

THE BRITISH EMPIRE COMMUNIST CONFERENCE

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

IN LONDON, from February 26 to March 4, the Communist Parties of the British Empire met to consider the vast problems confronting their many peoples. Present were 28 delegates, coming from 12 countries, from all over the far-flung Empire, from Australia, Cyprus, Canada, India, Malaya, Palestine, Ceylon, South Africa, Burma, North Ireland and Great Britain.

The conference was held in the well-known Beaver Hall, headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company, and the prevailing frigid weather, with the delegates wearing their overcoats, was reminiscent of the fur trapping business of this celebrated corporation. Within a few blocks of the Hall are the Mansion House, the Bank of England and many other institutions famous in Empire history. And close by is the heavily bombed area surrounding St. Paul's Cathedral.

THE CRISIS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The British Empire comprises (with mandated countries) almost 600 million people, about one-fourth of the population of the world. Of these great masses only about 70 millions (in Great Britain and the four Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) are self-governing. The rest are in British-dominated colonies and mandated territories. The great Empire, the biggest ever built by man, holds vast possessions in all the continents of the earth. And the proud boast of the British imperialists has long been that the sun never sets on this tremendous political system stretching, as it does, around the world.

For over two hundred years Great Britain ruled the world. Its imperialist traders and conquerors seized territories here and there pretty much as they saw fit; its industrialists led the industrial revolution and made Britain "the workshop of the world"; its Navy dominated the seven seas and bade defiance to all rivals. The British imperialists believed they were indeed firmly established as the world's rulers for ages to come.

But now this great Empire is in deep crisis. Economic and political forces are now at work that are tearing away its very foundations. The purpose of the Empire Conference was to analyze this crisis and to indicate ways for the many peoples of the Empire to avoid even greater hardships than they are now enduring

and to work toward a livable economic and political system. It was not the aim of the Conference to set up a definite Empire-wide Communist organization and a detailed program of action, but rather to give the many Communist parties an opportunity to talk over the complex problems facing them and to indicate general principles of policy. It was the first conference in the history of the British Empire in which the oppressed millions of enslaved colonial peoples were truly represented.

Already, at the turn of the century, the British Empire was showing distinct signs of losing its supremacy to rising imperialist rivals, particularly Germany, the United States and Japan. World War I dealt the Empire a heavy blow. Between the wars the vaunted British never-setting sun moved steadily toward sundown, and World War II gave the Empire a further blow, leaving it in such a state of crisis as to create a widespread belief in Great Britain and abroad that the British Empire is about to collapse.

The crisis now afflicting the Empire is very complex. At least five major phases of this crisis, all interconnected, may be indicated. These are: (a) the crisis in Great Britain itself; (b) the crisis between Great Britain and her colonies; (c) the growing contradictions between Great Britain and the Dominions; (d) the critical situation for Great Britain within the Anglo-American bloc; and (e) the unfavorable position of Great Britain in relation to

the rest of the world. Let us consider each of these phases separately, always bearing in mind their interconnection.

ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES IN GREAT BRITAIN

As a result of the many contradictions between the home country and its colonies and dominions, as well as with its imperialist rivals (which we shall discuss later), Great Britain finds itself, together with its Empire as a whole, in deep crisis. This crisis expresses itself in the home country, especially in an economic sense. Great Britain's industries have become debilitated and obsolescent; so much so that today a British worker produces, on the average, about one-third as much per man-hour as an American worker. British industry obviously stands in most urgent need of rehabilitation, since in its present state it is quite incapable of competing with American industry on the world market. The serious weakness of British industry was graphically illustrated by the partial collapse during the recent severe cold spell in Britain when, because of primitive methods in mining and transport, the heavy snow storms and bitterly cold weather created a coal shortage that shut down one-fourth of British industry, threw British cities into a blackout and deprived homes, factories, offices, trains, etc., of heat. The coal crisis actually, for a while, jeopardized the existence of the Labor government.

What makes the weakness of Britain's industries all the more apparent and intense, is the country's urgent need to double its efforts in order to keep up living standards, to repair the terrific damage from wartime bombing, to improve the acute housing situation, to rebuild Britain's decimated merchant fleet, to overcome the profound shortage of consumers' goods and to provide indispensable exports. To add to these difficulties, there is an acute manpower shortage. A major factor contributing to this shortage is Britain's aggressive foreign policy which keeps large bodies of British troops in various parts of the world and ties up large numbers of workers in England to feed, clothe and arm these imperialist armies.

Britain's economic troubles are intensified by a disastrous lack of capital. During the war Britain lost one-third of her national wealth. She also spent half of her international investments, rolled up a gigantic national debt and is operating at a yearly deficit of £400 million. Great Britain, which for many decades was the world's big money lender, has now become a debtor nation. She is heavily in debt to India, Canada and the United States. After World War I she had to repudiate her war loans from the United States, and there is not the slightest possibility that she can pay the debts she has contracted during World War II.

The recent American loan of 4 billion dollars was supposed to provide the means to make real head-

way in modernizing British industry, but this hope is proving a vain one. Already, nearly half of the loan is gone, from the effect of price rises in the United States and of purchases of consumer goods for the current needs of the British people. Almost nothing has been done to rehabilitate the sadly run-down industries. R. Palme Dutt, the British Communist Party's well-known expert on Empire and world affairs, who made the main report at this Empire Conference, thus summed up the general causes leading to Great Britain's present serious plight:

This crisis of the Empire is centered in the heart of the Empire, in Britain. The traditional economic, social and political situation in Britain has been built upon the world monopoly which British capitalism was able to establish in the nineteenth century, the domination and exploitation of one-quarter of the globe, and the drawing of overseas tribute. By the eve of the war one-half of Britain's imports were no longer paid for by exports of goods. This system led to neglect of development of Britain's basic industries, which lost their former primacy to newer capitalist rivals, especially Germany and the United States. The whole situation was already weakening and leading to conditions of chronic crisis in the years before the war. British capitalism was declining in the world market, compelled to introduce a closed system of tariffs and Empire preference to maintain its grip of Empire markets, and a deficit in the balance of payment had begun to appear. The effects of the war have brought this serious economic situation to a menace of catastrophe,

which is now universally recognized. Britain has lost its overseas investments, is not able to export capital, and is no longer a creditor, but a debtor country. The deficit on the balances of payments runs into colossal figures and is only temporarily concealed by the American and Canadian loans. The desperate effort under these conditions to maintain imperialist domination and strategic influences over one-quarter of the world, is overstraining British manpower and resources and crippling reconstruction at home.

In Great Britain mass living standards are low; nearly everything is rationed and price-controlled. The cost of living is high (the rich, of course, easily evade these restrictions). Especially prohibitive are the small "luxuries." Peaches cost 2 shillings (40 cents) apiece, and grapes sell at 10 shillings a pound. There are grave possibilities of further reductions in rations. Mr. Oliver Lyttleton, M.P., a Conservative, making political hay in this situation, recently stated that the American loan would soon be spent and that British living standards would drop by another 40 per cent. There is much uneasiness among the people as to the immediate future. This uncertainty is increased by the growing fear of an economic crisis in the United States which, if at all severe, would have a paralyzing effect on Britain's already enfeebled industries.

THE CRISIS IN GREAT BRITAIN'S COLONIAL SYSTEM

A major phase of the crisis of the

British Empire is the already tense and rapidly worsening relations between Great Britain and her colonies and mandated territories. "All Asia is in revolt," said G. Adhikari, well-known Communist of India, in his booklet, *Resurgent India*. He points out that the whole colonial and semi-colonial world in the Middle and Far East is seething with national liberation struggles: India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Egypt, Palestine—all British holdings—are blazing with revolt. The Dutch Empire in the Far East, which is a satellite of Great Britain, is also deeply affected, through the Indonesian Republic, by the vast upsurge of the colonial peoples. French Indo-China is likewise in the throes of revolt. The Communist parties are important forces in these mass movements fighting for freedom.

The causes of this tremendous struggle for freedom, perhaps the greatest in human history, are manifold. For one thing, all these colonies were heavily depleted economically during the war. Their economies were thrown into confusion, and their peoples fell victims to a plague of profiteers and black-marketeers. Now that the war is over, their peoples face inflationary high prices, greatly increased taxation and a sharp growth of repressive measures from the imperialist powers. These difficulties are stoking the fires of revolt.

Another basic cause of the present general colonial upsurge is the tremendous loss of prestige suffered by the white imperialists — British,

French and Dutch — during the course of the war. The colonial peoples saw the armed forces of the "invincible" European oppressors collapse and flee in the face of the Japanese offensive. They saw Burma easily overrun, and Singapore and Hong Kong fall like rotten fruit. They saw the erstwhile all-powerful British Navy, practically helpless, virtually abandon the whole Pacific. These events gave a tremendous impetus everywhere to the colonial national liberation movements.

Another major factor contributing to the present situation is the disappointment felt by the oppressed peoples in the Middle and Far East at the failure of the Labor government to put an end to the outrageous colonial system of Great Britain. At the Empire Conference delegate after delegate told the bitter story of how the hopes of the colonial peoples in their respective countries had soared when the workers of Great Britain put the Labor government in power and, in 1945, how these same peoples were disillusioned and angered by Bevin's continuance of the old Tory colonial slave policy.

The general result has been the present unprecedented mass liberation struggles in the colonial countries. These struggles are straining the British Empire at its very foundations. In particular, the resolute fight of the Indian people is threatening to topple the whole British colonial system.

R. Palme Dutt, at the Empire Conference, evaluated the colonial crisis

as follows:

Already after the first world war British imperialism emerged weakened and faced widespread colonial revolt which resulted in varying forms of constitutional compromise, such as the cession of Dominion status with partition, to Ireland, the cession of formal independence with military occupation to Egypt, and constitutional reforms in India. But in the new world situation, after the defeat of fascism, the crisis of British imperialism is enormously intensified. . . . The colonial peoples are in full revolt.

The upheavals in the colonies and mandated territories are having far-reaching negative effects on the home economy of Great Britain. They are also sharpening the Empire crisis in every other direction. They are, in addition, drastically undermining Great Britain's strength and prestige as a leading world imperialist power.

BRITAIN AND HER DOMINION RIVALS

Another dart in the neck of the bedevilled British Empire is the growing rivalry, economic and political, between Great Britain and her four Dominions, particularly Canada and Australia. These countries, as Tim Buck of Canada, the reporter on Dominion problems at the Empire Conference, pointed out, are no longer mere dependents on Great Britain but are independent lands:

The British Dominions, which but a

few years back were still dependent upon the United Kingdom, have become, as Engels foretold fifty-five years ago, politically independent capitalist states. Two of them, Australia and Canada, have developed to the stage in which their national economies are dominated by finance capitalist oligarchies, and the domestic and foreign aims and policies of the monopolists and their governments are stamped with the characteristics of finance capitalist imperialism.

These ambitious Dominions unhesitatingly declare their economic, as well as their political, independence of the mother country. Nor do they talk at competing openly with her on the world market when they see fit. Tim Buck said that Louis St. Laurent, Canadian Minister for External Affairs, recently declared Canada would oppose "any 'freezing' of its [the Empire's] forms of organization or supra-national authority," or "tendency" to become an obstacle to Canada's relationship and cooperation with other governments, or to the development of a world organization."

Pointing up this competitive attitude economically, of the Dominions toward the United Kingdom, Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, stated:

None of us can forget that Mr. Bennett, the former Prime Minister of Canada, said in London last November, that if there exist any in Great Britain who believe that Canada and

Australia were not going to enter into competition with the Motherland in relation to shipbuilding and heavy engineering, they were being deluded.

The Dominions are no less independent and aggressive in their foreign policies. Said Tim Buck:

The role of the Dominions in the shaping of world policy has changed greatly and is still changing. The period and the conditions in which the Dominion Governments were content to influence events solely, or in the main, by influencing the opinion of the Imperial Government is already far in the background. The Dominion governments now seek to exert their own direct influence upon world policy in pursuit of their own aims which . . . do not always coincide with those of the British Government.

The Dominions, particularly Canada and Australia, are tending to fall into the orbit of the more powerful American imperialism. Also, like the mother country, this is in the role of junior partners and on terms that often injure British interests as such. On this point Tim Buck remarked:

The turn of the Dominions' monopolists and their governments toward junior partnership with the United States is in fact part of a re-grouping of world finance-capitalist interests, with United States imperialism as its center and spearpoint in place of the British Isles.

The Dominions, it is true, still actively support the Empire, since it

gives them a good bargaining instrument with which to secure better terms from the ruthless United States monopolists. Nevertheless, their general lines of competitive economic policy and of independent political action definitely tend to undermine the world position of Great Britain. The latter's weakening hold on her Dominions is an important part of the general crisis of the British Empire.

GREAT BRITAIN, JUNIOR PARTNER OF THE UNITED STATES

Great Britain has been so completely outstripped by the United States in the fight for world leadership that her role of second fiddle in the Anglo-American bloc is now taken for granted even in Empire circles. In many parts of the world, in Argentina, Spain, the Middle East, the Far East and in various British Dominions and colonies, British imperialism is putting up a stubborn

battle against the encroachments of American imperialism, and this antagonism always threatens Anglo-American relations. However, overriding interests lead the two great imperialist groups to make common cause against the rising world forces of democracy and for joint world domination. And in their joint activities the United States, because of its superior economic strength, holds the whip-hand.

In a recent article, Eugene Varga, the noted Soviet economist, while warning sharply that the weakness of Britain must not be exaggerated nor the significance of the Anglo-American antagonisms underestimated, paints a picture of declining British imperialism being forced into second place by rising American imperialism in the spheres of industry, finance, military strength and world political influence. Among many facts, he presents the following three tables, which tell the basic economic story vividly:

IN 1848

| | <i>Great Britain & Ireland</i> | <i>U.S.A.</i> |
|---|--|---------------|
| Population (in millions) | 28 | 22 |
| Coal production (million tons) | 50 | 6 |
| Iron smelting (million tons) | 2 | 0.6 |
| Cotton consumption (million tons) | 0.32 | 0.1 |

IN 1900

| | <i>Great Britain</i> | <i>U.S.A.</i> |
|---|----------------------|---------------|
| Population (in millions) | 41 | 76 |
| Coal production (million tons) | 225 | 241 |
| Iron smelting (million tons) | 9 | 14 |
| Cotton consumption (million tons) | 1.5 | 0.4 |

IN 1946

| | <i>Great Britain</i> | <i>U.S.A.</i> |
|---|----------------------|---------------|
| Population (in millions without Eire) | 46 | 130 |
| Coal production (million tons) | 232 | 352 |
| Steel production (million tons) | 10.5 | 29 |
| Electric power (billions of KW) | 31 | 116 |

R. Palme Dutt in his report to the Empire Conference had the following to say regarding the relations between the two great imperialist systems:

At the present time the United States represents the strongest imperialist power in the world. Untouched by war damage, it alone among the powers has profited from the war. Its production is two-fifths of capitalist world production. It has taken over command of the seas from Britain and holds superiority in the air, as well as monopoly of the atom bomb. Its strategic military, naval and air bases extend over the entire globe. The aims of expansion and world domination which are entertained by the ruling militarists and jingo big business Republican sections dominating its policies, are open and unconcealed.

"American imperialism is advancing and expanding," said Dutt. "British imperialism is declining and thrown on the defensive. It is well known that the aims of American expansion extend to the absorption of the British Empire as the richest prize." American imperialist policy, while utilizing the alliance with Great Britain to facilitate its drive for world domination, is at the same time directed toward weakening the British Empire and toward removing

it as a dangerous obstacle to the expansion of American imperialism. All of this the British big business men and government leaders realize, but with their imperialist line they are unable to circumvent it. In this connection Dutt further remarked:

The British imperialists are well aware of the menace of American designs to their interests. But they are also aware of their economic dependence on the United States, expressed in the American loan, and of their strategic inferiority and dependence on the United States. They know they can only hope strategically to maintain the Empire by the aid of the United States, even though they know equally well that the price of that aid means the continuous cession of the Empire to penetration and domination by the United States.

In short, in the realm of U. S.-British relations in the Anglo-American bloc the general crisis of the British Empire expresses itself by a growing retreat—a surrender of one position after another to American imperialism. The present result of this fact is that the British Empire, for all its vast territory and its stubborn resistance to the advances of its great American rival, is definitely the lesser and diminishing factor in the Anglo-American bloc.

BRITAIN AND THE WORLD CRISIS IN IMPERIALISM

The crisis in the British Empire is further accentuated by the deep difficulties in which imperialism in general finds itself following World War II. Dutt, in his brilliant report to the Empire Conference, listed these difficulties of imperialism under five heads (which I have greatly condensed), as follows, especially as regards the situation of Britain:

1. Imperialism has been weakened by the downfall of Germany, Japan and Italy, and by the rise in strength and influence of the Soviet Union and the new democracies in Europe.

2. The establishment of the United Nations, despite its many present defects and weaknesses, reflects a new world balance of forces which in many respects is disadvantageous to the imperialist powers.

3. The increased world influence and leading role of the Soviet Union is of especial significance for the colonial peoples.

4. The increased strength of the working class, democratic and progressive forces in all countries, including the imperialist countries, powerfully assists the liberation movement of the colonial peoples.

5. Most important of all for the future of colonial liberation is the rising upsurge of the colonial peoples themselves.

These increased obstacles for world imperialism are having the specific result of intensifying all the contra-

dictions within the British Empire and of sharpening every aspect of the general Empire crisis.

American imperialism, upon the close of the war, undertook to break through all these obstacles and to establish its world control by launching a great diplomatic offensive. Its idea was by this offensive to set up its domination *immediately*. To this end, it made full use of diplomatic pressure, the political use of foreign loans and food reserves and the menace of war with the atom bomb. Its general plan was to smash the resistance of the Soviet Union; break up the democratic forces in eastern Europe; take over Germany, Italy and Japan as satellites; establish control over the weakened countries of western Europe; beat down the flames of colonial revolt; fasten tighter the American grip upon Latin America; and, last but not least, undermine the position of the British Empire. Great Britain went along with this grandiose scheme for the immediate realization of world domination by the Anglo-American bloc, in which it is playing the role of the minor partner.

But things have not gone as well as these imperialist plotters had expected. The peoples of the world, just escaped from the international menace of fascism at such a heavy cost, are in no mood tamely to put on the yoke of Wall Street. Resistance has been much greater than anticipated by the imperialists in the case of the U.S.S.R., the peoples of colonial Asia and Africa, democratic

Europe and Latin America. In Great Britain, too, there has been strong popular resistance to the wild imperialist drive of the Anglo-American bloc. This world resistance has definitely slowed down the progress of the imperialists. But it has not yet stopped them. In particular, it has not stopped the United States, which is now weaving imperialist plots in all corners of the world—in China, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe and even the North and South Poles—in its ruthless drive for power. In this general connection American reactionaries are widely propogating the idea that war against the Soviet Union is inevitable.

The rabid postwar imperialist campaign of the Anglo-American bloc has still further worsened the situation of the British Empire. By straining weakened British resources, it has intensified the crisis in Great Britain itself; it has prevented Britain from establishing valuable economic relations with the U.S.S.R. and democratic Europe; it has inflamed the colonial revolts all over the Far East; it has weakened still further Britain's bonds with her Dominions; and, above all, it has made Great Britain more dependent upon the United States economically and politically. Britain's attempt to keep imperialist pace with the United States, even in its accepted role of junior partner of American imperialism, has deepened and intensified the crisis in its Empire in every respect.

THE IMPERIALIST POLICY OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT

The policies of the Labor government, both foreign and domestic, despite the wishes of Attlee, Bevin, *et al*, are not alleviating, but are intensifying the crisis in which the Empire now finds itself. So far as the situation in Britain proper is concerned, the government's timid approach to nationalization and economic planning and its solicitous care that the financial interests and managerial positions of the capitalists shall be protected, in no sense constitute the drastic course necessary to lift British industry out of its present serious condition.

Nor does the Labor government's attitude toward the Dominions, which is a continuation of Tory policy, improve the situation in the sphere of the crisis. Likewise, as regards the Anglo-American bloc, the Labor government is going right along with that alignment and all its imperialist adventures under American leadership. Bevin's policy in this respect is hardly to be distinguished from Churchill's. The general result of the Labor government's Anglo-American bloc policy is to drive a wedge between Britain and the U.S.S.R. and the new European democracies and thus to make Britain more and more dependent upon the United States with all the negative economic and political consequences that this entails, including the danger of a new world war.

Labor government policy is no less

disastrous in its effects upon the relations between Great Britain and the colonies. The Social-Democratic leaders loudly proclaim that they are liquidating imperialism and have the objective of liberating the colonies. But the plain facts are that the imperial-minded heads of the Labor government are using every device to hang on to the colonies, especially India, and their methods, although heavily buttered with liberal demagoguery, do not differ basically from those of their predecessors in power, the Tories.

Conference delegates from all over the Empire told harrowing stories of *violent* efforts on the part of the British authorities, with their age-old British policy of divide and conquer, to break up the national unity of various colonial peoples and to hang on to what they can of the colonies and mandated territories. The Empire Conference declaration, in which the work of the Conference was summarized, thus emphatically repudiated the present general imperialist policies of the Labor government:

We condemn the continued occupation of Greece, the subjugation of Cyprus and Malta, the holding down of Palestine, the bolstering up of reactionary feudal puppet regimes of Iraq and Trans-Jordan, the retention of British troops in Egypt, the categorical refusal to recognize the national independence of India and Burma, the denial of a democratic constitution for Malaya, and the maintenance and use of British troops in those countries to

suppress their freedom movements, and the military aid given by British imperialism to crush the liberation struggle of the peoples of Indonesia and Viet Nam.

Mr. Winston Churchill, in a famous wartime remark, stated that he had not been elevated to the head of the government in order to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire. But it is precisely the policies long carried out by Churchill and his fellow-Tories, and now being so actively applied by the Labor government, that are resulting in the disintegrating tendencies so strikingly evident within the British Empire. One of the ironies of history is that although the Social-Democratic leaders of the Labor government are busily trying to save the Empire's colonial possessions if they can, their efforts, which are clearly in line with Tory policy, are much deprecated by the ultra-reactionary Mr. Churchill. Characteristically, he said recently that the Labor government is "casting away our Empire."

THE GENERAL PROGRAM OF THE EMPIRE CONFERENCE

The Empire Conference adopted a set of demands that would drastically change the government's policy toward the Empire. So far as Britain itself is concerned, there was an implicit acceptance of the line of policy adopted at the Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain which was held on the eve of the Empire Conference. The major fea-

tures of this line, designed to overcome the present serious industrial situation in Britain, consisted, in the main, of the following major steps: the development of a national planned economy, the rapid extension of nationalization into the area of heavy industry, the improvement of the living standards of the workers, and the replacement of the present capitalist-minded personnel in nationalized industry and governmental departments with reliable elements.

So far as the Dominions are concerned, the Empire Conference called for their close working together with Great Britain within the United Nations. Regarding the Anglo-American bloc, the Conference called for its dissolution and for full collaboration economically and politically, between Great Britain and the planned-economy countries of Europe. The Conference did not demand an economic bloc of these countries against the United States, but it did propose that the United States be required to work democratically with other lands and that it desist from attempts at world domination. It demanded Big Three unity and genuine international collaboration.

The main business of the Empire Conference had to do with the colonies, and it was on this matter that it developed the most thorough program. Briefly summarized, the Conference called for the immediate, unqualified independence of India, Burma and Ceylon. It demanded the

evacuation of Egypt, Palestine, Iraq and Trans-Jordan, and it opposed Britain's attempt to dominate the Arab countries. It insisted on the right of self-determination for Malta and Cyprus. It also demanded the establishment of full civil rights in the African and other colonies of the Empire, with "full support of these peoples in their aspirations for freedom and the right of self-determination."

The Conference sharply signaled and condemned the developing war danger:

A great responsibility rests upon the working class and peoples of the Empire countries in the struggle between the forces of reaction fomenting a new world war and the forces for peace and progress. The imperialist policies continued by the British Labor government are a betrayal of its election pledges. Aided and abetted by the Dominion governments, it is stimulating and encouraging the warmongering elements everywhere.

The Conference linked up the struggles of the workers and oppressed peoples throughout the Empire. The policy declaration said:

The fight for the peace of the world, the advance of the subject peoples to independence, the struggle of the workers for Socialism, are all part of a common fight. The alliance of the freedom movements of the subject peoples and the working-class movement is vital for the victory of the aims of both.

The declaration further stated:

The British Communist Party has a special responsibility in association with those forces of the labor movement now struggling for a complete change in the Labor government's foreign, colonial and Empire policy. The Communist parties of the Dominions also have special responsibilities along similar lines, particularly in Australia and New Zealand where Labor governments are in power.

THE PERSPECTIVE FOR THE EMPIRE

The capitalist world is now greatly alarmed at the serious situation existing within the British Empire. New York is almost as much worried about it as London is. The capitalists understand that the breakup of the British Empire would shake the capitalist system of the world. Mr. Sydney Gampell, a British economist writing in the *New York Times* of February 25, says that "Britain's economic difficulties are in reality a world crisis." And the headline written to the same article, shouted that "World Chaos Seen If British Collapse." Mr. Gampell sums up Great Britain's plight in these significant words: "Britain, whose national existence depends on exports, at present is not producing a cent's worth of exports."

American imperialists, who are bent on achieving world domination, do not want to see the Empire fall to pieces. They want to weaken

Britain, so that she will no longer be a dangerous rival to them; but they are afraid that if the Empire breaks up many of the pieces will go to the democratic Left. The prospect of the dissolution of the British Empire is indeed one to make capitalist hearts everywhere quake.

Of course, as Varga warns, we must not overestimate the severity of the present Empire crisis. The British Empire is still tough. Even during this war, which did so much to accentuate the crisis, the Empire managed to extend its swollen land mass substantially. Nevertheless, the Empire is in real difficulty, as we have seen, and its troubles increase daily. A British Empire without India, and India is almost surely on the way out, would be a very different, and weaker, Empire indeed. Such an Empire, if it continued along present imperialist lines, could be only a weak satellite of the United States.

At the Empire Conference no little attention was given to the question of the perspectives of the Empire. The consensus of opinion seemed to be: (1) that the colonies must be freed in the interests of all sections of the Empire; (2) when the colonies are freed, they may find it profitable to develop collaboration with what is left of the Empire; (3) if not, the home country and the Dominions would find it advantageous to cooperate together, especially in view of the menace of American imperialism. In the main report, R. Palme Dutt expressed the Empire perspective as follows:

There is no antagonism between the interests of British working people and the interests of the colonial peoples. On the contrary, we are fighting in Britain for such changes in the policy and personnel of the government as would guarantee a change from the present imperialist exploitation of the

colonial peoples and lead to a real friendship between the free and equal peoples. On such a basis, the continued association of the British people with the peoples now in the British Empire, if they desire it, can be to our mutual benefit.