

The Communist Party and the Mass Movement

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The 23rd Congress of the Communist Party, meeting at Easter, is an event of signal importance for the entire working-class movement and people. The Congress meets at a time when all signs point to the prospect of an era of sharpening industrial and political conflicts. Already the closing weeks of 1953 and the opening weeks of 1954 have seen the beginnings of action by the workers in the key industries on a scale not previously paralleled for a generation. The electricians' victory in March was a signal triumph of militant action and leadership.

The most positive feature in Britain in the present situation has been the advance of militant working-class action in industry, and of militant trends in the membership of the trade unions and the Labour Party. It is here that are revealed the true signs of the future for Britain.

This advancing revolt is still at a relatively early stage. The right-wing leadership is still in dominant control on a national scale, although its hold has been shaken. The industrial movement has been so far sectional in character, without a common co-ordination of leadership and policy. In the electoral and parliamentary sphere, Toryism has not yet been seriously challenged. The disruptive policies of the right-wing leadership hamper unity. There is still widespread confusion of policy. There can be no question that the initiative and campaigning of the Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* have played a key part in the new advance. Yet this has not yet been reflected in any corresponding growth of the Communist Party or extension of circulation of the *Daily Worker*. These are indications of the relatively early and elementary stage of the movement up to the present. They point to the character of the problems which require now to be tackled in order to ensure further progress.

The main task before the Communist Party Congress arises from this situation—to give attention to the needs and problems of the advancing militant mass movement and the new trends in the trade unions and Labour Party, and to indicate the path of future advance and the role of the Communist Party in this development.

A QUARTER CENTURY OF PARTIAL CLASS PEACE

The significance of the new era of industrial class battles which has opened needs to be seen against the background of the whole preceding era. For twenty-seven years, ever since the General Strike and miners'

lock-out of 1926, there had been scarcely a single national official strike in any industry in Britain, with the exception of the National Union of Vehicle Builders' strike in 1948. Thus hardly any worker under forty years of age had had previous experience of officially organised strike action on a national scale. The apostles of class peace and class collaboration might imagine that they had triumphed in Britain, and transformed the machinery of trade unionism from its function of militant action on behalf of the workers into a machinery to hinder and hold back that action. But the events of December 1953 undeceived them. Once again British trade unionism has begun to swing into action.

What lay behind this preceding period of official class collaboration and partial class peace? What has led to this first breach in the system?

The working-class movement in Britain has developed from the outset, not in a straight line, but through successive cycles of militant advance and temporary reaction. The revolutionary era of Chartism was succeeded by what Engels called the "forty years slumber" of the working class during the heyday of the Victorian era. This was ended in the 'eighties by the militant revival of the Socialist pioneers and the new unionism. This in turn gave place again to a period of lower activity, during which the workers took the first steps to build up the Labour Party, and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Tories, although mainly through Liberal candidates, in 1906. Following the disillusionment with the Liberal Government of 1906-10, a new period of militancy developed from 1911 to 1926; it was only partially interrupted by the outbreak of war and soon flared up anew even in the course of the war (the average number of days lost through industrial disputes during 1914-18 was 5 million days a year) and developed up to the General Strike of 1926. The General Strike of 1926 was deliberately provoked by the Tory Government, and was only led by the right-wing General Council in order to betray it, with the aim of striking a decisive blow at the militant, semi-revolutionary advance of the working class before it had reached sufficient strength of organisation, policy and leadership to sweep past the right-wing leadership and usher in decisive social change in Britain.

It was immediately following the General Strike of 1926 that the "new" right-wing policy of class collaboration was proclaimed under the slogan of "Never Again."

The new policy of "Mondism" was proclaimed as the magic path forward which through rationalisation of industry and class collaboration would lead to prosperity.

Even when the ruinous consequences of this policy revealed themselves in the economic crisis of 1929-32 and the long stagnation and mass unemployment of the 'thirties, the right-wing trade union leaders continued to carry it forward.

Outstanding militant struggles were conducted by the British workers

during this period. But they were conducted without the support, and most often in face of the direct opposition, of the central trade union machinery controlled by the right wing. The great unemployed Hunger Marches which forced concessions from the Tory Government, and which are today cited in the official propaganda of the Labour Party as examples of the historical battles of the working class, were at the time banned by the Executive of the Labour Party and the General Council, and were organised by the Communists and the left through the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement.

This right-wing policy of class collaboration was carried to a new height in the period of the Labour Government from 1945. The British working class, responding to the new political inspiration roused through the war of liberation against fascism, turned against the Tory Party of the big bankers and industrial magnates which had been responsible for their miseries in the 'thirties and whose Munich policy had opened the gates to fascist war. They returned the Labour Party to office with an absolute parliamentary majority.

The Labour Government carried through a typical social democratic programme of strengthening State capitalism and bureaucratic social legislation, and thereby, through the extending network of Nationalisation Boards, etc., drew still more closely the upper sections of the official trade union bureaucracy into a closely integrated common organisation with the State and the employers. In the name of "loyalty" to the Labour Government, the workers were called on to accept this policy of class peace and co-operation with the employers. During the first two years of the Labour Government's period of office, the full reactionary character of its imperialist, anti-Soviet and pro-American policy was concealed under the cover of the social reform legislation which was carried through.

At the outset the Communist Party was alone in giving warning at its Eighteenth Congress in November 1945 that the reactionary imperialist policy conducted by Ernest Bevin on behalf of the Labour Government would wreck any social advance achieved at home and bring disastrous economic consequences to Britain.

By 1947, the outbreak of the "convertibility" crisis confirmed the truth of this prediction. In a panic, the Labour Government turned to emergency measures to rescue capitalism in crisis at the expense of the living standards of the workers. The Cripps programme of economy and "austerity" was proclaimed. The Labour Government called on the trade unions to co-operate in increasing production and to refrain from pressing for improvements in wages and conditions. So was inaugurated the policy of the "wage-freeze."

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress co-operated with the Labour Government in this programme. In December 1947 the General Council issued a circular to all trade unions calling for

"restraint in wage claims." At the Conference of Trade Union Executives in March 1948, despite strong opposition from the militant left, this policy was confirmed by 5,421,000 to 2,032,000. The militant left, led by the Communist Party, consistently fought against this policy of the wage-freeze. The present advance is no sudden flash in the pan. It represents the outcome of years of consistent advancing fight against the policy of the wage-freeze.

CONSEQUENCES OF CLASS COLLABORATION AND THE WAGE-FREEZE

Today the disastrous consequences of the programme of the wage-freeze and class collaboration have made themselves felt in every working-class household.

It is sometimes argued that the worsening of standards, which has given rise to this developing militant action of the workers, has originated from the Tory Government's policy since 1951 and its offensive against the social services, food subsidies and standards of the people.

This is incorrect. The Tory Government, which was returned in 1951 as a result of the widespread disillusionment caused by the record of the Attlee Labour Government, carried forward and intensified the offensive against living standards which had been inaugurated by the Labour Government. But the offensive had been begun and developed continuously since 1947, and the decline in real wages has developed continuously since 1947.

Between 1946 and 1951 (i.e., during the period of the Labour Government), the Electricians' leader Walter Stevens stated at the Trades Union Congress, wages increased by 29 per cent, prices by 34 per cent (this is the official figure, which considerably understates the real rise in the cost of living), production by 43 per cent and profits by 100 per cent.

Between June 1947 and October 1953 the official rates show the following contrast between the rise of wages and of food prices:

				<i>Male Adult Wage Rates</i>	<i>Food Prices</i>
1947 June	...	...	...	100	100
1951 October	(Change of			121	141
	Government)				
1953 October	...	...	...	135	164

Thus real wages have steadily fallen both under the Labour Government and under the Tory Government. This fall in standards has affected all sections of the workers, equally those in the prosperous engineering industry and those in railways and transport where the heavy burdens of compensation interest left a nominal "deficit." At the same time profits have risen to record heights.

The Tory Government's extending offensive to abolish all food subsidies, and threat to raise the rents of nine million families, has further sharpened this situation.

It is this increasingly desperate situation which has been the immediate driving force giving rise to the new wave of militant action.

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE WAGE-FREEZE

The General Council's policy of the wage-freeze was never peacefully accepted by the trade union movement. The militant left, led by the Communist Party and Communist trade unionists, conducted a continuous and ever-stronger battle against the treacherous policy of the General Council. Already at the Conference of Trade Union Executive Committees in 1948, which officially confirmed the policy of the wage-freeze, two million votes were cast against the five million obtained by the General Council.

With the renewed "devaluation" crisis of 1949, the General Council of the T.U.C. was able to carry at the Annual Conference in September a resolution for "vigorous restraint on all increases of wages, salaries and dividends." Following this, however, a delegate conference of the miners compelled a coalfield ballot to be taken and this ballot resulted in an overwhelming reversal of the policy of the top leadership. As a result, at the Conference of Trade Union Executives in January 1950 the miners' vote was cast with the left against the wage-freeze, and the General Council's support fell to a total of 4,247,000 against 3,606,000 for the left.

By the T.U.C. of September 1950 the General Council's resolution in favour of the wage-freeze was defeated. A resolution against "any further policy of wage restraint" was carried, in opposition to the General Council, by 3,949,000 to 3,727,000.

The full effect of this victory was delayed through the conditions of the pre-election situation at the time of the T.U.C. in September 1951. A resolution by the Electricians' trade union for higher wages was defeated by 5,281,000 to 2,199,000. By 1952, however, the General Council felt compelled to sponsor a resolution for "justified wage increases." And by 1953 the General Council supported a resolution of the Post Office Engineers "rejecting any form of wage restraint," which was adopted, even though a more explicit resolution from the Electricians' trade union for wage increases was rejected.

Thus the battle of the left had defeated the right-wing policy of the wage-freeze and opened the way for militant action by the trade unions. But it was still necessary to transform this victory in principle into positive action for increased wages.

THE WORKERS IN ACTION

Prior to the latter period of 1953, the strikes conducted by the workers had in general taken on the character of "unofficial" strikes, owing to the entanglement of the official trade union machinery on a national scale in the elaborate structure of conciliation and collaboration. Every

strike, however justified the issue, was accordingly denounced, not only by the Tories and capitalist Press but also by the Labour Party and right-wing trade union leaders, as a "wild" strike, as a "plot of extremists."

By the latter part of 1953 a new element entered into the picture. The workers were beginning to get into a position of sufficient strength to utilise the official machinery in support of their claims. The honour of initiating such action rested with the Electrical Trades Union. In August 1953 the E.T.U. initiated a strategy of "guerrilla" action (i.e., action not over the whole industry, but at a series of selected key establishments) in order to compel the employers to abandon their refusal to negotiate on the wage claims.

The effect of this first demonstration of militant action officially led by a national trade union was felt throughout the trade union movement. Its influence was especially direct in relation to the three million engineers who had already presented their claim for a 15 per cent increase in wages in July. At the same time the Miners' Conference in June had given instructions for a demand for a wage increase to be lodged, and this claim was presented in September. In August the Railwaymen had presented their claim for a 15 per cent increase.

In preceding years these wage claims had been most commonly met by small token increases inadequate to meet the rise in the cost of living, but calculated to be just sufficient to hold off any action by the workers. Now, however, with the sharpening of the economic situation, the Tory Government and the employers turned to a policy of refusing any increases in wages. The wage claims of the engineers, miners and railwaymen were met with a flat refusal. No concessions were offered.

Feeling ran high among the workers, and mass demonstrations followed in the ensuing weeks. On October 18 the Welsh miners poured into Cardiff and demonstrated 60,000 strong against the Government's action in lapsing Section 62 of the National Insurance Act of 1946. On October 21 in Glasgow, 250,000 engineers struck work and 50,000 demonstrated in the streets of Glasgow. By the end of October similar strikes and token demonstrations took place in London, Belfast, the Clyde and many other industrial centres.

At first the Press endeavoured to keep silent on this new demonstration of militant action by the working class. The *Daily Herald*, which had screamed across its front pages every American-fabricated story of "strikes" and "uprisings" in Eastern Europe, discovered that the strike of a quarter of a million engineers in Glasgow was not news. *The Times* endeavoured to dismiss it in a minute paragraph of small type. But the rising mass movement could not long be hidden by these methods of Press silence. By October 23 the strike of the London Petrol Distributors, tying up London traffic—an unofficial strike—was met by the Government using troops with the support of the General Council and Labour

Party. *The Times* angrily demanded new anti-strike legislation to meet the situation:

"There must be sanctions applied in the courts and in industry, and by the unions, against the wreckers, and Labour and Conservative leaders alike must give their backing" (October 24, 1953).

"Parliament must take thought at once on the way to safeguard the nation against similar unconstitutional outbreaks" (October 28, 1953).

But events were to show that the advancing action of the organised workers was not to be so easily dismissed as the machinations of "wreckers."

THE PORTENT OF DECEMBER 2

On October 19 the Executive Committee of the thirty-nine trade unions comprising the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions agreed on a twenty-four-hour strike to take place on December 2. This was the big first testing of the readiness of the workers for action. Would the old machinery, rusted from disuse of a quarter of a century, function effectively? Would the younger generation of trade unionists, who had never known national industrial action, respond?

To the last the employers and the right-wing labour leaders hoped that the action would win only a partial response and end in a fiasco. In place of the usual hasty intervention by the Minister of Labour, the Government remained ostentatiously passive in order to observe this test of the mood of the workers and in the hopes that it would fail. The *Daily Herald* on December 2 came out on its front page with a shameless strike-breaking article which declared that the decision to strike had only been taken "under pressure from the left" and proclaimed the hope that the response to it "will be very patchy." All these calculations of the capitalists and right-wing Labour leaders were swamped by the result.

The response was overwhelming. The measure of response in many establishments exceeded the level of the General Strike in 1926. The younger generation of British trade unionists had shown that they were worthy sons of their fathers.

This action of the engineers led to immediate repercussions among the railwaymen. On December 12 the National Union of Railwaymen's Executive issued instructions to all its branches to strike at midnight on December 20 in support of their wage claim and against the miserable award of 4s. which had been offered by the Railway Staffs National Tribunal on December 4 (i.e., after the action of the engineers).

This time there was immediate intervention by the Government. Although the Transport Commission had declared that there could be no possibility whatever of any advance beyond the 4s., the Government

exercised pressure to gain a promise that within six weeks there would be a further advance on the 4s. (unofficially stated to be in the neighbourhood of an additional 3s.), and only on this basis the strike notices were called in. In the angry words of the *Daily Telegraph* next day, on December 17:

"The award has been overruled by the threat of force. That is undeniably a blow to the orderly settlement of disputes through the machinery of negotiation . . . the unions have been reinforced in the conclusion that the threat of force pays dividends."

TACTICS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND EMPLOYERS

The subsequent experience has shown a concerted shift in policy of the Government and employers. They have had to abandon the absolute negative stand which they had attempted in the latter half of 1953, and endeavoured to buy off the threatening movement by partial concessions. After the railwaymen had received their promise of an increase on the Tribunal award to reach a figure of 7s., the miners (without action or threat of action, but on the basis of the action of the electricians, engineers and railwaymen, busmen, builders and others) obtained an offer of 7s. 6d. to 8s. 6d. conditional on agreeing to co-operation for increased production; this was accepted by a vote of 537,000 to 227,000, and after a coalfield ballot for acceptance by 542,000 to 221,000.

The general trend of wage policy of Government and employers in face of the demonstration of action and threats of action by the workers has thus been to shift from the previous blank negative to the line of granting increases ranging about 7s. a week or 6 per cent in place of the 15 per cent generally demanded. This was not, in fact, enough to meet the rise in the cost of living.

The Electricians' battle continued through the early part of 1954, with the 24-hour strikes of January 18, and successive "guerrilla" strikes. By March the employers were compelled to concede terms previously offered by the union and refused. The demands of the engineers, builders and others remained still unsettled at the time of writing.

Thus the initial advance of the working class has already extracted partial concessions from the Government and employers, although far short of the workers' demands. On the basis of these concessions, and with the aid of the right-wing leadership, a temporary check was dealt to the advance of the movement. But it was clear to all that major issues of conflict were in front.

THE ROLE OF THE T.U.C. GENERAL COUNCIL

In the face of the advancing militant action of the working class, it is necessary to signalise the openly hostile role of the right-wing Labour Party and trade union leadership.

The long and obstinate battle of the General Council to maintain the policy of the wage-freeze against the mounting and finally victorious opposition of the trade union membership has already been described.

Every public declaration of the General Council slavishly followed the policies of Tory imperialism. In 1952 the Memorandum on Rearmament not only declared that the requirements of rearmament must have priority over the needs of the workers, but even argued that rearmament was a means of keeping unemployment at bay, and that it had no effect on the Balance of Payments (directly contradicted later by Butler at Sydney, when he declared that rearmament resulted in an adverse effect of £350 to £400 million annually on the Balance of Payments). In 1953 the Report on Public Ownership was aptly described by the General Secretary of the N.U.P.E. at the Douglas Congress as "a speakers' handbook for every Tory candidate."

During 1953 the open flirtation of the dominant General Council leadership with the Tory Government ("not a bad bunch") shocked the entire trade union movement. They denounced, not only the Communists and the left, the Bevanites and *Tribune*, but even Mr. Attlee for being insufficiently ruthless against the left. Hints were thrown out of possible dissociation of the trade unions from the Labour Party, although these hints were rapidly withdrawn when it was realised that this would leave the Labour Party membership free to move to the left.

The disruptive role of the General Council found expression in the offensive against the Trades Councils, the most representative bodies of the rank and file in the industrial centres. This offensive was especially directed during this period to disrupting the London Trades Council, the historic body which was in fact older than the Trades Union Congress, and which under left leadership had reached a record level of membership and activity.

In accordance with this systematic anti-working-class policy, the advancing wage movement of millions of organised workers—the majority of the membership of the T.U.C.—found no support or leadership in the General Council. On the contrary, the shameless strike-breaking article of the *Daily Herald* on December 2, 1953, reflected the right-wing policy.

THE SITUATION IN THE LABOUR PARTY

What of the Labour Party?

Here the consequences of the right-wing policy of disruption of the working classes, of erecting an absolute wall of separation between the industrial and political movement, made themselves conspicuously felt as soon as the workers moved into action.

Already the series of protest strikes at the beginning of 1952 against the Butler budget cuts had led to solemn denunciation by the National Council of Labour, as if such traditional demonstrations of working-class anger (which in the past had often extorted concessions from Tory

Governments) were a breach of the Constitution and an offence against democracy.

In 1952 it could still be argued that the action of the workers was unofficial, and that by challenging the Tory budget cuts it had invaded the sacred realm of politics. What, then, in 1953, when the action of the workers was conducted through the official machinery of the trade unions and was directed solely to the industrial aim of securing a wage increase?

The Labour Party is based, alike in its organisation, in the source of its finance and its electoral support, on the organised workers in the trade unions. Yet the decision of the three million organised workers of the Confederation of Engineering & Shipbuilding Unions—indeed of the five to six million trade unionists engaged in pressing wage claims—was regarded as of no concern to the Labour Party. Not only did the Labour Party leadership refuse to stir a finger in support of the workers' wage claims either on the platform or in Parliament. They openly expressed their sympathy and congratulations to the Tory Minister of Labour in his efforts to stop the action of the workers. Their official policy was that expressed in the programme *Challenge to Britain* adopted at the Margate Labour Party Conference in October which declared that the workers should "postpone improvements in living standards" in order to meet the requirements of the rearmament programme, war economy and the American-imposed trade bans.

Could anything demonstrate more clearly than this experience in action the contrast between the role of the right-wing trade union and Labour bureaucracy as the open allies of the Tories and the employers against the workers, and the role of the Communist Party and the *Daily Worker*? From the outset the Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* have been in the vanguard of the fight, equally for the ending of the wage-freeze and for the wage demands of the workers and for action in support of these demands.

At the same time the revolt which has developed in the trade unions has also spread in the Labour Party. This was shown already at the Margate Conference in 1952, and further at the Margate Conference in 1953. The most significant feature of this advance of the left fight in the Labour Party was the alliance of an extending series of progressive trade unions with the majority of the Divisional Labour Parties.

It was undoubtedly the growth of the mass pressure which led to the reconstitution of the Parliamentary Trade Union Committee at the beginning of 1954, and the moves to bring forward a resolution in Parliament on the wages issue, even though there has been no indication yet of any firm and unqualified stand in support of the action of the organised workers.

A new height in the developing battle was reached on February 23 on

the issue of German rearmament, when the Attlee-Morrison leadership was only able to achieve a majority of two in the Parliamentary Labour Party by the inclusion of Labour peers in the vote.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The vanguard role of the Communist Party and of the *Daily Worker* in this entire development of the mass movement and of the left advance of the trade unions and Labour Party has been evident and admitted by friends and foes.

The Communist Party led the long and ultimately victorious fight against the wage-freeze, was in the forefront of the fight for wage increases and against every attack by the Tory Government, and at the same time fought for a basic revision of the policy of the Labour movement—to turn it from acceptance of the cold war, rearmament and subservience to the United States to an alternative policy for peace, national independence, the improvement of living standards, the speedy defeat of the Tory Government and the advance to Socialism.

From the outset the theme of working-class unity as the indispensable condition of victory was continuously stressed by the Communist Party:

“9 million workers through their trade unions are demanding wage increases, and 9 million workers, once their power is united, are such a mighty force as can put paid once and for all to the attempts of the Tory Government to place the whole burden of the economic crisis, caused through its policy, on to the backs of the workers” (Communist Party Manifesto *The Wage Freeze Can Be Beaten*, July 1952).

The favourite accusation of the right-wing leaders against the criticism and demands of the left wing and of the rank and file, alike in the trade unions and in the Labour Party, was to declare that their views were “Communist-inspired.” Already in 1952 Mr. Gaitskell declared of the Labour Party Conference at Morecambe:

“A most disturbing feature of the Conference was the number of resolutions and speeches which were Communist-inspired, based not even on the *Tribune* so much as the *Daily Worker*. I was told by some observers that about one-sixth of the Constituency Party delegates appeared to be Communists or Communist-inspired” (*Times* report, October 5, 1952).

This attempt to frighten the left with denunciations of Communism and allegations of imaginary “Communist infiltration” was unsuccessful. In 1953 the resolutions of the left, which were uniformly denounced

by the platform as “Communist-inspired,” received steady votes of some 2½ million in the Trades Union Congress and 1½ to 2 million at the Labour Party Conference.

There is no doubt that the consistent policy put forward by the Communist Party and the *Daily Worker*, the programme of *The British Road to Socialism* and the unity proposals of Harry Pollitt’s *Labour—What Next?* and *A Policy for Labour*, and the influence and personal example of Communists at every level in the trade unions and in industry, have powerfully contributed to the advance of the left and strengthened the fight of the working class.

Yet the advance of Communist influence and activity during this period has not yet been reflected in a corresponding advance of membership or of the circulation of the *Daily Worker*. This is a negative feature of the situation. The registered membership of the Communist Party declined slightly from 35,124 in March 1952, to 35,054 in March 1953; and the complete re-registration of membership which was completed in March 1954 is not likely to show any appreciable advance, despite the recruiting drive which the extended meeting of the Party’s Executive Committee initiated in February 1953. The *Daily Worker* has had a heavy battle against the tendency of circulation to drop. The electoral vote of the Communist Party in the local elections fell from 162 candidates with 49,983 votes in 1952, to 152 candidates with 35,970 votes in 1953.

It is evident that this situation reflects a weakness in the role and method of work of the Communist Party in the midst of the development of united working-class activity on immediate issues. For permanent fruits are not won in the course of and through this activity to build up the strength of the Communist Party as the decisive instrument for the further advance of the Left and of the whole working-class movement.

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

It is now possible to sum up briefly the strength and weakness shown in the present stage of development of the mass movement. The strength has been shown in:

(1) The solidarity and fighting spirit of the rank and file, as soon as the call to action was given, as on December 2 and in the Electricians’ strike. It is noticeable that this enthusiasm and united response extended to all sections, not only to the older, experienced trade unionists, but equally to the youth, the women, and often also to the unorganised. This belies the picture of mass “apathy” often given by political observers; the “apathy” observed (in elections, attendances at meetings or attendances at trade union branches) is rather the reflection of the deadening effects of right-wing leadership and disruption, and the lack of a fighting leadership or visible difference between the front bench Tory and Labour policies. The conclusion can therefore be drawn that

a swing to a fighting policy of the entire industrial and political Labour movement would rapidly dispel this "apathy."

(2) The drawing of the official machinery of the trade unions into action, despite General Council sabotage, and the growth of the influence of the left at all levels in an extending series of national unions.

(3) The first beginnings of the link-up of the economic and political struggle, with the parallel advance of the left in the trade unions and in the Labour Party, and the increasing recognition that the fight for wages and living standards is bound up with the fight against the rearmament and cold war programme with its consequences in the deterioration of economic conditions.

(4) The increasing response among wide sections of the Labour movement to the colonial peoples' struggle.

(5) The leading role of the Communist Party in the development of the movement both in the industrial and political fields, in the shaping of policy and the promotion of united action.

The main weaknesses have been:

(1) The continued domination of the right-wing leadership on a national scale in the T.U.C. and in the Labour Party, maintaining policies closely associated with those of the Tory Government, and hampering working-class unity and action at every point.

(2) The failure of the Parliamentary Labour Party to represent the fight of the working class in the country.

(3) The consequent failure at the nearly thirty by-elections so far held since the General Election to make any impact on the Tory majority, and even a recent relative increase in the Tory proportion of the poll.

(4) The uneven character and sectional development of the industrial movement; the lack of co-ordinated and concerted action behind the various wage demands; the temporary isolation of the miners on a national scale, under the present majority leadership, from the advance of the progressive unions, thus assisting to maintain the reactionary majority in the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party Conference.

(5) The inadequate recognition of the unity of the economic and political struggle in the present situation; not only the separation of the political wing from the industrial battles, but the tendency of many militant trade unionists to see the question of wages or the attitude to increased production in purely economic terms (i.e., the size of the workers' share), and not as inseparably bound up with the fight for a reversal of the war policy which causes the worsening of conditions. Inadequate political participation of the trade unions at all levels in the work of the Labour Party, to use the full strength of the militant organised workers in the fight for a progressive policy and for militant candidates and representatives.

(6) The harmful effects of the right-wing system of bans and purges to prevent working-class unity and co-operation. The inadequate fight

to defeat this offensive of disruption; and the still relatively low level, outside the workshops and industry, of co-operation and unity under these conditions on general issues (the fight for peace, against rent increases, etc.).

(7) The lack of growth of the Communist Party in the midst of rapid advance of the mass movement.

PERSPECTIVE AND TASKS

The general perspective of the present situation points to the further development of the new era now opened of deepening class battles in industry and politics.

The ice has been broken by the beginning of large-scale national action of the working class at the end of 1953. There is no doubt that the Government and the right-wing trade union leaders will endeavour to utilise every manœuvre and every weapon in their arsenal in order to stem the tide and turn aside the pressure of the workers for action. Nevertheless this objective is not so easy for them in the present circumstances.

The sharpening economic situation, and the prospects of a United States slump and intensified trade competition, as well as the increasing burdens of the rearmament programme, colonial wars and the economic trade bans—all these have led to a hardening attitude of the employers in relation to wage claims, at the same time as the worsening conditions of the workers strengthen the demands for action to gain concessions. If the trade situation continues to worsen, the near future may see the launching of an offensive by the employers against existing wages, hours and conditions.

Nor can this situation be separated from the political situation, with the increasing unpopularity of the American war policy and the Tory Government's subservience to it. The demonstration of the rising living standards in the Soviet Union and Peoples' Democracies affords a powerful contrast to the experience in Britain and the other countries of Western Europe.

This situation calls for intensified effort and the most rapid advance of the militant fight alike in the industrial and the political Labour movement.

The lessons which stand out from the present actions are manifest.

First and foremost is the need to strengthen the unity of the workers in action.

In the battles of 1919 to 1925 the railwaymen, miners and transport workers forged a common front in the Triple Alliance. This played an important part in the strength of the fighting front that was established. Today, there are many differences in the conditions from the period of the early 'twenties. But the need of strengthened unity is all the more pressing in relation to the scale of the present struggles. This unity needs

to be forged at every level, especially at its base in the workshops and the pits and throughout the machinery of the organised trade union and Labour movement.

The second lesson is the necessity to strengthen the fight for a progressive policy and a stronger progressive representation in the leadership of all the trade unions and to defeat the reactionary policies and role of the right-wing trade union leaders. The right-wing trade union leaders have shown themselves as the direct allies of the Tory Government and the employers. So long as they are allowed to maintain their controlling positions, the action of the workers is faced with heavy handicaps. The experience of December 2 has nevertheless shown how the advancing action of the workers can go forward in spite of resistance and sabotage by the right-wing leadership. But the fullest effective mobilisation and extension of large-scale action for victory demands the decisive defeat of the right-wing leadership.

The third lesson is the necessity to recognise the inescapable close connection between the economic and political struggle in the present situation. The battle for the wage demands of the workers is bound up with the fight to end the reactionary policies of the Tory Government and to unite the whole Labour movement economically and politically, on the basis of a positive programme of peace and national independence and improved living standards, which can rally the entire people to defeat the Tory Government and return a new government to represent the whole people on the basis of such a programme.

Finally, the fourth lesson which has been emphasised and reinforced by these recent events is the indispensable role of the Communist Party as the organ of the vanguard of the working class alike in the economic struggle and in the whole field of the fight against Toryism and for a new policy. There is no room for dispute on the significance of the role which the Communist Party and the *Daily Worker* have played as the champions of the advancing mass movement which has so powerfully shown its strength in the action of December 2. If it has been possible to achieve the measure of advance of the left that has already become manifest both in the industrial and political movement with the present level of strength of the Communist Party, the conclusion must be borne in on every militant trade unionist and socialist: how much greater an advance can be achieved as soon as the ranks of the Communist Party are further strengthened in relation to the enormous tasks before us.

The most critical approach will be necessary within the ranks of the Communist Party to expose and overcome all the weaknesses which stand in the way of the rapid growth of the Party. It is not possible to take refuge in pleas of the difficulties of the objective situation, when in fact the mass movement is advancing, and at the same time the Communist Party is failing to advance. The obstacles evidently arise in subjective weaknesses, such as:

- (1) Under-estimation of the new trends among the workers in the trade

unions and Labour Party (signalised already in Comrade Pollitt's Report to the Extended Executive in February 1953, as one of the two main weaknesses in the current work of the Party), and of the consequent readiness of increasing numbers to come to the Party, if approached with understanding and consistent attention.

- (2) A superficial attitude to united activity in such a way as to counterpose such united activity to the task of building the Party.
- (3) Surrender to Left Labour illusions of the possibility of decisive advance of the Labour movement without the strengthening of the Communist Party; and insufficient explanation of the key role of the Communist Party.
- (4) Organisational weaknesses, reflected in the character of branch life, inattention to new members, or to the development of cadres.
- (5) Inadequate level of agitation and propaganda, not only for the immediate aims of the mass movement, but for the entire policy and programme of the Communist Party, showing the path to the solution of Britain's crisis and to the achievement of socialism.

There is no doubt that great new possibilities are now opening out before the working class in Britain and that the advance of their action can have a decisive influence, not only on the prospect of the political situation in Britain, but on the further development of the international situation and the fight for peace.

The outcome of the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party at Easter will help to chart the way forward for the whole working-class movement and the people of Britain in this new situation which is now opening.