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Van: KARA

Aan: Hoofd B

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BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY

July 1950

1. GENERAL POLICY

A tactical retreat from extremism in the Party's short-term programme was initiated at a meeting of the Executive Committee on 8 July 1950. The report outlining this programme is on sale as a threepenny pamphlet entitled "The Fight for Peace and Working-Class Unity". It has been prepared as a result of the need felt by Party headquarters to "judge every issue and review every aspect of our policy including our tactics in a further General Election, in the light of the present war situation and the paramount urgency of the fight for peace". Short-term policy - defence of peace, national independence, wages and full employment - remains the same. Significance lies in the fact that the Party, in instigating new tactics, has implicitly acknowledged the force of the British evolutionary and reformist tradition.

The initial section of the report describes the precarious position of Britain under capitalism. The anxiety of serious-minded sections of the population about this must, therefore, be "guided into the correct political channels", for British workers "want a clear and practical perspective and policy that can help them on the road to socialism". This is in marked contrast to POLLITT's challenge to Congress in November which had spoken, in the same context, "of the road of proletarian revolution which points the way to plenty, prosperity and peace", and had contended that every development in the existing crisis would drive home the need for its revolutionary solution.

In reviewing Party activity during the General Election, the report stated that there had been a discrepancy between what the workers wanted and what the Party believed that they wanted. While the reasons of the Party's failure at the General Election, expounded in the Political Letter "Forward with Confidence", were still valid, the leadership had not been sufficiently self-critical. The Party's failure was fourfold. The greatest weakness was the inability to arouse the masses in defence of peace. Second in importance was the existence of a very large section of the people which, alarmed at the degree of dependence of Great Britain on the U.S.A., had not yet been won for the Party. Thirdly, the impression had been given that, in predicting the imminence of slump, the Party had welcomed it as the only means by which Communist influence could be increased; instead the Party should have advanced more clearly its policy of how the slump could be averted. Finally, the fundamental mistake of the election was in its development into a contest between the Communist Party on the one hand and all other Parties on the other, without sufficient attempts at discriminating between Labour supporters and right-wing Labour leaders. The Party had failed to influence local Labour Parties through trade union representation.

The key to the solution of the Party's problems lay in the Cominform resolution of November 1949 on working-class unity. Taking this as the guide, the Party should "work for every conceivable possibility of securing unity in action with the rank and file Labour workers now, giving the utmost attention to this through our activity in the factories, localities and mass organisations of the working-class". Unity of the working-class and "all democratic and peace loving people" was therefore the most urgent duty of the Party. Party policy "alongside our fight for immediate demands", must be concrete and not general, immediately practicable and not only possible after some "Capitalist and Transport House bogey of a bloody revolution". It must be applicable to British conditions and "be based upon them and British institutions". Equally it must be shown that not Communists but Tory and Labour leaders were "out to destroy Britain".

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The report should be considered in relation to the rout of Communists and fellow-travellers at the polls in February, shortly after the National Congress had made public the re-emergence of the British Communist Party as an orthodox Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist Party: it will be remembered that illusions about the "forms of unity" developed during the united struggle against Fascism had been formally dismissed, the Parliamentary road to power explicitly rejected, and revolution emphatically stated to be the ultimate aim of the Party. It should also be considered in the light of a recent visit by POLLITT to Moscow.

In adopting the report, the Executive Committee endorsed the following points as the basis of the future (short-term) policy and tasks of the Party:

- (a) That we do all in our power to strengthen unity of action between Communists, Labour democratic and peace-loving people of Britain in the fight to defend peace, in support of the Peace Petition, the British Peace Conference in July, and the World Peace Congress in the autumn.
- (b) To concentrate on a limited number of Communist candidates at the next General Election who will fight against both the Tories and Right-wing Labour leaders, and also in constituencies where we have a real political basis.
- (c) In all cases where we are not contesting with our own candidate, to recommend voting Labour, whilst showing that the fight against Toryism also demands a fight of the rank-and-file of the Labour movement against the Right-wing leaders who are helping the Tories.

The Political Committee has been instructed to prepare a long-term programme.

2. REACTIONS TO THE SITUATION IN KOREA

Having for so long dilated on the gravity of the war danger, the aggressive intentions of the Western Powers, and the fact that peace was hanging by a thread, the Party appears to have been taken by surprise by events in Korea. On first receipt of the news the possibility of American intervention was entirely disregarded. After the statements by President Truman and Mr. Attlee no one was in a position immediately to interpret the situation correctly from the British Party standpoint. POLLITT did not want the Daily Worker to make a sensation out of the situation until more facts had been received. Eventually a pamphlet was produced entitled "Hands off Korea" with the sub-title "Stop America's Drive to War"; demonstrations were organised, and instructions were issued to mobilise all Party members to improve sales of the Daily Worker and increase the tempo of the peace campaign. A booklet "American Armed Intervention in Korea", published by Soviet News, was put on sale at Party demonstrations. A resolution passed by the Executive Committee of the Party made the following demands:

- (1) Withdraw the British Navy and British planes from Korea. Let Korea decide its own affairs.
- (2) Not a man, not a gun, for America's war.
- (3) The Chinese Government must be allowed to take its rightful seat in the Security Council.
- (4) The fully representative Security Council must meet and demand the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Korea.
- (5) Ban the atom bomb now.
- (6) Hands off Korea! Hands off China! Save world peace.

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There is no information to suggest that any British Party official had prior warning of the attack on South Korea. As late as 28 June no instructions had been given for the dispersal of records or for action in the event of the Party being declared illegal. More recently some attention to security has been paid at Communist Party headquarters and the offices of the London District. A resolution on political vigilance laid down that no Party member should be admitted to Party meetings without producing a Party card.

3. THE SCHUMAN PLAN

A joint declaration by the Communist Parties of France, Germany, Italy, Britain, Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg has been made on the Schuman Plan. This was published in the Cominform Journal and the Daily Worker. The Plan was condemned as a design to place the arsenal of the Ruhr at the disposal of the U.S.A. in its war aims against the Soviet Union, and for weakening the basic economy of Britain and France, increasing their dependence on the U.S.A. and lowering the living standards of the workers. "It rests upon the working-class", the declaration asserts, "to take up the struggle for national independence and to support the struggle of the oppressed countries for their national independence In order to defeat the war alliance of the merchants of death, the Communist Parties of France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg will work to organise the peaceful alliance of the peoples, of the millions of ordinary folk who do not want war".

4. CAMPAIGN AGAINST DEFENCE MEASURES

The question of evacuation of school children arising from a Government memorandum on this subject issued under the Civil Defence Act has been under discussion at a meeting of the Party Executive. A letter sent by POLLITT to Party councillors, teachers and others involved in this question makes it clear that Party members should in no circumstances let it be thought they are in opposition to measures being taken for the safety of children. For this reason the efforts of Party members should be directed towards ensuring wider support for the aims of the British Peace Committee and obtaining as many signatures as possible for the peace petition. In the belief, however, that the Government was attempting to use the fear of evacuation to aid their "war plans", the Party has instructed Communist councillors to vote against any attempts to impose a plan for evacuation in time of peace; but they are to make it clear that the Party stands for the protection of children during an emergency. Party teachers are instructed to contact and exploit Parent-Teacher Associations and to insist that war can be prevented and peace secured.

5. RAILWAY STRIKE AT BANBURY

About 250 members of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen struck work at Banbury on 1 and 2 July because the Railway Executive had decided to make voluntary a pensions scheme which had hitherto been compulsory in the Western Region. The strike was originally intended to take place only at weekends, but it continued at Banbury until 5 July because the strikers objected to being required to fill in a form explaining their absence from duty over the weekend. The strike ended on 7 July.

Of the members of the Banbury railwaymen's strike committee the chairman, Edwin Colin COULES, and the secretary, William Laurie CLARKE, were both known members of the Communist Party in 1949. Members of the South Midlands District headquarters of the Communist Party were in touch with National headquarters, and as soon as the prolongation of the Banbury strike was known COULES came to London to contact Alfred PRESS, a driver at Old Oak Common, who is a member of the West Middlesex District Committee of the Party. At a meeting held the following day at which PRESS spoke, Paddington drivers decided to support those at Banbury by striking at weekends.

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The Party considered that the Banbury strikers should not have objected to signing the form explaining their absence, since they thus laid themselves open to accusations of having been led by Communists. However, once the action had been taken there was no question of the Party failing to support them. There is no doubt that the Communist Party were exploiting this strike and would have had some success had not the Railway Executive acceded to the strikers' demands, thus ending the strike. It was hoped to involve railwaymen at Bristol, and the Party had made arrangements for a speaker to go there to address them. Drivers at Tyseley (Birmingham) and Newton Abbot also decided on strike action in support of the Banbury railwaymen, but it is not clear from present information whether this was a result of Communist exploitation. The result was hailed by the "Daily Worker" as a complete victory for the strikers.

6. THE STRIKE AT SMITHFIELD MARKET

A strike of 1200 meat drivers started at Smithfield on 24 June because of delays in meeting claims for increased pay. The number involved increased to some 3500 when porters struck because troops were used in the market, and at one stage a general strike of road haulage workers was threatened. The men returned to work on 12 July.

There is no indication that the Communist Party had any hand in instigating the strike, or that it provided leadership once the strike was under way. The strike leaders came from a group of known agitators in the market, none of whom is a member of the Communist Party, but who may nevertheless be sympathetic to some of its aims. The fact that porters struck in such numbers was consequent on the use of troops. There are indications that the London Portworkers' Committee, 10 of whose 16 present members are members or close associates of the Communist Party, was not confident of its power to bring dockers out in sympathy, except in the case of troops being used in the docks.

Both London District and National headquarters of the Party were interested in the progress of the strike, and the latter considered the possibility of gaining an extension to the provinces. The Party line was to play on solidarity among Transport and General Workers Union members, and to press for a general increase of wages for all transport workers by emphasizing the recent admission by the T.U.C. that rigorous wage restraint was no longer practicable. This is in accordance with the Party's policy of discrediting the leaders of the T. & G.W.U. and the T.U.C.

Erik RECHNITZ, a porter at Smithfield, and an economic adviser to London District of the Communist Party, appears to have kept the Party informed of the progress of the strike, but it is not possible to gauge his personal contribution towards its continuance. Party members as a whole were encouraged to keep the issue alive, while the "Daily Worker" continued its campaign against the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, whom the Party regards as its prime enemy in its struggle for trade union democracy.

7. THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND TRADE UNION CONFERENCES

Resolutions reflecting Communist Party policy were more in evidence this year than last at the annual conference of the Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers. James GARDNER, the Communist General Secretary, disclosed that in the Engineers' £1 ballot the majority of Scottish and Northern England members of the A.U.F.W. were in favour of strike action, and implied that the issue was not finally resolved even though the total vote was in favour of arbitration. This is consonant with current Communist Party policy, which regards the engineers as a whole as mistaken in voting as they did (326,233 for arbitration, and 111,049 for strike action) and in expecting to obtain a satisfactory result by arbitration. Ted HILL, the Communist Secretary of the Boilermakers' Society, present as fraternal delegate from the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, objected to Government interference on all wage questions, and urged strike action to enforce any claim if necessary. The Union's Executive Council

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was instructed by 39 votes to 11 to give moral and financial support to the British Peace Committee, and was urged to press for the return of the T.U.C. to the World Federation of Trade Unions. The Conference expressed itself as dissatisfied with the nationalisation policy of the Government and demanded greater workers' control in nationalised industry, with a majority of trade union representatives on the boards of control.

Four fraternal delegates from the U.S.S.R. were present, as was Ernest THORNTON, General Secretary of the Australian Ironworkers' Union, a member of the Executive Committee of the W.F.T.U. and a member of the Central Committee of the Australian Communist Party. James GARDNER and five others planned to make a return visit to the Soviet Union at the end of July.

8. DISTRICT CONGRESSES

District Congresses were held by the Tees-side, North East, and Lancashire and Cheshire Districts of the Communist Party during the last half of June. New District Committees were elected and resolutions passed in the usual Communist sense.

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