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### Notes of the Month

## *The Great Debate*

**'Everyone recognises that change is in the air, and that the old Western policy is obsolescent, if not obsolete.'**

**JOSEPH HARSCH, Christian Science Monitor, 10.1.56.**

**'The need in this new and changed situation of discarding the old ways and trying new ideas and a fresh approach to peace.'**

**ALFRED ROBENS, House of Commons, 27.2.56.**

**O**N this May Day of new hope and promise for the world—despite all the problems and dangers still with us—a fresh current is stirring and is changing all the old landmarks. The old problems still clamour for solution; the inheritance of the cold war still dogs our steps. But on all sides there is recognition of a new world situation and a new balance in the world. Among representatives of all political sections, equally in the sphere of international relations, and within the labour movement, a fresh wind is blowing. The search goes forward to chart a new course for the second decade after the war such as will replace the dark clouds and threats of the first decade by happier omens. The Great Debate has opened.

### **Three Themes**

What are the essential themes of the Great Debate? Not about Stalin. That there should be spots on any sun would only startle an inveterate Mithra-worshipper. Not about the now recognised abuses of the security organs in a period of heroic ordeal and achievement of the Soviet Union. To imagine that a great revolution can develop without a million cross-currents, hardships, injustices and excesses would be a delusion fit only for ivory-tower dwellers in fairyland who have still to learn that the thorny path of human advance moves forward, not only through unexampled heroism, but also with accompanying baseness, with tears and blood. The Great Debate that has opened is about larger issues, which spring from the swiftly moving new world situation, and which were spotlighted by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Three above all. First, the future of mankind in the nuclear age, of East-West relations, of peace and peaceful co-existence. Second, the future of the labour movement to meet the challenge of new conditions. Third, the future of the transition to socialism, for the completion of national and social liberation throughout the world.

### **Five Years of Change**

Five years ago in these Notes in August, 1951, we wrote already of the first stage of the Great Debate which had begun with the opening of the cease-fire negotiations in Korea as the initial sign of the turning point in the international situation. But the signs then were still weak and early. It took two years even for the cease-fire to be achieved in Korea. Since then the transformation has moved forward at an accelerating rate. Cease-fire in Korea; cease-fire in Vietnam; the leading independent rôle of India in the cause of peace; the Bandung Conference of states representing the majority of mankind for peaceful co-existence; the Geneva Conference of Heads of State; the upsurge of the Middle East and victories of independence of Egypt and the Sudan; the soaring economic achievement of the socialist world; and then the Twentieth Congress, with its tremendous new perspectives. Attempted counter-measures in plenty have not been lacking: Nazi rearmament, South-East Asia Pacts and Baghdad Pacts. But these have had to be pushed through in the face of overwhelming popular resistance; they bear already in the sight of all the character of desperate rearguard actions to turn the tide of history. The caravan moves on.

## **Quickening Pace**

Since the Twentieth Congress the pace has quickened. Consider the events of the mere six weeks of March and the first half of April. France, on the basis of the new leftward majority in parliament, moves to open official criticism of the entire Western military policy of the past years, and prepares for the visit of the French Premier to Moscow. The British people, breaking through all the police iron curtain barriers, boisterously welcome Malenkov; and the die-hard campaign to cancel the Bulganin-Khrushchov visit fails. Iceland's parliament calls for the withdrawal of American troops. Morocco and Tunis win independence. Jordan expels Glubb; and the last British troops leave the Canal Zone. Pakistan proclaims a Republic. Ceylon's people clear out the discredited flunkey Kotelawala and align their country with the progressive international orientation represented by Nehru.

## **Socialist Aid**

The Indo-Soviet Steel Agreement, finally signed in the beginning of March for the erection of a giant steelworks with Soviet aid, is followed a month later by an Indo-British Steel Agreement for the construction of a similar giant steelworks with British aid. Imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery. A new conception of the relation of advanced industrial countries to under-developed countries whose economy has been kept backward by imperialism is now extending from the socialist sphere to beyond its boundaries. President Eisenhower may still be demanding astronomical figures of dollars from Congress for the old type of so-called 'aid', four-fifths of which is officially described as 'military aid' (pouring in guns and subsidising troops for counter-revolution to uphold reactionary régimes which would otherwise collapse in a day without such aid), while the remaining one-fifth of so-called 'economic' aid is officially defended to Congress as subservient to the political and strategic purposes of United States foreign policy. The old familiar type of export of capital, investment, loans, credits or grants from imperialist countries to colonial or under-developed countries (sometimes mis-described as 'economic aid') may still continue, which is directed, not to make possible the independent economic development of the country in question, but to maintain its dependence, facilitate commercial penetration and pump out its raw material resources, while leaving the people in abject poverty.

## **A New Revolutionary Principle**

But the new revolutionary principle of aid from an advanced industrial country to an under-developed country to enable that country to establish its own independent economy by industrialisation, this new principle, first practised in history within the Soviet Union in the relations with the Central Asian Soviet Republics and other former backward colonies of Tsarism, then extended during the last decade in the relations of the Soviet Union with the People's Democracies of Europe and with the Chinese People's Republic, is now extended beyond the frontiers of the socialist sphere to countries in Asia and the Middle East. More. Under the beneficial stimulus of competitive peaceful co-existence this principle begins to force itself even on the imperialist countries, so that industrialisation—the indispensable basis for independent economic existence and therefore for full and effective independence from imperialism—begins to go forward in these countries, not only with Soviet aid, but, under its stimulus, also with what the Twentieth Congress ironically and not unjustly called 'indirect Soviet aid' from the imperialist countries. This is a very striking concrete measure of a changing world.

## **Socialist International and Communism**

Within the Socialist International two successive meetings of the Bureau and of the Executive of the Bureau have taken place to discuss the outcome of the Twentieth Congress and the proposition of co-operation with Communist Parties. True, the immediate outcome is negative; the emphasis in the public statement is placed on the old dogmatic abstractions of alleged irreconcilable opposites, without regard to the immediate common interests for peace and the defence of living standards, which in real life are felt and recognised and acted upon by socialist and communist workers together in all countries. But differentiation already appeared at Zurich between the British Labour Party, French Socialists and Canadians on the one hand, and the Austrian-Dutch-Scandinavian majority on the other, when the Labour Party moved a minority amendment against the majority extreme view; and again at the London meeting when the document prepared by the Labour Party appears to have been ignored by the majority ('Transport House prepared a document, but little use seems to have been made of it', *The Times*, 9.4.56). The issue will not be so easily settled. The very fact of these two meetings of the Bureau means that the discussion has opened; the question is on the agenda. In Italy co-operation exists. In France the whole pressure of the political situation drives towards it. In

the special conditions of Britain the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the Communist Party has made its fresh approach to the aims of co-operation. On every side new questions are arising.

### **From Fear to Hope**

'The trouble is', wrote the correspondent of *Time*, Jim Bell, in April, 'that the Geneva summit meeting killed the fear on which Nato was based.' A penetrating judgment which goes further than its proponent may have realised. For if mankind turns from being driven by fear to being moved by hope, there is no limit to the horizons which now open. Why this change in the mental climate of the world which all can now feel? What underlies this new world situation which is so visibly transforming the whole question of East-West relations, of the relations between the old minority world of capitalism and the rising majority world of socialism and national liberation? Many factors may be indicated. Underlying all is undoubtedly the manifest advancing peaceful economic and constructive strength of the socialist world (from less than one-tenth of world industrial production to nearly one-third today), the advance of socialism from one country to a world system, with the ceaseless peaceful initiatives of the socialist world. Closely allied with this, and arising from the extending weight of socialism in the world and the consequent end of the monopolist domination of the world by imperialism, is the advance of four-fifths of the former colonial and semi-colonial majority of mankind to the establishment of independent states, and to increasing open differentiation from the policies of their former imperialist overlords and to friendly co-operation with the socialist world for peace. All this has manifestly changed, and is further changing, the balance of the world.

### **A Revolution of Thought**

The new conceptions which arise from this changed world balance, and which have rendered obsolete all the old assumptions of the Western system of military alliances as the 'bulwark against communism', may be briefly indicated. First, it is now universally recognised that there is no question of military superiority of either camp. From this has followed the collapse of the old Western 'policy of strength' with its dream of the eventual 'showdown' or dictated solutions in place of negotiation. Second, it is now universally recognised that the entire nuclear strategy is suicidal, and that in this sense the 'Great Deterrent' is the Great Illusion. The Defence

White Paper may still seek to brandish the nuclear weapon as the lynchpin of Western strategy (now also for 'limited wars'); the Government may proclaim the 'plan' to evacuate twelve millions of the population to fictitious 'safe areas'; while the official Labour Party pamphlet in reply may retort that the real solution is not 'evacuation' but 'dispersal'. But the majority of intelligent people have long reached the conclusion that all this is mania, even though still dangerous mania. Third, it is now universally recognised that the Soviet leaders and all the leaders of the socialist world want peace, just as the Soviet leaders have recognised at their Twentieth Congress that there is today no aggressive State in either Europe or Asia which could launch a new world war. The special question of the United States, which now stands at the crossroads of its policy to face the new world situation, and is at the moment in this presidential year torn between conflicting currents, needs separate consideration.

### **'This Is All Rather Different'**

Walter Lippmann has graphically described the perplexity of American policy in face of this new world situation which has begun to make its vast panoply of military alliances inherited from the previous decade look obsolete:

In the past few months Mr. Dulles has found himself entangled in an extraordinary series of dilemmas—in issues in which he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. He has been caught in the Goa dilemma between Portugal and India, in the Jakarta dilemma between the Netherlands and Indonesia, in the North African dilemma between France and the Algerian Arabs, in the Palestine dilemma between Israel and the Arabs, in the Baghdad dilemma between Iraq and Egypt, in the Cyprus dilemma between Britain and Greece, in the Persian Gulf dilemma between Saudi Arabia and Britain, and so on and on.

This is all rather different from what it used to be in the pre-Geneva phase of the cold war. Then the issues were between Communists and anti-Communists. The line of leadership was self-evident. But now the issues which plague Mr. Dulles are very often primarily among our allies and the peoples that we are courting . . .

The old, much simpler days are past when there was one great adversary and leadership consisted in opposing him.

(Walter Lippman, *New York Herald Tribune*, 7.4.56.)

Similarly Mr. Dulles himself reported in Washington on March 23, after returning from his tour of ten countries in the Middle East

and Southern Asia, and discovering the marked contrast of the frigid reception he received from the enthusiastic mass reception to the Soviet leaders:

While we think first of the dangers that stem from international Communism, many of them think first of possible encroachments from the West.

Herein is expressed the present dilemma of American policy, reflected equally in the present doldrums of Nato, from which General Gruenther, after three years of vainly belabouring and berating his European 'allies' and seeing his 'grand army' dwindle under him, has thought it wisest to retire. In the United States also there is going to be need for thought, even though the atmosphere of a presidential election may temporarily arrest its public progress.

### **Britain, France, and Germany**

What of Britain? France has led the way among the Western powers in taking the first initiative to begin to break free from old conceptions and respond to the new world situation. The bold declaration of Foreign Minister Pineau on March 2, criticising the 'gigantic error' of Western policy over the past few years, has been followed up by the no less emphatic declaration of Premier Mollet on April 2 when he said, with reference to the disarmament negotiations:

Each time No is said by the United States, we lose a battle in world opinion. People conclude: 'Well, then, it is Russia that wants peace. It is the United States that doesn't want it'.

He went on to emphasise that German unity could only be realised in a framework of general disarmament, in place of the other way round—precisely the thesis maintained by the Soviet Union at the Geneva October meeting of Foreign Ministers and then rejected by the Western representatives. France has moved ahead of Britain. But there is reason to believe that Britain, simultaneously involved in many difficulties with the United States, has found the initiative of France not unwelcome:

The rogue elephant tactics of M. Pineau have compelled France's allies to look afresh into the whole question of relations with the Communist half of the world. While France is moving a bit too fast for Britain, and much too fast for the United States, she is moving in a direction that begins to look inevitable.

*(Sunday Times, 25.3.56)*

Shades of the inevitability of gradualism! When a leading Conservative organ begins to speak in these terms, the signs of new currents are inescapable.

## **Britain's Policy Straddle**

British policy, hamstrung by the preoccupations of its obstinate losing battle to maintain its old monopolist hold in the Middle East against both Arab and Cypriot national liberation and American penetration, has not been ready so far to move with the same freedom of action as France in the European sphere. French pre-occupation with the war against Algerian national liberation actually sharpens the hostility to Nato, which in the eyes of French colonialists has diverted French armed forces from their colonial tasks to an inappropriate military training, equipment and immobilisation under American command against an imaginary Soviet menace. Hence the most varied streams in French policy drive to the new orientation. British official policy, on the other hand, remains torn between the past and the future. On the one hand, the British Ambassador in Paris, Sir Gladwyn Jebb, sang the old gramophone record of the inevitable conflict with world communism in order to rebuke France on March 6:

By definition Communism must pursue its efforts to destroy capitalism. Conflict is the natural state of relations between East and West.

Similarly the *New York Times* correspondent in London, Drew Middleton, reported on March 22 a 'senior official' in London as declaring:

Almost without noticing it we have passed from the post-war into the pre-war era. We know it. I hope you know it in Washington.

On the other hand, the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Roger Makins, emphasised the significance of Soviet economic aid as 'without strings or conditions' and went on to criticise the Western cold war strategy in terms closely similar to those of Mollet and Pineau:

On our side there is a tendency to stress guns rather than butter. In short, from the British point of view, both France and the United States are out of step.

## **Sir Anthony's Two Voices**

As befits a British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden sings both tunes on successive occasions in order to keep his disparate flock in hand. On the one hand, he seeks to appease his anti-Soviet die-hards by proclaiming in public speeches at Conservative rallies all the old provocative shibboleths of the cold war, as in his speech at Bradford on January 28:

The character of the contest between the Communist Powers and the Western Democracies has changed, not for the better . . . . The address of the Power which dragoons and dominates its satellites is 'The Kremlin, Moscow'.

And similar stuff to delight the High Tory gallery and charm away their suspicions. On the other hand, his actions are in certain respects more important than his words. Having removed the extreme anti-Soviet Macmillan from the Foreign Secretaryship after the latter's dismal servility to Dulles and consequent fiasco at Geneva in the autumn, he has firmly resisted the very considerable clamour of the anti-Soviet Tory sections (reflected in the normally loyal Conservative organ, the *Daily Telegraph*) to cancel the Bulganin-Khrushchov visit. Indeed, he went so far as to achieve a (for him) relatively infrequent epigrammatic brilliance when he tartly replied to Air Commodore Harvey's enquiry on the 'cost' of the visit:

Very much less than a millionth part of one hydrogen bomb.

The significance of the differentiation in Conservative ranks should not be under-estimated.

### **What Is a 'Great Power'?**

Sir Anthony Eden's dilemma of policy, reflecting the contradictions of the present position of British imperialism, found expression in his speech to the Central Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations on March 16, when he sought to defend the 'unpopular' economic measures which the Government felt compelled to impose by the argument:

Only a solvent and prosperous Britain can shoulder the burdens of a Great Power. History and geography have combined to give us a special position in the world. We cannot, and will not, abdicate from this. . . .

The logical conclusion of abdication would be a policy of neutralism, and to be neutral for Britain is a slow death.

But supposing the 'logical conclusion' of this imperialist conception of a 'Great Power', with the consequent crippling colonial wars and overseas commitments, making Britain the most heavily taxed and militarised major country in the world in proportion to population, leads to economic strangulation and a consequent alternative form of 'slow death'. What then? No wonder that one Conservative M.P. has already jumped to the opposite conclusion:

Mr. Osborne (Louth, Conservative) said that we were trying too much to keep up with the Russians and the Americans. We did not have the resources to keep up with the Joneses and the Browns. Was it not time to recognise that Britain had come down in the world, and was no longer the Great Power she had been. (*The Times*, 1.3.56)

Between these two extremes of Conservative utterance is typically expressed the present crisis of British imperialism.

### **How Britain Can Lead**

But is it really true that these are the only two alternatives before Britain? Either to perish of economic strangulation in the desperate attempt to maintain a doomed imperialist system of power. Or to give up the unequal struggle and sink to the level of an insignificant country with little voice in world affairs. The two alternatives are equally preposterous. Never had Britain such an opportunity as today to play a foremost progressive rôle in world affairs, equally beneficial for peace and security in the world, and for the solution of Britain's problems at home. Let us recall the words of *The Times* on June 22, 1942:

The structure of European peace must be truly international, and must be founded on the freedom and co-operation of the peoples of Europe. But Great Britain and Russia will remain the essential pillars on which the whole framework rests. So long as they are intact and erect, the structure of peace will stand unshaken. If they fall assunder, nothing else will avail.

It is precisely because Britain during the decade after the war, in the desperate attempt to maintain a doomed empire, and falling a victim to the Hitlerite anti-communist bogey, fell away from this policy, entered into unhealthy dependence on the United States, and agreed to the partition of Europe and the remilitarisation of the old forces of Nazism in Western Germany, that Britain has fallen deeper in the mire. Britain, France and the Soviet Union, as the leading powers of Europe, have the responsibility to co-operate for peace and security in Europe; and on this basis the peaceful reunification of Germany can be achieved. More. Britain has the decisive opportunity for world leadership for peace today. An independent and consistent initiative of Britain for peace today alongside France, the Soviet Union, India and China, for collective security in Europe and Asia, for the ending of colonial wars, for the peaceful reunification of Germany outside sectional military alliances, and for disarmament, would rally all Europe and Asia in support, and hasten the indispensable revision of United States policy.

### **National Independence and Working Class Leadership**

But such a development requires decisive changes and a positive step forward in the whole orientation of Britain's policy. It requires a change in political direction in Britain. Its fulfilment requires in

the first place the effective national independence of Britain. When Sir Anthony Eden last went to Washington he pleaded for permission to relax the embargoes on trade with China in order to assist in meeting Britain's desperate market problems. Permission was not granted. Is that what Sir Anthony means by the status of a 'Great Power'? Toryism may manoeuvre an election in Britain, not on the basis of confidence in its own merits, but on the basis of the wave of disillusionment with the shortcomings of past Labour leadership and policy. But Toryism cannot lead Britain along the path of peace, progress and economic reorganisation required by the present situation. The responsibility of leadership to win a new future for Britain rests and can only rest with the organised working class, representing the majority of the nation and potentially capable of drawing to its banner the widest sections of the people for a new policy which could give them hope. But the fulfilment of this responsibility requires the policy, the leadership and the unity which can alone make it possible. The problems of policy and leadership can only be solved on the basis of the fullest democracy within the political labour movement, such as is at present hampered by the bans on representation and expression of key sections. The problem of unity of the political labour movement turns on the relations of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. To these problems the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the Communist Party directed its main attention.

### **Do the Communists Matter?**

At this point the critics commonly explode. How ridiculous! To talk of unity of the political labour movement as turning on the relationship of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. But the Communist Party, they repeat with tireless iteration, is insignificant. As well talk of uniting the fly and the elephant. The Communist Party, proclaims the pontifical *Times* editorial, with its mere 34,000 members and minute electoral vote, is 'derisory' in point of size, and 'of little immediate consequence'. 'The British Communist Party has no political influence in this country whatsoever', thunders the *Daily Herald*. It represents only a 'nuisance value'. It is a 'fifth column', screams the *Daily Herald* a few days later. 'Never in its chequered history', shrieks *Tribune*, 'has the Communist Party been nearer to complete demoralisation'. In fact, quite a remarkable amount of heat appears to be engendered by this insignificant object. A striking unanimity of apoplexy appears to extend from the Carlton Club to *Tribune* at the mention of British Communists

or the British Communist Party. But why does this apoplexy need to be so constantly buttressed by the ceaseless iteration of the assertion that its occasion is really quite too utterly unimportant for anyone's attention?

### **Communist Congress and the Press**

For such a negligible object, a remarkable amount of space and attention was given by the press to the recent Congress of the Communist Party. Of course it is true that the press had conjured up a 'crisis' in the Communist Party and was gleefully awaiting its outbreak. The contrast between the screaming headlines on the day that the Congress met, and the sudden somersault and discomfiture two days later when the press had to creep away with its tail between its legs, deprived of its 'crisis', affords an amusing example of modern high power publicity. Before the Congress the attentive reader learned that 'British Reds Slam their Leaders' (*Daily Express*), 'British Communists Snipe at Their Own Leaders', 'Executive Committee Under Fire' (*Manchester Guardian*), 'Reds Rebel' (*Daily Mail*). After the Congress, when the bewildered press table had had to observe the unanimous adoption of the political resolution by the free vote of the delegates, the gloomy headlines proclaimed 'Communist Crisis? Oh No' (*News Chronicle*), 'Communist Leadership 'Get Away With It' (*Daily Express*), 'Don't Write Off the Reds Yet' (*Daily Express*). *The Times* ponderously sought to explain the inexplicable by blandly asserting that 'it was evident that the rules enforcing discipline in the party still stand firm' (what 'rules' or what 'discipline' governed the free vote of the delegates was left discreetly unexplained). But this amusing example of current press methods carries also a certain lesson for the politically observant. Would there be so much excitement about an alleged internal 'crisis' of a minute organisation if it were really so politically insignificant?

### **Misleading Appearances**

The truth is that the 'insignificant' line of argument can have a certain temporary effectiveness at the moment, but it can be overdone. The Communist Party is still one of the smaller parties, though its membership already represents a greater organised strength than the old socialist parties which founded the Labour Party. The electoral system, designed to maintain the monopoly of two parties, gives to a certain extent a misleading effect; the 'British' system was deliberately imitated in Western Germany in order to

wipe out all Communist representation in the traditional Marxist strongholds of the Ruhr and the industrial West; its adoption has been openly advocated by reaction in France as a means to reduce the Communist representation of a quarter of the electorate to a fragment. Still the electoral weakness is so far a fact. There is no need to exaggerate the present stage of strength of the Communist Party in order to prove the value of co-operation of Communist and Labour Party workers in order to exert the fullest united strength of the working class and the political labour movement.

### **The Industrial Working Class and the Communist Party**

The politically important question for those seriously concerned with the future of the working class movement is not the comparison of the relative size of two parties, but the real situation in the working class. Even the noisiest peddlers of the 'political insignificance' of the Communist Party stress its 'industrial' influence in the factories, in the key industrial areas and in the trade unions—as if this were not 'political'. Hence the foolish talk about 'infiltration', 'trouble-makers', 'fifth columns', etc. But it is precisely this influence that is *political* in its significance and importance for the whole working class movement. When the Communist Party led the campaign in the trade unions against Nazi rearmament, and a real majority was won to reverse the official policy of support, this was a political campaign. When the progressive alliance of Communist and non-Communist trade unionists in the Trades Union Congress win an average of three to three and a half millions for resolutions denounced by the platform as 'Communist-inspired', and with Communist spokesmen as the principal advocates, this is a political phenomenon. When the same or corresponding left policies receive only from one to under two million votes at the Labour Party Conference, despite the addition of the largely leftward votes of the constituency parties, but where Communist spokesmen are excluded, this would clearly indicate that the political influence of Communist spokesmanship and leadership within the labour movement is not negligible. The maintenance of the *Daily Worker* now for over a quarter of a century, as the principal organ of left opinion in the labour movement, entirely on the basis of working class support, when the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress combined, with all their resources, found it impossible to maintain a daily newspaper, is also a political phenomenon of our era which no serious student of working class politics, with any knowledge of the history of the movement, will under-estimate.

## **Realist Conclusions**

Every trade union official, Labour Party organiser and serious political observer is perfectly well aware—whatever fairy tales they may feel compelled to offer on the platform or in syndicated press articles—that there exists a significant body of Communist opinion within the key sections of the industrial working class, and that the Communist Party and *Daily Worker* express and voice this body of opinion. But the industrial working class is the decisive basis of the Labour Party. From this situation three conclusions follow. First, the industrial working class, as in every capitalist country, but above all in such a country as Britain where the wage-earners are the majority of the population, represents the political future in Britain and the leader of the transition to socialism. Second, the Communist Party representing the aim of socialism, already exercises a sizable and growing political influence and leadership within the most active key sections of the industrial working class, especially in major industry. Third, and as the inescapable consequence of the foregoing, it follows that, if the two foregoing propositions are true, then for any serious socialist or Labour Party member concerned for the future of the political working class movement the question of the relationship of the Communist Party and the Labour Party, and of the possibility of co-operation of Communist and Labour workers is no minor subsidiary question, but the key question for the effectiveness and unity and future victory of the political labour movement and socialism in Britain.

## **Trade Unions and the Labour Party**

The trade unions are the basis of the Labour Party, thereby differentiating it from the type of social democratic party based on a set of political doctrines. They supply five-sixths of its membership and the main proportion of its central finance. The policies of the majority of unions are thrashed out at conferences with the participation of communists in preparation for the Labour Party Conference. The constitutions of important unions require the participation of their leading officials in delegations to the Labour Party Conference. In given cases the leading officials may be communist. They participate in the discussions of the delegation determining its vote outside the conference hall, and then are illogically excluded from presenting the viewpoint of their membership inside the conference hall. What is the use of talking about the 'menace' of the 'communist embrace'? The 'communist embrace' is already there; only the normal healthy democratic functioning is hindered which

would facilitate the common thrashing out of policy with democratic representation and decisions to express the wishes of the membership.

### **Mr. Gaitskell Kisses Death**

When the Labour Party leadership need more finance for the Labour Party—and they need it badly, as the so far unsuccessful wooing of the co-operative societies for affiliation has indicated, thus revealing that the problem of unity is in fact a problem affecting all sections of the movement—they inevitably have to go to the general secretaries of the trade unions to ask for it. So Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Morgan Phillips travelled up to Southport before the last Trades Union Congress to meet the general secretaries of the unions and ask for more money. But the general secretaries of some of the most important major unions are leading communists. Did Mr. Gaitskell blench before the ‘kiss of death’? On the contrary. He positively rushed forward into the embrace with the laudable aim of securing more cash for the Labour Party. All that he forgot for the moment was that there is an old English democratic principle of ‘no taxation without representation’. Mr. Gaitskell is a realist. Perhaps he may even yet learn, if communist influence continues to extend in the main trade unions, and he wishes to maintain the indispensable basis of the Labour Party. But Mr. Robens will have to beware of contamination from association with Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Morgan Phillips. For kisses can be infectious. And Mr. Robens’ ‘kiss of death’ was Mr. Gaitskell’s ‘kiss of life’.

### **Liberating Mr. Zilliacus**

Mr. Zilliacus has sought to defend the maintenance of the iron curtain between Communist and Labour Party workers by exhuming the somewhat hoary MacDonaldite fallacies that there exists some supposed irreconcilable antagonism between the Marxist theory of the conquest of political power by a united working class leading the majority of the people for the purpose of establishing socialism and the theories of the Labour Party. True, Mr. Zilliacus has to admit that the Communist Party stands for the achievement of socialism by democratic means. But he endeavours to argue that this is only since the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956, after which ‘the British Communist Party with disciplined unanimity became lightning con-

verts to democratic socialism'—'a lightning conversion'. It would be an insult to so well documented a scholar as Mr. Zilliacus to suggest that, without needing to go into past controversies, he was unaware that the Communist Party Programme 'The British Road to Socialism' in 1951 propounded this same path. Five years would make a somewhat curious 'overnight conversion'.\* Indeed, Mr. Zilliacus could construct a much prettier argument, if he were so inclined, to 'prove' that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union slavishly follows the British Communist Party. But we sympathise with Mr. Zilliacus and would not dream of accusing him of being unaware of the facts belying his allegations. He knows that he is under very sharp surveillance on these matters, and that unless he were to repeat somewhat vociferously the ancient MacDonaldite fallacies he might again be in danger of finding himself on the mat under the somewhat precarious democratic structure of the Labour Party. We sympathise with Mr. Warbey and the rest of the thirteen Labour M.P.s who found themselves caned for endeavouring to hold a conference on suggested democratic improvements of the Labour Party's constitution. We regard Mr. Zilliacus, Mr. Warbey and their friends as good men in bondage. The Communist Party is endeavouring to liberate them and all other socialists in the Labour Party to be free to fulfil the aims of the pioneers.

### **A Voice From the Past**

After all, the aims of the pioneers were to try to establish unity of all sections of the working class movement, socialist parties and trade unions together, Marxist and non-Marxist, for the democratically agreed common objectives of the working class. Listen to the Address of the Chairman of the Labour Party Conference in 1917 (when the Labour Party was still a federation of socialist parties and trade unions):

From the very first the ties which bound the party together were of the loosest possible kind. It has steadily, and in my opinion, wisely, always declined to be bound by any programme, to subscribe to any dogma or to lay down any creed . . . On the contrary, its strength has been its catholicity, its tolerance, its welcoming of all shades of political and even revolutionary thought, provided that its chief object—the unifying of the workers' political power—was not damaged or hindered thereby.

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\*Since the above was written Mr. Zilliacus has offered the explanation (*Daily Worker*, 17.4.56) that he regarded *The British Road to Socialism* programme of 1951 as a proposal to establish 'a pale imitation of the People's Democracies' which he defines as 'broadly based revolutionary dictatorships which came to power by violent means'. Since *The British Road to Socialism* proposes that a united labour movement, rallying its support from the majority of the people, should elect a parliamentary majority in order to carry through the change to socialism, it is difficult to see how even the scholastic powers of Mr. Zilliacus can 'interpret' this proposal as contrary to the conception of a democratic transition to socialism.

No doubt conditions have changed. We cannot go back to the past. But is it not desirable to try to find the way to fulfil the same basic aims in the new conditions of today, as the pioneers did in their day? They also had to wrestle with many obstacles in the path of unity. But they found a solution in terms of their day, on the basis of 'catholicity', 'tolerance' and 'welcoming of all shades of political and even revolutionary thought', to combine all sections, without destroying the identity of each, for the common objective of 'unifying the workers' political power'. Has this no message for us today?

### **Why Not Try to Co-operate?**

Let us be modest in our first steps towards the aim of unity, recognising that the inheritance of the past will not be overcome in a day. What is in question today is an immediate objective for immediate political needs. It would be idle phantasy to imagine that the present conditions are ripe for settling the ultimate questions of the long-term future relationship of the Labour Party and the Communist Party as we know them today, or the path to the final aim of a united political party of the working class. It would be as out of place to denounce the Labour Party as bankrupt because many of its leaders have moved away from socialism, as to demand the dissolution of the Communist Party because its members sincerely believe that the whole history and experience of the labour movement demonstrates the necessity of an active party of socialism within the broad labour movement of the mass organisations of the working class. What is in question is to seek the first steps to co-operation of all workers, communist and non-communist, in the immediate political field as they co-operate already in the economic field; to remove the artificial barriers which at present hinder such co-operation; and to facilitate the democratic functioning of the political labour movement by the participation of all sections through the democratic election of delegates with equal rights from the mass organisations. These objectives are not unattainable. The whole situation requires them and will further require them. The plain issue is before us. The debate has opened. Even Mr. Robens' 'kiss of death' speech was a contribution to the debate, however negative; for he recognised that the issue now stands before the movement for discussion. Let the debate continue. We can be confident that the good sense of the working class, the urgent needs of the situation and the deep desire for unity will prevail in the end against all the forces of division.

*April 16, 1956.*

R.P.D.