

THE ELECTION — THEN AND NOW

WILLIAM GALLACHER, M.P.

FOR the 1945 election Gollancz turned out a number of books directed towards exposing the reactionary character of Tory policy and the progressive, if not revolutionary, policy of the Labour leaders. One of these was written by none other than Aneurin Bevan, with the title 'Why not trust the Tories?' Mr. Bevan is as wordy and confusing as ever MacDonald was, but while MacDonald played up to the 'Classes', Mr. Bevan always sought to give his demagoguery a working class content. He went for the 'big fellows'. Now the 'big fellows' have him in their grip and he agrees to, and supports, pacts and cuts and policies that would a few years ago have aroused him to the extremes of synthetic wrath. Consider this book of his. At the beginning there is an introduction which says 'One advantage flows from the fact that the events I deal with all fall within the past twenty-six years. It should make it more difficult to practise successfully the same tricks within so short a time'.

Read the book, see what the tricks are, and then it becomes very obvious that however difficult the operation may be, Mr. Bevan is prepared to have a try at it. You haven't got the book? Well, all right, I'll give you one or two excerpts from it just to show you what I mean. First having given a paragraph from the introduction, I'll take a jump right to the end of the book and note the concluding sentence. When he wrote it Mr. Bevan never dreamed that in the shortest possible time at the behest or rather the command of Wall Street he would be linked up with every Fascist and near-Fascist supporter of Capitalism in piling up armaments far and away beyond the capacity of our economic resources. Here it is, cut it out and paste it up for all to read, or better still, send it on to Mr. Bevan and invite him to pass it around his Cabinet colleagues.

You may have laughed at the 1914-18 generation and the way it was deceived. Watch you are not caught the same way. Or it may be that the day will come when, a generation from now, you will be seeing your young son off to fight yet another war from which you were not wise enough to protect him.

What do you think of that? 'A generation from now'—but the warmongers are not prepared to wait that long. 'A generation from now' and the socialist countries will be away, plain for all to see, far ahead of the decrepit, semi-bankrupt capitalist countries. That's why war has become an extremely urgent matter for the capitalists, par-

ticularly the capitalists of the United States. Socialist progress will turn the scale in every European country. What chance is there for American capitalism if the whole of Europe goes socialist? That is the nightmare that is driving the American multi-millionaires into a frenzy that now affects the majority of the American population. Psychopathic cases in America are prepared to destroy Europe rather than see it taken over by the ordinary people and Mr. Bevan and his colleagues are with the psychopathics and against the people.

What went on in Paris just the other week, Mr. Bevan? All the brass-hats were there and the Americans were there. There has been sufficient of a leak to make us aware that the forces in France and in this country are going to come under the direction of America either in an open or concealed form. In some cases it will be open, in others hidden, but all the time it will be there. America will decide when our lads have to be sent to the slaughter—when Europe will be destroyed—are you doing anything to stop that, Mr. Bevan? No. You and your friend Churchill (Oh, I know you make a point of scoring off him in the House, always go for the 'Big Fellow', but everyone knows there's never anything said that can't be sorted out in the smoke-room), so to continue, you and your friend Churchill support America in all the moves it makes towards driving the people to war against the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. But the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries represent a mighty bastion of peace which steadily draws the people of the capitalist countries to its support. Here in this country we will fight against your war policy, Mr. Bevan, and you can pass that information on to Mr. A. V. Alexander and to the pious Sir Stafford Cripps.

Mr. Bevan has a chapter headed 'Death by Words'. It's an interesting story the author has to tell. It is an unsparing condemnation of the Tories, but it is also an exposure of the mind and politics of Mr. Bevan. Take this, for example, from page 25:

You remember the old saw children sometimes chant at each other when they quarrel—'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me'—nothing could be more wrong than that. Words have a terrible power to hurt people. Indeed, words are probably the most powerful things in the world. That is why the masters of words are so often the masters of nations. When people hear the right words they are apt to think the right actions will follow.

The Tories, taking advantage of this, told quite a story following the first world war and thereby got themselves a substantial majority in the House of Commons. Mr. Bevan, after drawing attention to this, goes on, page 27:

You will see from this that the Tories are in possession of supreme power. What they want they can get. *If they really want to carry out a great reform there is nothing to stop them* (my emphasis, W.G.).

Very good, Mr. Bevan, but these words condemn you. If they were true of the Tories, so also are they true of you. You and those associated with you in the Labour Government 'are in possession of supreme power'. What have you done with it? Have you solved the housing problem? That was one of the pledges you made at the General Election. It was to be the first priority. It was to be tackled as a military operation. Think of how you sneered at the Tories. You don't remember? I'll refresh your memory. On page 76 of 'Why not trust the Tories?' we are informed that Mr. Willink 'told us that in the first year after the war one hundred thousand houses will be built and two hundred thousand would be put in hand—not finished, mind you—in the second year. . . Not much of a blitzkrieg, is it? It has taken five years of Governmental labour to produce that mouse'.

That is followed by a quotation from Churchill about temporary houses. Said Churchill:

I hope we may make up to half a million of these and for this purpose not only plans but actual preparations are being made during the war on a nation-wide scale. Factories are being assigned, the necessary set-up is being made ready, materials are being ear-marked, and as far as possible the most convenient sites will be chosen. The swift production of these temporary houses is the only way in which the immediate needs of our people can be met in the four or five years that follow the war.

So much for Churchill. What of Bevan? 'There you are', says Mr. Bevan, 'after five years of hullabaloo what you get by way of a programme with any sense of urgency behind it is steel boxes'. Mr. Bevan was quite definitely opposed to temporary houses. He poured contempt on them and those who sponsored or approved of them. Why? Because, as he says on page 77, 'The danger about temporary houses is that not only do they serve to take the sense of urgency out of the demand for a really comprehensive housing programme, but they are apt to become permanent'.

Where is the 'comprehensive housing programme'? Where is the 'blitzkrieg'? It may be that Mr. Bevan has built a few more houses than would have been built by the Tories. It wouldn't require any special ability to achieve that, but most certainly if he hadn't made use of the temporary houses which originally he attacked with such violence, his showing for four years would be poor indeed. In a measure, the 'steel boxes' promised by the Tories have been his salvation. Don't trust the Tories, that's good advice; but we don't seem to get much further trusting Mr. Bevan. The Tories had the power if they had wanted to build the houses. There was nothing to stop them. Mr. Bevan had the power, just the same as the Tories—why didn't he build them? Why such a poor result for four years in face of the desperate need?

Then take the Health Service. Mr. Bevan isn't overshadowed by

modesty. He likes to go round boasting that ours is the finest Health Service in the world. This simply isn't true and if it were the credit would have to go to the Tories and the Liberals. True the voluntary hospitals have been taken over by the State. A very desirable procedure. But the hospitals were already there. Mr. Bevan didn't produce the hospitals. The panel system has been extended, but it also was already there. On these all that could be claimed is that he had improved somewhat on what had been done by his Tory and Liberal predecessors. He can claim little credit for this. For since the inception of the Health Service, every successive Minister has contributed his quota to its advance. But following the war the time had arrived for a really big advance, for something of an entirely different order to anything known before. In all countries where the workers had taken power Health Centres of the most ambitious character were being established. Was Britain going to lag behind? No, sir, not with Mr. Bevan on the job. See him march forward to the box on April 30, 1946, to propose a second reading for the National Health Service Bill. Listen to him as he concludes his speech. Hansard, column 63:

I should have thought it ought to have been a pride to hon. members in all parts of the House that Great Britain is able to embark upon an ambitious scheme of this proportion. *When it is carried out* (my emphasis, W.G.) it will place this country in the forefront of all countries in the world in medical services.

When it is carried out! Now let us jump back a bit to the middle of his speech. Here in columns 57 and 58 we get the following:

Third instrument to which the Health Services are to be articulated is the Health Centre, to which we attach very great importance indeed. (The other two 'instruments' are the hospitals and the doctors, W.G.) . . . the general practitioner cannot afford the apparatus necessary for a proper diagnosis in his own surgery. This will be available at the Health Centre. . . The Centres will vary: there will be large centres at which there will be dental clinics, maternity and child welfare services, and general practitioners' consultative facilities and there will also be smaller surgeries where practitioners can see their patients. The smaller centres are necessary because some centres may be a considerable distance from people's homes. So it will be necessary to have simpler ones, nearer their homes, fixed in a constellation with the larger ones.

Has anyone, anywhere, seen any of these 'constellations'? Has anyone seen a Health Centre? An ambitious scheme! Right, Mr. Bevan, a very ambitious scheme. But what has happened to it? I suggested in the House one day that Mr. Bevan should visit Czechoslovakia and study the Health Service there. Have they got Health Centres? They certainly have, and what is more, they have got Health Resorts. The same applies to Poland, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria. Health resorts that were the special preserve of Emperors and Aristocrats. Now they are taken over by the Health Department

and in most cases operated by the Trade Unions. 'When it is carried out', said Mr. Bevan on April 30, 1946, and it is now 1950 and there isn't a Health Centre anywhere and no likelihood of any being established. But he and his cronies go on talking about the finest Health Service in the world just as though there were Health Centres and 'constellations' in every part of the country. 'The Tories', said Mr. Bevan, 'have power. What they want they can get'. Did you want the Health Centres, Mr. Bevan? If so, why haven't we got them?

All right, we haven't got the houses, and we haven't got the Health Centres, but at any rate we've got 'full employment' or very near full employment and for that credit must go to Mr. Bevan and his colleagues. Not so, not even that can be counted unto them for righteousness. 'Don't trust the Tories'. They're 'lower than vermin'. That's the stuff to give them. That's the language to rouse the masses. Just listen to them cheer. Hear them comparing notes when the oration is ended. He's a great lad. He isn't frightened to tell them off. But what's this? The same Mr. Bevan has to do a turn at the Labour Party Conference at Scarborough on the 18th of May, 1949. He is talking about the Tories, not the British, the American variety. And what does he say? He tells us that without the assistance of the American Tories, unemployment in this country would at once rise by 1,500,000. Morrison went one better. He said, 'We should be facing big cuts in rations and a million or two unemployed if our generous friends in America had not come to our aid'. In other words, had it not been for the American Tories, conditions in this country under a Labour Government would be as bad or worse than ever they were under a Tory Government. I am not saying that. Bevan and Morrison say it. Trust the Tories—the American Tories. I'll bet Bevan never dreamt he would come to that, when in 1944 he wrote, 'Why not trust the Tories?'. But you may argue there's a crisis—a deep economic crisis. That's why the houses and the Health Centres haven't materialised, that's why we have to place our faith in the big Tory capitalists of America. It won't do, brother, it won't do. The crisis could easily be solved if we would develop trade and friendship with the Soviet Union, the countries of Eastern Europe and Liberated China. But cutting home consumption and boosting exports will never solve the crisis. It can only deepen. Every cut in domestic consumption has simply led to a worsening of the situation and to further cuts. Every socialist ought to understand this and refuse to give support to such a policy. Here is what Mr. Bevan had to say about it in 1944. After quoting from Tory authorities he goes on, page 61:

The logic of that is clear. We are to accept a lower standard of life in order to sell more goods abroad. . . . But if we accept a lower standard of life in order to export more goods, by that very act we require less goods

from other nations and so make it more difficult for them to buy from us. If we adopt a policy of scarcity here we help to impose it on other nations, and the last result will be worse than the first. . . Plenty begets plenty and scarcity begets scarcity'.

I could go on quoting at great length on that repudiation of what is now the policy of Bevan's own government, but I will content myself with this final word from page 63:

In short, attempts at increasing exports by lowering consumption contract the world market instead of expanding it. It is a gospel of despair, of desperation and of ultimate disaster.

Yet it is this very gospel that Mr. Bevan and the Labour leaders, in keeping with the Tories, will be putting before the people in this present election. The Miners, through their branches, have already repudiated this gospel. Where there are Communists standing let them carry that repudiation to the ballot-box. For the Communist Party alone has a policy that can safeguard the present and the future, that can carry the workers forward to Peace and Socialism.

'Labour Monthly' learns that a Victimisation and Reinstatement Fund has been opened for nine full-time officers recently dismissed by the Transport and General Workers' Union because they refused to sign a declaration affirming that they were not members of the Communist Party. First call upon it will be to ensure a proper standard of living until alternative employment can be found. It will be recalled that at the Union's last Conference a resolution was carried denouncing the 'purge' of workers from their jobs because of their Communist Party membership or sympathy as being 'absolutely undemocratic' and called for the full force of union machinery to be used in their support, an ironic comment! The fund is sponsored by the Committee for Trade Union Democracy, on whose behalf Mr. W. Jones (London 'Bus Section) of 3 Hale End Road, E.17, will accept donations and issue periodic accounts.