

NOTA

Van: KA-R.A.

Aan: Hoofd B.

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THE BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY.

March 1950.

1. AFTER THE ELECTION.

A political letter entitled "Forward with Confidence" has been sent from Party headquarters to all Party members. Ascribing the swing to the right at the General Election to the bankrupt policy of the Labour Government, which on all main issues was similar to that of the Tories, the letter stated that it was this policy which had strengthened Toryism by failing to win the working class or its potential allies in the fight against capitalism. As the economic crisis deepened the new Government of "thinly veiled coalition with Toryism" would carry forward still further the policy of subservience to the U.S.A., preparation for war and lowering of working-class standards. The only way to defeat the attacks on peace and living standards was to fight the "right-wing Labour policy and prevent any coalition with the Tories, open or concealed."

The letter stated that the Party's election campaign represented an achievement of which all could be proud. Communists alone had advanced a "concrete constructive policy" for solving Britain's problems, and only Party candidates had fought the campaign with a genuinely "anti-Tory" policy. Six million electors had received the Communist election manifesto and election addresses; "millions" of leaflets had been distributed and 400,000 pamphlets sold; hundreds of new members and readers of the Daily Worker had been made. This would result in "millions whom we did not convince in the election campaign recalling what we said in the coming months, when their own experiences are going to prove to them the correctness of our policy".

Four main reasons were given for the low vote recorded by Communist candidates: the fact that the Party was not yet deeply rooted in the factories and trade unions; working-class fear of a return of the Tories which had not yet "advanced" to the realisation that the right wing Labour leaders were, as agents of capitalism in the Labour movement, equally the object of class hatred; the belief of a majority of the electorate that the policy of the Labour Government was responsible for full employment and benefits under the National Health Service; and anti-Communist propaganda.

The main lesson of the campaign was the need to direct the workers' class hatred of the Tories into a mass fight for Communist policy and to expose effectively the right wing social democrats. A further weakness of the campaign had been the failure of candidates to answer those who felt that they would be splitting the vote by supporting Communists. It was necessary to intensify "our explanation of the rôle of the Soviet Union" and to answer speedily and effectively slanders against "the land of Socialism". It was also necessary to make serious efforts for united activity with members of the Labour Party, trade unions and cooperative societies who were prepared to fight for the demands of the workers.

Five main tasks were given to all Party members:-

1. To intensify the fight for wages and against victimisation and redundancy.
2. To ensure that the profound feeling for peace and national independence expressed in the election be transformed into a positive fight against the war plans of the American and British imperialists.

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3. To fight to win youth and women for Party policy.
4. To conduct an even greater propaganda campaign in the spring and summer months.
5. To convince the working class of the need for the Communist Party and its policy.

The letter stated in conclusion that the Party "must go into the local elections which take place in May with a strong list of candidates and a stronger organisation".

Party headquarters claims that a sum of £40,971 was raised for the election by the Party. There is no information to suggest that this was collected in any way other than by subscription in this country. A total of £16,000 was said to have been collected in London; £5,500 in Scotland; £4,500 in Lancashire and Cheshire; £4,500 for POLLITT's central fund; £400 in Devon and Cornwall; £420 in Tees-side; £410 in East Anglia; £350 in Hants and Dorset. Chesterfield collected £260, Mansfield £250 and Nottingham £360. In Wales a sum of nearly £1400 was collected, expenses for the four Welsh constituencies contested amounting to approximately £1500. The sum collected did not cover the Party's total election expenses, and some anxiety is felt about the deficit.

A further claim is that 1280 recruits were made for the Party and 177 for the Y.C.L. The daily circulation of the Daily Worker was said to have risen temporarily at election time by 10,000 copies, while the week-end sales of 18 February had risen by 20,000.

A frequent comment in Party circles was that, while considerable numbers of the working class had listened sympathetically to the speeches of Communist candidates and had appeared favourably impressed by their domestic policy, it was the policy of admiration for and cooperation with Russia that had turned voters away from the Party. The extent to which the Party will participate in the next election has been under discussion at headquarters, some highly placed officials favouring another maximum effort. The Party will contest the by-election in Sheffield.

2. THE FIGHT FOR PEACE.

Considerable friction exists, and has existed for some time, between the British Peace Committee and the headquarters of the international organisation in Paris. This is largely due to the lack of support for the peace movement in Britain and alleged administrative incompetence on both sides. Arrangements have been made to improve this situation. Discussions between representatives of the World Peace Committee and the chairman of the British Committee have taken place to settle common problems. It has been decided that J.G. CROWTHER will act as adviser to the World Committee on British affairs, spending three to five days each month in Paris. Phil PIRATIN, the former Member of Parliament, has been put in charge of the peace campaign at Party headquarters, and a similar appointment has been made at the London District offices of the Party. The small circulation in Britain of the movement's international journal has been another cause of friction; a British correspondent has been appointed and other measures are under consideration to improve sales. Plans to widen the peace front include a systematic circularisation of trade unions, guilds and cooperative societies, the publication of a signed statement on the subject of the hydrogen bomb, and individual letters to the national press, which almost ignores the activities of the Peace Committee.

The visit of an international delegation from the World Peace Committee, which lobbied Members of Parliament at the House of Commons on 14 March, was described as the "highlight of an intensive campaign..... for the banning of the hydrogen bomb". About five hundred persons took part in the demonstration, which had been well advertised for some days previously in London by loud-speaker vans. On the evening of 14 March a meeting was held at the Prince of Wales Baths, Kentish Town. 300 persons attended and a sum of approximately £50 was collected. The chairman was J.G. CROWTHER. The main speakers were the foreign delegates: Albert Lecrivain-SERVOZ, Independent Deputy for the Rhone District of France; Guisto TOLLOY, Italian Socialist Deputy; Theun De VRIES, Dutch Socialist author; Carl KRISTENSEN, Copenhagen Dockers' Union; Madame DUBROVINA, Russian Deputy Minister for Education; Fernando SANTI, Italian Socialist Deputy; Mario PALERMO, Italian Senator; and Charles SERRE, French journalist and Deputy for Oran, North Africa. Janos PETER from Hungary was due to attend, but was unable to do so allegedly owing to delay in being granted a visa. Two Soviet delegates, SIMONOV, Assistant General Secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers and prominent in the international peace movement, and KABALEVSKY, who should have attended, arrived in London on 17 March.

Suggestions made by CROWTHER for furthering the cause of peace were:

To report back the impressions gained and the points made at this meeting.

To form peace committees and make sure that they were affiliated to the British Peace Committee.

To promote the circulation of B.P.C. literature.

To obtain funds by means of regular subscriptions.

To ensure that the B.P.C. aims were made known and understood by everyone and to preach them on every occasion.

The main resolution demanded the reduction of arms and the banning of atomic weapons.

3. THE NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL CONFERENCE.

The Communist Party holds its first National Industrial Conference since November 1948 on Sunday 5 March 1950 in the Holborn Hall. It was attended by over 220 delegates, about three-quarters of whom had been Party members for more than ten years. Tim BUCK, leader of the Canadian Labour Progressive Party, and T.F. McWHINNIE, who is employed in the Press Department of the W.F.T.U., were also present. The main speaker in the morning session was George ALLISON, the Party's Industrial Organiser, and in the afternoon Harry POLLITT.

ALLISON's speech consisted chiefly of reiteration of familiar lines of Communist policy. He laid great stress on the twin fights for peace and higher wages, and on the essential conditions for their success - namely, the strengthening of the Party's organisation in the factories and the political education of the workers. Both ALLISON and other speakers made it clear that a refusal of the engineers' claim for a pound-a-week rise in wages would be met by a vigorous Party campaign for strike action; Wal HANNINGTON, a national organiser of the A.E.U., declared that only by such action could the claim be won. In connection with the peace campaign, ALLISON declared that there had been too much talk about peace and too little

action, and that the Party would in future give special attention to this question, a point which was later taken up by T.F. McWHINNIE, who said that British workers should follow the example of French workers in refusing to handle war material. ALLISON, however, said that he did not think it possible at the present stage to persuade British dockers to refuse to load war material for Malaya. Other points in ALLISON's speech were: the importance of the Party's campaign against the "witch-hunt" in the trade unions, with special reference to the Transport and General Workers Union; the necessity of developing in the trade union movement a campaign against the manufacture and use of atom and hydrogen bombs; the importance of fighting for a re-entry into the World Federation of Trade Unions; and the mistake that the Party had made in not making sufficient use in the factories of propaganda to show the contrast between living conditions in the Soviet Union and those obtaining in this country.

Few of the contributions from the floor were of much interest. George CRANE, a former national organiser of the A.E.U., and Samuel HENDERSON, a "purged" official of the T. and G.W.U., complained of insufficient support for Party policy and for Communist trade union officials from the rank-and-file of the Party; and thereby gave point to ALLISON's emphasis of the need for the political education of the workers.

In the afternoon session, POLLITT, who had not been present during ALLISON's speech, covered many of the points made by ALLISON. Speaking of the peace campaign, on which he, too, laid great emphasis, he declared "Let's have more spirit like the 'Jolly George'": such incidents, he said, could occur again as soon as the Party built up its groups in the docks.

It appears that the general tone of the conference left the delegates in no doubt that whenever possible they should fight for strike action, the engineering industry being the most promising ground. Thus the conference confirmed the Party's conclusion from the results of the General Election that it could achieve success only by concentrating on its industrial activity. There is reason to believe that ALLISON and other leading officials of the Party were disappointed in the conference: it was felt that not enough delegates had been briefed and that many important points of Party policy had not been discussed beforehand in the Party's advisory committees.

4. THE STRIKE AT DE HAVILLAND'S AIRCRAFT FACTORY, HATFIELD.

On 27 February a strike of about 130 workers at the De Havilland Aircraft Company began in protest against a proposed revision of the men's production bonus, and was recognised by the Hatfield and district committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Employees complained that their earnings would be seriously reduced and objected to certain principles of the piecework system. The strike was called off on 6 March after talks between representatives of the workers and the management, but not before some 1,700 employees were involved.

The two most prominent leaders of the strike were Joe MARSHALL, and Thomas Henry TROUNCE, both current members of the Communist Party. The former was chairman while the latter was a member of the strike committee, and both were the main speakers at the meetings held by the strikers. TROUNCE was also actively engaged in gaining support from the employees at De Havilland's Stag Lane Factory. Another current member of the Communist Party, Alfred KOSKY, who was also a member of the strike committee, addressed the strikers and endeavoured to gain support for the strike at Stag Lane.

On the afternoon of 6 March a resolution was passed that the strikers should return to work on the understanding that a settlement of the issue

would be discussed at a conference with the management the following day. MARSHALL made it clear that if no settlement were reached consideration would be given to further strike action, and that the strike committee would not disband until agreement had been obtained. MARSHALL gave the names of the eight persons who were to comprise the deputation to the management; five were current members of the Communist Party and one was last known to be a member in 1947.

There is no information to suggest that Communist Party headquarters or the South East Midlands District of the Communist Party were responsible for the instigation of the strike, but it is apparent that the responsibility for leading and exploiting it rested mainly on Party members.

5. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY.

International Women's Day was celebrated at the Kingsway Hall on 8 March. About 2,000 persons were present including the Russian delegates Yelena POTAPOVA, Zinaida KONDRACHOVA, Nina MATVEENA, Vikroona DUBROVINA, Alexandre KHOLOPOVA and Margarite ZAKHAROVA; Angèle CHEVRIN and Elizabeth POISSON from France; and Taruna BOSE of India. Tamara RUST, chairman of the Women's Advisory Council of the Communist Party, Elizabeth ALLEN of the International Women's Day Committee and the National Council for Civil Liberties, and Freda GRIMBLE, who had acted as secretary to the International Women's Day Committee during Miss ALLEN's absence owing to illness, were largely responsible for the success of the meeting, which was well organised. A sum of £150 was collected.

Admiration for Russia was manifest in speeches, the underlying theme being the need for peace and the banning of the hydrogen bomb.

Later in the month meetings, which were addressed by Russian delegates, were held under the auspices of the Committee in provincial towns. In Leicester the meeting was attended by only 30 people, who were reported to be very enthusiastic. Although the Soviet women were "very much impressed by the spirit", they "keenly felt the smallness of the meeting". At Chesterfield 60 people were present, at Mansfield 80 and at Nottingham, where the visitors received a great ovation, over 500.

The Committee is planning a nation-wide peace demonstration on 2 June, described as International Children's Day.

6. THE WOMEN'S ADVISORY COUNCIL.

At the quarterly meeting of the Women's Advisory Council decisions were taken to intensify Party activity among women around the issues of living standards and peace. Demands for the banning of the hydrogen bomb and the reduction of armaments will be made by local deputations to Mayors, and war-widows and mothers of conscripts will be approached for sympathetic support. A deputation of women will lobby Members of Parliament in the summer. The experiences of French women in their fight against the colonial war in Vietnam will be used for the purposes of a proposed campaign against the war in Malaya. Demands will be made for the withdrawal of purchase tax from essential foods and the extension of food subsidies to offset the rise in cost of living. Attempts are to be made to form women's sections of the Party in all constituencies contested by Communist candidates.

7. THE DAILY WORKER.

The drive to increase the circulation of the Daily Worker, which is now under 100,000, continues. The aim is to win 10,000 extra daily readers

and 25,000 week-end readers. At a meeting of Daily Worker organisers in the London area held at the Beaver Hall on 22 March, George BRIDGES, assistant industrial organiser at London District, emphasised that the paper was the paramount weapon in the working class struggle, and that Party members must ensure an increase in sales.

From Daily Worker Bazaars in 1949 a total of £16,200 was collected. Of this sum just over half went to Party funds, the balance being paid to the Daily Worker. Approximately the same sum was paid to the Daily Worker in 1948.

8. DEMONSTRATIONS.

The London District of the Communist Party was responsible for organising a small demonstration on the occasion of the French President's visit to Greenwich. A banner bearing the words "Vive Thorez. Vive la Paix" was placed in a prominent position shortly before his arrival. The Party had hoped to organise other demonstrations but none materialised.

9. SERETSE KHAMA.

The Communist Party has not been inactive in supporting the cause of Seretse Khama. It has provided speakers, including George MATTHEWS, at some of the meetings held on his behalf. The joint secretaries of the Seretse Khama Fighting Committee, which was established on 9 March at 13 Chelsea Embankment, the address of the West African Students' Union, were William STRACHAN, a member of the Party and secretary of the London branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress and Convenor of the West Indian Subcommittee of the International Department at Party headquarters, and Nee ODOI ANNAN, of the Party's African Committee.

The fact that Seretse KHAMA's cause has been taken up by a large number of non-Communist organisations is a source of some regret at Party headquarters, who would have liked to claim all the credit. Seretse KHAMA has been grateful for the Communist support he has received.

10. THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PARTY.

Plans are already under discussion for the celebration of the Party's thirtieth anniversary, which falls due on August Bank Holiday. Activities, which will extend from the last fortnight of August into the first half of September, will include public demonstrations in London and the main provincial towns, lectures and factory meetings. The Education Department has been instructed to prepare special material for the event, and John GOLLAN will write a pamphlet. The production of a book illustrating the principal events in the history of the Party is under consideration.
