all things to avail itself of Russian experience as soon as this can be made clearly and intelligibly available for it.[154]

A report of this nature would, it was stated, 'do more at the present time to concentrate and clarify Labour thought and Labour energies than any form of propaganda'.[155]

The best available experts, representing a broad cross section of the labour movement, were requested to be part of the delegation, with a 'star-studded' line-up that included the likes of Attlee, Bevin and Dalton on the initial shortlist.[156] The delegation quickly published the findings of their investigation, entitled *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia*, upon their return to Britain, and in the introduction Cole and Clement Attlee stated that the authors, each of whom studied a different aspect of Soviet society, 'went out for a definite purpose, knowing within fairly narrow limits what questions [they were] setting out to answer'. In particular, they 'were … on the look out for such features of the Soviet system as seemed likely to be of interest and importance to Socialists in Great Britain'.[157] While much of the focus of the trip was on the financial and economic systems of the Soviet Union, the 'Russian Legal System' (and by implication its prison and penal systems) was for the first time officially acknowledged as providing an exemplar from which Britain could learn.

In its report the delegation was careful to note that each individual author was 'solely responsible for the conclusions which he has drawn'—a clear indication of the perceived need

[154] New Fabian Research Bureau, 'Proposed Mission of Inquiry to Russia 1932', 4 March 1932, cited in Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 157.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid, 155; Caute, *Fellow Travellers*, 70.
[157] New Fabian Research Bureau, *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia* (London, 1933), 7-8.

to make few 'official' commitments to the Soviet project on behalf of the Labour Party. Overall the reports were positive, with the experience of Dalton in particular having considerable significance for his future politics of 'planning'.[158] Margaret Cole, too, taking the place of her husband as a result of illness, described feeling as though 'One has come home'.[159] In some instances the conclusions of the delegates fluctuated drastically, and the official detachment of the NFRB from the views of its individual representatives allowed 'the excessive claims of the few' to be 'buried among the modesties of the most important contributors'.[160]

D. N. Pritt, a successful barrister who had not long been a socialist, studied the Soviet legal system, and has historically been considered one of those who made excessive claims on the NFRB's behalf. Having examined the Soviet court system and naively pardoned the OGPU of its more disproportionate activities, Pritt moved on to his main aspect of study, the Soviet prison regime.[161] In the main, his report was a repetition of those of many previous delegations, pointing out the key prison features that were extolled as part of the *kul'tpokaz* package.[162] But Pritt also made a number of nuanced points. Firstly he provided, for perhaps the first time, a clear analysis of the strata of the prison system. The worst type of prison, he noted, was the closed institution, which housed the 'more difficult prisoners'. These institutes were still far better than their English equivalent, but would in a few years be eradicated.[163] The second type of prison, the 'open or semi-open camp', was in many ways better than the closed prison; but it was the third type of prison, 'the modern type of labour commune', which 'constitute[d] one

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[158] Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton*, (Basingstoke, 1986), 208-12; BLPES, LSE, Hugh Dalton Papers, Dalton/1/53 'Diary to USSR', 12 July 1932, 26.
[159] Cited in Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 178.
[160] Ibid; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 170.
[161] D. N. Pritt, K. C., 'The Russian Legal System', in NFRB, *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia* (London, 1933), 149.
[162] These included the shorter sentences utilised in the USSR, the idea of correction instead of punishment, the equalitarian atmosphere of the institution, the range of activities and educational tasks available to prisoners, the self-sustaining and self-governing nature of the prison and the lack of stigma upon release in keeping levels of recidivism low. Pritt, 'The Russian Legal System', 161-4.
[163] Ibid, 161-2.

of the most encouraging phenomena of modern Russia'.[164] Having inspected the Bolshevo Labour Commune, Pritt extolled the virtues of this type of camp as being 'indistinguishable from any other village' and producing the 'most excellent results'.[165] This was a relatively straightforward point to make, but it had rarely been done so before.

The second observation Pritt made concerned the effect of the Soviet Union's eradication of unemployment upon the rehabilitation of criminals. An ostensibly key feature of the Soviet programme was the training and employment of prisoners in skilled labour within the prison. This was possible, Pritt noted, because of the 'complete absence of any of the problems that in the unemployment countries obstruct all efforts to find work for the prisoners or to market their products'.[166] Moreover, the knowledge 'that every prisoner on leaving can find work at once', given the demand for skilled labour, and 'the fact that the labour of the prisoners can make the prison virtually self-supporting … provide a foundation on which a humane administration can build more hopefully'.[167] The effect, then, of statist, centralised economic planning upon the new value system being constructed in the Soviet Union was epitomised in the Soviet prison system. For visitors like Pritt, the 'redefinition of human behaviour' was just as important, and inherently tied up with, the technocratic allure of the USSR.

Pritt's final observation was perhaps his boldest:

> Substantially speaking, everything that Russia has recently done is what English reformers have preached for years with unflagging courage; and their courage will be

[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid, 161-3.

> rewarded, no doubt, when the favourable conditions that have helped reform Russia are present with us.[168]

For this comment (in conjunction with his increasing infatuation with the Soviet system on his return to Britain, and his later apologia for the Stalinist show trials), Pritt has largely been dismissed in historical accounts as an unthinking sympathiser.[169] In particular, Williams castigates him for 'ignoring the reality of what … [he] looked at'.[170] Yet, as is demonstrated in chapter three, the Soviets had created a masterful cultural-diplomatic apparatus during the 1920s through which they successfully surveilled, appropriated and sold back to westerners their own ideas, including the most contemporary theories of penal reform, fitted out in Soviet dress. For propaganda purposes, the Bolsheviks had never been afraid to borrow freely from an international vocabulary.[171] Moreover, many of the changes that Pritt detailed had indeed been discussed as far back as 1925 at the International Prison and Penitentiary Congress in London. Hobhouse and Brockway, in their *English Prisons To-Day*, had also championed these very reforms; the Soviets knew this. While Pritt may well have lacked a certain capacity for objectivity, the 'reality of what he looked at' in the USSR was reported by him accurately.

The influence of Pritt's reporting was certainly diminished throughout the 1930s as he unfailingly lent his support to the Soviet regime through the show trials and purges. Even in 1932, it is noted, he had 'very little real influence over the elaboration of actual policy in the Labour Party'.[172] Yet certain circles took Pritt's analysis seriously. The Howard League was

[168] Ibid, 175.
[169] See D. N. Pritt, *The Autobiography of D. N. Pritt*, 3 vols (London, 1965), I, 38; 190; Jones, *Russia Complex*, 43; Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 168-71; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 177; David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 91; BLPES, LSE, Raymond Postgate papers, Postgate/2/33 USSR (1931-2), 228.
[170] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 171.
[171] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 32.
[172] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 179.

content to print accounts of Pritt's Russian experience and his recommendations for reform in Britain, as were numerous other publications.[173] With Attlee's contribution to the NFRB's *Twelve Studies*, and his particular comment that Pritt's analysis will make readers think again, Pritt's analysis would, at least for a limited time, have had a good deal of influence over the labour movement.[174]

The Webbs

Given the affinities of Sidney and Beatrice Webb with the co-operative movement, their own enthusiasm for Soviet communism and its penal system in particular should not come as a surprise. The Webbs are, perhaps, the most notorious fellow-travellers of the 1930s, in no small part due to their seemingly rapid abandonment of the gradualist philosophy which they had propagated since the late nineteenth century. Certainly they had preconceived ideas as to what they wanted to see in the Soviet Union, and these were generally what they ended up seeing, or at least what they thought they had seen. As Kevin Morgan notes in his reassessment of the Webbs' approach to Soviet Russia, though, the 'degenerated form of communism' that they are generally held to have been converted to is not as clear cut as it is currently portrayed in the established literature. Where Liebman stresses the Webbs' affinity to Stalinist technocracy; Clarke the centralised and powerful Stalinist bureaucracy; Crosland the defeat of workers' control; and Harrison the prosaic Stalinist methodology as against revolutionary Trotskyism; Morgan traces the Webbs', and particularly Beatrice's attraction to the Soviet project to the discovery of a new 'Scale of Values' which emphasised the 'nobler motive of public service'.[175]

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[173] D. N. Pritt, 'Bolshevo: A Russian Labour Colony for Criminals', *The Howard Journal*, 3, 4 (1933), 78-82; *Forward*, 7 January 1933.
[174] Clement Attlee and G. D. H. Cole, 'Introduction', in NFRB, *Twelve Studies in Soviet Russia* (London, 1933), 9.
[175] Marcel Liebman, 'Fabianisme et communisme; les Webb et L'Union Soviétique', *International Review of Social History*, 5 (1960), 410; Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), 262; Anthony

The deepening political and financial crisis in Britain persuaded the Webbs to undertake their visit to the Soviet Union in 1932, but ideas as to the trip had been stirring since much earlier in the 1920s. As they pored over as much literature on the Soviet Union as they could acquire, and as their predilection for their object of study intensified, the Webbs were aware of their existing bias and its potential for impacting upon their examination.[176] And despite often admitting to the flaws in their comprehension of the USSR ('We do not really know how the business works'), they were nevertheless convinced in the early 1930s that a 'new civilization' was emerging.[177] Difficulties in obtaining the requisite information failed to censure the Webbs' enthusiasm for their 'promised land'; the exhilarating prospect of 'bring[ing] about the world's salvation' proving too enticing for the ageing couple.[178]

While at times the Webbs recognised the atrocities that had been committed by the Soviet regime, at others they bowdlerised their effects, questioned their veracity or simply ignored them altogether.[179] Travelling to the Soviet Union with such a palpable vision of their own idealised communist state meant that, frequently, both Beatrice and Sidney were forced to shape the many incongruous experiences they witnessed to their own aspirations for the Soviet project. The ascription of their own 'superior' meanings to these 'imperfectly expressed' events was, as a result, a criticism levelled frequently by contemporaries of the Webbs. Sidney was also very aware of the fact that they were being 'petted' by the Soviet authorities throughout orchestrated visits; but, according to his Soviet guide, this failed to stop him from proclaiming

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Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London, 1956), 356; Royden Harrison, 'Sidney and Beatrice Webb', in Carl Levy (ed.), *Socialism and the Intelligentsia, 1880-1914* (London, 1987), 72; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 150-61.

[176] *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 284, entry 5 April 1932; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, xii.

[177] *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 305, entry 8 June 1933.

[178] Ibid, 279, entry 4 January 1932; 322-3, entry 7 January 1934; Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 591.

[179] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 571; 995; *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 293, entry 18 December 1932; 299-300, entry 29 March 1933; 300, entry 30 March 1933.

the wonders of model Soviet institutions and the temerity of accusations of poverty and famine.[180] It is unsurprising that their analysis of Soviet prisons was in much the same vein.[181]

For a start, the Webbs did not actually visit a prison during their 1932 sojourn; the pages of their personal notebooks that were assigned to the topics of prisons and the legal system remain conspicuously blank.[182] They were, as a result, slightly more cautious in their initial reports of prisons than on other topics. They claimed that 'the [prison] administration is well spoken of, and is now as free from physical cruelty as any prisons in any country are ever likely to be'. Yet, despite not having seen a prison for themselves, as well as their acknowledgement of the existence and brutality of prison camps like Solovki, the Webbs still claimed that the prison reform that was begun under Felix Dzerzhinsky was to be fulsomely praised.[183] Relying on the testimony of the French traveller P. Guiboud-Ribaud, the praise that the Webbs called for was based merely on Guiboud-Ribaud's comment that 'le regime pénitentiaire en Russie soviétique est humain et acceptable'.[184] The account of the German journalist, Lenka von Kerber, entitled *Soviet Russia Fights Crime* (1934), was also invoked as a justification for the 'moral effect of regular and especially of purposeful occupation' in prisons.[185]

It was the Bolshevo Commune, though—which only Sidney visited on a second trip to the USSR in 1934—that was praised most thoroughly by the Webbs, with much the same rationale provided as given by those British visitors to the commune before the Webbs.[186] Bolshevo

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[180] Sidney to Beatrice, 12 September 1934, *Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, III, 397-9. See 'Otchet o poseshchenii S. Vebba', 19 September 1934, in A. V. Golubev, *'Vzgliad na zemliu obetivanuiu…' Iz istorii sovetskoi kul'turnoi diplomatii 1920-1930-x godov* (Moskva, 2004), 228.
[181] See the comments of Eugene Lyons, cited in Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 236; 208-9; *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 318-19, entry 29 November 1933.
[182] BLPES, LSE, Passfield papers, Passfield/7/1/55 Soviet Notebook A, 80.
[183] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 584-7.
[184] Ibid; P. Guiboud-Ribaud, *Où va la Russie?* (Paris, 1928), 115-34.
[185] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 587; Lenka von Kerber, *Soviet Russia Fights Crime* (London, 1934).
[186] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 587-9; 994-5.

went ‘further … in promise and achievement, towards an ideal treatment of offenders against society than anything else in the world’, and this was, for the Webbs, largely due to the work of the OGPU. Relying heavily on secondary sources, including the reports of many of their own British socialist comrades, including most frequently Pritt’s, the Fabian couple enthused at how the ‘reconditioning’ of young delinquents, in conjunction with their freedom, their potential for industry and creation, was ‘achieving a triumph in human regeneration’.[187] Through its work, the OGPU was considered a source of education and ‘political wisdom’, while the Procurator of the legal system (again, according solely to the Webbs’ interpretation of Pritt’s report) took on a position which oversaw the legal operation of government and was as yet unknown in England. ‘He visits prisons regularly, generally as often as once in six days’, and ensured that nothing unlawful occurred and that the institutions were properly managed.[188] This included the oft publicly-debated (and, according to Sidney, ‘ambiguously termed’) topic of forced labour.

> In this is sometimes included what is more correctly classed as prison labour, or the work imposed on persons convicted of crime as part of their sentence, whether punitive or as incidental to their reformatory treatment. Such treatment of convicted criminals, which is in no way condemned by the International Convention against Forced Labour, does not seem objectionable.[189]

‘The Soviet Government’, Sidney claimed, was ‘not even accused of any such perversion of the practice … as the hiring out of prisoners to contractors to be worked for private profit’. And the employment of prisoners in economically productive labour—‘this being, perhaps, the only

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[187] Ibid, 587-9; 591.
[188] Ibid, 134-5; 589; *Moscow News*, 14 August 1933.
[189] Sidney Webb, ‘Freedom in Soviet Russia’, *Contemporary Review* (January 1933), 16-17; Passfield papers, Passfield/7/1/65.

way of making their work of reformatory value'—could not possibly be 'resented in a country where this can have no effect in undercutting the price or the wage in profitmaking employment'. In his positive descriptions of the Soviet regime, Sidney held on to the claim that the 'Soviet government has specifically denied that any convicted prisoners are employed in making commodities for export', despite the fact that, as a member of MacDonald's Cabinet in 1931, he had been witness to meetings in which the utilisation of forced labour in Russia was freely acknowledged.[190]

The Webbs' *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* had a print run of ten years and saw six new editions between 1935 and 1944. In its second edition, published in 1937, the title's question mark was famously dropped in a stamp of affirmation; and for much of the left the book quickly became a standard reference work on the Soviet Union, despite its inconsistencies and inaccuracies. The volume was even screened, edited and eventually sanctioned by the Soviet authorities. Unlike most other accounts of the Soviet penal system, then, the Webbs' work was certainly influential in its portrayal, even if its authors' own authority was diminishing by this time. Yet, paradoxically, the Webbs were, on balance, the least qualified of all the individual delegates who had reported on this issue, given their fundamental omission of failing to see a Soviet prison for themselves.

Travellers before the purges

By 1935, even among those on the left who held the Soviet experiment dear, doubts were beginning to emerge. Among a greater proportion of sympathisers than previously, there was a realisation that, as Britain began its road to economic recovery and capitalism appeared to be surviving, the Soviet state was, at heart, merely another state to be dealt with. The USSR's

[190] Webb, 'Freedom in Soviet Russia', 17.

admittance to the League of Nations in 1934 gave credence to the notion that it might still act as a force for international peace, but its exceptional and mystical qualities were diminishing.[191] For their part, the Soviets remained convinced of the political passivity of the left in Britain and that the failure of the capitalist system to collapse only strengthened the reformist elements of British social democrats.[192] Through much of the Third Period (1928 to 1935) the Soviets and the CPGB had referred to those in the labour movement as 'social fascists', but in the period between 1932 and 1935, following the decision of the Executive Committee of the Comintern to command communists to work through reformist groups, the worst excesses of 'class against class' were in retreat, and a popular front strategy was adopted.[193]

This change in strategy did little to halt further influential figures of the labour movement visiting the Soviet Union, a number of whom were doing so for the second time. Between 1935 and 1936, Wells, Citrine, Laski, Charles Trevelyan and Attlee investigated the USSR at a time when the idea of centralised economic planning had been sanctified and civil strife had, between the ending of forced collectivisation (1928 to 1932) and the beginning of the Great Terror (1936 to 1938), been reduced to a relatively placid state. Wells and Citrine were less impressed than they had been on their first visits in 1920 and 1925 respectively. The most notable aspect of Wells' visit was his three-hour meeting with Stalin. At the time, Wells held the influential position of president of the global association of writers, and with the Congress of Soviet writers upcoming, there were important reasons for attempting to impress the English

[191] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 193-4.
[192] See S. P. Peregudov, *Antivoennoe dvizhenie v Anglii i leiboristskaia partiia* (Moskva, 1969), 141; 237; Matthew Worley, 'Courting Disaster? The Communist International in the Third Period', in Matthew Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (New York, 2004); 1-2; idem, *Class Against Class*, 120.
[193] Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 183-5; 192.

author. Even more significant, Wells had only recently met personally with US president Franklin D. Roosevelt.[194]

Yet, despite the positive conclusions he had drawn from his visit in 1920, Wells had remained immune to the fawning methods of Soviet flattery directed towards him, and the significance of a rare meeting with Stalin fifteen years later appeared to have little effect on him in this regard.[195] Wells liked Stalin, and was impressed by his Russian literary counterpart, Gorky; but his impressions of Stalinism were far less enthusiastic, and he returned home struggling to make a meaningful connection between his own ideas and those of the Soviets.[196] According to Michael David-Fox, even the Soviets admitted that they had not managed to 'seduce the girl' this time.[197] Citrine was also less impressed with Soviet conditions than he had been in 1925. Indeed, as the Webbs' *Soviet Communism* was published, Beatrice wrote in her diary how Citrine had 'spitted at us' in the *Daily Herald* for their obsequiousness over an 'inhuman society of robots'.[198] Citrine's entries in his unpublished diary of the trip make clear his displeasure at the conditions of much of what he saw in Russia. He was pleased to see that illiteracy and prostitution were being all but eliminated, but his displeasure at the position of the trade unions and Soviet standards in general led him into some antagonistic exchanges with his guides.[199] The Soviet Union had not, he thought, engineered socialism, but rather a crude state capitalism.

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[194] David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 235.
[195] Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 360. See 'Alfavitnyi ukazatel' posetitelei kremlevskogo kabineta I. V. Stalina', *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 4 (1998), 16-203.
[196] Viacheslav Ivanov, 'Why Did Stalin Kill Gorky?', *Russian Studies in Literature*, 30, 4 (1994), 5-40; H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discourses and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (Since 1886)* (New York, 1934), 562-3; 626; idem, *After Democracy* (London, 1932).
[197] On his return to Britain in 1920 Wells had lobbied the Foreign Office for improved Anglo-Soviet relations. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 792, ll. 122-46, '*Glava iz knigi g. Uel'sa 'Opyt avtobiografii' posveshchennaia ego poslednei poezdke v SSSR*'; l. 121, 'Radek to Stalin', 9 November 1934, cited in David-Fox, *Showcasing*, 237.
[198] *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 361-2, entry 15 December 1935; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, II, 233-4. See also Citrine's *I Search for Truth in Russia* (1936).
[199] BLPES, LSE, Walter Citrine papers, Citrine/1/19 Visit to Russia vol. 1 (1935), 146; 159-61; Citrine/1/20 Visit to Russia vol. 2 (1935), 3; 20; 32.

Citrine was most disappointed with his visit to a workers' site at the construction of the Moscow-Volga canal, another enormous Soviet state project that had been inspired by the propagandistic 'success' of the Belomor-Baltic canal. When he enquired as to the composition of the work force, he was shocked to find that 10 per cent were trade unionists, while the remaining 90 per cent were convicts. He was prevented from inspecting the workers' 'barracks', and was further disappointed to find that the prison wage system that had been in place during his 1925 visit had since been reversed. Rather than distributing wages in a systematic and fair method, there reigned now 'a system which put a premium on cheap labour'.[200] In their exploitation of convict labour, Citrine argued that the Soviets 'were setting a fine example for Hitler and Mussolini'.[201] Citrine also visited the Bolshevo Commune, but remained relatively ambivalent about the project, his frustration at the Soviet authorities at this point overwhelming him. He felt, overall, that if he was 'so foolish as to judge a country by the superficial signs as an indication of a success in the regime, I should certainly plump for Hitler against Stalin'.[202]

The visits of Sir Charles Treveylan, President of the Board of Education in both of MacDonald's Cabinets and born of a Liberal aristocratic family, and Harold Laski, were more positive in their reports of the Soviet condition, and the penal system in particular. Trevelyan, visiting in 1935, was impressed by the system along the same lines as his previous fellow-travellers, but picked up immediately on the issue that would, at the time, have prevented Labour from attempting to implement a Soviet-styled penal system in Britain. 'It would be difficult', he noted, 'to see how we could create the conditions which make it possible. The existence of a large reservoir of unemployed labour … will always make it impossible to treat

[200] Citrine/1/19 Visit to Russia vol. 1 (1935), 143-6.
[201] Ibid, 146.
[202] Citrine/1/20 Visit to Russia vol. 2 (1935), 204-6; Citrine/1/21 Visit to Russia vol. 3 (1935), 241.

convicts as ordinary producers'.[203] The USSR had created, in place of its prisons, 'communit[es] of contented workers' where, 'quite apart from humanitarian views as to the redemption of criminals and whether it is wise … to treat them as ordinary citizens, the economic situation in Russia demands the employment of every available man and woman'. Lagging behind the USSR's enlightenment, Britain was, in Trevelyan's view, unfortunately 'debarred from adopting this grand method of human regeneration'.[204]

Laski, a leading Labour theorist on the left of the party and a professor of political science, took an equally positive view of the Soviet penal system, but was more optimistic about its potential implementation in Britain, provided the right minds could engineer the change. The 'Soviet treatment of crime' was 'well known' in Britain, he claimed, 'since there is no realm of administration in which their achievement has been so dramatic'. The reform in Russia had opened up new 'vistas', and despite the results in Britain of Charles Goring's 1913 study, *The English Convict*, having come to the same conclusion as the Soviets (that the criminal is at base a product of his environment), 'the advantage is all on the Russian side'.[205] English prisons remained too secretive, whereas the constant criticism of the Soviet system was alleged to be well-received by the authorities, and prisons were improved rapidly as a result. Laski believed the English lawyer had 'missed immense opportunities of throwing light on social problems by his indifference to research' on the Soviet system, since there was much 'ground for experimenting with the Russian theory to a degree that no prison administration in the west has yet been willing to do'.[206] Calling for a change to the British system and a 'new Benthamism',

[203] Sir Charles Trevelyan, *Soviet Russia: A Description for British Workers* (London, 1935), 37-8. See also Working Class Movement Library (WCML), Salford, AG/USSR/Box 12.
[204] Trevelyan, *Soviet Russia*, 36; 38.
[205] Laski, *Law and Justice in Soviet Russia*, 10; 25-7.
[206] Ibid, 26; 34.

Laski recommended the Soviet system.[207] And Laski was not alone, as other figures of lesser political standing praised the system, the 'Red Dean of Canterbury' Hewlett Johnson even calling the Soviet penal system 'the nearest thing to active Christianity that I know'. Bolshevo, he claimed, was even 'more marvellous than Canterbury Cathedral itself'.[208]

The visits of the labour movement to the USSR of the mid-1930s were brought to a close with the trip, in 1936, of Clement Attlee, the Labour Party's new leader. By this time, the enthusiasm for the Soviet state in Britain was waning, though it would be wrong to say that it did not still burn strongly in certain sections of the movement. Attlee's visit, his attendance at the first Soviet show trial of the old Bolsheviks (Kamenev, Zinoviev and, in absentia, Trotsky), and his own reflections on the USSR acted as an accurate barometer of the Labour Party's attitude, especially as increasingly adverse comments about dictatorship were being aired in the party.[209] Previously Attlee had espoused the Five-Year Plan and the concept of 'commissioners', urging Labour to 'take the strong points of the Russian system and apply them to this country'; he was not, he claimed, 'afraid of … [Russian] comparison[s]'.[210] He returned cautiously optimistic about the Soviet Union, but was more convinced than ever that 'Britain need not follow the Moscow road'—his enthusiasm tempered by a realisation that, 'in the main, we saw only that

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[207] Ibid, 35. Bentham's own ideas on penal and prison systems had, of course, been inspired by his experiences in Russia in the 1780s. See Stanziani, 'Free Labor—Forced Labor: An Uncertain Boundary?', *Kritika*, 27-52.
[208] Dean of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson, *I Deny that the Russians are an Irreligious People* (London, 1937), 11. See also WCML, Peace Box 3; and Hewlett Johnson, *The Socialist Sixth of the World* (London, 1939). Harry Pollitt famously referred to Johnson as 'that bloody red arse of a dean'. Cited in David Pryce-Jones, *Treasons of the Heart: From Thomas Paine to Kim Philby* (New York, 2011), 185-6.
[209] Clement R. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective* (London, 1937), 140; 149-51. Attlee wrote, for example, that: 'The action of the Nazi Government in Germany in turning their universities into parrot cages for the repetition of the catchwords of Fascism evokes only contempt. The tendency observable among Communists to try to reduce all history to an economic formula has always been rejected … British Socialists recognise very clearly the danger that exists in the tyranny of the reformer who wishes to make all men in his own image', and that 'Socialists reject the conception of dictatorship altogether'. In addition, he claimed that: 'It would no doubt be easier to plan a new organisation of society in which all controlling power would be entrusted to a few super-men by whose orders, through an obedient bureaucracy, the material resources of this country … would be developed … but it would be subject to all the dangers and uncertainties which accompany dictatorships, not the least of which is the mental instability which seems almost inevitably to attack dictators'. See also Douglas Jay, *The Socialist Case* (London, 1937), 302.
[210] Clement R. Attlee, *Problems of a Socialist Government* (ed.), Sir Stafford Cripps (London, 1933), 203.

which it was intended we should see', and that some sites he had been shown were evidently 'showplaces and not in the least bit typical'.[211] Scepticism of the Soviet state was on the rise, but the reports and reflections of the travellers of the 1930s demonstrated that the Soviets remained apt at instilling great enthusiasm among those sympathetic to either a centralised state apparatus or the creation of a new system of morals and values. A substantial number of labour figures were more than willing to indulge the Soviets and to praise their prison and penal systems throughout the decade, but the questions surrounding show trials and Soviet justice ensured that Labour's own penal reform was unlikely to follow the Soviet path.

5.4 The Impact of Russia and Policy through the 1930s

Throughout the 1930s, the Labour Party faced crises internally, in Britain more broadly and internationally; and with the exemplar of the Soviet Union always a conspicuous background phenomenon, Labour's approach to penal reform, prisons and criminality remained as disjointed and uncertain as it had since before the First World War. On a range of issues from the Soviet penal system, compulsion and reconditioning camps, the death penalty and mounting international tensions, the party's actions over penal politics were erratic. The general Labour public continued to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt through much of the decade, and it would therefore be wrong to dismiss the role of a lingering inspiration; yet, as Williams points out, it would equally be wrong to draw too many conclusions 'as to the continuing importance of the USSR'.[212] At a time when doubts were growing as to Soviet efficacy and it was being acknowledged that judging the Soviet experiment too rapidly would be unreasonable, Labour figures were beginning to look elsewhere for inspiration, with Roosevelt's USA a particular force for contemplation.[213] As in the 1920s, an obvious impact

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[211] Idem, *As It Happened* (London, 1954), 91; Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London, 1982), 126.
[212] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 240.
[213] William Beveridge, 'Review of Webbs' Soviet Communism', *Political Quarterly*, 7, 3 (1936), 364; *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 324; 357, entries 4 February 1934 and 2 September 1935. See also B. C. Malament, 'British

of the labour movement's investigations of the Soviet penal system upon its own politics is not clear; show trials and dubious notions of justice stymied any attempts to emulate Soviet penal methods. Indeed, any conspicuously manifest impact in policy terms remained extremely unlikely through the 1930s, given the party's return to its more moderate stance following its temporary drift to the left. Yet, in domestic affairs the Soviet Union continued to play a significant role in the Labour Party's thinking.

In 1933, six British engineers working in the Soviet Union for the Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Export Company were arrested and charged with wrecking activities against the Soviet state. Investigated and taken to trial, the event took Anglo-Soviet relations to 'the brink of disaster'.[214] The British government's immediate response reflected its resentment at British nationals being indicted in what was assumed to be both a trumped-up charge and a Soviet retort to the government's abandonment in 1932 of the 1930 Anglo-Soviet trade agreement. It was also thought, as rumours swirled of devastating famine in southern Russia and Ukraine, that the trial was an attempt to divert attention from Soviet dysfunction, rather than a legitimate legal process or part of a propaganda drive.[215] The British government quickly threatened and implemented a trade embargo, a move against which the Labour Party protested vociferously, and through which its attitudes towards the Soviet state were revealed.[216]

Labour and Roosevelt's New Deal: The response of the Left and the Unions', *Journal of British Studies*, 17, 2 (1978), 136-67; Stefan Berger, 'Labour in comparative perspective', in Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (eds), *Labour's First Century* (Cambridge, 2000), ch. 10.

[214] Gordon W. Morrell, *Britain Confronts the Stalin Revolution: Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Metro-Vickers Crisis* (Ontario, 1994), 1.

[215] Ibid, 1-2; Lammers, 'The Engineers' Trial (Moscow 1933) and Anglo-Soviet Relations', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 62 (1963), 256-67; idem, 'The Second Labour Government', 60-72. See Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York, 1937).

[216] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 286-7; *The Moscow Trial. A Pamphlet Published by the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee* (London, 1933).

W. P. Coates openly suggested that the trade embargo would result in the unemployment of over 60,000 British workers, while in parliament some of the labour movement's most prominent figures rushed to the defence of the Soviet legal system. Lansbury argued that it was not for the British to question the legal procedures of another sovereign state, while Stafford Cripps proclaimed the fairness of the Russian judicial system, even on the issue of the death penalty. 'It is', he stated, 'the known method in Russia, and people who go to Russia know that if they are accused that is the way in which proceedings will be conducted. The remedy … if you do not like it, is to stay out of Russia'.[217] Bevan, too, in response to the claim by the Conservative MP, Colin Patrick, that the class basis of the Soviet system could not possibly equate to any sort of justice, noted correctly that the very same bias existed in the English legal system, only in an inverted sense.[218] Both made valid points. Patrick was correct in asserting the role that class could play in the Soviet justice system. Measures that had, in the aftermath of 1917, been intended to neutralise the injustices of the imperial Russian court system, sought to consider the poverty and privation of the Russian proletariat as mitigating factors in sentencing procedures.[219] Over time, though, this had degenerated into a 'primitive workerism' that disproportionately discriminated against citizens of non-proletarian status.[220] As to Bevan's argument, the vast costs of the English legal system still ensured that justice remained far more accessible to the upper classes, despite legislation passed by the second Labour government.

The Soviet ambassador to Britain, Ivan Maisky, confessed to the Webbs that the evidence against the six British defendants looked grave.[221] With some deft diplomacy, though, he

[217] Lansbury, 'Preface', in W. P. Coates and Zelda Coates, *More Anti-Soviet Lies Nailed* (London, 1933); *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5 April 1933, vol. 276, cc1804-5.
[218] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5 April 1933, vol. 276, cc1816-19; 1838-49.
[219] Lapenna, 'Lenin, Law and Legality', 261-2.
[220] Farber, *Before Stalinism*, 153; 166.
[221] Passfield papers, Passfield/7/1/74, Memo of statements by Maisky, 8 April 1933.

suggested that relations need not be severed, despite Litvinov's telegrams to Maisky complaining of the damage that the language, 'strong expressions' (*sil'nye vyrazheniia*) and actions of the British government had already done in Moscow.[222] The pressure of the British government eventually paid off as the British defendants in the trial were either acquitted or released shortly into their sentences. But the Soviets were aware of their ability to manipulate the British left, the Soviet prosecutor Vyshinsky even quoting Cripps' defence of the Soviet system as a justification for the trial itself.[223] These actions of the Soviet authorities were seen by the right in Britain as a victory for the National Government, while on the left the 'concessions' and conciliatory nature of the Soviets was perceived as yet more proof of their superior value system.

As the 1930s progressed and the paroxysm of the Great Terror took hold of the Soviet Union from late 1936, a mounting distaste among the left could be felt.[224] Party intellectuals often found ways to excuse the trials and the accompanying purges, but these were more often than not merely tortuous apologias. Beatrice Webb relied on fellow sympathisers to ease her anxieties, though she wavered between a sense of repugnance at the trials and a conviction that a great counter-revolutionary conspiracy was genuinely in motion.[225] D. N. Pritt, who had

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[222] 'Telegramma Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh Del SSSR Polnomochnomu Predstaviteliu SSSR v Velikobritanii I. M. Maiskomu 31 marta 1933 g.', in *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moskva, 1970), XVI, 207-8. See also the diary entries for 9 August 1934 and 8 July 1940 in Gabriel Gorodetsky (ed.), *The Maisky Diaries: Red Ambassador to the Court of St James's, 1932-1943* (London, 2015), 9-10; 294-5. Maisky only began writing his diary in 1934.

[223] See *The Case of N.P. Vitvitsky, V.A. Gussev, A.W. Gregory, Y.I. Zivert, N.G. Zorin, M.D. Krasheninnikov, M.L. Kotlyarevsky, A.S. Kutuzova, J. Cushny, V.P. Lebedev, A.T. Lobanov, W.L. MacDonald, A. Monkhouse, C. Nordwall, P.Y. Oleinik, L.A. Sukhoruchkin, L.C. Thornton, V.A. Soklov Charged with Wrecking Activities at Power Stations in the Soviet Union. Heard Before the Special Session of the Supreme Court of the USSR in Moscow, April 12–19, 1933: Translation of the Official Verbatim Report*, 3 vols (Moscow: State Law Publishing House, 1933), I. For the Soviet coverage of the trial see 'Soobshshenie sovetskoi pechati o besedakh Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh Del SSSR M. M. Litvinova s Poslom Velikobritanii v SSSR Oviem, 16 aprelia 1933 g.', *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, XVI, 233-40.

[224] Williams, *Labour and Russia*, 239.

[225] *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 374, entry 28 August 1936; 380, entry 25 November 1936; 384-5, entry 20 February 1937; 411, entry 9 March 1938; Passfield papers, Passfield/7/1/86, 'A memo on the meaning of the Moscow trials (1937)'.

attended and judged the first show trial as a fair and just process, was regularly invoked by Beatrice in her efforts to shore up her own views. But it was not only the intellectuals who held firm in the face of Stalin's efforts to be rid of his political rivals. As recent research highlights, Kingsley Martin of the *New Statesman* in particular was at pains to avoid condemning the Soviet Union. It was not the case that Martin denied or ignored the purges; rather, he justified them with reference even to the Soviet state's alleged commitment to the extension of the rights of man.[226] The *Manchester Guardian*, too, had been convinced as early as 1936 that a great 'underground opposition' was at work in the USSR.[227]

It is difficult to assess the extent to which, on the part of many in the labour movement, the indulgence of the Soviet Union's grievous behaviour was influenced by their perceptions of the Soviet penal system. Attempts to ascribe this tolerance exclusively to the 'fund of goodwill' that had developed overtly in the 1930s, if more inconspicuously in the previous decade, towards the Soviet prison system are shrouded in difficulties given the obstacles in trying to 'prove' influence, especially when so few party materials exist that relate directly to the issue. There were, undeniably, clear and supportive statements about the Soviet penal system in the 1930s, often emanating from the writings of significant Labour figures and party theorists, and on a theoretical level it can be argued that the Soviet exemplar in penal politics had a significant impact upon Labour's own understanding of the issues. The practical effect, or rather the lack of effect, of the Soviet exemplar on penal policy directly, however, is much clearer. The issue remained tangential to the Labour Party throughout the decade, and growing awareness of the troubling Stalinist show trials and Soviet justice made any efforts at emulation very unlikely. The party's major programme of the period, *For Socialism and Peace* (1934), omitted any

[226] *New Statesman*, 5 September 1936; Udy, *Labour and the Gulag*, 430-1.
[227] *Manchester Guardian*, 19 and 20 August 1936.

discussion of the topic.[228] The left in general maintained the stance that prolonged unemployment, to which a huge number of British workers were subject, was the principal cause of crime, and a recognised rise in juvenile crime was acknowledged by Laski. But little action was taken as to reform, despite the connection between those figures admitting the importance of the issue to Britain and their respective experiences of the Soviet system.[229]

The treatment of juvenile offenders in Britain was discussed in penal circles, with the Soviet example once more hailed as superior to British and continental approaches in its methods and effects. But these groups also recognised, somewhat presciently, that despite the 1936 Soviet Constitution and its claims to have established the most democratic state in the world, the Soviet Union had throughout the 1930s been turning back to more repressive practices in general, and with regard to juvenile offenders in particular.[230] Soviet archival documents bear this out, as the Politburo passed resolutions lowering the age of criminal responsibility and of the death penalty to twelve, and routinising the trying of juveniles for counter-revolutionary crimes with a maximum sentence of five years.[231] Soon, too, parole and probationary measures for those serving sentences in corrective labour colonies were abolished.[232] Developments like these played a significant role in reinforcing the scepticism that was increasing among the left in Britain as to the utility of the Soviet example. Enthusiasm remained in pockets, but excitement about the experiment was diminishing overall; there was, at root, simply less that could be brought away from the Soviet ideal as its familiarity increased and its less palatable features were exposed. Its effect on Labour's penal policy was therefore diminished.

[228] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 294.
[229] *Unemployed Leader*, June 1935; Harold J. Laski, 'The Criminal Statistics', *The Howard Journal*, 4, 3 (1936), 257.
[230] P. Cornil, 'The Treatment of Juvenile Offenders in England, Belgium and Russia', *The Howard Journal*, 4, 3 (1936), 271-3.
[231] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 4, l. 2.
[232] RGANI, f. 89, op. 73, d. 4, l. 1.

Domestically, the Labour Party appeared uncertain for much of the decade over its line on penal politics. Little action was taken that related directly to penal reform, but issues that were connected to related concerns over justice, compulsion and, briefly, the death penalty, provide a good idea of how the party continued to deal with penal politics in a sporadic and uncoordinated fashion. After 1931 and the collapse of the Labour government, for instance, the Conservative-dominated National Government proceeded to maintain the network of reconditioning camps that had been set up by MacDonald's second administration. Unemployment continued to rise once Labour had left office, and the camps were deemed an adequate palliative measure by the government amidst a general policy lacuna. Assessment of the camps was divided, and, as had been the case between 1929 and 1931, the NUWM was thoroughly opposed to their maintenance.[233] The *Unemployed Leader*, in particular, took an especially aggressive line against the camps, protesting against their likeness to the worst of Britain's prisons and their 'slave colon[y]' structure.[234] The NUWM began to refer in public to the centres as 'concentration camps', and was exasperated at the Home Secretary John Gilmour's failure to deny such a state of affairs. In a flood of literature aimed at the working class, resolutions were passed by the NUWM against the ongoing 'slave' system, while even the CPGB protested at the camps as 'fascist measures.[235]

Government ministers of course defended the camps in the Commons, and Labour continued to defend them in line with the government.[236] The Labour Party, in fact, went much further, actively appropriating the term 'concentration camp' in its public assessments of the centres.

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[233] Hannington, *Achievements of the Hunger March*; idem, *Problem of the Distressed Areas*, ch.7; Richard Croucher, *We Refuse to Starve in Silence* (London, 1987), 162-71.
[234] *Unemployed Leader*, May 1934; July 1934; September 1934.
[235] Ibid, May 1934; NUWM, *How to Fight Unemployment* (London, 1933), 16-18; idem, *The Fight Against Unemployment and Poverty: Our Action Plan* (London, 1934), 3-7; *Daily Worker*, 21 March 1934; 26 May 1934.
[236] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 1 March 1935, vol. 298, cc1504-8.

The *Daily Herald*, in a flurry of laudatory articles in March 1934, used the term expressly to describe how the unemployment problem was being solved under a scheme that Labour had introduced while in office.[237] H. R. S. Philpot, writing in the *Labour Magazine*, continued to use the term concentration camps in a positive and complimentary sense, an action that was persistently protested by the NUWM.[238] Indeed, it was only in July 1935, when competition between unskilled workers in the camps and employed skilled workers was made explicit, that the TUC uttered its first criticisms of the camps in the *Daily Herald*.[239] But the Labour Party remained consistent in its support for the camps, even as the fear of militarisation on the continent grew and Nazi-controlled Germany appeared, at least in a superficial sense, to be operating a similar camp system. This was, perhaps, a deliberate, if increasingly uncomfortable, strategy to avoid accusations of hypocrisy; and it was at least reported that, as tensions between social democrats, communists and fascists rose, party members began to prefer the term reconditioning camps to concentration camps.[240]

But enthusiasm for the 'Grith Fyrd' (Peace Army) idea behind the camps that was being cultivated remained strong in left-wing circles. Many on the left remained committed to the idea of experimental schemes in order to relieve unemployment and continue to work towards a socialist society, with the important caveat that the labour utilised not be forcibly conscripted.[241] John Norman Glaister argued that, while many contended that the 'huge experiment which is illustrated in the USSR' could solve the problem of growing a capitalist society into one of socialism, a simple replication by capitalist states was infeasible. It was

[237] *Daily Herald*, 15, 16, 17, 19 and 22 March 1934; see also Huw Richards, *The Bloody Circus: The Daily Herald and the Left* (London, 1997).
[238] See H. R. S. Philpot, 'Those Concentration Camps', *Labour: A Magazine for all Workers*, 1, 8 (April 1934); *Unemployed Leader*, June 1934.
[239] *Daily Herald*, 18 April 1935; *Unemployed Leader*, July 1935.
[240] King, *In the Name of Liberalism*, 167.
[241] John Macmurray et al., *The Grith Fyrd Idea* (Salisbury, 1933); Guy W. Keeling, 'Grith Fyrd Camps as a Contribution to the Unemployment Problem', in Macmurray et al., *The Grith Fyrd Idea*, 11.

extremely doubtful, he claimed, that 'anyone who has first-hand experience of the real social problems of this country [Russia] is numbered amongst' those who truly believed in the efficacy of this replication.[242] As a result, the impact of the Soviet Union on attitudes to the camps is difficult to ascertain. The enthusiasm for self-governing colonies had a much longer history within Britain itself, but their consideration within the context of the Soviet situation should not preclude the potential for Soviet influence. Given the left's overwhelmingly positive reports of Soviet correctional colonies, as well as their willingness, at times, to indulge the more unsavoury practices of the Soviet state, it is not necessarily a far-fetched notion that in their support of British 'concentration camps', Labour had Soviet-styled practices in mind. The forcible conscription of labour in the Soviet Union was certainly less likely to play well with Labourites, but the experience of the broader labour movement's dealings with the USSR demonstrates that often extenuation could be granted with an idealistic and ambitious objective in mind.

Despite its apparent vacillations, though, the Labour Party did nevertheless make some strides in its penal policy in the 1930s. At its 1934 conference the party passed a resolution that finally made the abolition of the death penalty official party policy. Unopposed, the resolution stated that:

> This Conference expresses its conviction that experience in this and other countries, as shown by the evidence submitted to the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1930, has demonstrated the futility of the Death Penalty. The Conference believes that this punishment is ineffective as a deterrent, and, in its demoralizing effects,

[242] J. Norman Glaister, 'Grith Fyrd: An Essential Element in Social Reconstruction', in Macmurray et al., *The Grith Fyrd Idea*, 31-3.

> gravely prejudicial to social order and security. The Conference therefore urges the next Labour government to give legislative effect to the recommendations of the Select Committee for the Abolition of the Death Penalty for an experimental period of five years.[243]

Despite its belated passing, this was a major step in the reform movement. But, as Twitchell points out, though abolition became party policy, party policy was 'not necessarily Labour government policy'. That the Labour manifestos of 1935 and 1945, as well as every King's Speech between 1945 and 1951, failed to articulate the issue or push it as part of a legislative agenda demonstrated the party's continued understanding of penal politics as digressive and a distraction from the more urgent issues of the day.[244] Between 1937 and 1938, a small number of attempts were made to push penal reform in the Commons, with a good deal of cross-party support, but each attempt came to nothing.[245] Penal politics ultimately continued to form a tangential feature of the party's programme through the decade: having engaged constructively, if on a somewhat ad hoc basis, with penal reform during its time in government, the drift leftwards of certain sections of the party between 1931 and 1933 provided an opportunity for a 'socialist' approach to penality to be cultivated. Such an opportunity was not grasped, though, and penal politics remained an issue that the party dipped in and out of when it deemed it expedient, or was forced to. Despite the party's alignment with the 'progressive' forces in British reform movements and its historical focus on issues of social justice, the significance of penal reform never surpassed more immediate and pressing political concerns.

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[243] *LPACR, 1934*, 187.
[244] Twitchell, *Politics of the Rope*, 65.
[245] See *LPACR, 1939*, 164. (In 1938, a motion moved by the Conservative MP for Leeds West, Vyvyan Adams, to abolish capital punishment for an experimental period of five years was passed by 114 votes to 89, but the bill progressed no further. See Block and Hostettler, *Hanging in Judgement*, 100; and *Parliamentary Debates*, 16 November 1938, vol. 341, cc954-1011.)

There were, indeed, often good reasons for this. As Britain faced, in the words of Richard Overy, a sense of impending catastrophe through the 'morbid age' of the inter-war years, the Labour Party was faced with a plethora of political and ideological confrontations which forced the issue of penal politics, along with many other relatively low-priority social issues, to the bottom of the agenda. Following Labour's electoral catastrophe in 1931, the rise to power of Hitler's National Socialists was soon impacting Labour's domestic programme. The CPGB quickly called for a United Front against fascism which was soon agreed to by the ILP, but the Labour Party and NJC declined such proposals.[246] Further calls for a United Front by the CPGB and left-wing socialists like Stafford Cripps, working out of the Socialist League, persisted through the decade, but Labour's resistance remained stern. While figures like Dalton welcomed the entrance of the Soviet Union to the League of Nations and the role that a left-wing coalition could play in the fight against fascism, Labour pamphlets like *The Communist Solar System*, *Communist and Other Organisations* and *Democracy versus Dictatorship* (all 1933) reiterated the warning against official collaboration in any united front, warned against communist infiltration within Labour ranks, and pitted Labour's parliamentary socialism firmly against the conflated dictatorships of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.[247] On top of the disturbing spread of fascism across Europe, the difficulty of fighting British communists and the Comintern while simultaneously courting the Soviet state and its lessons for British socialists remained a difficult path to tread throughout the 1930s.

International turmoil, especially after Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, also forced Labour to undergo a period of re-evaluation, as growing sentiment in favour of the enforcement

[246] Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914*, 285.
[247] NFRB, *Why the USSR Joined the League* (London, 1935), 3; Labour Party, *The Communist Solar System: The Communist International* (London, 1933), 2; National Joint Council, *Communist and Other Organisations* (London, 1933); idem, *Democracy versus Dictatorship* (London, 1933); Davis, 'Labour's Political Thought', 78-84; Paul Corthorn, *In the Shadow Dictators: The British Left in the 1930s* (London, 2006).

of sanctions by the League of Nations made Lansbury's position as Labour leader untenable. His resignation added another layer to Labour's period of soul-searching and its attempted construction of a distinctive party identity.[248] This impacted directly on the party's decision, in 1936, to pass a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish civil war, despite its support for the republican forces against Franco's dictatorship. In 1937, in its flux, as well as the confusion caused by the 'CPGB- and Moscow-backed Communists shooting at their nominally republican allies' (the ILP-backed Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), the party reversed its decision and became supporters of intervention on behalf of the republicans.[249] As the prospect of global war began to appear more and more inevitable, the unity of the united front campaign remained fragile as the ILP showed increasing restlessness at the prolonged purges in the Soviet Union. That all of these developments occurred at a time when Labour had not yet recovered its parliamentary position to the level of 1929 meant that its power over both domestic and international politics was always extremely limited. The ability of the party to attempt to work practically in the domestic sphere on the issue of penal reform, even as it was becoming an increasingly bi-partisan subject, was increasingly limited. The prospect of utilising any ideas it had gained from the Soviet Union was even more improbable.

5.5 Conclusion

That sections of the Labour Party lurched leftwards in the early 1930s should not be disputed, though the party's move to a more radical politics should be qualified by its shallow and fleeting nature. Indeed, throughout the decade the party held true to its gradualist, reformist core. Despite this, the USSR remained an inspiration for the party through these years and was more accessible than it had ever been before; and with regard to penal politics, the 1930s saw

[248] Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 79.
[249] Pugh, *Speak for Britain*, 245-6.

the most explicit (and official) support yet of Labour figures for the Soviet systems of justice and penality. Arguably, its role as an exemplar in this area reached its apex between 1932 and 1935. Labour was certainly seeking a new style of socialism in the aftermath of 1931, and through the decade a number of Labour figures found themselves in influential and well-placed positions in the penal reform movement. Crime remained a topic of concern for the Labour Party, but, out of office and suffering from a greatly weakened parliamentary position, its purchase on the issue was severely limited. As was the case throughout the 1920s, the issues of criminality and penal reform were often buried under the more immediate actions and pressing matters of the party. The inspiration of the Soviet Union within this context, despite its theoretical stimulus, carried little practical currency.

As the 'leftism' of the Labour Party reached its high-water mark in 1933, the opportunity had been presented for forming a coherent and socialist approach to penal reform. That this opportunity was not taken owed as much to the party's own failings in this area as it did to the complex and trying circumstances in which it found itself. Whether on issues of prison reform, the death penalty, reconditioning centres, compulsion, or the Soviet penal system, Labour remained a disparate grouping, unable to forge a cohesive party approach. This is not to say party attitudes failed to change; indeed, without a coherent approach to the problem, understandings of penality within the party necessarily altered over time as issues were faced on individual bases, isolated from other similar and connected problems, and in reaction to the changing circumstances of the decade. In this sense, the party's erratic approach was not necessarily different from the previous two decades. During the 1920s, however, in its two periods in governmental office, the party was forced to engage with penal politics, whereas its long period in opposition during the 1930s, combined with the pressing nature of increasingly insecure international relations, meant that the motivation for engagement with the issue was

seldom high. Despite its period of 'radicalism', a cohesive penal philosophy, socialist or not, remained to be found.

The 1930s nevertheless saw the Soviet model reach new heights as an inspiration for the Labour Party. As the fellow-travelling phenomenon boomed through the decade, and the search for a more optimistic vision of society intensified, the aspects of the Soviet system that appealed most to British socialists were increasingly focused around the technocracy of a state-controlled, centralised and planned economy, in conjunction with a new moral code or 'scale of values' which placed the collective endeavour of society above the personal pecuniary ambitions of individuals that so characterised western capitalist economies. The visits to the Soviet Union of influential figures ensured that the Soviet model was provided an audience that was greater in size, interest and enthusiasm. The years from 1932 to 1935 saw the height of this enthusiasm, and many socialists returned to Britain proclaiming the progress of the Soviet penal system. More than once it was suggested not only that the USSR had advanced far beyond the West in its creation of a new civilisation, at the heart of which lay its penal system and the regeneration of socialist human beings, but that Britain had much to learn from the Soviet experience, and had in its ignorance of it hitherto made a significant error.

That the Soviet model provided inspiration in this arena is clear; yet relations between the Labour Party and the USSR became more complex in this decade as the movement adapted to the changing effects and attractions of the Soviet state. Enthusiasm for the Soviet project certainly remained (and within particular factions, peaked), but the experiment was by now far more familiar to the left in Britain than it had been in the 1920s, and excitement among the movement was inevitably diminished, especially as the realities of the Stalinist show trials and suspicious methods of Soviet justice became clearer. As an uncompromising Stalinism began

to occupy the space in which all types of Labour figures had once placed their hopes, the idealisation of Soviet Russia as providing ready-made, 'off the shelf' solutions for British problems lost credence. Scepticism, moreover, at the more dubious actions of Soviet communists gathered pace throughout the 1930s, and any Soviet inspiration proved benign as it failed to be translated into concerted practical action. Labour's own penal politics in this decade was therefore relatively unaffected by the Soviet example.

The *theoretical* impact of the Soviet penal system, though, was indeed significant—calls for the utilisation of the Soviet model in the search for a new British Benthamism attest to this. But the international developments of the 1930s and the distinct lack of development in the area of penal reform in Britain demonstrate that the inspiration remained theoretical. Language and action are very different forms of expression, and the latter will generally be historically prefaced over the former. Yet this should not undermine, nor ignore, the fact that the language of many within the British left was incredibly indulgent towards the Soviet prison system, even as its repressive and authoritarian features were coming to light. That the Labour Party leadership never acted upon its Soviet inspiration in many ways casts the party in a more positive light than, for instance, the ILP following its headlong commitment to the Soviet state. But the party's ability to act upon or influence any major decision in the decade, as Pimlott points out, was severely restricted by the chaos of the international political relations of the 1930s and Labour's weakened domestic position. Despite its disinclination to act, the party's complicated vulnerability to Soviet influence clearly remained.

As one resigned, pro-Soviet intellectual put it in 1932, under the frustration of Labour's impotence, '[w]e are old people sitting on the bank; we can't influence the Labour party and we don't want to'. Yet, in time, the real desires of these figures were once more to the fore,

even if still obstructed in practice. ‘I [wish] that the Labour leaders … were less prejudiced against the internal organisation of the USSR’. Despite the often-enthusiastic utterances of the party’s leadings lights on the Soviet state throughout the 1930s, ‘in their projects of reform they never mention the experience in constructing the socialist state of the Soviet Union’.[250]

[250] *Diary of Beatrice Webb*, IV, 348, entry 22 February 1932; Beatrice to Laski, 18 November 1941 and 26 March 1942, *Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, III, 452; 456.

CONCLUSION

As Britain entered wartime, the focus of the Labour Party had understandably shifted towards the international political situation. In comparison to the party's engagement with penal politics during the 1920s, the issue had taken a back seat during the 1930s and was not re-visited in depth until the war had ended.[1] Penal politics were not lost altogether, as Labour MPs continued to press for the abolition of the death penalty throughout the war; Rhys Davies, who appeared to do much of Labour's legwork on penality in this period, pressured the Home Secretary on numerous occasions over the issue,[2] while Ellen Wilkinson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Home Security, also kept the subject alive.[3] And in an article for *The Times* just prior to the end of the war, George Bernard Shaw advocated the introduction of forms of euthanasia to replace the gallows. This was, he suggested, in aid of the necessary work of 'weeding the garden' and 'judicial liquidation'.[4] Other than these disparate events, however, little was achieved in penal politics during the period between 1939 and 1945.

Only in 1948, under an Attlee government elected with a huge majority, were significant steps taken in reforming Britain's penal system. In that year, great strides were made with the passing of the Criminal Justice Act, which abolished penal servitude, hard labour and prison divisions in England and Wales. In the same year, Sydney Silverman, Labour MP for Nelson and Colne, introduced a private members' bill in the Commons that sought to suspend the death penalty for a five-year period.[5] The bill passed the Commons, but the Labour Home Secretary, James Chuter-Ede, originally spoke against it, stressing that the time was 'not ripe for undertaking …

[1] Block and Hostettler, *Hanging in the Balance*, 100.
[2] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 4 February 1943, vol. 386, c.1077; 3 February 1944, vol. 396, c.1425.
[3] Ibid, 14 December, vol. 395, c.1401.
[4] *The Times*, 5 March 1945; 8 December 1947.
[5] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 14 April 1948, vol. 449, cc980-7.

reform' and that he failed to believe that 'public opinion in the country is in favour' of such legislation.[6] Claiming that unanimous opinion was required on such an important issue, Chuter-Ede stifled the bill, despite, as pointed out by Silverman, the findings of the Select Committee back in 1931.[7] In time, Chuter-Ede agreed to reprieve convicted murderers until the future of the bill was addressed sufficiently, but this was only temporary.[8] In any case, the House of Lords voted by 181 votes to 28 against the abolitionist motion.[9] Only in 1965, long after a Royal Commission of 1949 had been established by Prime Minister Attlee, were greater strides made as capital punishment was abolished under the first Wilson administration.[10]

Despite these successes, a unified approach within the Labour Party was clearly still missing in the post-war years. Indeed, in a parliamentary debate on abolition in 1948, the House was reminded by the Conservative Party that, in spite of its push to reform, Labour remained the party of figures like Shaw, who had on numerous occasions expressed the sentiment that those people who were beyond reformation 'be killed "as one would kill a mad dog"'.[11] Moreover, while Attlee had established a Royal Commission to examine capital punishment's efficacy, the terms of reference of the Commission precluded, in Attlee's own words, a recommendation for abolition.[12] This was a great disappointment to abolitionists and reformers, who had 'seen a Select Committee report in their favour [in 1931] and the recommendations ignored … [and] had had a Bill in favour of abolition for five years passed in the Commons only to see it thrown out by the Lords'.[13] The abolition of capital punishment had been official Labour Party policy

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[6] Ibid, c.1083.
[7] Ibid, c.980.
[8] Ibid, 16 April 1948, vol. 449, c.1307; 3 May 1948, vol. 451, c.1236; 1 November 1048, vol. 457, c.32; *LPACR*, 1949.
[9] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 1 June 1948, vol. 156, cc19-75; 102-92.
[10] Ibid, 20 January 1949, vol. 460, c.329.
[11] Ibid, c.989. The Conservative spokesperson was Maurice Christopher Hollis, who, despite his attack on Shaw, supported abolition against the line of his own party.
[12] Ibid, cc329-31.
[13] Block and Hostettler, *Hanging in the Balance*, 123.

since 1934, but in practice it failed to commit to the issue. Even in 1956, when Attlee was asked to endorse a petition against the death penalty, he replied that: 'I am very tepid on the question of the abolition of capital punishment and would rather not sign'.[14] Attlee's ambivalence epitomised Labour's struggles with the issue of penal reform in the inter-war period.

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In the time between the earliest writings on crime by British socialists in the 1880s and the abolition of capital punishment in 1965, the Labour Party had travelled a great distance. Formed out of the utopian socialists, Fabian gradualists and ethical ILPers who had preceded it, Labour had in a short space of time transitioned from a pressure group, through opposition, and eventually into a party of government. Socialists' ideas on crime in the 1880s are currently understood, if not well known, while the Labour Party's role in reforming the justice system in 1948 and 1965 has also been granted scholarly attention. How the party developed its approach to penal politics, criminality and punishment in its most formative years—the inter-war period—has until now been granted very little analysis, and this has been the subject of this thesis. Its principal aim has been to examine how the party's attitudes to these issues changed and developed over time according to its cultural, economic and political circumstances, and to reconsider more broadly the development of British socialism according to these temporal and contextual changes. In particular, the analysis has been undertaken with reference to the Labour Party's most formative political exemplar during the inter-war period, the Soviet Union.

[14] Gardiner papers, Add MS 56456.

The thesis has presented three principal arguments. First, it has contended that, while at different times the Labour Party engaged with penal politics with changing levels of enthusiasm, it failed throughout the inter-war period to develop a coherent, single and unified approach to the issues of crime, punishment and penal reform. Some early socialist approaches to crime and punishment in the 1880s were indeed distinctive, drawn as they were from a general creed of socialism and focused on the assumption that criminality would naturally decrease as society transitioned towards a socialist order. On top of this, there existed a broader view that Britain's penal system was in urgent need of reform. Few individual figures, however, attempted to connect these two points, and only on rare occasions did socialists engage thoroughly with the issue of penal politics. This was in no small part due to the popularity, if not quite the dominance, of this teleological and 'utopian' approach to penality.

Despite this detachment, certain characteristics of socialists' approaches can be discerned. On the whole, punitive methods of punishment were felt unnecessary and inhumane, while the view that environmental factors were the principal element in producing criminal tendencies ensured that many socialists held views broadly similar to those of contemporary progressive criminological circles. The idea that education and training in skilled professions were essential on the path to reform was also popular, while for 'utopians' the inculcation of a socialist ethic would be the principal factor in ensuring order. For other socialists, though, perhaps most explicitly a number of Fabians and those involved with the Eugenics Society, punitive measures held greater sway. The keys to reducing or preventing criminality, according to the Fabians, included increasingly strict and comprehensive legal systems, a fear of harsh sentences and a top-down, bureaucratic (and, on occasion, authoritarian) structuring of society. In the utopias of these figures, the role of concentration camps, isolation, sterilisation and gas chambers were often prominent.

If the emphasis of early socialists' penal politics focused less upon the practical features of prison institutions and more on the ethics that lay behind competing ideas of criminality, this began to change with the experience of the First World War. As chapter two has demonstrated, the war had a great impact upon the labour movement's engagement with penality, forcing it to focus on Britain's penal system as the liberal foundation of Britain's political culture was called in to question. The experiences of conscientious objectors both increased the labour movement's interest in Britain's prison system and changed the composition of the Labour Party, as disillusioned Liberals made the move to Labour. The effect was positive in terms of propelling the party forward on the issue of penal reform, as the socialism of the Labour 'old guard' was complemented by the newly acquired experience of the prison regime of Liberals and Labour members. Moreover, as the Labour Party reconsidered its ideological foundation following the war and sought a 'new social order' under its 1918 constitution, a number of prominent objectors like Fenner Brockway and E. D. Morel attempted to force penal reform on to the party's 'reconstruction' agenda. And with the advent of a 'socialist' system in Soviet Russia, the party was soon exposed to a host of new ideas on the issue of penal reform.

While focusing the party on the issue of penal politics, these competing influences did little to aid the formation of a clarified, single party approach. Indeed, as chapter three highlights, the approach of the party in the 1920s was complex. On the one hand, the utopian nature of many socialists' approaches had diminished significantly by this time, and a far more practical attitude towards the issue dominated, epitomised by the LRD enquiry into English prisons. As the responsibility of government loomed ever closer, a more practical, pragmatic, and very often non-committal approach to penal politics was deemed necessary in its striving to prove itself a respectable party of government. The 'Big Five' now dominated a moderate party leadership, and MacDonald's steadfast commitment to gradualism ensured any socialist

transformation was extremely unlikely. When Labour assumed office for the first time in 1924, its minority status made any radical legislation a difficult prospect and consequently it failed to meet the expectations laid down by the movement.

On the other hand, however, in its 1918 programme the party had rallied for the 'radical transformation' of society and, with socialist revolution in Russia, it now had an exemplar to study. The visits by the labour movement to Soviet Russia throughout the decade proved a formative experience in penal politics, as members returned enthusiastic about new socialist approaches to penality, having been subjected to the increasingly sophisticated programme of Soviet cultural diplomacy. In the form of Russia, the 1920s proved an idealistic decade, while domestically the Labour Party was forced to take a strictly pragmatic stance. When the Webbs claimed in 1922 that a successful prison system would surely pass the wit of man, it appeared that Labour's pragmatic stance was set to dominate.

As Labour entered government for a second time in 1929, its minority administration quickly became hostage to global financial meltdown. Facing rapidly increasing unemployment and national crisis, the potential for enacting 'socialist' legislation was immediately diminished, and the penal reform targets that had been set for the movement had little chance of being met. The party's engagement with the issue was necessarily elevated in government, but without an overarching penal philosophy it approached the issue on a relatively ad-hoc basis. At the Home Office, J. R. Clynes learned quickly on the job and brought a humane vision to the task, achieving important reforms in the treatment of expectant mothers sentenced to death, the abolition of the preliminary period of solitary confinement for convicts, and the removal of class bias from Britain's judicial system. Moreover, a lengthy campaign by Labour backbenchers culminated in the passing of legislation that abolished the military death penalty

for cowardice and desertion, while Clynes' openly abolitionist approach helped to force a national debate on the issue of capital punishment. On all these issues, the second Labour government must be re-assessed and, in contrast to the prevailing historiography of the administration, its successes in penal politics must be acknowledged.

Once more, however, the party's increased engagement with penal politics did not necessarily equate with the development of a unified party philosophy. Indeed, even within the government itself, actions with regard to criminality varied. While the Soviet Union continued to influence the party in government, its impact was felt less in penal politics than in the broader areas of justice and repression, in which the Labour Party chose to ignore the more unsavoury aspects of the Soviet regime. In Britain itself, moreover, Labour's administration of reconditioning camps designed to deal with soaring unemployment saw it renege on its long-held opposition to conscription, as benefits were denied to those unemployed who refused to be conscripted into labour camps.

The party's engagement with penal politics diminished in the 1930s as it entered into opposition. That the ideas the movement had gained from the Soviet Union during the 1920s had failed to penetrate the party leadership in government did not prevent the party from re-visiting Soviet Russia. Indeed, as capitalism appeared to be collapsing and as Labour briefly espoused a more radical agenda between 1931 and 1933, a number of significant Labour figures took to the Soviet Union and the 'utopian' prisons they witnessed only fuelled their admiration. In contrast to the 1920s, though, and more in line with the early utopianism of the 1880s, the Soviets showcased the development of a new socialist ethic with much more fervour than the features of their prison institutions, and this was reflected in the fawning British reports. Despite finally committing to the abolition of the death penalty in 1934, the issue of

penal politics became increasingly tangential throughout the decade, and an increasingly disengaged labour movement failed to develop its penal philosophy in the face of a threatening international situation. Once more, Labour's enthusiasm for more 'utopian' ideas was constrained by broader political circumstances.

Armed with this knowledge, Labour's vacillations with regard to penal reform following the Second World War can be more accurately understood. Moreover, within the small established historiography that exists, Radzinowicz and Hood's contention that there existed in Britain a 'distinctive and coherent' socialist point of view can be challenged on the basis that socialist attitudes to penal politics fluctuated over time and in accordance with the changing political, cultural and economic circumstances.[15] Indeed, the Labour Party's approach to penality is inextricably related to the temporal and contextual conditions through which it moved, and the 'distinctiveness' of its approach to crime both increased and (more often) diminished according to its correlate political circumstances.

Secondly, the thesis has argued that a focus on criminality allows for a significant re-assessment of the relationship between the Labour Party and the Soviet Union. While recent research on Labour-Soviet relations has emphasised the important role that the Soviet Union came to play as an exemplar for the Labour Party, there remains a lack of examination of the significance of this relationship for Labour in specific policy areas.[16] Indeed, an analysis of Labour's reaction to and admiration for the Soviet penal system also provides an important window for understanding the broader relations of the two entities.

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[15] Radzinowicz and Hood, *History of English Criminal Law*, V, 34.

[16] Davis, 'Altered Images'; idem, 'Left Out in the Cold'; idem, 'Labour's Political Thought'; idem, 'Labour and the Kremlin'; idem, 'A New Socialist Influence'; idem, 'An Outsider Looks in'; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*, 3 vols.

On a basic level, the thesis demonstrates the development through the inter-war period of a great deal of admiration for the Soviet penal system on the part of the labour movement. As chapter two has shown, the reactions of the movement to the Russian revolutions of 1917 provided space for an enthusiasm for the Soviet project to develop, often under the rubric that the revolutionary state deserved a fair chance to shape its own political destiny. As the first socialist state, Soviet Russia came to embody socialism itself in the minds of many in the labour movement, and this made the Labour Party vulnerable to Soviet influence. Moreover, as chapter three has demonstrated, as the labour movement began to visit the Soviet state through the 1920s, it was increasingly subjected to an elaborate programme of Soviet cultural diplomacy, within which prisons came to play an incredibly significant role. Building on the work of Davis and Morgan, it is argued that it was not just in the areas of economics and foreign policy that the Soviet Union positively influenced the labour movement; from as early as 1919 Labour figures heaped praise upon the Soviet penal system.

An examination of crime in this context, though, reveals much more about the Soviet-Labour relationship. Chapters three and five have demonstrated the significant lengths to which the Soviets went to analyse their foreign visitors and tailor trips to their interests, as well as the specific focus upon British guests and prisons that was developed throughout this period. More than simply accelerating the development of British admiration for the Soviet system, the engineering of a 'fund of goodwill' had a number of important implications for the Labour Party, their relations with the USSR and international politics more broadly through the inter-war years. The showcasing of model Soviet prisons, for instance, and the dissemination of their 'superiority' within Britain reinforced among the labour movement the image of a 'humane' style of socialism developing in the Soviet Union. In contrast to contemporary Conservative propaganda, this humanitarian imagery fostered a sense of comradery towards the USSR, but

also strengthened the idea in Britain that socialism could indeed bring about positive changes to society. As Labour's idealism diminished through the 1920s in favour of a party pragmatism, the image of the Soviet penal system as humane, comradely and an emblem of justice provided reassurance to the movement that socialism could in fact succeed.

Moreover, with insight into the development of the Soviets' *kul'tpokaz* programme and its extensive, thorough and subliminal reach, it has been argued that the casting of British visitors within the established literature as consistently naïve is short-sighted. In the early 1920s, as the *kul'tpokaz* programme was still in its infancy, British visitors often witnessed genuinely progressive developments in Bolshevik penal reform, while the far-reaching efforts and effects of Soviet cultural diplomacy ensured that the vast majority of *all* international visitors believed the Soviet system sincere. Once more, this had significant implications for Labour's relations with the USSR, and, armed with this knowledge, a more accurate understanding can be arrived at as to why Labour—or at least large factions of the movement—disbelieved so many of the accusations levelled against the Soviets in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Better insight can also be gleaned as to why, when so few other states were willing to establish diplomatic and trade relations with the Soviets, and amidst so much opposition in Britain, the Labour Party fought to sustain Anglo-Soviet relations. There were, of course, a host of complex reasons for this, but the goodwill that had been established through cultural diplomacy and Labour's enthusiastic reception of Soviet prisons is an important and hitherto ignored factor. As chapters three and four demonstrate, questions remain as to how much more might have been done to pressure the Soviets over their repressions had the Labour Party known in detail the effects that its concern over the penal system was having; or indeed whether, in lieu of any knowledge of 'humane' Soviet prisons, the USSR's pariah status would have only been exacerbated.

By analysing Labour's relationship with the USSR from the perspective of criminality, the thesis has demonstrated in new detail the extent of the movement's tolerance for ostensibly 'communist' ideas. In particular, chapter three highlights how the ideas that the labour movement were subjected to in the Soviet Union were often of (recent) western provenance, and merely dressed up in Soviet socialism. Without knowing this, however, many in Labour circles returned to Britain calling for the incorporation of Soviet 'communist' ideas into a social democratic British state, blurring the lines between the often-entrenched positions of communism and social democracy, and as to what was considered acceptable to non-revolutionary socialists in Britain. The emphasis in the 1930s on a 'new Soviet civilisation' and the Soviets' new moral code only reinforced this distortion.

Despite this capacity for tolerating—and even indulging—the socialism of the Soviet Union, it has also been demonstrated that, as the Soviet project became more familiar to the British labour movement, and as the problematic issue of dictatorship came to the fore in the 1930s, the USSR became somewhat less exciting for its British admirers. As a result, its ability to present to the labour movement 'off-the-peg' solutions for the problems within British society was weakened. This is not to suggest that enthusiasm for the Soviet project evaporated altogether; indeed, figures such as the Webbs, Laski and Pritt continued to espouse the Soviet system through the 1930s. Moreover, even after the Second World War, as an increasing amount of material was being processed by the Labour Party that revealed the use of forced

labour and slave conditions,[17] enthusiasm remained within the movement for the Soviet state.[18] Right through the 1950s delegations continued to visit the USSR,[19] hailing the effect of Soviet penal colonies in decreasing rates of crime and ensuring that British enthusiasm for Soviet communism was known to the Politburo.[20] For their part, too, the Soviets maintained their efforts to study and analyse foreign penal systems in order to prove the superiority of their own.[21] The pull of the Soviet exemplar thus remained in factions, but Labour's disinclination throughout the inter-war period to incorporate any Soviet-styled policies into its programme only attests to the strength of the party's gradualism and the intensity of the domestic restrictions under which it was placed each time it neared political power.

In its final argument, the thesis has contended that, by analysing the Labour Party's approach to criminality and its relationship to the Soviet Union together, an important reconsideration of British socialism, Labour policy and attitudes to the USSR over time can be undertaken. In particular, criminality and the USSR provide a means through which to examine the type of socialism to which the labour movement aspired, and the ways in which this changed over time and in relation to political and economic circumstances. As demonstrated in chapter one, early utopian socialist approaches to crime urged the self-governing of society and the establishment of communities within which a set of involuntary social habits (or public opinion) effectively

[17] See LHASC, LP/ID/USSR/02 (Labour Party International Department: USSR Correspondence), Report of the Foreign Office, 11 March 1948 on 'The Real Conditions in Soviet Russia'; Report of the Foreign Office, 24 March 1948 on 'Facts about Russia: "Equality" and Class Distinction in the Soviet Union'; LP/ID/USSR/23, Soviet Labour Camps (11 November 1955); LP/ID/USSR/42 (USSR: forced labour pamplets), Forced Labour in the USSR: The Facts (c.1950); 'Prisoner's Forum: Siberia', *The Howard Journal*, 5, 4 (1940); M. L. Berneri, *Workers in Stalin's Russia* (London, 1944).
[18] WCML, AG/USSR Box 3, Ralph Millner, *Crime in the USSR: 50 Questions Answered* (London, 1944); Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The Truth About Soviet Russia* (London, 1941); Harold J. Laski, *Russia and the West: Policy for Britain* (London, 1947).
[19] See GARF, f. R-9412, op. 2, d. 1, ll. 71-90.
[20] GARF, f. R-9412, op. 2, d. 1, l. 3; f. R-9412, op. 2, d. 1, l. 65; RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 224, l. 13.
[21] GARF, f. R-9414, op. 1, d. 1783, ll. 1-58, '*A. M. Iakovlev, Broshiura: Tiuremnye sistemy burzhuaznykh stran (Glavnoe upravlenie ispravitel'no-trudovykh kolonii MVD SSSR. Nauchno-issledovatel'skii otdel)*'.

policed behavioural norms. Within these communities, often relatively small in size, any juridical apparatus remained conspicuously small. In contrast, other socialists—often Fabians and gradualists—offered a different set of relations between the individual and the state, in which a ruling elite controlled society through a top-down, bureaucratic structure, and across which a strict apparatus of laws and police forces operated. Evidently, the role of individual citizens in the governing of society is far greater in the utopian ideal.

Following the First World War and the collapse of the Second International, it appeared that idealistic designs for socialism had all but expired. Indeed, following the international aggression of the war, a yearning for a League of Nations meant for many in the labour movement merely the establishment of an international police force, and, as a consequence, a further move away from the self-regulation of society via an established set of involuntary social habits.[22] As Labour moved closer to governmental authority through the 1920s, kernels of its idealism remained, but its commitment to a teleological narrative of socialist progress was diminished. The Soviet Union provided socialist inspiration through the decade, but in power the Labour Party was committed to patching up the capitalist system—a practical system that was reliant on an apparatus of rules, laws and regulations enforced from above. Even in its administration of reconditioning camps, Labour recoiled from the opportunity to attempt to create socialist prototypes. As demonstrated above, self-sufficient and self-regulated labour colonies were, for many early socialists, a key platform upon which to establish a socialist society, but by this time Labour's vision for society and socialism had taken on a far more moderate character.

[22] *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 1 August 1918, vol. 109, c.720.

In the 1930s, as capitalism appeared to be on the brink of collapse, the effect of the Soviet Union captured the labour movement once more. While they were impressed by the Soviets' planned economy and socialised production, visitors to the Soviet state were most taken with the apparent creation of a new socialist ethic, and with it a 'new Soviet man'. With Soviet workers alleged to be labouring only for the collective good, and convinced by the Soviet authorities that crime was rapidly diminishing under communism, the aspects of 'socialism in action' that most impressed British visitors changed quite drastically during the decade. Indeed, in many ways the appeal of the Soviet Union at this point recalled the early utopian ideas of British socialists. As the Labour Party moved leftwards between 1931 and 1933, its vision for society changed briefly and was aided by the Soviet example. But by 1934, gradualism had regained its hold over the party, and with it the more moderate aspirations for an evolutionary social democratic society.

Throughout the inter-war period, the Labour Party's approach to crime, punishment and prison reform was never coherent or unified. Instead, the party engaged with the issue only sporadically and in relation to the changing political, cultural and economic circumstances of the time. The party's complicated relationship with the Soviet Union played a key role in its dealings in penal politics, even if on a more theoretical than practical level, and, when analysed in conjunction, these aspects of Labour's history provide a new understanding of the changing nature of British socialism, Labour policy and the formative role of the party's relationship with the USSR. In its attitudes to crime at the end of the twentieth century, it has been suggested that the Labour Party 'conceded crucial ideological and political ground' to the moderate arm of British politics.[23] Following the analysis in this thesis of Labour's complex approach to

[23] Joe Sim, Vincenzo Ruggiero and Mick Ryan, 'Punishment in Europe: Perceptions and Commonalities', in Vincenzo Ruggiero, Mick Ryan and Joe Sim (eds), *Western European Penal Systems: A Critical Anatomy* (London, 1995), 4.

penal politics, it can be argued that, in spite of a host of socialist influences and a shifting articulation of Labour's socialism, this concession in fact began squarely in the inter-war period.

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