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## **FOR A MILITANT LABOUR MILITANT MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN. Harry Pollitt**

What a contrast there is between the situation now and as the millions who voted Labour at the General Election expected it to be; between what was promised and what has been done. The people thought the General Election victory meant the end of the domination of the Tory Party. They expected to see the speedy nationalisation of the key industries, social security, and the fulfilment of the housing programme, the forty-hour week, implementation of the new Education Act, repeal of the Trade Union Act, hope for the former Depressed Areas, Old Age Pensions of an adequate character without Means Test, and the elimination of the Mosley organisation.

They wanted to see the war alliance of the Big Three Powers carried into the peace in order to realise the total destruction of fascism, the establishment of democratic and united Germany, economic and political cooperation between a Labour Britain, the Dominions, the colonial peoples, the new European democracies and the Socialist Soviet Union.

Instead, the workers are now faced with a deepening of the economic crisis, increasing taxation, cuts, shortages, the growth of the offensive of reaction and the development of an open war alliance between American and British imperialism against the Soviet Union.

The present Government's policy is strengthening reaction at home and all over the world. It has made a Labour Government the active partners of American big business

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against the Soviet Union and Socialism.

## **BRITAIN'S CRISIS**

What is the essence of the crisis that Britain is now facing? Why has it arisen?

The real reasons for the development of the crisis are both economic and political. First, the general crisis of world capitalism—which led in the 1930s to the deepest most prolonged and universal crisis in world history—has been intensified and not lessened as a result of the war.

Second, within the general crisis of capitalism, the position of British imperialism, already seriously weakened before the war, has been further undermined as a result of the war. Before the war, British imperialism, deprived of its former industrial pre-eminence, did not develop the essential productive forces in Britain or modernise its basic industries.

But the third decisive cause of the aggravation of Britain's difficulties and development of the crisis is the reactionary imperialist policy of the Labour Government, which has lined up Britain With American imperialism against the progressive forces of the world, maintained vast armed forces and costly overseas commitments, and has failed to carry through necessary economic measures at home at the expense of the monopolists.

It is this policy which is the main cause of the colossal deficit in the balance of payments. For a time the loan from USA was used to cover the bankruptcy of the policy, with the exhaustion of the loan, the bankruptcy has been laid bare, and

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the crisis has developed in its sharpest form.

It is these facts which place the responsibility of the present crisis on the Labour Government. On the basis of the present policy of the Labour Government we could have still further increases in production and yet the existing economic crisis would not be solved. The present policy will not solve the crisis, it will only make it worse. It will lead to further attacks on the conditions of the working on the people.

Actually, prices are increasing so much faster than wages that the worker's share of existing goods gets smaller. The real reason for the inflation which does exist is twofold. Firstly, the excessive military expenditure of £900 million a year represents not only an extraordinary demand for goods and services, but also keeps one-and-a-half million workers from increased production of goods. Cutting the forces would be a tremendous blow against inflation. Secondly, the rising profits of the employers (which in 1947 were running 30 per cent, above the wartime peak level), has enormously swollen bank deposits distorting the economy, which is lacking real control, to the whim of the profiteers and black marketers.

All this, in addition to the general economic deterioration of British imperialism, has led to the weakening of sterling in relation to dollars. The French devaluation decision, with the proposal for a "free" currency market, caused panic in the British Government' because it demonstrated the real, as opposed to the official value of the £ and the fallacy of British imperialism's efforts to make the £ "face" the dollar. The £ could face the dollar if a real class policy were operated in Britain.

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## **THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION OF BRITAIN**

As a result of the policy of the Labour Government the international situation has seriously worsened. All pretence of Britain pursuing an independent course “neither tied to the United States, nor to the Soviet Union” as the Ministers used to claim, has been abandoned. Britain is now the open satellite of the United States with orders to organise the Western bloc under American auspices. Labour Government ministers have thrown off the mask and come out in full support of Churchill’s Fulton policy. Their speeches are one long hostile and provocative diatribe against the Soviet Union and the new European democracies. Since the New Year Mr. Attlee, Mr. Bevin and Mr. Morrison have vied with Churchill in publicly threatening war against the Soviet Union.

It is for these strategic aims, under American inspiration and in accordance with American plans that Bevin is now endeavouring to build up a Western European bloc. The old propaganda which sought to present the Western bloc as a kind of third alternative to association either with the United States or the Soviet Union is now finally exploded. It was in the midst of a loud chorus of insistent demands from Washington that Bevin made his speech of January 22 proposing the Western Bloc. The State Department immediately issued its official statement of approval. The proposed Western bloc is nothing but one front of American global strategy. It is nothing but an attempt to revive the Munich combination and Hitler’s Pan Europe in a new dress. Therefore, it is no matter for surprise that these moves are accompanied by threats of anti-Soviet war

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on the part of Attlee, Bevin, Morrison and Churchill.

This increasingly violent and undisguised war propaganda of leading circles in Britain and the United States is not an evidence of the strength of imperialism. On the contrary, it is evidence of the increasing desperation of the imperialists before the continuing advance and strength of the democratic forces throughout the world.

Truman and Marshall are only putting forward lines of policy which are meant to advance the aim of American world domination. The USA aims to make Western Germany and Japan its principal war bases, not only against Communism, but against all nations which in any way hinder the development of the trading plans of American big business, and in particular to make Britain and the Western European countries economic and political colonies of the USA.

In relation to the international situation, the basic position of the Labour Government is its opposition to the Soviet Union. But what does it hope to get out of this? Does its alliance with USA increase Britain's possibility of improving its position as a world power? On the contrary, it is undermining Britain's position and increasingly bringing about a position of complete economic and political servitude to the USA.

In its vain efforts to maintain the weakening structure of its own imperialism, the Labour Government is more and more losing out to its powerful American rival. This is seen, above all, in its position on the Marshall Plan.

The details released so far from the various "expert" committees working on the drafts of the Marshall Plan are absolute proof of every accusation made that the aim of American big business is fundamentally to undermine the

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economic and political independence of Britain and Western Europe.

## **THE PRICE OF AMERICAN AID**

Britain and other participating countries are being called upon to pay a heavy price for such US aid as they may receive. The aid proposed is limited and hedged about with restrictions in a way that could not promote economic recovery. The aid for Britain would not cover more than a fraction of the dollar deficit. The sponsors of the Plan calculate that Britain would still be compelled to exhaust its gold resources and that by 1952, at the end of the Plan, the standard of living would still be below pre-war. The allocations proposed are concentrated mainly on commodities such as tobacco and dried eggs which United States exporters wish to unload on the European market. The requests of the European countries for aid in productive equipment have been drastically cut down, notably with regard to steel.

On the other hand, in return for whatever aid is given, the United States expects rights of economic, political and strategic interference. This has been made clear from the statements of General Marshall and the State Department, the Harriman Report, the Herter Report and the Congress hearings. In return for whatever aid is given, the USA is demanding the right to interfere with the reconstruction plans of the various countries. Capital expenditure programmes to build up industry in Britain and Western Europe, which would really make for independence from America, have already been criticised and it is clear that pressure will be exerted to cut them down; to cut down expenditure on housing and abolish exchange controls.

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Already the Harriman Report has attacked the shipbuilding programme in Britain and elsewhere. The British Government, by cutting the steel allocation to the British shipbuilding industry by 20 per cent, is showing an indecent haste in carrying out US wishes.

They claim the right to interfere with Britain's commercial policy. For example, Mr. Bernard Baruch, the Wall Street financier, stated that "Britain and other countries should be allowed to retain their Imperial preferences for three years", as if this were a matter within the jurisdiction of the US Congress. General Marshall's revelation before Congress that he and Mr. Bevin had discussed the terms of the Anglo-Soviet trade treaty, gives a further insight into US pretensions in this sphere.

We are witnessing the period of maximum pressure of the United States upon Britain, and in this connection the devaluation of the French franc must be viewed. Just as the Western Customs Union is directed towards breaking up the Empire basis of Britain, and as part of the Marshall Plan the drive against Imperial preferences, etc., so devaluation is another part. The franc crisis shows the catastrophic position in France, and the alarm has come from Britain, not so much, on the devaluation proposals, but, as we pointed out, on the free rate for the £. In point of fact the franc devaluation moves were carried through with the approval of America. It all represents a deepening of the world economic crisis, further pressure on the sterling bloc, and the development of the war position.

All this is linked with the systematic American drive to weaken Britain's trade links with the Dominions, India and the colonies, as seen in the latest trade agreement for a lowering of tariffs which favours the USA more than Britain, especially with the disparity between the productive capacity of the two

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countries. The USA steadily drives Britain out of its Latin-American markets, and conducts an increasing trade offensive against Britain in the Middle East. USA capital penetrates into India, Burma, Malaya; its trade agreement with Chiang Kaishek practically means the closing of the Chinese markets in British trade.

In short, the economic policy of the USA means economic suicide for Britain.

Wall Street's political aim for Britain is to reduce Britain to a political yes-man, supporting every American action for world supremacy.

This for Britain is political suicide. There can be no doubt about the desire of American reaction to organise a war against the Soviet Union, as well as the role which America sees Britain playing in such a war.

The USA aims to make Britain its base if another war breaks out—its aircraft carrier, its rocket and flying bomb base. It matters nothing to Wall Street that Britain and its industries and people would be speedily wiped out in such a war.

The aim of American pressure, its loans, its economic and political policy for Britain together will mean in the event of a new war, military suicide and the end of its rule as an important power. In short, US policy aims to eliminate Britain as an independent power and to make it completely dependent on America.

## **THE POLICY OF RIGHT-WING SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

Since 1924 we have had three Labour Governments. Those

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of 1924 and 1929 were decisively defeated at subsequent General Elections; and the results of the recent Municipal Elections, and the steady increase in the Tory vote at by-elections, are a dangerous sign of the loss of faith in a third Labour Government, even though it' has a great majority behind it in Parliament.

In each case, however, it is easy to trace why the high hopes of Labour supporters have been thwarted. It is because under the leadership of the right-wing leaders the Labour Governments have, in each case, refused to organise any real fight against capitalism, and through this, assisted in a strengthening of the Tory Party.

The whole history of the British Labour movement is clear evidence of the disorganising part played at every stage of the workers' struggle against capitalism by right-wing leaders.

We saw it during the miners' struggle in 1921, and the failure of the Triple Alliance to act alongside the miners, in the fight of MacDonald and company against "Poplarism," i.e., defending the interests of the poorest sections of the working class. In 1924 the Labour Government was in sharp opposition to official trade union strikes and accused the trade unionists of "stabbing Labour in the back." In 1926, leaders of the same type betrayed the General Strike.

The right-wing leaders supported "non-intervention" in Spain, the policy of Chamberlain at Munich, they resisted every effort to organise working class unity, and they again attempted to dragoon and threaten all those in the Labour Party who from time to time feel impelled to protest against the callous betrayal of the principles which inspire the Labour movement.

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## **THE ALTERNATIVE FORCES IN BRITAIN**

There have always been strong Left tendencies in the Labour movement, but their major weakness has always been that they have never been fully united and organised. At the present time, discontent and dissatisfaction with the policy of the Government does exist inside the Parliamentary Labour Party. There is a strong Left movement in the trade unions, and a growing differentiation to be observed inside the Co-operative movement. There is a serious determination on the part of the rank and file of the trade unions not to allow any freezing of wages to take place, and many important trade union leaders are also fully in line with this outlook. The position on food subsidies is even stronger, and any attempt to reduce these would meet with the strongest opposition on the part of large and important sections of the Labour movement.

These features of the position inside the movement have to be considered also in relation to the growing feeling in Britain against the policy of American reaction; the desire for trade and friendship with the Soviet Union; and above all, in remembering the strong, fighting anti-capitalist and Socialist traditions in the whole Labour movement. It provides a serious basis upon which can be united and organised the most formidable mass movement of the Left to fight against the present disastrous policies of the Labour Government and to bring about the desired change.

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## **SOME REMARKS ON COMMUNIST PARTY POLICY**

When the world is clearly divided into an imperialist and an anti-imperialist camp, with a Labour Government an active partner in the imperialist camp, and carrying through a capitalist solution of the crisis, it is necessary that important changes in the policy of the Communist Party to meet this situation should be made.

We correctly exposed the reactionary nature of the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan, but we were slow after the end of the war to recognise that American imperialism had become the new central force of world reaction, seeking to dominate the world and to subordinate Britain to its own interests.

We correctly worked for the victory of the Labour Government in the General Election, and quite rightly gave constructive support to the Labour Government for the fulfilment of its election programme, criticising and opposing its reactionary policies, but we were late in appreciating the full scale of the drift to the Right of the Labour Government and clung to old formulas and approaches after it had revealed itself, particularly with its role in the Marshall Plan, as an instrument of the imperialist camp, of capitulation to the Federation of British Industries, and of subordination to Wall Street.

Our campaign of exposure of the role of social democracy has also been insufficient. We have tended to forget that millions of young people who have come to adult life and are now taking an active interest in working class politics and policy have not had the experience of the role of social

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democracy which the older workers have had.

Furthermore, in our anxiety to improve our organisation for fighting elections, we did so in many cases at the expense of factory organisation, and are not yet giving sufficient attention to developing our mass work and organisation in the factories.

While mentioning these weaknesses, at the same time we pay tribute to the positive achievements of our Party and members during the year. We have led a consistent campaign on housing and food prices. Our fight for a real economic plan, for the nationalisation of steel and for the reduction of the size of the armed forces and trade with the Soviet Union has had considerable effect. This movement, with which we as a Party were associated, had a powerful effect on the votes at the Trades Union Congress, where a substantial militant minority stood firm for a working class position despite all pressure and attacks.

Our consistent exposure of Government policy on Greece, on Spain, and on Palestine has found a ready echo in the movement. Our Party is proud to be in the forefront of the struggle against Mosley today, as it was before the war. In spite of the propaganda from all official sources, our meetings are bigger than ever, and 5,000 workers have joined the Party in the last three months.

Our main danger today is an underestimation of the strength of the working class and its readiness to fight back for the achievement of its demands and its solution of the crisis.

We shall have to convince the Labour movement of the capitalist character of the Government's policy, and prove that if this policy is continued the present attacks on working class conditions and standards represent only the beginning. While we fight for a correct solution of the economic crisis, the fight

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to defend and improve the workers' standards and for their daily interests, is the only way to compel changes in policy and government. This fight will have to be conducted in a variety of forms, and the stronger it becomes, the sooner the changes required will be obtained. It is this which is new, and its decisive importance must be recognised.

It is now the mass struggle against the present reactionary policy and present composition of the Government that needs to be aroused and organised at every stage.

It is this alone which can end the present frustration and confusion; which can lead to the development of a fighting Labour movement against capitalism, secure the solution of the crisis in the interests of the people, and at the same time safeguard the national independence of Britain and enable it to play a really constructive role in all International organisation.

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