PANKHURST’S DREADNOUGHT
AND THE (ORIGINAL) FOURTH INTERNATIONAL
“Left Communism” and Soviet Democracy

The Dreadnought Before Pankhurst’s Expulsion

As we have seen, even before the “merger” of the CP (BSTI) with the CPGB at the Unity Conference of January 1921, Sylvia Pankhurst’s Workers’ Dreadnought had ceased to be “The Organ of the Communist Party” and now presented itself as a paper giving “independent support” to the united party “from a Left-Wing standpoint.” This was not a position that was going to be tolerated for very long by those in charge of the party or by their Comintern mentors.

Pankhurst was serving what was to be her final jail sentence during the period of the January Unity Conference and was not released from Holloway prison until the end of May. The decision of the executive committee to expel her from the party was made on 10 September.
Until then, the *Dreadnought* had made some effort to give what a later generation of Communist dissidents would call “critical support” to the party, while continuing to promote “Left-Wing” Communism. The fact that, following Pankhurst’s release, no dramatic change can be discerned in the way the issues were presented suggests that — however small in numbers — “Left-Wing” Communism was at least more than a one-woman band. It soon became clear that Pankhurst, like the SLP, viewed the freedom to debate and criticize as a necessary pre-condition of soviet democracy.

There was also a renewed emphasis on women during this period, with, for example, a leading article by Dora Montefiore (“Why We Celebrate a Communist Women’s Day”) and a piece by Alexandra Kollontai (“International Solidarity and the Proletarian Woman of To-day”) appearing in the *Dreadnought* in April.¹ This continued after Pankhurst’s break with the CPGB with, for example, a new edition of “Kolontay’s Splendid Pamphlet *Communism and the Family*,” advertised in the paper early in 1922. Kollontai’s *The Workers’ Opposition in Russia* and Rosa Luxemburg’s *Russian Revolution*, together with her letters, were featured a year later.²

Much of what appeared in the *Dreadnought* during the period before Pankhurst’s expulsion reflected Communist orthodoxy, with reports and articles by Lenin, front-page prominence given to the “Red Trade Union International Conference,” and a piece titled “Prison Life in Russia,” which contrasted that enlightened regime with “the prisons of ‘Democracy.’”³ There was little here, or in the paper’s report on the party’s conference in April, to disquiet the Communist Party leadership. The main function of the April conference had been to ratify the party’s constitution and rules. Its most dramatic event was the expulsion — for what was deemed his treacherous behaviour on “Black Friday” as secretary of the National Transport Workers’ Federation — of Robert Williams, the stirring advocate of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” at the Leeds Soviet Convention in 1917.⁴

But the *Dreadnought* also published material that was bound to cause leadership eyebrows to be raised. There was little to annoy in the
spring 1921 serialization of Sylvia Pankhurst’s *Soviet Russia as I Saw It in 1920*, in which the 21 conditions of the Communist International were hailed as “disciplinary measures aiming to give power to the old forces of Socialism.” (Indeed, later in the year, the paper’s reviewer was to complain that “Miss Pankhurst throws no light on the ‘Cheka.’”)

But the same could not be said for the serialization, spread over three months, of an extended version of Herman Gorter’s response to Lenin’s “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.

In July, the Bow branch of the CPGB protested when the *Dreadnought* published a letter criticizing the policies pursued by Communists elected on the Labour Party ticket as members of the Poplar Poor Law Guardians, the local authority that administered aid to the poor. No “information likely to cause injury to the Party or to prejudice the Communist reputation of any other member” should be published without the consent of the branch, the Bow branch insisted. In response, Pankhurst said that it was the duty of Communists to criticize the Labour Party. What was it to do “when members of the Communist Party go into the Labour Party and become an indistinguishable part of it, displaying all its weaknesses and faults?” If the branch had the right “to control the public activities of its members,” why then had “the Party left its representatives to do as they please, and only passed a vote of censure on those who, at long last, have called attention to the fact that these representatives are not moving in the path of Communist tactics”? The Bow branch could not safeguard the Communist Party’s reputation by “a policy of ‘Hush! Hush!’” Pankhurst ended by claiming that she shared the CP’s aim to affiliate with Labour “in order to draw it into the path of Communism.” But this could only be accomplished “by constant vigilant criticism and discussion.”

Soon after, Pankhurst questioned Communist tactics in running a candidate in the Caerphilly by-election. In the same issue, her editorial criticized some of Zinoviev’s “pronouncements” to the Comintern, in particular his contention that the “tactics of creating Communist nuclei within the Trade Unions” had been successful in (among other
countries) Britain. She would like to hear from such groups. “It would do our heart good,” she wrote, “if they really are advanced enough to be called Communist, and really powerful enough to achieve results. Let us hear from you, O Communist nuclei.” It was also “not quite accurate” to say that the shop stewards’ movement had joined the party — only “certain members” had done this so far. Furthermore, she declared, Zinoviev was wrong about the Labour Party. At the second Comintern congress, Lenin had used “Comrade Rothstein’s” argument in support of Labour Party affiliation. Rothstein had argued that Labour “was really not a political party at all but a loose federation of Trade Unions, within which one could carry on any sort of propaganda one chose.” But subsequent events had demonstrated that Rothstein’s argument was false. And already the Labour Party had twice refused to accept the CP’s bid for affiliation. If all this was not enough raise hackles, Pankhurst concluded by reiterating her claim that, in Moscow, Lenin had advised her that her group should join a united party and work within the Comintern on behalf of their own anti-parliamentary policy:

“If the decisions about the Labour Party and Parliamentarism are wrong,” he said, “they can be altered by a subsequent Congress. Form a Left Block within a United Communist Party.”

On this advice we have continued to act in good faith.  

What must have been the final straw followed a fortnight later. The Dreadnought headline proclaimed: “A New International. Left Wing Communism’s Anti-Parliamentarians Consolidate.” The impetus for the new international, Pankhurst said, came from Germany and Holland, with Pannekoek and Gorter as “leading theorists.” There would be an international newspaper, published in several languages. An anti-parliamentary party was being formed in Holland to join the existing German KAPD (Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands, the Communist Workers’ Party of Germany), and Dreadnought readers should “watch these developments with attention.” She concluded by restating the familiar anti-parliamentarian case: “The change of system
will not come until the old forms of government are discredited and the workers break away from them.”

The following week’s *Dreadnought* introduced Alexandra Kollontai’s *The Workers’ Opposition* under the headline “The Workers’ Opposition in Sovrusssia.” Although she was, the paper explained, a member of the central committee of the Russian party, her “brochure” on “Working-Class Organisations” had been refused publication. It had then been “printed illegally” and retrospectively approved, but, at the same time, its distribution among Communist Party delegates had been forbidden in Russia. Kollontai complained that the unions had “become depopulated,” with only “little groups that did not take part in the race for a career in the Soviet bureaucracy” still “intimately bound up . . . with the workers.”

Meanwhile, applications for five-shilling shares in a new “Dreadnought Publishing Co.” had already been sought, and the editorial preceding the “New International” piece had dealt with the *Dreadnought*’s financial difficulties. Whatever “Moscow gold” the paper had previously received had clearly been discontinued by this time.

**Pankhurst’s Expulsion, “Freedom of Discussion,” and the Dreadnought Reprieved**

A week after her expulsion from the *CPGB*, in the 17 September issue of the *Dreadnought*, Pankhurst gave her own account of the decision. The party was, she said, “passing through a sort of political measles called discipline, which makes it fear the free expression and circulation of opinion within the Party.” Ever since its formation, it had “fretted itself” about the “independent Communist voice” of the *Dreadnought*, and, apparently, the January conference had “even debated whether members might be permitted” to read the paper. Informed that the question of the *Dreadnought*’s future was “in abeyance,” some party organizers interpreted this news as a prohibition on its circulation. The “struggle for existence as an unsubsidised paper was intensified,” she noted, “in the face of the *Communist*, heavily subsidised, largely advertised and sold at 4d a quire cheaper to newsagents and branches.”
Soon after her release from prison, Pankhurst explained, she had met with a subcommittee of the CPGB’s executive, which proposed that “as a disciplined member of the Party” she should hand over the paper unconditionally: “The disciplinarians set forth their terms to one who had for eight years maintained a pioneer paper with a constant struggle and in the face of much persecution.” She had refused but had promised “to consider carefully and in a comradely spirit” any alternative proposition the party might make. The original demand was repeated, however, with the executive committee insisting that she “should surrender the Dreadnought to it within the space of two weeks.” She had not replied, she said, and at the end of the two-week period had “received a summons to meet the Executive,” which she did on 10 September:

“We are not here to consider the good the Dreadnought might do, but the harm it might do,” said Comrade MacManus, his red silk handkerchief showing so smartly from his pocket.

“What the Committee wants is the death of the Dreadnought,” said another comrade.

Discipline was the watch word of the meeting.

Pankhurst went on to stress the necessity of an independent organ “giving expression to Left Wing ideas.” She cited recent developments, especially the decision of Third International to exclude the KAPD, which she described as “the industrialist, anti-Trade Union, anti-Parliamentary and highly revolutionary Communist Labour Party of Germany, which played so important a part in the Ruhr Valley rising.” The Kollontai article of the previous week had demonstrated “the growing cleavage between Right and Left in the Russian Communist Party” and “the tendency to slip to the Right” in Russia. But such questions were not discussed in The Communist, “a Party organ under the control of the Right Wing of the British Communist Party, and of the Executive in Moscow, which is at present dominated by the Right Wing policy.”

At the 10 September meeting, Pankhurst reported in her account,
after the executive had confirmed once more its unwillingness to “tolerate the existence of any Communist organ independent of itself,” she had announced that the *Dreadnought*’s financial problems meant that the next issue of the paper would be its last. Rounding off the debate, MacManus then concluded that there was no alternative but expulsion.\textsuperscript{11} The CPGB position was quite explicit, and in its 17 September issue *The Communist* gave front-page prominence to the expulsion of Pankhurst for refusing to “hand the paper over to the control of the party.” A few weeks later, in an article in *The Communist* titled “Party Organisation,” Tom Bell would emphasize that “no paper may be recognised as a Communist organ if it does not submit to the direction of the party.”\textsuperscript{12}

Pankhurst really does seem to have believed that the issue in which this long account of her expulsion appeared — that of 17 September 1921 — would be the end of the *Workers’ Dreadnought*. Quite apart from her unrepentant comments about her expulsion, it looked as though the paper would die with stings in its tail. The editorial, headed “Farewell,” regretted “the growth of opportunism in the Third International,” and a letter, from A.J. and F.E. Symes, congratulated Pankhurst on her expulsion and announced their own resignation from the CPGB, regretting the “end of our little fighting B.S.T.I.” and the sacrifice by the merged party of its principles. Another letter protested emphatically against the expulsion and attacked the CP executive: “It has made the ‘Power of recall’ a mere phrase, well buried in the constitution. It has interpreted the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as the Dictatorship of the gentlemen who happen to be in power, or rather in office. It has gagged the voice of the rank and file.” The issue also featured an article titled “Transition to and from Communism,” signed “A. Ironie,” that attacked the recent retreat towards market economics and the reinstatement of private property in Russia and contrasted “free Communism” with “Communist Partyism.” Finally, in a boxed inset, Pankhurst protested against the way the *Daily Herald* had dealt with her letter concerning her expulsion. The paper had submitted the letter to MacManus for his “cuts and criticisms,” while not reciprocating by according her “the similar courtesy” of seeing the CPGB’s
statement before publication (something that MacManus had refused). She also insisted on the truth of her statement that no member of the Communist Party would be allowed to publish anything without the sanction of the executive.

Had the 17 September issue really been the last *Dreadnought*, that battleship would have certainly gone down with all guns blazing. In fact, the paper managed to struggle on — and indeed appeared the following week. Much of this edition was given over to Pankhurst’s exposition “Our Point of View,” in which she explored the differences of the Communist Left Wing with the CPGB, which were a matter “partly of principle, partly of practical utility.” The Communist Party’s representatives on local bodies did not “operate the Parliamentary policy in the destructive sense laid down by the Third International,” she complained. In other words, they failed to use their election to local bodies simply as a means to discredit these institutions but instead tried to play a positive role as conventional local councillors. Pankhurst also repeated her claim that Lenin had “urged” her to join a united Communist Party and “form a Left block within it.” Her hope had been that this would allow the Left Wing to achieve “final ascendancy in the united Party, failing that they could, should some crisis render it advisable, break out later on.”

The CPGB and the Third International were bent on the “excommunication” of the Left Wing. But new tendencies were developing. On 11 September, in Berlin, the KAPD had held an international conference of Communists opposed to the Third International, and in a recent speech Lenin had announced that the Workers’ Opposition was leaving the Russian Communist Party. It seems clear that Pankhurst assumed that the “Right” would soon be discredited in Russia and throughout the international Communist movement. She seems genuinely to have believed that Lenin was sympathetic to the formation of a “Left block” and at least to have hoped that he was already siding with the Workers’ Opposition.13

William Gallacher — whom Lenin had recently criticized, along with Pankhurst, for being in the grip of an “infantile disorder” because
of his “Left-Wing” views — now alleged that she had deliberately provoked her own expulsion “because someone was willing to finance The Workers’ Dreadnought.” The retraction and apology that Pankhurst demanded was not forthcoming.14

Perceptions of Russian Reality: The Beginning of the Change

Pankhurst’s Soviet Russia as I Saw It in 1920, serialized in the Dreadnought over the course of many weeks in 1921 while its author was in prison, presented a rosy view of Soviet Russia in general and soviet democracy in particular. Though still “incomplete,” the Russian soviet constitution already contained “a system of democratic checks and balances quite foreign to the Parliamentary and Cabinet system of capitalist states.” In a subsequent instalment, the change to one-person management in industry was accepted uncritically with a positive gloss: “The steady tendency is for the election of management to give way to selection, based on practical experience, technical competence and organising capacity.” 15

In the Dreadnought edition published on 10 September, the day of Pankhurst’s expulsion, an article by Dennis E. Batt, recently returned from Russia, answered the question posed in its title — “Does Moscow Soviet Represent the Workers?” — with a definite affirmative. Batt reported that he had witnessed a normal election campaign in which “Mensheviks, Left and Right Socialist-Revolutionaries, [and] Anarchists” participated, although together they managed to secure only 2 percent of the delegates. Following the election, Batt reported, the “support of the non-partisan vote was pledged to the Communist Party by the non-party spokesman at the opening session.” There was no comment on the oddity of this or its apparent lack of consideration for the views of the supposedly sovereign electors.

Until now, Dreadnought dissent had focused on the policies and actions of the British Party and, to a lesser extent, on the International’s misguided policies regarding parliamentary participation and Labour Party affiliation. Only the very recent Kollontai article, published on 3 September, suggested any real disquiet about the state of affairs in

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Russia itself. But this was swiftly to change. Whoever’s identity lay beyond “A. Ironie” in the (temporarily final) issue of the *Dreadnought*, he or she was clear about that nature of Bolshevik rule:

We were told that however much we might object to government of any sort, on principle, government in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat was necessary to bring about the transition from Capitalism to free Communism, and that such a dictatorship would be shorn of the objectionable qualities of other forms of government. Some of us never assented to this, and the trend of things seems to show we were right when we maintained that the dictatorship of the proletariat could only amount to a dictatorship over the proletariat of an official class, which would partake of the common nature of all officialism, even if some or all of those officials should be drawn from or voted for by the proletariat itself. We maintained that bureaucracy never proved the transition to anything save increased bureaucracy, or towards the revolt of the proletariat which should discover that those aspirations towards Free Communism which some have never relinquished, others have newly awakened to, are yet far from realisation.\(^{16}\)

The positive view of Russia under the Bolsheviks, exemplified by Pankhurst’s account of her visit the previous year, was by this time giving way to one that was much more critical. The Comintern — with which her earlier organization, the CP (BST1), had been so anxious to identify that it included the claim to be a “section” of the Third International in its name — was no longer the guide and inspiration it had been. Now Pankhurst and the *Dreadnought* were investing their hopes in a new Communist International.

*The Original Fourth International and the Communist Workers’ Party*

As we have seen, the advent of a “Left-Wing” Communist international had been broached even before Pankhurst’s expulsion in September 1921. Early in October, an editorial appeared in the *Dreadnought* under the heading “The New Communist Workers’ International.” The Third International had “through force of circumstance developed
along lines which have caused it to become the defender of Soviet Russia rather than the champion of World Revolution.” The actions of affiliated parties were controlled by a “Moscow Executive wholly dominated by Russian Policy,” and a new Fourth International had become inevitable. “The Workers’ Dreadnought was the first British paper to welcome the Third International; it now has the honour to be the first to welcome the Fourth International.” Like-minded individuals and groups were invited to send in their names for enrolment in a new Communist Workers’ Party soon to be formed. There was, of course, a big difference between Pankhurst’s tiny group and the German KAPD. In August 1920, the month that the CPGB was formed, the KAPD had about forty thousand members — although, as Marcel van der Linden tells us, following an all too familiar left-wing pattern “from then on, the Party was decimated by a series of splits and splinter groups.”

The manifesto of the new international was spread over two issues of the Dreadnought as extracts from it reached the paper. It was now clear the Bolsheviks had possessed no ability to skip a bourgeois revolution: even the Bolsheviks could not “evade the law of history,” the paper commented. While the contest in the industrial towns had been between capitalism and socialism, in the countryside it had been between feudalism and capitalism, with the peasants demanding private property rights. Once victory over the feudal aristocracy was achieved, the divergence of interests led to conflict and eventually to the New Economic Policy. The state and the “economic machine” had gradually been “strongly penetrated by bureaucracy.” The reaction to this was the Workers’ Opposition, which represented “more than the mere desire to choose for itself the management of the branches of industry.” As the conflicts escalated, there had been demonstrations in Moscow and the “insurrection of Kronstadt.” Meanwhile, there was famine and, as the paper stated emphatically: “The call for succour by the Soviet Government to the whole world has illumined the situation like a searchlight.” The Soviet government was surrendering “its country, its revolution, its proletariat, to the International bourgeoisie.”

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In the *Dreadnought’s* view, the Communist Workers’ International would have to “be created from down below.” The objects and methods of the Communist Workers’ Party were set out in the issue of 11 February 1922. The party aimed “to overthrow Capitalism, the wages system, and the machinery of the Capitalist State, and to establish a world-wide Federation of Communist Republics administered by occupational Soviets.” The statement of methods was largely negative: the new party would take no part in elections and would expose “the futility of Communist participation therein.” It would refuse affiliation to “reformist” organizations such as the Labour Party and seek to “emancipate” workers from the “merely palliative” trade unions. More positively, they would seek to “spread the knowledge of Communist principles” and to set up workers’ councils “in all branches of production, distribution and administration, in order that the workers may seize and maintain control.”

The activities of the Communist Workers’ Party now appeared regularly in the *Dreadnought*. Membership cards could be obtained for a shilling. Meetings, usually featuring Pankhurst as the main speaker, were advertised. Early venues included the Minerva Café, at 144 High Holborn, and the St. Leonards Academy in Leytonstone, as well as a meeting in Tatton organized by the Portsmouth Communist Workers’ Party, a breakaway from the CPGB. The latter was “a crowded meeting,” held on 26 March in Tatton’s Trades Hall, that included a musical program by the Proletarian Socialist Sunday School featuring “The International” sung in Esperanto, as well as an address by Sylvia Pankhurst. In a manner very reminiscent of the early days of *The Clarion* in the 1890s, members were urged to respond to requests for propaganda and propagandists from rural districts by becoming “Communist Pilgrims” and organizing village meetings on the weekends, at which the “simple and beautiful gospel” of communism could be proclaimed.

Much hope was invested in the Workers’ Opposition in Russia, which, the *Dreadnought* reported at the beginning of June, had now “allied itself with the Communist Workers’ Party (Fourth
International).” This it had done by sending a manifesto to the KAPD, signed “Group of Revolutionary Left Communists (C.W.P.) of Russia,” which greeted “the unanimous determination to set up the Fourth International as being the central body that will unify the genuine Proletarian forces of the revolution.” A further statement by this group appeared in the Dreadnought a fortnight later under the headline “The Workers’ Opposition Joins Fourth International”:

In all theoretical matters and practical problems, the C.W.P. of Russia will be influenced by the Communist Workers’ Party of Germany, and it pays regard also to Communist Workers’ Parties in Holland, Bulgaria, and Czecho-Slovakia, which have united with it, as well as to all other Left Wing Communist parties and groups which adhere to it.

An advertisement for Kollontai’s The Workers’ Opposition, in the same issue, said that the book “describes and explains the Communist Proletarian Movement which has grown up in Russia to oppose the Soviet Government’s ‘New Economic Policy’ of reversion to capitalism.” By mid-July, the Dreadnought was appealing for financial help for the Workers’ Opposition. The organization had collected “several million roubles” to print the publications it was prevented from producing in Russia, only to find that, owing to the exchange rate, its funds would “scarcely pay postage” in Germany. Because of the favourable rate of exchange for sterling, however, even small contributions would help.

There must have been some confusion in the offices of the Dreadnought, for another page of the issue carried a report from the Russian Communist Workers’ Party, which, the paper insisted, was “not to be confused with the unprincipled and backboneless leaders of the so-called Workers’ Opposition.” This was followed by a report on the Fifth Special Congress of the KAPD, which had been attended by delegates from ten industrial districts as well as an observer from the Dutch KAP and another from the “Left-Wing Communists of Russia.” The financial appeal seems to have had some effect, because a letter from the “Revolutionary Left Wing Communist Group (C.W.P.)” thanking readers for their assistance appeared later in the year. All this is

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very difficult to disentangle. But clearly there was a group — variously named in the *Dreadnought* — that the paper had initially assumed was the same as the Workers’ Opposition associated with Kollontai.

Most of the Communist Workers’ activities advertised in the *Dreadnought* were London based and featured a small group of speakers that included Pankhurst, Norah Smyth, and A. Kingman. The addresses of the secretaries of the Willesden, Portsmouth, and Sheffield branches were published on 30 September 1922, in the same issue that contained the agenda for the Second Congress of the Fourth International, to be held in Berlin on 1 October. The Communist Workers’ organization was, the paper subsequently said, “essentially a rank-and-file movement. It has no place for leaders as commonly understood.”

In October 1923, the *Dreadnought* reported on the formation of a “Communist Workers’ Group” in Austria, and, a few weeks later, on the protest of the Russian Communist Workers’ organization at the expulsion from the Communist Party of five “old Worker Comrades,” whose names it listed. In the same issue, the paper also published the organization’s manifesto, “typewritten copies of which at the beginning of the year were circulated all over Russia.”

More of the manifesto — now described as coming from the “Workers’ Group of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolshevik)” — was published early in 1924. According to the *Dreadnought*, the struggle in Russia against the “liquidation of the conquests of the October Revolution” needed united working-class support from outside the country. The Workers’ Group had been unable to publish the manifesto in Russia, the paper reported, and those suspected of sympathizing with its views would be “excluded from the party and trade unions simply upon suspicion, arrested and spirited away.”

In May 1924, the aims of the “Communist Workers’ Movement” were again said to be “to spread knowledge of Communism amongst the people” and to build an “All-Workers’ Industrial Revolutionary Union of employed and unemployed workers” on a workshop basis “covering all workers regardless of sex, craft or grade who pledge themselves to work for the overthrow of Capitalism and the establishment
of Communist administration by the workers’ councils.” The minimum cost of membership in the “Communist Workers’ Movement” was a mere tuppence a week, which illustrates the huge gap between ambitions and resources.31

Around this time, the **Dreadnought** reported, the *Daily Mail* had noted that in Hyde Park “Communism was represented by a little woman wearing a bright green coat and a red tie, who was speaking on behalf of the Workers’ Communist Movement.” This, said the *Dreadnought*, was “Comrade Norah Smyth” — and she could use some help.32

**The Role of the Soviets in the Coming Revolution**

The “Left Communists” may have been miniscule in number even by the standards of the British Left, and the *Dreadnought*’s struggle to survive would end in failure. But it does illustrate the persistence of uncompromising notions of “Left Communism” well into the 1920s. Towards the end of 1921, and into the following year, Pankhurst published a series of pieces called “Communism and Its Tactics,” which offered a more comprehensive exposition of her view of the nature and role of soviet democracy. In her view, the soviet structure was something that arose “naturally when the workers are thrown upon their own resources.” It might eventually be superseded by “something higher,” but for some time to come it would be “the organisational structure of Communism.” During the revolutionary crisis, the “guiding and co-ordinating machinery” would take the form of soviets, which, after the revolution, would run industries and services.33

Pankhurst totally rejected Zinoviev’s “Thesis,” one of those adopted by the Second Congress of the Third International, that “no attempt should be made to form Soviets prior to the outbreak of revolutionary crisis”:

> The idea expressed and insisted upon in that Thesis of Zinoviev was that the Soviet must be a great mass movement, coming together in the electrical excitement of the crisis; the correctness of its structure; its
actual Sovietness to coin an adjective, being considered of secondary importance. A progressive growth, gradually branching out till the hour of crisis; a strong and well-tried organisation is not contemplated by the Thesis.

In Russia the revolution had been “an affair of spontaneous outbursts with no adequate organisation behind it.” Russian trade unions had been feeble and had, in any case, been crushed at the outbreak of war. The revolutionary parties had been incapable of making a revolution:

The disability arising from the disorganised state of the workers was not felt in its true weightiness until after the Soviet Government had been established. Then it was realised that, though the Soviets were supposed to have taken power, the Soviet structure had yet to be created and made to function. The structure is still incomplete: it has hardly functioned at all. Administration has been largely by Government departments, working often without the active, ready co-operation, sometimes even with the hostility of groups of workers who ought to have been taking a responsible share in administration.34

It would, she said, be “monstrous folly” to replicate Russian unpreparedness elsewhere. “Workshop soviets” should instead be set up whenever possible because they were “a good fighting weapon and a preparation for the Soviets after and during the revolution.” Unlike the unions, which were “governed from a central office,” the soviets were self-governing organizations. With soviets there was “no official class.” As Pankhurst explained:

As the breakdown of Capitalism draws nearer, the conflict of opinion as to what shall replace it grows keener. Is it to be State Capitalism pure and simple; or is it to be some dual control of society by a Parliament of professional politicians and of officials of the Trade Unions, and perhaps also Cooperative Societies? Are the Trade Unions and Cooperative Societies to be the controlling force? Are all these to make way for the Workers’ Committees?

The issue is vital, for on the decision depends whether the new
society is to be a combination of the Post Office type of administration and trusts, or some modification of that, or a free Communism. The question is whether the basis of social organisation is to be government and control of persons, or the administration of services, to be freely used by all.

The questions, said Pankhurst, for anti-parliamentary Communists such as Guy Aldred — those who argued that “soviets of the workshop must not be organised until after” the revolution or that “they may only be started during the revolution” — were “What force is to make revolution?” and “When is the revolution to begin? Who can be sure of recognising its beginning, who can predict its duration?”

Pankhurst’s view of the CPGB seemed confirmed when, at the end of July 1923, the Dreadnought reported:

Mr Walton Newbold, speaking on behalf of the Third International in the House of Commons, said that when the Capitalists are expropriated, production will be organised either by the general councils of Trade Unions or by the workshop committees. To Mr Newbold the difference seems to be immaterial. It is, however, of vital importance. It is nothing less than the question whether industry is to be controlled by an outside authoritarian body composed of professional officials, or whether it is to be organised by the equal co-operation of the workers in the industry.

The soviets would be the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat — “a much misused phrase,” for “when Communism is in being there will be no proletariat, as we understand the term today, and no dictatorship.” Insofar as it was “genuine and defensible,” the phrase meant “the suppression by Workers’ Soviets of capitalism and the attempt to re-establish it. This should be a temporary state of war,” if an inevitable one. But when any serious attempt to re-establish capitalism had reached its end, “then away with the dictatorship; away with all compulsion. Compulsion of any kind is repugnant to the Communist ideal.”
According to Pankhurst, the “special fitness” of the soviet system was its construction along the lines of production and distribution. Soviets would replace not only the institutions of national and local government but also “the capitalists, managerial staffs and employees of today with all their ramifications.” As she noted: “The Soviets may also conduct the fight for the actual overthrow of capitalism, though in Russia the power was actually seized by the Bolshevik Party and then handed to the Soviets.” Pankhurst then outlined the familiar “generally accepted theoretical structure of the Soviet community.” In Russia, however, this had “only been very partially applied.” Soviets had not been “regular in structure.” Moreover, the “new economic policy” of a reversion to capitalism “strikes at the root of the Soviet idea and destroys the functional status of the Soviets.” Even before this, the Russian soviets had been “irregular from the theoretical standpoint”:

The Soviets, instead of being formed purely of workers in the various industries and activities of the community, were composed also of delegates of political parties, political groups formed by foreigners in Russia, Trades Councils, Trade Unions and co-operative societies.

Consequently, “the essential administrative character of the Soviets was thereby sacrificed. Constituted thus they must inevitably discuss political antagonisms rather than the production and distribution of social utilities and amenities.”

The workshop council was, for Pankhurst, “the germ of the Soviet.” During the war, “when the Shop Stewards’ movement flourished,” even employers had seen the merits of such councils and of the election of workers’ stewards. This was demonstrated by the “general spread of Whitleyism” — joint consultative boards of employers and workers in each industry, recommended by a wartime committee chaired by J.H. Whitley. As Pankhurst noted:

The trend of the times supports the view that the Soviet Government made a serious blunder when it decided (and put its decision into practice) that “workers’ control of industry” is only a slogan useful for
securing the overthrow of the capitalist, and must be discarded once the workers have turned out the capitalist, in favour of management by an individual or committee appointed by some centralised authority.

She finished the series by recapitulating her view in three propositions. First, soviets or workers’ councils would “form the administrative machinery for supplying the needs of the people in Communist society, after having made the Revolution by seizing control of industries and services.” Second, the revolution in Russia had been possible only because the government had broken down, capitalism was weak there, and the country was in a chaotic state. In Britain, the machinery of soviets must be prepared in advance. Finally, trade unions were useless for this purpose: what was required was industrially and nationally co-ordinated workers’ councils.39

Admiration for the murdered Rosa Luxemburg, whose Russian Revolution, and later her letters, were serialised in the Dreadnought, did not deter Pankhurst from adding dissenting footnotes at the point where Luxemburg criticized Lenin and Trotsky for not introducing another Constituent Assembly at a later stage. “In our view, the soviets, not the Constituent Assembly, form the essential administrative machinery of the Revolution,” declared one footnote. In another, Pankhurst asserted: “The substitution of the Soviets for a Parliament would have meant not a setting aside, but a development of democracy had they functioned adequately.”

As Pankhurst emphasized, the road to the soviets in Britain was to be “One Big Revolutionary Union organised on a workshop basis.”40 The denial of workers’ rights in Russia was “the clearest possible evidence of the fact that until the workers are organised industrially on Soviet lines and able to hold their own and control industry, a successful Soviet Communist revolution cannot be carried through nor can Communism exist without that necessary condition.”41

Pankhurst was optimistic that sooner or later a crisis would precipitate the formation of soviets in Britain. On 23 September 1922, the Dreadnought called for a general strike to prevent the war against

Pankhurst’s Dreadnought and the (Original) Fourth International
Turkey that Lloyd George seemed intent on beginning. An advertisement appeared for an “Open conference for the General Strike against the war,” to be addressed by a number of Communist Workers’ Movement speakers, including Smyth and Pankhurst herself. By May 1924, the Dreadnought’s statement of “What We Stand For” included — in bold: “A centralised Government cannot give freedom to the individual: it stultifies initiative and progress. In the struggle to abolish capitalism the workshop councils are essential.” 42

The Nature of Soviet Democracy

In 1921, as Pankhurst and the Dreadnought grew ever more libertarian in tone, some aspects of the notion of democracy the paper espoused became clearer. The demand for “freedom of discussion” within the Communist movement that preceded and accompanied Pankhurst’s expulsion, the contemptuous rejection of the notion that the party should determine what members were allowed to publish, the idea that “compulsion” was alien to “genuine Communism,” and the criticism of Russian soviets for extending representation to political parties and interest groups instead of being based solely on the workers on the shopfloor: all form part of this emerging picture.

The rejection of “leadership” was another aspect. At the beginning of 1922, the Congress movement in India was criticized for appointing a single individual, Gandhi, “as its sole executive authority,” although there was optimism that the “absence of democratic tendency” would be short-lived in this case. In much the same way, British trade unions were condemned for, in some cases, making eligibility for office dependent on long periods of prior membership, for electing executives for periods of up to eight years, and for having “no general congress of branch representatives.” 43 An unsigned review of G.D.H. Cole’s Guild Socialism Restated (1920) noted how his ideas had changed since The Self-Government of Industry, published in 1917. Having previously borrowed from Fabians and syndicalists, he was now following the popular course and borrowing from Soviet Russia. He had endeavoured to “Soviet-Governmentalise” his
structure, with “Communes” at all levels formed from delegates of the “smaller” bodies:

In his earlier book, Mr Cole made the general ballot of members in given districts, or in given trades, the main method of electing his Guilds. But now he chooses the Russian method, saying he approves of indirect election, if checked by recall. He even boldly cuts the roots of popular election away by dictating that if a delegate be appointed by a committee to represent it as a delegate, he would cease to be subject to recall by the original electors. Only the committee which has sent him can now recall him.44

For Pankhurst, soviet democracy was to be a system that excluded politics as normally understood. It presupposed the achievement of social harmony and a virtually conflict-free society. Soviet democracy would have to grapple only with the predominantly technical questions of production and distribution. As we shall see in the next chapter, she and other Left Communists were by no means alone in this assumption.

Pankhurst’s anti-political views were made very clear in March 1922, in a Dreadnought article in which she considered the possibilities of reform within the parliamentary system — and rejected them. The monarchy and the Lords, or any second chamber, might be eliminated, the prime minister might be chosen by a majority in Parliament or directly by the electorate, as might the cabinet, and the “doings of Parliament might be checked by Referendum,” but Parliament would still remain “a non-Communist institution.” However, “under Communism we shall have no such machinery of legislation and coercion,” Pankhurst declared. “The business of the Soviets will be to organise the production and supply of the common services; they can have no other lasting function.”45

Pankhurst summed up her view of soviet democracy in a Dreadnought editorial in November 1922, at the time of the general election. The “Capitalist machinery of Parliament and the local government bodies of the Capitalist State” did not administer production, distribution and transport. Rather, Parliament, “with much talk and little
effect, merely passes laws to palliate the inevitable ends which arise from the private ownership and management of the means of production, distribution and transport.” She continued:

Members of Parliament receive no instructions from their constituents, nor do they report to them except by holding some public meetings in the constituencies, at which vague speeches are made. Members of Parliament have really little to report. They merely sit in Parliament, listen to speeches and vote according to the instructions of the Party Whip.

The soviets, by contrast, would administer production, distribution and transport. “Every one of us will take part in the Soviets; we shall all belong to the Soviet where we work” 46

There was even greater emphasis on local autonomy in a series of articles that appeared early in 1923 under the title “Communism and Its Tactics.” In the workshop, a state of affairs reminiscent of Morris’s News from Nowhere would pertain: “Dictation from the so-called ‘higher councils’ will neither be needed, nor could it be accepted. There will be no conflict of class interest: all will be working towards a common end.” Therefore, under communism, “the arguments which will arise in the Soviets will be as to the efficacy of this or that technical process, as to whether this or that proposed innovation will increase or improve production — an end desired by all.” 47

This scenario contrasted with other “utopias” on offer — including that of the Webbs. Reviewing the Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain at the end of April 1923, Pankhurst concluded:

The entire failure of the Webbs’ Utopia seems to us fundamentally anti-socialist. They visualise an assembly of warring interests and competing claims, and no doubt under the constitution they propose they would get such an assembly.

The Utopia of the Webbs is that of the policeman and the inspector. It is a Utopia of class distinctions and economic differences. It will not do. 48
In a more immediate way, the nature of democracy was at issue in the Poplar Board of Guardians incident in 1923, following which Councilor C. Key, the prospective mayor of Poplar, challenged his opponents among the unemployed to a debate — chaired by Pankhurst. The *Dreadnought* report concentrated on Key’s defence, before offering an emphatic rebuttal:

He said that the Guardians were tired of being menaced by the unemployed, and that no party or body of elected representatives would stand being ordered to do things under menace. They must come to a decision according to their own judgement.

*This contention of Mr Key is not new. It is as old as Parliamentarism. Elected persons habitually say to their constituents, “We will not do what you ask, but what we think right.” If the elected persons were really the representatives of the unemployed, instructed by them, and subject to recall, they would be compelled either to do what the unemployed desired or to forfeit their positions. The present so-called representative system does not represent at all: for apparently representing many diverse interests elected persons actually represent no one, and in practice usually do as their party dictates, not as their constituents wish. Indeed, their constituents have diverse wishes and diverse interests.*

Moreover, the “elected persons in the Parliamentary governing system” had only “an indirect power which cannot be constantly exercised,” Pankhurst insisted on 1 December 1923, in a piece titled “Soviets or Parliaments?” “If Parliament were to take over the industries the House of Commons could neither administer them, nor represent them,” she declared. This stood in contrast to a soviet system “built on industrial lines” and based on “the rank and file in the workshops.”

Contemplating the new Labour government early in 1924, Pankhurst predicted that “nationalised industry, managed as the Post Office is managed, would be managed with radical inefficiency at the top and would offer to the worker no freedom, no share of intelligent co-operation.” Jowett-style proposals to replace the cabinet by committees would produce a system that would be “only a shade less evil
than the Ministerial system.” Both ministers and committees were detached from what they were supposed to be managing. “It is the workers in the department or industry itself who should, and will in a true democracy, undertake all management. Management in the form of an autocratic outside body, imposed from above, will no longer exist when democracy is actually achieved.”

Yet Pankhurst was prepared to concede that something short of a total commitment to “free Communism” might constitute at least a very small step in the right direction:

The London Central Branch of the I.L.P. is advocating a four or rather five chamber Parliament. The proposal is adapted from the proposals of Mr and Mrs Sidney Webb in their book entitled “A Commonwealth for Great Britain.” We cannot subscribe to the I.L.P. proposal. It is out of keeping with the free communist society we desire. Nevertheless we welcome the fact that even in the I.L.P. people begin to realise that King, Privy Council, Lords and Commons together represent a machinery which is incompatible with the Socialist ideal.

The Degeneration of the Russian Revolution:
“Right-Wing” Communists Abandon Soviet Democracy

Like the SLP and The Socialist, the Dreadnought was quick to detect signs of degeneration in Russia. Unlike the former, however, it saw this not simply as an inevitable consequence of the “backwardness” of Russia, compounded by the failure of the working class of the West to come to its aid. Rather, there had been a series of avoidable wrongs committed by the Bolsheviks.

At the beginning of 1922, Pankhurst noted signs of this deterioration. One was the arrest in Russia of the Rumanian KAPD member, Henry Kagan, who was “suspected of having entered relations with Left Social Revolutionaries and with the Workers’ Opposition.” This was probably the consequence of “a decree lately given out by the Soviet Government, in accordance with which all who oppose the new economic policy are to be treated as enemies of the state.”

White
Guards and other counter-revolutionaries, who had “fought, weapon in hand, against Soviet Russia,” the *Dreadnought* claimed, were being amnestied in order “to make room in the prisons for our comrades of the Workers’ Opposition and the Left Social Revolutionaries.”

About a month later, the paper reported that “Anarchist-Communists,” as well as SRs and the Workers’ Opposition, were being suppressed by the Bolsheviks. The same issue contained a letter protesting the arrest by the Cheka of the All-Russian Section of the Anarchist Universalists, as well as an appeal by Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Shapiro on behalf of anarchists imprisoned in Russia.

By March 1922, the *Dreadnought* was arguing that whereas the Russian Soviet government was a “target for capitalist abuse, Communists had refrained from criticism.” But now, what with the reversion to capitalism in the form of the New Economic Policy and “the chorus of praise swelled by bourgeois politicians,” it was time to consider the views of those Russian workers in whose opinion “the proletarian revolution is being betrayed.” An article by a “Russian comrade,” translated from the anarchist *Le Libertaire*, followed. From the outset, in 1918, “the roles of the Communist Party and of the proletariat in the revolution were rigidly defined; on the one side the material, the herd, the proletariat; on the other, the Communist Party, which organises, administers and directs all. ‘The Communist State’ in its essence is the dictatorship of the Central Committee.”

A second article, from the same source, attacked the Terror: “All shapes and forms of human liberty were torn up by the roots; freedom of speech, of association, of assembly, and of free labour were proclaimed to be middle class ideas and prejudices.” The Cheka had become a “hideous sore for the whole country.” The Bolsheviks had taken over the revolutionary movement, and, “under cover of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” they had turned on “all who understood the social revolution as the self-organisation of the labouring masses,” beginning, as of 12 April 1918, with the violent suppression of anarchist clubs and press and becoming systematic thereafter. The advertisement
for Pankhurst’s *Soviet Russia as I Saw It in 1920*, in the same issue, now carried the warning “Written before the Policy of Reversion to Capitalism was Instituted.”

In *The Workers’ Opposition*, serialized in the *Dreadnought* in the spring of 1922, Kollontai argued that the revolution had benefited the peasants and the middle classes, who had “cleverly adapted” and taken over all responsible positions in Soviet government, while the working class was told to “suffer and wait” as their conditions became “more unbearable.” Pankhurst complained that in a debate between speakers from the ILP and the CPGB, Ernest E. Hunter and Palme Dutt, both had assumed that “state socialism” existed in Russia, “entirely ignoring the fact that the land of Russia is privately worked by the peasants, that vast tracts of it are being offered for private capitalist exploitation, and that the industries are fast passing away from the State into private hands.” Further evidence of the Bolshevik’s descent “from depth to depth” was to be found, said the *Dreadnought*, in a *Daily Herald* report that there would be no workers’ participation or compulsory trade union membership for the employees of foreign “concessionaries.” The *Dreadnought* hoped that the fact that “the Soviet Government expressly permits the capitalist to employ non-unionist labour will open the eyes of the proletariat of the Western world.”

“Oh! For another workers’ uprising to cleanse this augean stable that is being created in what was once Red Russia!” wrote Pankhurst in August 1922. Lenin was “hauling down the flag of Communism and abandoning the cause of the emancipation of the workers.” He preferred “to retain office under Capitalism than to stand by Communism and fall with it if need be.” And on 7 April 1923, responding to reports of the execution of a Roman Catholic priest in Russia, Pankhurst commented: “It is the very worst sort of propaganda for Communism which, though some people are apt to forget the fact, is based upon human fraternity.” A little over a year later, as the *Dreadnought* neared its end, Herman Gorter concluded in “The International and the World Revolution” that “Russia and the Third International are the greatest enemies of the world revolution.”
Parallel degeneration was evident nearer to home. When *The Communist* argued that the question of “whether the workers are to rule through a Soviet Dictatorship or through a Parliament” would become “a vital and immediate issue” only once the Labour Party was in power, Pankhurst concluded that the Communist Party had “abandoned the establishment of the Soviets as an essential part of its policy” and that “to the officials of the CPGB the Soviets mean dictatorship. They have no conception of a free Communist life in which Soviet workers in the industries will administer the production and distribution of the social product.”

The CPGB was “now more reactionary than the old B.S.P of pre Russian Revolution days.”

The Irish Communists were no better. Instead of demanding the replacement of the *Dail Eirean* and the existing local government bodies with soviets, their proposals on the ownership and management of industry were constructed “on truly Fabian lines.” When the *Workers’ Weekly* (which had replaced *The Communist*) insisted that the CPGB was striving to establish “a Workers’ State,” Pankhurst dismissed this as “State Capitalism”:

“They are great statists, great disciplinarians, great dictators, these latter-day Right-Wing Muscovites. It should be noticed that unfortunate humanity is expected to bow to the rod of the super-disciplinarians for at least a generation after the Workers’ State has come into being.”

In September 1923, the *Dreadnought* once again attempted to clarify its own understanding of communism: “When we use the terms ‘Communist’ and ‘Communism,’ we are far from meaning the blood and thunder, physical force, follow-your-leader-discipline nonsense which passes for Communism in many quarters.” But while the Bolshevik revolution degenerated, and at home the shop stewards’ and workers’ council movements seemed virtually dead, there had been encouraging signs elsewhere.
The Spread of Soviets and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The *Dreadnought* kept discovering soviets in embryo in many locations — some of which seem anything but likely. In February 1922, the temporary seizure of some mills and creameries near Mallow and of stations in the city by Cork railworkers was headlined “The Soviets in Cork.” A month or so later, it was Austrian workers’ councils that were seen as forerunners of the soviets, and in May the takeover and running of some butter factories earned an editorial headlined “Another Irish Soviet.”

Hopes for a “soviet” Ireland were not, however, encouraged by the publication of the draft constitution of the Irish Free State, which contained, said Pankhurst, “some features which have not yet found their way to this country.” These included proportional representation and some provision for the use of the referendum and initiative but also “checks on the working of democratic government, notably the Senate.” She concluded:

From the democratic standpoint the draft constitution therefore leaves much to be desired: whilst to those who are Sovietists, like ourselves, it is wholly unsatisfactory. Of course that was inevitable. On with the Soviet movement.

The lack of permanent progress towards soviets in Ireland was frustrating. For

soviet have again and again risen in that green island across the sea. The Irish workers have given evidence that they can act. What they lack is a general comprehension that the soviets should be regarded not as a weapon for forcing concessions from the employer, but as a permanent successor to the employer, so that the employing system may go out of existence altogether.

By 1924, there were few “soviets” to report, although the *Dreadnought* detected signs of a desire for soviets in the 1924 National Union of Teachers conference when, in a debate on a motion urging co-operation with the Board of Education, some speakers called for “teachers’ control
to put a check on the bureaucratic control.” Similarly, two weeks later, the paper was encouraged when the Railway Clerks’ Association conference discussed workers’ control of industry:

Its executive opposed the principle and procured a vote in favour of joint control of industry by the workers therein and by the community. The idea of workers’ control is moving onward and securing wider and wider circles of adherents. When it is fully understood, we shall see spring up the workshop councils which eventually will take over industry.67

While soviets were advocated enthusiastically and unconditionally and every instance of self-initiated working-class activity was seen as potentially leading to their establishment, Pankhurst was having second thoughts about the dictatorship of the proletariat. In July 1923, the Dreadnought published the manifesto of the Unemployed Workers’ Organisation, which, it hastened to point out, was not connected “with another organisation known as the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement.” According to the manifesto, the organization was opposed to affiliation with a “counter-revolutionary party as the Labour Party or such a reformist party as the Communist Party of Great Britain” and likewise with the TUC or RILU. The manifesto, signed by J. Mummery (chairman) and G.E. Soderberg (secretary) continued:

We firmly believe in the application of a rigid dictatorship of the proletariat when the collapse of Capitalism comes, but until that time we strongly object to the dictatorship of a caucus of self-seeking politicians who make the “united front” an excuse for their own self-aggrandisement.

The Dreadnought declared its general support for the Unemployed Workers’ Organisation. But it had reservations:

One phrase has crept into the manifesto . . . which requires discussion. It is a phrase of which all Communists have made use, both of late and also in the days of Marx, Engels and Bachunin [sic]. We refer to the term “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” This in its original use
meant the rigid suppression of the middle and upper classes in so far as they may endeavour to resist the coming of socialism and to combat the popular will.

Latterly, under the inspiration of Russian bureaucrats, the term . . . has been used to justify the dictatorship of a party clique of officials over their own party members and over the people at large. So far as the dictatorship has been carried that the parties submitting to it have become utterly sterile as instruments of education and action. In Russia the dictatorship has robbed the revolution of all it fought for; it has banished Communism and workers’ control.

Liberty is an essential part of the Communist revolution. We must not sacrifice it to the ambitions of would-be dictators. 68

Early in February of the following year, in the course of commenting, supportively, on the manifesto of the Russian Communist Workers’ Group, which touched again on the question of the “dictatorship of the industrial proletariat,” Pankhurst wrote:

In spite of the time-honoured character, we must affirm that, in our view, the use of the term “dictatorship” is responsible for much confusion and misunderstanding.

No reasonable person believes that what was required in Russia was that the relatively small number of industrial workers in Russia should act as the dictators — in the sense that the Czar and Napoleon were dictators — over the peasant masses of Russia.

But a week later the Dreadnought carried two series of articles by Herman Gorter that were distinctly “anti-peasant.” According to Gorter, peasant soviets had been a mistake since “it was certain that the peasants would fight for private property and against Communism. A proletarian revolution, in Germany or England, will never give the peasants political rights till they have shown that they are really communists.” 69

Gorter was equally hostile to trade unions. Only workshop councils could supply “the essential bedrock” for communism. “By making
peace with trade unionism the Russian Bolsheviks and the Third International showed that they were themselves still capitalist, and neither wished or dared to smash up European capitalism.” But, he went on, “the real proletarian revolution, which is preparing in England, North America and Germany, cannot be made by a stupid mass led by a few wise leaders, only by the self-conscious, self-acting mass.”

Though Pankhurst seems never to refer to herself as an anarchist, the libertarian emphasis in the later *Dreadnought* was strong. Contemplating the nature of “free Communism” in October 1923, she wrote: “There shall be no State, Government or Parliament.” Rather, the economy would be organized on a “voluntary autonomous workshop basis.” By April 1924, Pankhurst was reassessing the ideas of Proudhon in a review article based on the recent republication of some of his work by the anarchist Freedom Press. “We differ emphatically from his desire to retain private ownership and petty trading,” she noted, but his “denunciation of the tyranny of majority rule and of the centralised bureaucracy advocated by the State Socialists is unanswerable.”

In an article in which she declared that “neither legal nor religious forms can make the mating of men and women either right or wrong,” Pankhurst advocated “free Communism,” with “no State, Government or Parliament” and the economy organized on a “voluntary autonomous workshop basis.”

Like the SLP’s *The Socialist*, Pankhurst and the *Workers’ Dreadnought* thus maintained a “Left Communist” commitment to its own version of a pure form of soviet democracy. But how did ideas of soviet democracy fare in the Communist Party of Great Britain?