

NOTES OF THE MONTH

*United Front—After Southport—Problems of Left Opposition
—Spain—Spain and British Labour—Labour Chairman on
Fascism—“ Terrible Warning ”—From 1931 to South-
port—Rising United Front Movement—Socialist
League’s Rôle—Socialist League in Opposition
—Cripps’ “ Bargain ”—Southport as Right
Wing Offensive—War on United Front—
Conclusions for Left Opposition—Facing
the Issues—No Capitulation—
Mass United Front*

IN view of the Southport Labour Party Conference decisions, the question needs to be plainly faced by all socialists and left workers in the Labour Party : Where do they stand ? Overshadowing every issue at the present time is the need of the united working-class front, the need to mass the common front of the working class against fascism and war, to face with absolute clearness the real character of the struggle before us. The Spanish mass-struggle reinforcing the lessons of Germany and Austria ; the meeting, for the first time for twelve years, of representatives of the Second International and Communist International ; the increasing menace of the world situation, which is visible to all in the fascist offensive, the armaments race and the drive to war ; the Southport decisions, still seeking to set up an iron wall against any form of united front ; the signs of the opposition votes at Southport, heavily defeated, but on the issue of the general strike against war reaching a large measure of support : all these reveal a situation in which it is more than ever necessary for every socialist, for every worker, for every working-class organisation to strengthen the fight for the united working-class front, to take stock afresh of the whole situation in the light of present developments and present needs, to open up the widest common discussion of the line of advance, to break down every obstacle to common working, to redouble every effort in order that we shall yet build up effective working-class unity in action for the coming battles, decisive

for the whole future of Socialism in Europe and the world. *It is a hundred times evident that we are on the eve of big and critical issues for the whole future of the working-class movement, and that a heavy responsibility rests on all.*

THE decisions of the Southport Labour Party Conference raise urgent issues for the whole working-class movement, and in particular for all socialists and left workers in the Labour Party. On the one hand, Southport has meant the adoption of an extreme reactionary programme, a programme of the "public corporation" or Corporate State in place of socialism, and of open support of imperialist war, and has definitely rejected the Socialist League proposals of a supposed rapid parliamentary transformation to Socialism to be accomplished by the next Labour Government. These latter hopes, so far as they may have been held, have been pricked. Not only that, but the Executive has reinforced last year's rejection of the united front by new and intensified discipline against any form of association whatever between revolutionary and reformist workers—at the very same time as the united front is advancing all over Europe.

THAT is one side of Southport. But there is another side. Southport has shown that the extreme reactionary line of the Executive is meeting with definite opposition, which reflected, even though not yet strongly, the rising opposition and movement to the united front throughout the country, as seen at Olympia and Hyde Park and Bellevue, in the united front decisions of the Manchester and Bradford Trades Councils, or in the strength of the opposition at the London Labour Conference on Fascism. The Socialist League has for the first time come out into the open in opposition to the Executive on every major political issue. Roughly one third of the local labour parties voted consistently against the Executive. Above all, on the issue of the general strike against war, which arouses intense feeling in the working class, two of the largest unions, the Miners with a membership of 400,000 represented, and the Distributive Workers with 100,000, voted against the Executive,

and a total opposition vote of 673,000 or one third of the membership was reached. Taking into consideration the heavy limitations and restrictions on any expression of militant working-class opinion at the Labour Party Conference, it is manifest that there is evidence here of considerable opposition forces, which can be enormously strengthened if the issues are correctly placed before them and work is intensified in all the working-class organisations, and offering the possibility still to defeat the reactionary policy of the Executive and win the battle for the united working-class front throughout the country. *What is important now is the clearing of the issues within the left opposition in the Labour Party. The understanding that the necessary path forward of the left opposition lies, not in utopian day-dreams of future parliamentary socialist transformations to be accomplished through a hypothetical Left Labour Government, but in the present struggle, in the building of the united working-class front despite all the bans of the reactionary Executive, and that here or nowhere, in this present fight, will be settled the future of the working-class movement—this is the essential that must be reached.*

BEFORE the Southport Conference had concluded its sessions, the guns of the reaction in Spain were booming the answer to the dreams of the peaceful parliamentary-democratic path to Socialism, and demonstrating anew the necessity of the united working-class front of struggle in every country. The Spanish workers were fighting arms in hand the assault of the class enemy. The struggle for Socialism was revealed as no parliamentary comedy, but as the armed struggle of the classes for power. *After Italy, Germany. After Germany, Austria. After Austria, Spain. When will the lesson be learnt in Britain?* Will it be learnt in time through conscious preparation of the workers, or will it only be learnt at heavy cost after disaster and defeat? That is the really urgent issue, underlying all discussions of left and right. The Spanish mass struggle has raised immeasurably the whole international working-class movement, even more than the battles of Vienna in February, because at a higher degree of preparation, mass

unity, speed of response, and consciousness of aim, even though not yet reaching the conditions of leadership and organisation for victory ; the strength of the fight achieved already at the present stage of the world crisis, shaking the power of the ruling class, makes certain the future victory throughout Europe, as the world crisis develops.

BUT what has been the response of the British Labour Movement to the Spanish struggle? The Labour Party Conference at Southport "welcomed" the fight of the Spanish workers and peasants. In an emergency resolution it "welcomed the evidence that the workers' organisations are prepared to resist the threatened attempt to establish a Fascist régime." But this resolution omitted certain details of importance. It omitted that the Spanish workers' organisations, Socialist and Communist, had formed a united front—at the same time as the Labour Party was not only refusing the united front, but condemning and forbidding any form of co-operation whatever of revolutionary and reformist workers. It omitted that the Spanish workers were conducting armed struggle—at the same time as Labour speakers on every platform were denouncing every form of armed struggle (save on behalf of imperialism) as an invention of Communism to be rejected and opposed by every Labour supporter. It omitted that the Spanish workers were appealing to the soldiers to come to them—at the same time as Labour representatives in Parliament were proclaiming their agreement with the first clause of the Sedition Bill and denouncing all attempts to turn soldiers from their allegiance as "loathsome." It omitted that the Spanish workers, including also the principal Socialist leaders who took part in the struggle, were proclaiming the aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat—at the same time as the Labour Party was denouncing this aim with all its power as to be opposed no less than Fascism. Under these conditions the "welcome" could hardly carry conviction. The contradiction of this "welcome" only laid bare the basic contradiction of the whole position of the Labour Party, seeking still to appeal to the workers and in fact representing a policy opposed to every interest of the working-class struggle.

THIS glaring contradiction between the realities of the class struggle in Europe and all the professed principles of the Labour Party struck even the Chairman of the Labour Party Conference, W. R. Smith, of the Boot and Shoe Operatives, in his opening address. Speaking of the victories of the Fascist dictatorships in Germany and Austria, he declared :

Their opponents could not defeat them at the ballot box, so they were made the victims of machine-gun bullet, hand-grenade and artillery shell-fire.

The happenings in Germany and Austria are a terrible object lesson and warning to the workers of all lands.

What is the "terrible object lesson and warning to the workers of all lands" (*i.e.*, including Britain), which the Chairman of the Labour Party Conference here points out? It consists, according to the Chairman of the Labour Party Conference, in this : that when "their opponents could not defeat them at the ballot box," that is, when the workers advance in parliamentary strength, then they are "made the victims of machine-gun bullets, hand-grenade and artillery shell-fire." But in that case what happens to all the Labour Party teaching of the peaceful path to Socialism through Parliament and denunciation of the Communist warning to the workers to prepare "not for easy parliamentary victories, but for heavy civil war." *Under the hard compulsion of facts, after the event, with the "object lesson" before the eyes of all, the Labour Party Chairman is compelled in 1934 to admit the correctness of the Communist warning which the Labour Party so long derided and denounced : but in the face of this admission the exactly opposite policy is still pursued.*

HAS this "terrible object lesson and warning" of the emptiness and impotence of paper "ballot-box" defences, and of the inevitability of heavy class struggle, including armed struggle, been taken to heart and studied and learned by the British Labour Movement? Not yet. From Right to Left of the Labour Party leadership, from Henderson and Clynes to the Socialist League, just this issue, the cardinal issue confronting the British workers, is studiously ignored. On the very eve of the Southport Conference appeared the semi-official book of the Socialist League, G. R. Mitchison's "First

Workers' Government." It appeared with commendations of Lansbury, Webb, Cripps, etc., that is, of prominent Labour Party leaders. The book consists of an imaginary picture of a transformation to Socialism through a Labour Government elected in 1936. The transformation is described with the most painstaking attention to administrative detail, even to the inclusion of the draft texts of parliamentary bills. But the class-war is left out of the picture. Instead, the Preface contains one revealing sentence, the sole reference to Fascism :

As for Sir Oswald Mosley and his followers, I have not even mentioned them.

This sentence deserves to stand as a monument of the outlook of the Labour Party leadership in 1934, which paralyses the workers for the struggle before them and thereby prepares the way for Fascism.

IT is necessary to face the plain facts of Southport and what Southport means. For this purpose it is essential to understand the process that has taken place in the Labour Party during the past three years since the last Labour Government. The crisis of 1931, the ignominious collapse of the Second Labour Government, the passing over of the principal and best known leaders to open unity with the class enemy, shook the Labour Party from top to bottom. This was not only shown in the loss of two million votes at the 1931 election, the first big setback of the Labour Party since its inception. It was also shown in the inner process that developed in the Labour Party, the anger, disillusionment and wave of left sentiments of the rank and file, and the diminishing authority and prestige of the remaining leadership. The past Labour Government was universally repudiated and denounced as a warning of how not to do it. All the Communist criticisms of that Labour Government were admitted—after the event. "Gradualism" was denounced from official platforms. "Reformism" was denounced. The "frontal attack on capitalism" and "Socialism Next Time" became the watchwords. Indeed, the brighter spirits began to pour contempt on the Communists as "reformist" because they fought for the immediate demands of the workers. The

left wing of the Labour Party, represented by the Independent Labour Party, broke away from the Labour Party in 1932. At the Leicester Labour Party Conference in 1932 Henderson with difficulty secured a hearing ; and a resolution that any future Labour Government, whether " with or without power," must " immediately " introduce " definite socialist legislation," was carried without a division, against the opposition of the Executive, represented by Henderson, pleading to the Conference not to " tie their hands " and proclaiming the resolution " a profound mistake." At the 1933 Hastings Labour Party Conference the well-known resolution to " take no part in war " was unanimously carried, in glaring opposition to the official Labour policy and even to the rest of the decisions of the Hastings Conference. The Executive professed its acceptance of the resolution and bided its time. For the moment the Executive had to bow to the storm, in order to strike its blow later. That time came with Southport.

THE advance of Fascism in Europe intensified this process. The united working-class front was rising in the country, despite all the Executive bans. This was shown in the Hunger March in the beginning of 1934, supported by the local working-class movements all over the country ; in the National Unity Congress, attended by 1,420 delegates from working-class organisations ; in the development of the Anti-War and Anti-Fascist Movement ; in the success of the anti-fascist counter-demonstrations at Olympia and Hyde Park ; and in the extended activity of common bodies like the German Relief Committee, in which prominent Labour Party members took part side by side with Communists. In the face of this rising militant working-class front it became more and more necessary for capitalism and its organ, the Labour Party Executive, to strike a blow to check it. The secret conversations of the National Government and the Labour Party leaders preceding Southport, nominally concerning the issue of Fascism, turned above all in practice on the question of the rising communist influence in the working class and how to check it.

The Labour Party Executive laid its plans for Southport. At Southport the Right Wing struck its blow.

IT was in this period 1932-4 that the Socialist League was created and grew up. The Independent Labour Party, the former organ of left reformism in the Labour Party, under pressure of the leftward demands of its membership on the one side, and of the increasing Executive discipline, on the other, compelling its members to vote, not merely against their consciences and against I.L.P. policy, but against Labour Party Conference decisions and against the most elementary needs of the workers or be expelled, finally gave up the impossible attempt to "ride both horses" (in Maxton's phrase) and passed out of the Labour Party. The Socialist League was then created to fill the vacant place. The Socialist League was intended to provide a model of an auxiliary propagandist socialist organisation within the Labour Party, which should not repeat the errors of the I.L.P. It was emphasised at the outset that the Socialist League would make no attempt to repeat the fatal path of the I.L.P. and put forward an alternative policy to the Executive. Its leaders in the main took no part in the united front or in the active working-class struggle, but confined themselves to abstract propaganda for a legislative socialist programme to be accomplished by the next Labour Government. Further, the League consisted mainly of a group of leading elements and writers in the Labour Party with little working-class membership; the membership claimed was three thousand. Every precaution had thus been taken to create a "safe" socialist organisation within the Labour Party which would not repeat the ill-fated path of the I.L.P., but would counter the militant left tendencies within the working class by a "constructive socialist programme" on a basis of loyalty to the Labour Party. The subsequent history of this attempt is an instructive study of the rôle and dilemmas of left reformism in the present period. Within two years of its formation the Socialist League found itself putting forward a complete alternative programme to the official Labour programme, being overwhelmingly voted down at the Labour Party Conference, and already beginning to be

faced with the same problems as confronted the I.L.P. in the preceding period.

SO long as the Socialist League confined itself to general propaganda of vast socialistic promises on behalf of a future Labour Government, the Labour Party Executive tolerated it as a useful propaganda department. The division of labour between left and right was so far similar to that of the Labour Party and I.L.P. in the years 1924-7 : while Henderson and Clynes remained as pledges to the bourgeoisie of the essential " soundness " of the Labour Party, the " wild statements " of Cripps would appeal to the left workers and intellectuals. But this blissful confusion of voices could not continue indefinitely, any more than with the Labour Party and I.L.P. On the other hand, the glaring contradiction between the wholesale socialist promises of the Socialist League and the actual capitalist policy of the Labour Party became more and more impossible to conceal. The membership of the Socialist League, as the successive conferences in 1933 and 1934 showed, increasingly pressed for a more definite stand, for more militant policies, for the united front. On the other hand, as soon as the Socialist League began to trench on the sphere of policy, the Executive uttered a warning note and prepared to take action. The conflict was postponed as long as possible ; at the 1933 Conference a division was avoided, and the Socialist League proposals were withdrawn, on the understanding that the Executive would give them full and careful consideration. But the publication of the new Labour Programme in 1934 brought the issue to a head. The Socialist League could not passively accept this explicit programme of the Corporate State and of imperialist war without committing political suicide. It was forced to come into the open with a complete series of opposition amendments. A division was inevitable for the Southport Conference.

EVERY effort was made to avoid a conflict. Elaborate behind-the-scenes negotiations between the leadership of the Labour Party and of the Socialist League preceded

the Conference, and the Conference opened with the announcement by Clynes and Cripps respectively of a bargain having been reached. The character of the "bargain" is likely to arouse more laughter than respect. The Labour Party Executive made an extremely vague promise to meet opposition of the House of Lords "if" the House of Lords should "sabotage" Labour measures, and in any case to propose the "abolition" of the House of Lords "as a legislative chamber" (therefore, in fact, not its abolition, but its reorganisation as a "revising" chamber); further, it solemnly promised that "if there were an emergency" it would take emergency measures. Several speakers on behalf of the Executive were at pains to point out that this meant no change whatever in the policy of the Executive. On this basis, however, Cripps declared his complete satisfaction to the Conference: "this solves difficulties to the satisfaction of both sides." Cripps was thereafter elected to the Labour Party Executive. It is obvious to any observer that this "bargain" settles nothing whatever of the actual issues. The Socialist League amendments to the programme remained, even though in watered-down form, and were steadily voted down by the Conference. The election of Cripps to the Executive (with a mandate to take responsibility for and carry out a programme condemned by the Socialist League as "gradualism" and "reformism") only emphasises, rather than diminishes, this definite defeat and rejection of the Socialist League's policy. *The deeper issues of the left opposition in the Labour Party, which were only partially and inadequately reflected in the Socialist League amendments, will not be so easily "solved."*

THE significance of Southport thus stands out sharply in relation to the whole development of the period 1931-4. Southport represents *the extreme offensive of the ruling Right Wing in the Labour Party to re-consolidate capitalist control and policy in the Labour Party* after the temporary confusion of the years succeeding the fiasco of 1931 and the exposure of the Second Labour Government, and *to erect a dam against the rising united front demands and opposition elements*. It was necessary to make the Labour Party "safe"

(for capitalism) against the rising left currents, against the rising united front movement, against the extravagant socialist hopes which were beginning to be centred on the next Labour Government, and for the new tasks of capitalism, for the advance to more and more fascist forms of organisation, for the coming war. The line of the Labour Party Executive to accomplish these aims covered four main points. First, the new Programme of Capitalism and War (innocently called "For Socialism and Peace"). Second, the specific War Resolution, wiping out the Hastings resolution, and committing the Labour Party to the "duty of supporting our Government unflinchingly" in imperialist war ("the difficulty of British Labour will be to differentiate its policy from that of Mr. Winston Churchill and the French Government"—*New Statesman and Nation*, October 6, 1934). Third, the overwhelming voting down of the Socialist League and exposure of its weakness, as not being able to muster even so many votes as the Communist Party was previously able to obtain in the Labour Party before the Communists were expelled. Fourth, the new and intensified disciplinary regulations against any and every form of Communist and left wing activity, against any and every form of united working-class front or association of revolutionary and reformist workers. The total work of the Labour Party Executive at Southport thus powerfully laid the foundations for the next stage of capitalist fascist advance.

LET there be no misunderstanding of the significance (above all, at the present time when the united front is spreading throughout Europe) of the new threat of "full disciplinary" measures against any form even of "loose association" between Communist and Labour Party workers. These organisational measures contain the real political programme with far more inescapable clearness than even the programmatic statement, whose cloudy phrases ("equality of opportunity," "a planned national economy," "peace, freedom and justice"), many may still be innocent enough to misread as "socialist," if they listen only to the speeches on popular platforms and do not analyse the actual proposals. But in the

organisational measures the realities of class-war stand out sharp and open, and admit of no ambiguity. Many delegates raised the question why, if such ruthless discipline was being enforced against any Labour Party member who appeared on a common platform with a Communist, the same Labour Party chiefs who were enforcing this were themselves constantly on a common platform with the leaders of the bourgeoisie, in the League of Nations Union, at Industrial Peace dinners, etc. Why such hostility to the working class party, the Communist Party, and no hostility to the capitalist parties? The only answer could be was that the Labour Party Executive preferred the united front with capitalism to the united front of the working class. And this in fact was the answer given. The Labour Party leader, Herbert Morrison, in a statement deserving of record made plain *that, in the view of the Labour Party Executive, the main enemy was the Communist Party, and not the capitalist parties.* He said:

The Communist Party was singled out for exceptional treatment because it was an exceptional political party. It was the only political party that set out to make trouble for the Labour Party, the trade unions and the co-operative movement.

Thus, in the view of the Labour Party Executive, the Conservative and Liberal Parties, the parties of capitalism, do not "make trouble for the Labour Party": they are recognised as allies, or at any rate as friendly and honourable rivals on the same side of the barricades; the only basic enemy is the Communist Party. Could there be a clearer statement of the basic capitalist outlook of the Labour Party Executive? And from this fact follows the necessity of the continually sharper discipline year by year, as the pressure of working-class advance increasingly strains against the barriers imposed by the Labour Party Executive and Trades Union Congress General Council.

WHAT, then, must be the conclusions of the militant workers and socialists from the results of Southport? It is necessary to face the unfavourable facts without illusions. A programme has been adopted which is indubitably a programme of capitalism. In the words of one of the official

speakers of the Socialist League at the Conference, the programme is

not a plan for Socialism, but a repetition of the 1929 attempt to work within declining capitalism. Capitalism will not be endangered by these proposals.

And again, on the compensation discussion :

The issue was between a form of organisation leading to the Corporate State and a form of organisation leading to Socialism.

The Conference chose the "form of organisation leading to the Corporate State." It is no good trying to deny this hereafter, or to continue for purposes of public propaganda to paint marvellous pictures of the great socialist transformation which a Labour Government, if returned with a parliamentary majority, will accomplish. To do this is knowingly to deceive the workers. When the same speaker who had made the above declarations as to the character of the official Labour programme adopted at Southport, proceeded at the end of the Conference to declare, in seconding the vote of thanks to the Chairman, that "the Conference had contributed to the building of the new Socialist Order of Society," he was only playing fast and loose with words and destroying the meaning of his own previous fight.

DOES this mean that there is no room for an opposition in the Labour Party, and that the only course for the left workers is to come out of the Labour Party? On the contrary. *There is every room and vital need for the most powerful and all-embracing movement of active opposition to the existing capitalist policies and leadership in the Labour Party, as in the trade unions :* this is the indispensable path to the revolutionisation of the British working class and the building of the mass Communist Party which can alone lead the working-class revolution to victory. But there is only one inescapable condition for such an opposition to be able to realise its rôle. It must be *a militant opposition on the basis of the active class struggle, on the basis of the struggle for the united front*, not an illusion-fed "opposition" which spreads misleading hopes of a future peaceful parliamentary transition to socialism through the existing Labour Party, while ignoring the present issues of

the class struggle which the Labour Party leadership is betraying. This is the decisive test.

TWO paths, in fact, open out before the left opposition in the Labour Party. One path is the path of capitulation, of the "bargain" of Cripps. This path is the path of stultification and defeat. It means to close one's eyes to plain facts, to eat one's words, to advocate the very programme previously denounced, and correctly denounced, as a programme of capitalism, and proclaim it now for purposes of propaganda a programme of socialism, and *on this false basis* to call for support for a future Labour Government. This means to talk "socialism" for the benefit of capitalism, and to become in fact an enemy of the workers' struggle, of the workers' united front.

THE other path, the only other path, is—to *fight*, to fight the capitalist policies of the Executive, to fight for socialism, to carry on the class struggle on every issue, to build the workers' united front in despite of all the official bans, and *win through by the strength of mass support*. This is the path which leads to victory. All the official bans and ukases are impotent when the masses are in motion. Already the Hunger March showed it. September 9 showed it. On the very morrow of Southport, and its solemn excommunication of any common platform with Communists, the Manchester Trades Council has called an All-in Demonstration against Fascism, with a common platform of leading Communist, Labour Party and Trade Union speakers. This is the spirit which will conquer. Once this movement develops all over the country, Transport House will spit its venom in vain. Let all the left opposition, let all who wish to fight for socialism, mobilise the masses in the present struggle and build the united front—this is the way forward. Let them build the Anti-Fascist Front. Let them work to unite the movement in the localities and in the districts on every issue. The Communist Party will fight side by side with every militant socialist and worker in the common fight ; is ready—as the example of France

has shown—to make the utmost possible sacrifices and concessions for the sake of the common front. The united working-class front will finally conquer, because the imperious needs of the whole situation and of the working-class struggle increasingly demand and compel it. Its victory will lead the way to the defeat of fascism, to the defeat of the war menace, and to the final advance for the overthrow of capitalism. This is the lesson of Southport. We must take up and defeat the challenge of the Labour Party Executive. We must win the battle for the united working-class front ; for on this all else depends.

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