Introduction

> *The British witch-hunt seemed pretty 'civilised'. That does not mean that it may not have been as effective – even more effective from the government's point of view ... we set out not to make martyrs whereas McCarthy made them left, right, and centre.*[1]
>
> —Douglas Hyde, former news editor for the *Daily Worker*

The decade after the Second World War saw the rise of anti-communism in the political sphere and governmental institutions of the United Kingdom (UK). In the grip of the emerging Cold War, the fight against domestic communism – in all its guises – fashioned into a broad consensus that took hold in mainstream politics. It formed through the concerted efforts of the Labour and Conservative parties, governmental institutions and pressure groups, and as a result of external influence from the United States (US). The consensus brought with it new counterinsurgency measures and a heightened sense of awareness over security matters. It also established an atmosphere of mistrust and paranoia. The era constituted a period when the British state – through mostly covert means – allied with non-governmental actors to battle against a number of its citizenry.

The times were strange indeed. When reviewing the rhetoric of the period, one comes to imagine proverbial barbarians ready to storm the gates of Westminster.[2] For some in government, the threat of a 'barbarian invasion' was not just a figure of speech. Records show that as early as 1946 the mandarins in Whitehall were actively preparing for a Soviet invasion of the British homeland. Files housed in The National Archives (TNA) in Kew detail a Joint Intelligence Committee directive for an in-depth topographical survey of the UK's coastline and beaches to be conducted post haste. The top-secret survey, working under the name 'Operation Sandstone', was then given to the US navy.[3] Leadership in both countries considered it of vital importance to assist in planning future American landings, which

would be needed to liberate the UK from an impending Soviet occupation. Furthermore, in the minds of many in government, the barbarians had already breached the gates and were silently awaiting orders to strike.

Starting in 1948, MI5 quickly drew up plans to erect detention camps to house potential fifth columnists in the event of a national emergency.[4] First on the list were known members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and their suspected allies.[5] The government relied not only on topographical mapping and contingency plans to combat the menace. More proactive steps were also put in place, policies which strove to minimise and eliminate the perceived threat. For many, these measures did not go far enough. In both Houses of Westminster Palace, in demonstrations on the streets of London, in cabinet discussions, in trade union meetings and in printed publications, a warning arose that more was needed to safeguard the UK from a communist takeover. In corners of the political establishment there was a longing for McCarthyite solutions. Not all Britons viewed the excessive wave of red-hunting across the Atlantic as an entirely negative occurrence. A number of those in power strove to implement a version of their own which was palatable and acceptable to the political and societal makeup of the British nation.

Historiography

The above depiction runs contrary to the comforting and alluring traditional narrative of the era. This narrative suggests that while Americans were gripped in an exaggerated fear of communism, the level-headed British retained both their wits and their commitment to decency and fair play. 'Since the early days of the Cold War', historian Jennifer Luff maintained, 'observers have reproached American anti-communism by invoking the example of British moderation.'[6] Sociologists during the 1950s and 1960s were the first to make the comparison. University of Chicago professor Edward Shils argued that the lack of 'populist sentiment' in political life and the 'ruling classes' imposing a 'traditional sense of privacy' left British society immune to the frenzy of red-hunting infecting the US.[7] In 1964, Herbert Hyman of Columbia University maintained that in the UK the 'political exploitation of the communist issue, which could contribute to a climate of intolerance has been negligible', and argued that red-baiting during past election campaigns there was almost non-existent. The first historian to put forth this interpretation was David Caute who, in the late 1970s, lambasted the US for its 'anti-Communist hysteria' and its failure 'to sustain the authentically liberal values and standards of tolerance that persisted in Britain'.[8] Subsequently, a number

of academics followed suit, arguing that a governmental overreaction towards domestic communism did not take place in the UK.[9] The proponents of this historical interpretation charge that, when equated with the excesses of American McCarthyism, the UK's response must be considered restrained and reasonable.

In sequent years, however, scholarship on the period has questioned the notion of the UK contemporaneously dodging its own red scare. As access to more documents became possible, researchers begun contesting the long-accepted version of events, subsequently arguing that a type of political repression indeed took place, but, because of a number of variables, one not as visible and high-profile as that contemporaneously erupting across the Atlantic. Perhaps the first historian to draw this conclusion was Dianne Kirby, who during the late 1980s began her PhD research questioning the established narrative.[10] Her work developed from the assertions of a number of left-academics who in the mid-1980s harshly repudiated Caute's claim.[11] Focusing on anti-communism repression in the Church of England, Kirby formulated the supposition that a type of 'British McCarthyism' did in fact exist.[12] The work of Rhodri Jeffrey-Jones also supports this view: Jeffrey-Jones wrote that 'taking a broad definition of McCarthyism, as is now standard practice … it is evident that the phenomenon existed in Britain as well as in America'.[13]

Richard Thurlow drew similar conclusions, stating there existed a 'significant political paranoia, which developed into a kind of British McCarthyism'.[14] More recently, Luff refuted Caute's interpretation by contending the nation's 'liberal tradition' did not leave it immune from an exaggerated response to the so-called red menace.[15] The book *MI5, Cold War, and the Rule of Law* is the most significant and substantial revisionist work in this field of study to date. Viewing the events through a legal lens, the authors allege MI5 enacted gross abuses against civil liberties and argue 'the post-war focus on the Communist Party is not one that could easily be justified by the mandate with which MI5 was entrusted'.[16] They conclude that the security service violated the rule of law and exceeded its legal authority through its countersubversive activities. As the growing research in this revisionist movement has expanded, it is increasingly evident that, contrary to what many have attested, the UK did not escape 'an unwarranted obsession with communists and communism'.[17]

An obsession with communism is perhaps the best way to define the focus of this book. Unlike prior studies in the field, this monograph seeks to comprehensively demonstrate how domestic anti-communism exhibited itself in state policies, political rhetoric, party politics and the trade union movement of the UK of the early postwar years. Through an examination of how the phenomenon materialised and functioned in these facets of the

body politic, we arrive at a more profound understanding of its impact on both the nation and its citizenry, alongside identifying the central architects of the anti-communism reaction. Taken as a whole, this response constituted an overreaction to the threat posed. Until recently, this response to the 'red menace' has attracted relatively little attention compared to the phenomenon of American McCarthyism. Throughout the years, numerous scholars have raised just such a point. In the 1980s, Reg Whitaker argued, 'There is no study of the domestic impact of the Cold War on British politics, as such; the picture has to be pieced together from fragmentary information from disparate sources.'[18] A decade later, Steve Parsons wrote:

> Anti-communism in Britain never reached the pathological heights that it did in the USA; no one was imprisoned because of their party membership; fear and hatred of communism were never used to measure one's patriotism and national identity. Yet a series of significant developments took place in post-war Britain – a domestic impact of the Cold War that has generally been passed over in silence.[19]

Closer to the present, Giora Goodman concurred with this assessment. She reasoned, 'the manifestations of domestic anti-communism in Britain during the early Cold War … have received attention from historians but have not been fully explored'.[20] Karen Potter contended there is 'an incomplete accounting' of the 'manifestations of anti-communism in Britain during the Cold War years'.[21]

Anti-communism's manifestation in the UK of the early Cold War was not (nor should it be considered) a neatly mirrored version of the American experience. Because of the societal, governmental and institutional variances between the US and the UK, the British version transpired differently. Nevertheless, in the UK – just as in the US – the issue was politicised through the means of state repression, red-baiting and the 'othering' of fellow citizens. The handful of prior revisionist studies has identified segments within the religious and intelligence communities as the chief instigators for the more aggressive and disproportionate response. Yet neither these hierarchical men of the cloth nor the shadowy figures who lurked in the halls of the 'secret state' were the individuals seeking further oppressive measures to tackle the threat. When identifying the promoters of the British 'witch hunt', this book points to a subset of the nation's politicians – the representatives of the public good – as its driving catalyst, one primarily filled with those within the Labour Party. Yet while these elected overseers constituted the impetus of the fight against communism, the cause had many acolytes in the clergy, trade unions, civil service, police and security service. As we will see throughout the following pages,

working as a collective, these individuals formed the consensus anti-communism that emerged from the era. Picking up where other academics have left off, this work provides a holistic account of anti-communism within British politics and government of the era.

Defining anti-communism

Since its inception, the political and economic ideology of classical Marxism has been met with fierce resistance. In a Hegelian move, an antithesis quickly formed to combat this new thesis. This counter-philosophy would manifest itself in diverse forms. Alongside an obsessive nature, it held two fixed tenets in its belief system – namely, that communism is a 'supreme and unqualified evil' and its followers seek to impose this evil on the entire world.[22] With this Manichaean viewpoint firmly in place, the opponents to communism went out to combat their nemesis. Through this confrontation, a new quasi-ideology – anti-communism – was created. Yet, anti-communism remains an elusive concept, since the term suffers from the imprecision of its meaning. In this work and many others, it signifies a type of creed or way of thinking.[23] Anti-communist is more than simply not being a communist – one must be actively opposed to communism and communists themselves. Anti-communism, as Moshe Lewin argued, 'is less a matter of research and more an ideology claiming to be a study':[24] one forged in both fiction and reality, a dangerous mixture, which had led to a form of psychosis in a number of its unhinged votaries. The crimes and abuses of communism are well documented.[25] Yet, anti-communists were unsatisfied in only fighting these real transgressions. A multitude of exaggerations, and sometimes outright fantasies, fuelled their ideology. They routinely practised mythmaking: myths of conspiracies, cultural and ethnic stereotypes, and civilisational clashes.[26] As philosopher Karl Popper pointed out, when conspiratorially minded individuals find themselves in positions of power, they often take on the perceived and imagined trappings of their enemies – thus imitating their foes.[27] Anti-communists often exemplified this type of governing approach when in authority.

Anti-communists of the time were didactic by nature. The rhetoric and methods of anti-communists developed from their belief system. In simplistic terms, they viewed their cause and themselves as a crusade and crusaders against an 'evil empire' and 'failed god'. Such thinking brought an intensity and urgency to their efforts, and in specific instances a willingness to transcend boundaries – both legal and ethical – when confronting their foe. Here it is worth recounting at length the commentary of sociologist Joel Kovel on the topic:

> Because the moral logic of anticommunism had but two poles, it matched the Cold War geopolitical reality of a world divided into two hostile power blocs. Anticommunist statements of value were therefore drawn away from a simple negative assessment of communism and turned into a zero-sum game in which every demerit of the red East was automatically scored as an asset for the West. Thus bad became our good. Now once you enter this theological domain there is really no turning back. The morality of anticommunism drives toward a state of all-goodness defining our side of things, surrounded, indeed defined, by a force of all-badness: absolute evil, evil so great that anything – any violation of human rights, any crime, any war – is a priori justified.[28]

Alongside its moralistic nature, the ideology worked to buttress the status quo in non-communist countries. Thus, unlike its foil, it found tremendous success in the West. Anti-communism worked as a vanguard for the traditional social order.[29] Therefore, few governing elites found it objectionable, even as anti-communism penetrated societal and governmental institutions and shifted existing cultural attitudes. It quickly formed a cornerstone of national identity and the core belief system in numerous countries – nowhere more so than in the US and UK.[30] Federico Romero explained that domestic anti-communists within Western countries came from 'distinct political cultures' and were 'often engaged in fierce competition' between themselves for power and influence. However, during the early Cold War, they merged their different voices into 'a shared representation that structured public narratives and intellectual discourse no less than official propaganda'.[31]

Despite all these commonalities, the ideology manifested itself in different forms where it took root. As John Earl Hayes made clear, anti-communism 'needs to be understood in the context in which it has occurred'.[32] As this book demonstrates, in Cold War Britain the foundation of anti-communism rested on the following assertions:

- Communism was directly comparable and linked to fascism and Nazism.
- Communism constituted a conspiracy, not a political party or ideology.
- Communism functioned as a Soviet tool used to weaken the UK.
- Communism worked as a religion and those who followed it were willing to betray their country.

These core beliefs were what British anti-communism rested upon. They formed the driving motivators of the cause and consistently were

found in the political rhetoric of the era and as stated justifications for governmental counterinsurgency measures. These assumptions also led to the politicisation of the anti-communist issue. The adopting of language casting communism as comparable to the despised ideologies of Nazism and fascism permitted the demonisation of the CPGB. The notion of a vast underlying conspiracy allowed for attacks on left-wing elements of society that challenged the ruling establishment. The charges that domestic communism was directed by a foreign power and that Marxists were more likely to betray the country gave sanction to the 'othering' of fellow Britons.

The explicit rejection of Marxism and Marxist political thought was another facet of British anti-communism that arose from the period. Conservatives denounced both, alongside a number in the Labour Party hierarchy. On various occasions, the Labour Party maintained it had no relation to Marxism and rejected any claim that it ever did. Several scholars have put forth a strong argument that Labour socialism and Marxist theory never held a close connection, even prior to the Cold War. Richard Toye argued that Marxist influence on Labour socialism existed, but its influence was quite limited.[33] Andrew Thorpe claimed that from its origin the Labour Party consistently preached a less radical version of socialism, which held more in common with 'German revisionism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than with classic Marxism'.[34] Stuart Macintyre suggested that by the 1920s there existed 'a distinct Labour socialist ideology' which functioned as a 'complete alternative' to Marxism.[35] Patrick Cosgrave, a one-time advisor to Margaret Thatcher, stated that while many 'assumed that Labour Party's socialism was Marxist in origin', the truth is it owed more to the creeds found in Methodism.[36] Labour's first prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, viewed Karl Marx's methods as critical and destructive and argued against its revolutionary theories.[37] MacDonald declared Labour 'socialism marks the growth of society, not the uprising of a class'.[38]

By his own account, the party's second prime minister cared nothing for Marxist theory whatsoever. During a 1954 trip to the Soviet Union, Clement Attlee was asked by the British ambassador if he had ever 'read any of this Marx stuff'. Attlee stated he 'had read none of it, you know' and, in the recollections of Richard Crossman, cared more about finding out the most recent cricket scores from back home than discussing political theory.[39] Attlee's admission of not having read Marx by no means stopped him from disassociating the Labour Party from Marx's theories. In 1945, when responding to campaign attacks from Churchill, Attlee 'reminded' the prime minister that Labour socialism, unlike socialist parties on the continent, had no foundation in Marx. 'He [Churchill] has forgotten',

Attlee stated, 'that socialist theory was developed in Britain long before Karl Marx.'[40] Years later, during an interview with a reporter from an American magazine, he stressed: 'our system which has little to do with Marxism sprang from religious origins'.[41] Attlee was not alone in his lack of interest in and hostility towards Marx's theories. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin once retorted to his Soviet counterpart that 'members of the House of Lords are the only people in England who have the time to read Karl Marx'.[42] A number of lords on the Labour benches would have disagreed with Bevin's tongue-in-cheek assessment. They had no time for Marx either. Addressing a May Day rally in 1951, the minister of civil aviation – soon to be promoted to first lord of the admiralty – Lord Pakenham pointed out that any socialist party basing itself on Marxism was wrong, since true socialists believed not only in equality but also in the individualist value of every single person.[43] 'Speaking for myself', he would later say in the Lords, 'we have no use for Marxism whatever on these benches.'[44] During a speech on industrial relations in 1955, Labour peer Lord Amwell made clear he was 'not a Marxist; I do not agree with either his economics or his philosophy'. Amwell told his fellow lords he did 'not expect modern socialists to understand or accept Marx's theory. Not even those who call themselves Marxists have ever read his works except at second hand in bits and slogans'.[45] On behalf of the entire Labour Party, its chairman Morgan Phillips called Marxism a 'historically aberrant tendency in the development of British socialism' and argued Labour's version of socialism contradicts 'Marxism at almost every point'.[46] Phillips went on to denounce the theory unequivocally: 'Our rejection of Marxism as a philosophy has not made us any less revolutionary than those who claim to be his official spiritual descendants today and who would impose a new tyranny on the people of the world.'[47] By the early 1950s, a final break had occurred between Marxist theory and Labour socialist thinking, if one ever truly existed.[48] In *The Future of Socialism* (1956) – a book labelled one of the most important treatises on social democracy written in the UK – Anthony Crosland denounced Marxism as an irrelevant set of ideas.[49] 'In my view', Crosland wrote, 'Marx has little or nothing to offer the contemporary socialist, either in respect of practical policy, or of the correct analysis of our society, or even of the right conceptual tools or framework.'[50]

Inside the ranks of the Conservative Party, the distinction between democratic socialism and Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism was quite blurred – certainly on purpose when it was time for campaigning in general elections. Conservatives contended that any sort of post-capitalist society would eventually lead to the erosions of individual liberty and the

death of democratic institutions. In more campaign-friendly terms, basically, socialism leads to communism. Alongside the two major political parties, the Church of England took a dim view of the political concept of Marxism. The leading article in a 1949 issue of the *York Diocesan Leaflet* decried the 'Marxian Attack on Religion'.[51] Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher argued that 'the premises of Marxian materialism' were 'irreconcilable' to Western Christian civilisation.[52] Oddly, Fisher professed to despise Marxism more than the theory of communism. He reasoned that 'Marxist communism rests upon principles which are not compatible with the Christian philosophy but communism can be detached from these principles and, to some extent, can be made compatible with Christian ideas'.[53] The Catholic Church was also antagonistic to the theory. The *Catholic Standard* put its thoughts on the topic quite succinctly in 1955: 'Marxism and religion can't co-exist.'[54] 'We have to take a stand for Christian doctrine founded on the Ten Commandments', the Archbishop of Birmingham proclaimed at a rally in 1952. He told the audience that to do so, 'We must take a stand, for example, against Marxism.'[55] From 1945 to 1956, the term 'Marxism' in the politics of the UK – as it did during the American red scare – held the same negative connotations as communism. This was especially, if not also surprisingly, the case within the ranks of the Labour Party leadership.

Alongside the explicit rejection of Marxist theory by the ruling political establishment, another major tenet of anti-communism was a strong anti-Soviet sentiment. Again, this resonated because of a fear of a fifth column working for a hostile foreign power.[56] In the possibility of an all-out war with the Soviet Union, it was suspected that some Britons would side against crown and country and underhandedly fight for the opposing side. The anti-communists considered the 'battle' against domestic communism as the 'home front' and a vital part of the Cold War, so by logical extension part of the fight against the Soviet Union. The anti-communists thought the hearts and minds of Britons at home needed to be won against communism or the Western defences against the East might dissipate and eventually fail.[57] This mentality of securing the home front echoed the same efforts made against the external enemy of Nazism during the Second World War. Such a mindset of danger from an 'enemy from within' was not only manifest inside political institutions but seeped into the overall culture as well. Tony Shaw wrote that a simple trip to the neighbourhood cinema could give such an impression: 'Cinema-goers were constantly reminded of the need to be on the look-out for political "deviants" masquerading as ordinary citizens ... implying that the Cold War was as much an international civil

war as an inter-state conflict.'[58] Here, American influence takes a large amount of credit. Between 1948 and the early 1960s, Hollywood produced over 100 films in which the struggle against the evils of communism was an overt theme; nearly every one ran in British movie houses.[59]

Background and narrative overview

Dread over communism existed long before the Cold War. Both governmental and private attempts to combat it can be traced back to the 1917 Russian Revolution. To many in the Western world, the bloody execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his entire family marked a grave warning sign for their prospective futures if the threat of revolution could spread from the borders of the once-mighty Russian Empire. 'We are running a race with Bolshevism', warned Woodrow Wilson in March 1919, 'and the world is on fire.'[60] In the context of the times, few saw Wilson's declaration as mere hyperbole. The spring of 1919 saw Soviet republics declared in Hungary and Bavaria. The leader of the newly established Russian-based Communist International (or Comintern), Grigori Zinoviev, promised that this marked only the start, and estimated that 'within a year all [of] Europe will be communist'.[61]

Observers in the UK took the matter seriously; anxiety over a Russian-style upheaval crept into the public mindset. A 1919 protest by the Scottish Trade Union Congress quickly turned into a citywide general strike, which resulted in clashes between workers and police. The Battle of George Square, as it became known, appeared to many as the opening shots of a nationwide revolution. The secretary of state for Scotland called the strikers a 'Bolshevist uprising' and ordered onto the streets of Glasgow an army of 10,000 soldiers equipped with machine guns and tanks.[62] The fear of red insurrection endured. The reaction to a January 1926 radio programme called *Broadcasting from the Barricades* is evidence of its lingering into the mid-1920s. The twelve-minute broadcast aired on the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), claiming to be a live news bulletin covering a revolutionary mob rampaging the streets of London. The realistic 'news reports' stated that the rioters had blown up the Savoy Hotel and used trench mortars to topple Big Ben. It turned out to be all just a hoax – satirical in nature – perpetrated in jest by a Catholic priest who wrote detective novels named Frank Knox. The reaction it engendered was no laughing matter. Listeners from across the country were convinced that London lay in ruins. Relatives of guests staying in the Savoy Hotel urgently phoned the establishment to check on their loved

ones. Through diplomatic channels, the Irish Free State made inquiries to find out whether the House of Commons had been destroyed.[63] This reaction proved quite similar to the scare induced in the US by Orson Welles's updated version of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* twelve years later. The radio pranks of both Welles and Knox aroused in their audiences a dread of a potential future. In the US it was a growing concern over affairs in Europe and in the UK the likelihood of a communist-inspired uprising.[64]

For its part, MI5 considered the ability of the Soviet Union to inspire and instigate subversive activities more a direct threat than Soviet-sponsored espionage. It feared most of all a communist-inspired mutiny inside the British armed services.[65] A 1931 seamen's strike in the Atlantic Fleet docked at Invergordon contributed to the belief that a full-on rebellion was possible. Although the quickly ended dispute at Invergordon was not deemed red-inspired, the cabinet was told that communists 'had sent their best agents' to infiltrate navy ports to sow rebellion.[66] The resulting actions saw two CPGB members charged and imprisoned for mutiny and hundreds of seamen purged from the navy.[67] Another key target for MI5 were working-class communists. They were put under surveillance and were subject to arrests for their political beliefs – not in engaging in espionage activities. After a 1921 raid on the CPGB headquarters, the police arrested Albert Inkpin for printing seditious literature.[68] A visiting communist organiser from the US was sentenced to a month in jail for possessing a list of party members in Manchester. In 1931, Bernard Moore, a communist candidate for parliament in a Birmingham constituency, was arrested for being a 'disturber of the peace'.[69] The 1926 General Strike brought with it a large number of detained and arrested communists. Indeed, for MI5, communism constituted a problem bubbling up from the bottom of society.

Neither the intelligence community nor right-wing elements of the governing establishment trusted the Labour Party to combat communism. From the start of the first Labour government in 1923, MI6 withheld covert intelligence and foreign communication intercepts from its elected ministers. The agency determined these vital secrets were not safe in the hands of such potential security risks. The decision by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald to accord *de jure* recognition to the Soviet Union only strengthened this mistrust. So too did Labour's decision to halt the prosecution of J.R. Campbell, a communist journalist charged with attempting to subvert the armed services. The dropping of charges against Campbell resulted in a vote of no confidence in the House of Commons and the 1924 General Election campaign.[70] The election brought relations between British intelligence and the Labour Party to a new low. The matter turned on the publication of the so-called Zinoviev Letter. With only days to go

before the October election, the *Daily Mail* detailed the contents of a letter purportedly sent from the Moscow headquarters of the Comintern to the CPGB. The letter, supposedly signed by Comintern leader Zinoviev, stated that a Labour victory would greatly benefit the Soviet cause. The Zinoviev Letter confirmed the suspicions of many Britons that the Labour Party was soft regarding its willingness to fight communism.[71] Doubts arose that the document ever existed, and its supposed contents were thought to be fabricated by MI6 to embarrass Labour and ensure its electoral defeat. Conservatives would go on to win the election by a wide margin, with many in Labour blaming it on the forged Zinoviev Letter.[72] Conclusive evidence never surfaced that MI6 had a hand in orchestrating the affair, though many in Labour Party circles still believed it did. Historian Keith Jeffrey reached the same conclusion: 'right-wing elements, with the connivance of allies in the security and intelligence services, deliberately used the letter – and perhaps even manufactured it – to ensure a Labour defeat'.[73]

By the late 1930s, the perceived threat from communism and Soviet agitation diminished considerably. Governmental counterinsurgency activities remained predominantly focused on the armed forces, the trade unions and the CPGB.[74] Yet, the anti-communist spirit had dampened after the nation weathered the storms of the 1926 General Strike, and the 1934 unemployment marches, without either spiralling into full-blown Marxist revolutions. In addition, many in the UK found Stalin's Soviet Union less menacing – because of its emphasis on socialism in one nation rather than international revolution. The situation had changed so much that in 1938 Head of MI5 Vernon Kell boasted to his French counterpart that 'Soviet activity in England is non-existent, in terms of both intelligence and political subversion.'[75] In terms of communist subversion, Kell was mostly correct. Historian Peter Clarke attested there was zero likelihood of a red takeover of the UK during the interwar years. Clarke wrote:

> The spectre of Bolshevism in Britain was mainly just that: a phantasm. The Communist Party of Great Britain, set up in 1920, was tiny; and the fact that it took its orders from Moscow was not so much sinister as inhibiting … the security forces naturally had a professional interest in providing spine-chilling reports on … examples of subversion. Though the significance of activities was largely in inflating the red menace, for theatrical effect and political advantage.[76]

In retrospect, the anti-communism of the interwar period was largely driven by the threat of revolution and subversion, not that of espionage or

conspiracy. It was a period when right-wing politicians and intelligence agencies were the primary purveyors of anti-communism in government policies.

Mirroring the changing politics of the time, the advent of the Cold War and the rise of the Labour Party to power brought a new and heightened brand of anti-communism in the years following the Second World War. The quasi-ideology reached its pinnacle during this postwar era, as communism replaced Nazism and fascism as the dominant enemy of the state and the citizenry it governed. As East–West tensions worsened, communism became increasingly unacceptable. Under the premiership of Clement Attlee, a consensus on how to deal with the threat emerged. The ruling Labour Party set the direction and generated the degree of intensity of the domestic fight against communism. This constituted a startling shift from the interwar times. Shortly after taking power, evidence of Labour's aggressive anti-communism appeared. Less than a year into office, its leadership targeted communists for fomenting domestic disruptions in the new postwar climate and began implementing new counterinsurgency and counterintelligence measures. Although Labour spearheaded and initiated this transformation, it continued under the subsequent ruling Conservative governments. Under the guidance of both parties, the government systematically put in place unprecedented measures to combat and curb communist influence. It sought to purge and prohibit communists from government jobs; halt their inclusion inside the democratic process; limit their ability to travel; wiretap and put under surveillance a number of its citizenry; question the patriotism and loyalty of all individuals with communist affiliations; and secretly indoctrinate the British population into holding a more anti-communist worldview. Direct pressure from the US government contributed to heightened security measures and increased anti-communist policies in the British government, but contemporaneously the British public's negative reaction to the excesses of the American witch hunts moderated and shifted these measures to forge a less overt and more shadowy response. As this book seeks to show, what transpired came to be a very British witch hunt.

Chapter structure

The first chapter of this book examines extreme anti-communism which arose in the political discourse of the times. It describes the efforts of two of the most dogged and prolific anti-communists of the era – former Foreign Office (FO) diplomat Robert Vansittart, who sat in the House of Lords as an independent, and Sir Waldron Smithers, a maverick Tory

member of the House of Commons. This duo represents the quintessential McCarthyite anti-communist reaction, thus disproving such methods were absent in British politics. The thematic core of the chapter regards the use of political repression – as opposed to state – and explores the type of illiberal anti-communism that is conventionally considered a uniquely American phenomenon. An accounting of the motives and techniques used by these individuals and others gives credence to the argument that 'British McCarthyism' did exist and operated in quite the same manner as its American namesake.

Chapter 2 focuses on Labour anti-communism during the Attlee government. While in power, Labour crafted a form of consensus anti-communism which functioned as governmental policy; the chapter examines Clement Attlee's efforts to eliminate supposed crypto-communists from the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). The prime minister employed MI5 to seek evidence to justify these removals. Next, the issue of security vetting is covered extensively. Ordered by the Labour government, and implemented by MI5, this is perhaps the most recognisable manifestation of domestic anti-communism of the early Cold War. Colloquially called 'the purge', the vetting process sought to remove communists and other potential subvariants from sectors of government service. The fact the purge only applied to several government departments is often championed as evidence of governmental restraint. However, its limited scope had very little to do with protecting civil liberties and personal freedom, owing more to the logistic impossibility of vetting the entire civil service. Also evidenced is MI5's concern that the government allowed the purge to expand beyond its original mandate. The lukewarm public reception to the initial announcement of vetting procedures convinced Attlee to stealthily enact subsequent anti-communist measures with no future announcements. Included here is an examination of the employment of visa and immigration restrictions to halt communist influence and the establishment of the Information Research Department and the Committee on Communism (Home). The existence of these two governmental entities was classified as top secret; though both conducted domestic operations that affected the British citizenry, the public was kept in the dark.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the Conservative Party and its dealings with anti-communism. It first covers the use of electoral red-baiting by the party during the 1945 and 1950 General Election campaigns. In both instances, the Conservatives sought explicitly to link the ideology of socialism to that of the reviled communism. Detailed next are the non-governmental investigations conducted by the Central Office of the party into communist activities. These efforts by the party's leadership

amounted to an unofficial and non-governmental witch hunt. Included as well is an in-depth analysis of the Philby affair of 1955. Rightfully suspected of being the 'third man' who aided in the escape of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, Philby was publicly cleared on the floor of the House of Commons by Harold Macmillan. While Philby is considered the crown prince of British traitors, his exoneration has received very little attention in the various monographs and biographies which depict his exploits. Yet the Philby affair exposes a rift in the anti-communism consensus of the period.

Chapter 4 investigates the activities of the anti-communist pressure groups operating during the era. A robust anti-communism movement functioned inside the British political sphere that existed outside the party and governmental structures. The individual examinations of these pressure groups identify a number of key parties pushing the anti-communist agenda. These organisations both worked within the political framework of the UK and as private organisations cooperated with and garnered covert assistance from government agencies. The chapter examines how British officials aided these groups in their anti-communist activities and how these organisations provided interested parties with the means to influence their agendas through undisclosed means.

Finally, Chapter 5 deals with the trade union movement and industrial unrest. Communists and their opponents alike regarded the best chance – short of a Soviet invasion – for a communist takeover to succeed as resting on control of organised labour. For both sides, it was a battle that needed to be won. The chapter explains the context of the conflict and outlines the methods used to counter communism by trade unionism leaders; it examines state participation in the matter, alongside how the Conservative and Labour governments dealt with industrial unrest. The chapter strongly argues that a governmental consensus formed clandestinely to fight communism in trade unions, since any overt attempts would prove counterproductive. While in power, both Labour and the Conservatives stuck to this strategy. However, the two political parties in government demonstrated a total deviation in their attitudes towards industrial action and unofficial strikes. Despite convincing evidence provided to him by MI5 refuting the charges, Attlee and members of his cabinet accused communists of engaging in sabotage and blamed them as chief instigators of a number of high-profile strikes. Conversely, after returning to Downing Street, the Conservatives rarely made such unsubstantiated allegations – instead, they accepted the assessments of the intelligence community (MI5, Special Branch, and so on) as facts.

Notes

1. D. Hyde, *I Believed* (London, 1951), p. 99.

2. Young Citizens Challenge to Communism, *Communism: The Enemy Within Our Gates* (London, 1949).

3. Over 1,300 files pertaining to Operation Sandstone are housed in The National Archives in Kew, categorised under the subheading ADM 326.

4. These plans, released to the public in 2005, scheduled the use of the Isle of Wight as well as Ascot and Epsom racecourses as internment facilities if a war with the Soviet Union appeared imminent. See TNA KV 4/251.

5. Guy Liddell's diary, entry 27 July 1951 (henceforth Liddell diary, date). The Liddell diaries are housed in the following files at TNA: KV 4/185–KV 4/196 (1939–45) and KV 4/466–KV 4/475 (1945–53). Codenamed 'Wallflowers', they were considered so sensitive that MI5 kept them locked away in a safe. Liddell's wartime diaries were released in 2002 and his Cold War musings were not declassified until 2012.

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8. D. Caute, *The Great Fear* (New York, 1978), p. 20.

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20. Goodman, 'Challenge of McCarthyism', p. 63.

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