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THE BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY

April 1950

1. THE FIGHT FOR PEACE

The British Communist Party has recently put the main emphasis in its overt propaganda on fighting for peace. Earlier, criticism had been expressed in Party circles that the Political Letter, "Forward with Confidence", had given the fight for peace second place in the list of Party tasks to the campaign in defence of living standards. This, it was argued, was against Cominform policy. In an article in World News and Views, DUTT, the Party's leading theoretician, was at pains to oppose "any tendencies to controversies" on this subject and summarised the Party's attitude by saying that "we must expose the war policy, which is responsible for the wage freeze".

The Political Committee has stressed that every development in the international and national situation points to "the gravity of the war danger" and the urgency of bringing the British people into action for peace. The statement of THOREZ that peace was "hanging by a thread" has been quoted. The meeting of the Atlantic Pact Defence Ministers at The Hague, and the proposed meeting of Foreign Ministers in London in May, were given as examples of the designs of the Western Powers "to carry forward with the utmost speed war preparations" which would strengthen the American hold on Britain and other European countries. Nor was reference omitted to the incident of the American plane over Soviet territory. This was "obviously engaged in photographing Soviet naval installations" and was a "striking indication" of the extent to which the Americans were prepared to press forward their war plans. The Party was called upon to make a "supreme effort" in the execution of the two most important items on the peace agenda: the peace petition, which was launched during the month; and the National Peace Conference in July.

J.G. CROWTHER, the chairman of the British Peace Committee, has prepared a memorandum, for private circulation, about this conference, one of whose tasks is to prepare for the Second World Peace Congress on 2 October, which will probably be held in Italy. The basis for this memorandum is a resolution passed by the meeting of peace delegates at Stockholm, as a result of which CROWTHER has decided to approach such purely pacifist organisations as the National Peace Council to participate in the conferences arranged by the British Peace Committee. He makes it clear, however, that his own Committee should assume and retain the leadership of the "peace forces", should in no way "act or look like a co-ordinating committee", and should not "hand the conference over" to such organisations. Another indication of the Party's desire to widen the Peace front can be seen in the wording of the peace petition. Originally, this called for the banning of atomic weapons, the branding of the first Government to use the atomic bomb as a war criminal, and a reduction of armaments. Recently, the third demand has been omitted. Peter KERRIGAN has explained this in a circular to all Party Districts by saying that its inclusion would narrow the response to the petition. The key instruction on the peace petition to Party members has been that it should not be confused with recruiting propaganda. Once signatures had been obtained, then could Party members say that the wage freeze was due to military expenditure, but no indications should be given that the petition was Communist propaganda.

The Peace Committee has been reorganised to intensify peace activity and to restore efficiency. A secretariat has been appointed, consisting of the chairman, secretary, Phil PIRATIN, now known as the campaign organiser, D.N. PRITT and R. BIRCH, an official of the E.U. Sub-committees for organisation, publicity, finance and conference arrangements have been formed. Some headway has been made in the formation of local Peace Committees.

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On 4 April, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of J. PLATTS-MILLS to report the proceedings of the Stockholm Congress. The speakers were J.G. CROWTHER, George CRANE, J.D. BERNAL, James ALDRIDGE and R. BIRCH. The last named advocated the formation of factory branches of the Peace Committee.

2. THE LONDON DOCK STRIKE

The strike in the London docks, which began on 19 April, was in direct succession to the Canadian seamen's strike in the summer of 1949, in which the Communist Party took so prominent a part. The dockers this time, as then, had no grievance about their conditions of work. They struck in protest against the expulsion from the Transport and General Workers Union of three of its members for their activities during the earlier strike.

Final confirmation of the expulsion of these members was published on 18 April and the London Portworkers Committee convoked a meeting of dockers on the following day, at which strike action was decided. When the findings of the Committee were made known, the Communist Party was presented with a ready-made issue. Further, since one of the expelled men, E.A. (Ted) DICKENS, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party, it had a second opportunity of challenging the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union, whom it regards as its prime opponent in the trade union movement.

It cannot be said on present information that the Communist Party was directly responsible for the outbreak of the strike on 19 April. It is unlikely that, had they been so, the National Industrial Organiser, George ALLISON, would have been absent at the time in the provinces, as in fact he was. The initiative clearly did not rest with the Party, since action depended on the date of the announcement of the expulsions, of which they had no prior knowledge.

When the strike began Party action followed immediately. An attempt was made to arrange for an immediate expression of support for the dockers from various provincial ports. The Party also had hopes of inducing workers of the Transport and General Workers Union in other industries to support the strike. They did not feel initially that the issue behind the strike would warrant its continuance for long. It was therefore hoped that the disagreement between Shaw Savill and Albion and the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers Union might be quickly brought to a head, thereby increasing the number of striking dockers.

The Party was, through the "Daily Worker", loud in its support of the strikers, but, instead of encouraging Party formations and members to play an overt part, preferred to let the strike run under the direction of the Portworkers Committee. Such a decision would be consonant with its activities in previous disputes. It is anxious not to compromise itself when a strike appears to be running efficiently.

The London Portworkers Committee was formed in August 1949 in succession to the Lock-Out Committee formed during the Canadian seamen's strike. Estimates of its membership varied between seventeen and twenty-three. Its members are not all publicly known, and understandably, since they would personally risk the victimisation from which they are professedly anxious to safeguard others. The Communist Party is well represented amongst the known members and it probably exercises a decisive influence in the Committee's deliberations.

3. THE STRIKE AT CROSSLEY MOTORS LIMITED, STOCKPORT

On 7 February a strike of about 1200 workers at Crossley Motors, Limited, began in protest against the inclusion of a shop steward convenor in a redundancy list, and continued until 20 March. The Communist Party was active in supporting it once it was under way. A leading article in the "Daily Worker" stated that "all workers should rally to support the Crossley men and

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demand official union action to protect stewards". In Manchester the Communist Party strove to exploit and spread the strike, and made particular efforts to instigate a further strike at Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Co. Ltd. It was however careful to avoid such activities as would result in charges of interference, and made plans to withdraw certain of its members from active participation and to replace them by persons who were not publicly known to be Party members. Two members of the Communist Party were on the strike committee. In Manchester the Communist Party claimed to its members that it had led the strikers, and a national leader of the Party described the strike as a good example of mass Party activity.

There is nothing to show that the Communist Party was directly responsible for originating the strike, but it took an active part in trying to prolong it and to spread it to other engineering firms in the area.

4. THE ENGINEERS' WAGE CLAIM

Communist Party support for the engineers' wage claim is long-standing, but Party members in the engineering industry have, in the last two or three months, been urged to promote a strong campaign for the claim within branches of the A.E.U. and inside factories. Party policy is to oppose by every possible means any question of arbitration, to hold out for nothing less than a £1 increase, to strike if necessary, or, in the event of no strike occurring, to press for a "go slow".

The Communist Party has shown concern about the legality of the ballot agreed upon by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions which asks for a vote either in favour of a strike or arbitration. The Party fears that the position of the Confederation, in which it has some influence, may be jeopardised by the apparent illegality of this action and by the opposition recently shown by the T.U.C. and a number of trade unions. The Party hopes at the present, therefore, to distract attention from the legal aspects of the ballot by attacking the Government on the grounds of its interference in the affairs of trade unions, and in creating as much discontent as possible in the engineering industry before the ballot is held.

5. THE INTERVENTION OF FOREIGN TRADE UNION ORGANISATIONS IN BRITISH INDUSTRY THROUGH THE BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY

The secession of the British Trades Union Congress and the American Congress of Industrial Organisations from the World Federation of Trade Unions in January 1949 was followed by a thorough re-organisation of the W.F.T.U. and by the establishment of new Trade Union Internationals for workers in various industries or groups of industries. Although on two occasions in 1949 (once during the Canadian seamen's and London dockers' strike, and once later in the year) members of T.U.I.s came to this country, there was at this stage no evidence of an existing plan for co-operation between the W.F.T.U. and the British Communist Party. But in the latter half of January 1950 a visit was made to Paris by George ALLISON, the Party's Industrial Organiser, and three leading Party members. At least one of these - namely ALLISON - had talks with W.F.T.U. officials with the purpose of helping the W.F.T.U. to exert its influence in this country, and the final arrangement was that selected Party members in various industries should act as contacts with the relevant T.U.I.s, official contact with British trade unions being out of the question.

Such contacts have been set up for the Seamen and Dockers' T.U.I. and for the Metal and Engineering T.U.I., and it is believed that others have already been considered by the Party. The material passed consists of appeals for international solidarity among strikers and for action against the "preparation of an imperialist war", and instructions for propaganda work. It is also probable that help in the printing of posters and leaflets may be given by T.U.I.s. These special contacts should be distinguished from the normal

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• circularisation of individuals and organisations by the W.F.T.U. with information bulletins and comparatively harmless propaganda for various W.F.T.U. campaigns.

A case, which appears to have been an isolated one, of intervention by a foreign trade union organisation other than a T.U.I., was that in which the Federation Nationale des Ports et Docks, the French dockers' union, sent a circular addressed to "all the dockers of English ports" urging them not to load arms bound for France.

The most recent development in co-operation between T.U.I.s and the British Communist Party was the attempted visit of Alphonse DROUARD, Secretary of the Land and Air Transport Workers' T.U.I., in April of this year. He was refused permission to land in this country. In view of his position, and of Moscow's open support, through the W.F.T.U., of opposition to the Military Aid Programme so that its expenditure might be diverted towards wage increases for industrial workers, it is probable that he would have had meetings with leading Party members in the transport industry, and would have attempted to encourage a more militant approach to industrial problems by the British Communist Party.

6. THE LONDON DISTRICT CONGRESS

The London District Congress, held on 15 and 16 April at the Lime Grove Baths, Hammersmith, was attended by 1054 full delegates and 111 consultative delegates. Over 40% were under 30 years of age. The Executive Committee of the Party was represented by W. LAUCLAN. The chairman of the Congress described it as the "finest Congress we have ever had, and also the most important". John MAHON, the District Secretary, made an "excellent opening Report and a first-class reply to discussion".

The most important points in the discussions were:

1. The need for the development of a broad peace movement and to fight sectarianism. "The policy (for peace) must be to work with anyone and everyone who is sincere. The campaign for Peace is the central political task of the Party".
2. The relation of the peace and wages fight. "The struggle for higher wages must be intensified, thus hindering the progress of capitalism" because "capitalists paid for wars by freezing wages".
3. The need to develop the fight for working class unity.

The composition of the new District Committee is as follows:

T. AHERN	J. FRAZER	J. NICOLSON
J. BROWNE	J. FOORD	F. PIRATIN
J. BETTERIDGE	J. GASTER	M. POLLITT
C. BERRIDGE	T. GIBSON	J. ROOTES
K. BEAUCHAMP	E. GODFREY	J. RYAN
G. BRIDGES	D. GOODWIN	F. STONE
A. COHEN	M. HEINEMANN	N. SHEEDY
B. CARRITT	B. JONES	L. STANNARD
H. CHURCHMAN	J. JACOBS	E. THOMAS
T. DICKENS	S. KAYE	G. WOOLLEY
G. DRAPER	D. LLOYD	T. WARD
J. EIGHTEEN	O. MIDDLETON	J. WODDIS
F. EASTWOOD	J. MAHON	K. YATES
P. FARRELLY	F. NEWMAN	

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7. REORGANISATION OF LONDON DISTRICT

Because it was considered that London District of the Communist Party was too unwieldy, and that too much devolved upon the District secretariat, it was decided at the end of 1949 to divide it into four: the West Middlesex District; the Surrey District; the London District; and the Essex District. The formation of the new Districts was postponed until after the General Election.

By March arrangements were complete for the West Middlesex District and the Surrey District with temporary offices at Hayes and Mitcham respectively, but it was decided to postpone the setting up of the Essex District until it was seen how well the other two were working. All Districts will be controlled from Party Centre. London District remains under the secretaryship of John MAHON, with an approximate membership of 12000; the staff has been reduced from 32 to 19. Alec MILLAR has become Treasurer in place of Sid FRENCH, who has been released to become Secretary of the Surrey District. West Middlesex District Party Committee held its inaugural meeting on 2 April at the Hayes Party offices. Abe LAZARUS is Secretary. District membership is approximately 1750. The Surrey District Committee was established on the same day by a County Congress meeting at Sutton and on 4 April it held its first meeting at the Labour Hall, Mitcham. Membership is in the region of 1200.

8. PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

Out of deference to the wishes of the Scottish District of the Party, the Political Committee decided not to contest the West Dumbarton Parliamentary constituency with a Communist candidate. Instead, the Dumbarton area of the Communist Party, in an attempt to arrest the advance of the Tories, decided to approach the local Labour Party with the request that a new Labour candidate be put forward who would fight for a genuine working-class policy. Later it confined its activity to an independent campaign around its policy. At Neepsend by-election the Communist candidate, E.L. MOORE, polled 729 votes and forfeited his deposit.

In the Municipal elections the Party hopes to put forward four hundred candidates.

9. THE DAILY WORKER

The fifth annual report of the People's Press Printing Society was presented to meetings throughout the United Kingdom. No attempt was made to conceal the financial difficulties of the society. A trading loss of £52,293 was disclosed for the year, advertising revenue having fallen by £13,468 to £22,947. It was claimed that the contributions from the fighting fund and bazaars had offset the deficit by £46,000, while the balance was met by a transfer from the non-interest bearing loan capital. Membership of the society was shown as 29,720. Share capital at the end of 1949 stood at £164,050, but since then withdrawals had exceeded subscriptions, which had reduced the total to £163,047.

10. DELEGATION OF BRITISH WORKERS TO MOSCOW FOR MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS

In February 1950 the Moscow Trades Council invited the British Soviet Friendship Society to send a delegation of twenty English and Scottish workers to the May Day Celebrations in Moscow and to remain there for approximately two weeks as their guests.

This invitation was circulated by the British Soviet Friendship Society to shop stewards committees and trade union district committees inviting them to elect suitable delegates. The selection of the delegates was to be by ballot, but there is no doubt that in the majority of cases the choice was made previously and only the name of the candidate decided upon was put forward for

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election. In at least one case, that of the Austin Factory at Birmingham, unexpected opposition was experienced at the meeting at which the election was to take place and the meeting broke up without the pre-arranged delegate having been chosen. At a further meeting held next day a different individual was selected.

Only a small proportion of the delegation of 20 are members of the Communist Party; the remainder are said to be members or sympathisers of the Labour Party, and there seems to be little doubt that their names were put forward by the British Soviet Friendship Society, which is Communist controlled, as persons having some influence among the workers in their particular trade and on whom the propaganda value of the Moscow trip would have good effect.

The party left for Moscow via Prague on 27 April. A meeting to welcome the delegates home will be held in London on 18 May, followed by similar meetings in Hampstead and Birmingham.

There seems little doubt that in this matter the British Soviet Friendship Society is conducting activity among trade unions on behalf of the Communist Party, since its political significance is not so well-known as that of the Party.

11. THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

Sixty-eight individuals and 209 delegates from 119 affiliated organisations attended the annual general meeting of the National Council for Civil Liberties on 15 April. National organisations represented were as follows:

National Union of Bank Employees
Association of Building Technicians
Constructional Engineering Union
Electrical Trades Union
Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen
Fire Brigades Union
Gambia League
Guild of Insurance Officials
Institution of Professional Civil Servants
International Brigade Association
Progressive League
Association of Scientific Workers
Six Point Group
Socialist Medical Association
National Union of Students
Society of Telecommunication Engineers
Tobacco Workers Union
Workers' Circle Friendly Society
Committee for Cyprus Affairs

Other bodies represented were: 27 trades councils; 4 Labour Parties; 3 Co-operative Parties; 2 Communist Party branches; 4 Co-operative Education Committees; 6 Co-operative Women's Guilds; 10 branches of the Amalgamated Engineering Union; 7 branches of the Civil Service Clerical Association; 6 branches of the Post Office Engineering Union; and the South Wales Area of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Resolutions were passed on freedom of speech, attention being drawn to the "increasing number of cases" where permission to use halls for public meetings had been refused "on a discriminatory basis"; fascist and anti-semitic violence and provocation in London; the difficulties facing coloured people in this country; political discrimination in the Civil Service and

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Government establishments; the danger that the Masterman Committee report would further restrict political activities by Civil Servants; equal pay for equal work; civil liberties in the colonies; and support of the establishment of the Committee to enquire into the future of broadcasting when the Royal Charter of the B.B.C. expires.

Although in closing the conference the chairman said that accusations that the Council was an offshoot of the Communist Party were completely untrue, the new Executive Committee which was elected consisted in the majority of Party members and sympathisers.

12. VISITS ABROAD OF COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICIALS

On 12 April Harry POLLITT, General Secretary of the Communist Party, left Northolt Airport for Prague. While in Czechoslovakia he will receive medical treatment for the spinal injury from which he has been suffering and it is believed that this is the main reason for his visit, the duration of which is so far not known.

Rajani Palme DUTT, Vice-Chairman of the Communist Party, left Northolt for Prague, en route for Budapest, on 2 April. He was travelling as the British Communist Party representative to the festivities taking place in Budapest on 3 April to celebrate the National Day of Liberation. He returned to the United Kingdom on 14 April having spent two days in Prague on his way home "on private business". On arrival he had in his possession a large quantity of literature dealing with international Communist affairs relating in particular to China.

John Ross CAMPBELL, Editor of the Daily Worker, left Northolt for Paris on 1 April and returned on 6 April. He attended the National Congress of the French Communist Party as representative of the British Party.

13. THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE

Ron LEVEN, National Organiser of the Young Communist League, is to become Birmingham City Secretary of the Communist Party. He is to be replaced as League National Organiser by Dick NETTLETON, Chairman of the League National Committee, and secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire District of the League.

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