

BRITAIN'S COLONIES AND THE COLOUR BAR

A Speech by R. Palme Dutt

[The Conference convened by Labour Monthly on this question was held on October 26 at Denison House, London, and was attended by 166 delegates from 98 Trade Union, Co-operative and Labour organisations, and from associations of coloured workers, as well as by 150 visitors, or a total of 316 attending. The proceedings and the contributions to the Conference revealed a very

CONTENTS

DECEMBER · 1958

	Page	
BRITAIN'S COLONIES AND THE COLOUR BAR, by R. Palme Dutt	529	<i>striking unity of representatives of the British working class movement, speaking with direct experience from the trade unions and workshops and local labour movement, and of representatives of the colonial peoples and coloured workers in Britain, together with the participation of such well-known fighters for the cause of peace and liberation as D. N. Pritt, the Dean of Canterbury, Gordon Schaffer, Solly Sachs and others. The Chair was taken by Stan Pope, General President of the National Society of Copper-smiths, Braziers and Metal Workers, in his personal capacity; the opening report in the morning was given by the Editor, and in the afternoon by E. A. C. Roberts, Assistant General Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, in his personal capacity. On page 563 we print the credentials report, and a brief report of some of the contributions. Below is the opening speech.]</i>
THE COAL CRISIS AND THE MINER, by Will Paynter	539	
PLAIN WORDS ON TESTS, by Quæstor	543	
MEMORIES OF THE REICHSTAG FIRE TRIAL, by D. N. Pritt, Q.C.	548	
SOME ECONOMIC CHANGES IN SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, Part 2, by Maurice Dobb	556	
A LETTER FROM IRAQ, by A Baghdad Correspondent ...	560	
CONFERENCE REPORT	563	
JOHN MILTON, 1608-1958 ...	552	
INDEX	572	
<i>Book Reviews :</i>		
Law Versus the Trade Unions, by D. N. Pritt, Q.C., and R. Freeman: F. L. Haxell ...	569	
Productivity and Economic Incentives, by J. P. Davison, P. S. Florence, B. Gray and N. S. Ross: R. Bellamy	570	
The Commoners of England, by H. Fagan: Wogan Philipps ...	571	

I SHOULD like to support the Chairman's welcome on behalf of the Editorial Board to all the delegates who have come here from organisations, and to the visitors, and to add, if I may, our thanks to the team of voluntary helpers who have made possible the organising of this Conference. I am sure we should also wish to welcome the inspiring greetings we have received both from friends and organisations in this country and from leading representatives and democratic organisations and trade unions in Jamiaca, Kenya and Rhodesia. These expressions of friendship and exhortation, are expressions of that unity and that alliance in our common struggle which will be the guarantee of our common victory.

I. Britain and the Colour Bar

SINCE this Conference was called, new and shocking events in our midst have awakened opinion to sharper realisation of what these questions mean, not merely as something affecting far-away peoples and countries but as something now very close at home. The ugly danger signals of colour bar violence, of violence against coloured people, in Notting Hill or in Nottingham, have undoubtedly raised universal anger and condemnation. We welcome the prompt and unanimous declaration of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference, repudiating the colour bar and racial discrimination.

These declarations expressed the feelings of all decent people. We welcome the promise of a first step towards legislation against the colour bar by the next Labour Government. We of the Left have agitated a long time for such legislation. Consider how long Mr. Brockway's excellent Bill on this matter had been left for a lonely fight, ignored by the Front Bench, until these events. It is still only a beginning that is proposed, namely in respect of public employment and public organisations. But the main problem is in the private sphere, with the private landlords, hotels, restaurants, dance halls, advertisements, etc. How often do we see in the local press such advertisements or other forms of announcement as 'Gentiles Only', 'No Coloured Need Apply' all at present perfectly legal in this country. Therefore we cannot rest until we achieve the same level of civilised legislation in this country as already exists in Socialist countries, which makes every form of practice or preaching of racial hatred, colour discrimination or the like a penal offence to be wiped out with all the resources of the state and the law.

The danger of a new colour bar offensive still exists even from high quarters. We cannot fail to note how Mr. Butler at the Tory Conference on this question of coloured immigration promised legislation to deal with what he called criminal elements. We cannot fail to note how, only last week, Sir David Eccles, President of the Board of Trade, intervened in the Conference of the British Travel Association to secure the rejection of a resolution which was proposing that hotels and restaurants which barred coloured people should be excluded from the Association. Thus the present Tory Government has used its influence to protect the colour bar in Britain in the name of freedom.

We cannot also fail to note that even in some sections of the Labour and trade union movement there are some similar tendencies. Thus there have been the proposals of Mr. Edelman representing Coventry, or Mr. Rogers representing Notting Hill, for legislative restriction of immigration of Commonwealth citizens to make such immigration dependent on prior guarantees of employment and housing. Nominally this proposed legislation could apply to all Commonwealth countries. But everybody knows that in practice such legislation is proposed in order to restrict the entry of the coloured people from the colonial countries. It is argued that such measures should be supported in the name of protection for jobs and housing because there is unemployment and because there is a housing shortage. That is the wrong way to set about these problems which arise from capitalist conditions, not from colonial immigration.

What is to happen to these people? Drive them back to the conditions they came from? There, in the West Indies, one in three, or one in four of the working population can find no means of livelihood, no employment, because of the conditions created by colonialism. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say that you are going to maintain these countries as colonial countries, rob them of their resources, deny them the fundamental freedom to build and develop their own country, and reduce them to uttermost poverty and then, simultaneously, when in desperation they come here to find some means of livelihood say 'Back you go to the conditions we have created for you'. That is not an attitude worthy of Socialists or the Labour movement. Let them have freedom, control of their own resources, and then we can discuss as between equals who travels where and with what rights. But so long as they are held in colonial subjection, we are in the same boat, fighting

against the same oppressors, and working class solidarity is the way to tackle all these problems of jobs, housing and other human needs.

It is not enough to condemn in words the colour bar and racial discrimination in this country so long as many of those who do so—and we are not speaking here of backward youths but of the highest social circles—so long as they condone and uphold the colour bar in the colonial sphere. The colour bar openly operates in Kenya, Bermuda, Rhodesia, etc. Racial discrimination—in the sense of the domination and exploitation of coloured populations by a tiny ruling European community—operates in all colonial territories.

Only last week the United Nations Assembly Political Committee carried a resolution condemning *apartheid* in South Africa. They carried it by 68 votes to 5.* Who were the Black Five who voted against? Britain and the other colonial powers—Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Australia. That is the official voice of Britain in relation to this issue of *apartheid*. That is the kind of thing we have got to fight and change. Therefore we have to recognise that the question goes a little deeper than just racial prejudice.

2. Colonialism Not Dead

The real foundation of the colour bar and racial discrimination lies in the colonial system. You cannot separate them. The old French socialist Jules Guesde used to say: 'Colonial wars have always been a school for civil war'. He had in mind the experience of 1848, when the Paris workers were shot down by Generals Changarnier and Cavaignac fresh from the conquest of Algeria, and during the Commune the execution of 30,000 Paris workers by General Gallifet trained in wars of suppression in Algeria. Today once again in 1958 we see the role of General Massu and the paratroopers with their Algerian coup. Thus the truth of the old Socialist wisdom is proved once again in our day. The Algerian war destroyed French democracy. This is happening today, not in the past, but today; not at the other end of the world, but close to our shores. In Britain also the first danger signs have appeared—little initial signs, like Nottingham and Notting Hill, with the open hand of Mosley fascism, should warn people against the easy illusions 'It can't happen here'.

*On October 30 the United Nations Assembly carried the same resolution by 70 votes to 5.

For this reason it is necessary to end the complacency which exists on these urgent questions in some sections of the Labour movement. This current complacent outlook declares that imperialism and colonialism belong to a vanished past—all colonies are free or about to win freedom in a year or two. No further major issue of controversy remains save on details.

Yes. It is true that all over the world the peoples who have been subject have won or are winning their freedom. That is the revolution of our time, the great sequel of the victories of the socialist revolution. In fact this liberation from imperialism is an integral part, as Lenin always said, of the world socialist revolution. The advance of this vast Afro-Asian majority of mankind to win their freedom is transforming the world and ending the old unbalance and European domination.

But they have been winning it, and are winning it, by their own liberation struggle with the support of the socialist revolution and the working classes all over the world. At this moment those who have always upheld imperialism and sought to suppress that liberation struggle, try now to say—as in spite of them freedom advances—'Well, you see, we did it'. 'We gave India freedom'—is the favourite formula of Earl Attlee. Earl Attlee forgets that he was a member of that second Labour Government which threw 60,000 Indians into prison for the crime of demanding national freedom for India. It was not until the uprising of the Indian people after the war was accompanied by the Indian armed forces also rising in revolt, and Sir Stafford Cripps had to say in Parliament that there were no longer adequate forces or reinforcements available to maintain British rule in India, that it then became necessary to make the best settlement they could. Even so, in leaving, they imposed partition on India, as they had previously done in Ireland. The fruits of partition still bedevil conditions in Ireland, as they still bedevil conditions in India and Pakistan.

Surely and thoroughly the liberation fight of all the peoples of the subject countries sweeps forward, and will conquer. The attitude to this great change throughout the world is the decisive test for every nation and people in the world.

We salute the victory of the Iraqi Revolution. No one can say they 'gave them freedom' in Iraq. The Iraqi people took it. The Iraqi victory is the herald of the victory of the Arab East. Soon all Africa will win its freedom. We hail Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea. We hope that soon East and Central Africa—the most oppressed—

can also win their freedom. Soon also the West Indies will win their full freedom beyond the present fettered constitution.

But the battle is not yet over. The present shameful war in Cyprus is the proof of that. Young British soldiers are being sent out to their deaths in Cyprus—by whom? Who sent them? Not Barbara Castle. The responsibility for their deaths, as for the deaths of all the Cypriots who have died, rests wholly and entirely on the Tory Government, on Macmillan and Sandys who sent those British soldiers to invade Cyprus and who refuse freedom to the Cypriot people. The press of the right, the scribes and apologists of imperialist oppression and massacres, try to pose as the defenders of the interests of these British soldiers. It is we, of the Left, who are defending equally the lives of these young British soldiers, as also the lives and freedom of all the people of Cyprus.

When we hear all this talk that 'colonialism is a thing of the past' let us recall that even the direct British colonial empire is still twenty times the size of Britain in territory. The population of the British colonial empire is one and a half times the population of Britain. So that, in this sense Britain is still a minority democracy. All this is in addition to the vast assets and the exploitation in the newly independent countries; for political independence is not yet economic independence. India is grappling with that problem at the moment. It is in addition to the expanding new aggression, as in the Persian Gulf.

3. British Labour and Colonialism

Colonialism is the enemy of Socialism. The cost of the colonial wars in Cyprus, Oman or Malaya; the cost of colonial oppression as in Kenya and other territories; the cost of the inflated armaments and the imperialist cold war alliances—all these costs strangle Britain's economy and social progress. Unless we deal with this monster, talk of Socialism is empty. Imperialism and colonialism are the real basis of the right wing and its domination in the present stage of the Labour movement.

Today there is widespread and welcome awakening among certain sections of the Labour movement to the urgency of these questions. That has been shown in the rank and file resolutions at recent Labour Party Conferences. It was shown over Cyprus, when the Conference pressure last year compelled a recognition of the right of self determination, and this year compelled a retreat from the

support of the British-Turkish Tory plan. It has been shown in the campaigning work and strong affiliated support of such a broad organisation as the Movement for Colonial Freedom, from whom we were particularly happy to have the friendly message from Mr. Brockway, with all the work he has done in that movement.

But we must realise there is still much to be done to win the full strength of the trade union and labour movement to fulfil their role of alliance with the colonial peoples in the struggle against colonialism.

There is a gulf between principles and practice. Look at the official literature—and there is no lack of it from the Labour Party—pamphlets, policy statements, etc., on the colonial question. You will find, if you look at them, that the ultimate aims of freedom and self determination are often admirably proclaimed. But the practice still remains of support of colonialism, domination, occupation, exploitation, and even colonial wars as in Malaya.

Now all kinds of elaborate new arguments are brought forward to sustain this contradictory position, which is an outrage to the real feelings of the Labour movement. For example, if you study this literature, you will find that you hear no more of 'the colonial question'. The problem has become one of 'multi-racial communities'. What is a multi-racial community? Six million Africans live in Kenya, as their fathers have lived before them. A few thousand scions of British aristocracy come along and seize the best land. So you have a 'multi-racial community', where it is necessary to be fair to both sides!

A more subtle form of the same argument takes the line 'If we move out, the white settlers would have a free hand to set up a brutal dictatorship in the same way as the settlers in Central African Federation demand at this moment, such as would be a parallel to South Africa'. So the British armed forces must remain in the interests of the poor African population. In the interests of the Africans the great-hearted Jomo Kenyatta must continue to rot in jail. But of course it is the armed forces that maintain these white settlers in their position.

When we put forward our demands about independence and so on, we are not putting forward some wild unpractical policy or empty slogan. Today, in the present world situation, there is no colonial territory anywhere where the question of full independence and withdrawal of armed forces is not already an immediate, real

and burning question. By independence we mean negotiation with the national leadership in place of putting them in prison. Such national leadership has now developed in all these territories.

Such negotiations as these could provide for free constituent elections of a constituent assembly to determine future forms of Government by the people themselves, with guarantees of rights of any minorities. That is what we mean by our demand for independence and withdrawal of armed forces as an immediate demand.

Similarly on the question of economic relations and economic aid. The argument is often put: Look at the poverty of these people; it is our responsibility; it is the result of colonial exploitation. Correct. Let us then, it is suggested by a great effort of sacrifice put 1 per cent of the national income to help them. The principle of aid from a developed country to those countries whose development has been retarded is a good principle. But look a little closer. One per cent of the national income is £160 million. The Tories boast they have already sent £200 million a year to the Commonwealth countries. Of course they are referring to export of capital for profit. But how much of the proposed £160 million in the Labour Party Plan is meant to be export of capital, or subsidies to the British monopolies? How much would be direct aid? You will search in vain to get their answer. In respect of aid, if you add together all the Colonial Development and Welfare grants for the past twelve years, 1946-47 to 1957-58, the average has been three farthings per head per week for all the colonial peoples. The fact is that, even £160 million—even if it were all real aid—is only a portion of the gigantic profits which are drawn every year from these colonial countries. The return of these profits to the peoples who have been robbed would represent a gigantically bigger figure of real aid than all the promises of 'sacrificing' one per cent of the national income. This was the very correct and important issue raised by the South Paddington amendment at the 1957 Labour Party Conference; but the amendment was condemned by the Executive as 'unrealistic' and rejected.

All this current fashionable talk on the part of the imperialists, whose wealth is built on colonial exploitation, about the need to make 'sacrifices' for 'charity' for the poor under-developed colonial peoples inevitably reminds one of Tolstoy's remark that 'The rich are ready to do everything for the poor, except get off their backs'. It is time to get off their backs and go forward together as equals to our mutual benefit.

4. *Towards the Future*

What conclusions should we draw?

It is evident that there is a great deal for us to do in awakening opinion and understanding on these urgent questions in the Labour movement and among the people of this country. Our conference is a modest contribution towards building up such informed opinion.

Let us make it our aim to prove in deeds to all colonial peoples that in our struggle for freedom the British workers are with them in their struggle for complete national independence, withdrawal of armed forces, and the right to determine their own future.

Let us build up unity and comradeship of the British and coloured people here in Britain on the basis of equality of rights and common class interests against all who exploit or seek to divide us, and make the practice and preaching of colour bar or racial discrimination in any form a crime.

Let us work to build a new economic relationship with the liberated colonial peoples which will at once be of practical help to them in their liberation and offer limitless scope for a reconstructed British economy without fear of unemployment.

These aims represent not only the elementary duty of our movement and the interests of the colonial peoples, but also the vital interests of the British Labour movement and the future of socialism in this country.

We recall how Marx said of Ireland, that he once thought the victory of the British working class would bring the liberation of Ireland, but deeper thought and study had convinced him of the opposite, that first the liberation of Ireland would create the conditions for the liberation of the British working class.

It is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland. . . . For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. I always expressed this point of view in the *New York Tribune*. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general.

(Marx, *Letter to Engels*, December 10, 1869.)

Lenin carried forward this teaching in our era, in the twentieth century. Many who claimed to represent Marxism at the beginning of the twentieth century used to say that of course the advanced Western industrial countries would be the first to move to socialism. But Lenin said: No, first the weakest link, the most backward

imperialist power, riven with contradictions, Russia, would be the starting point of the world socialist revolution. 1917 proved the correctness of this. After the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia, once again many who claimed to represent the Marxist viewpoint, such as Trotsky, looked to Western Europe for the next stage of the advance of the socialist revolution and even as decisive for the fate of the Russian Revolution. But Lenin again said, in 1923, just before he died: No, next will come China, India, all the East.

Shall we be able to hold on . . . while the West European capitalist countries are consummating their development to Socialism? But they are not consummating it not as we formerly expected. They are not consummating it by the gradual 'maturing' of Socialism, but by the exploitation of some countries by others, by the exploitation of the first of the countries to be vanquished in the imperialist war, combined with the exploitation of the whole of the East. On the other hand precisely as a result of the first imperialist war, the East has been definitely drawn into the revolutionary movement, has been definitely drawn into the general maelstrom of the world revolutionary movement. . . .

In the last analysis, the upshot of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And it is precisely this majority that during the past few years has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest shadow of doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.

(Lenin, *Better Fewer, But Better*, March, 1923.)

All this Lenin wrote a third of a century ago. It is happening in our day. Afro-Asia is sweeping forward in unity with the socialist world, and, in doing so, is not only breaking their own chains, but breaking our chains. Imperialism is sinking, even though not yet ended. The ending of the colonial empire means the victory of the working class and socialism in Britain. That is the heart of the understanding of the problem of the Labour and socialist movement in Britain.

Let us go forward with conviction that through the ending of the colonial empire and colonial wars, we shall not only help to win the liberation of the colonial peoples, we shall at the same time win the liberation of Britain. We shall open the gates to our victory, to the victory of the working class and socialism, when we can march forward as equal partners at last with all the peoples, black, brown and white and yellow, in the new world of free humanity.