

The Communist Party and the Fight for Unity

by HARRY POLLITT

SLOWLY the mobilisation of Britain for victory over fascism gets into its stride. 1942 opens with the new man-power decisions coming into force. However drastic in character they may appear to be, they are in point of fact long overdue. The revolution that they effect in the lives and habits of millions of British citizens, who never thought that war would affect them so closely, will be welcomed by all who recognise how grave the position is, what is at stake, and what still needs to be done before the victory is achieved.

Only out of continued crisis and struggle are the weapons of victory being forged, and the man and woman power to use them at last being brought together. *They* can, in their application, bring about a further unity between all those for whom no sacrifice is too great in order to preserve the decencies of life and the possibilities of social progress, which in our present epoch can be guaranteed only by the elimination of fascism and all its attendant barbarism.

For fascism can be defeated only by a united people, supporting with full confidence a National Government determined to achieve a British-Soviet victory.

The recognition of this political fact, long delayed but at last gaining increasing conviction, has been borne in on the consciousness of the people not only through adversity but by the positive aspects of the resistance of the Soviet people. For in countless discussions it has been understood that to explain the magnificent character of this resistance, there must have been not only military preparedness, strategy and genius, but a political and moral unity of a kind representing something entirely new in world history.

This unity alone explains the difference between what happened when Poland, Norway, Holland, France and Belgium were attacked by Hitler, and what happened when, enormously strengthened by his conquests of these countries, he

attacked the Soviet Union. In the first instance we saw only capitulation and defeat; in the other we see a resistance that, while retiring on some sections of the vast battlefield, gives decisive counter-blows on other sections—and does so after five months of the greatest military struggles in the history of the world.

This role played by the political and moral unity of the people in the struggle against fascism is given further significance when the battles in Libya are set alongside those on Soviet territory. At first it was anticipated that the Imperial Forces would have a comparatively easy task when the Libyan offensive was announced, but soon it became apparent what fighting against fascism means, when it is the Nazi brand and not the Italian. The hard tasks the Imperial Forces have had to perform on this much smaller front only serve to heighten the respect aroused by the resistance of the Soviet people, with forty and fifty times more force arrayed against the Red Army than has been used by the fascists in Libya.

This is why, when victory is still to be won at such a terrible cost, we welcome every decision of the Government that reveals the intention to place our country on a real war footing. Great and overwhelming as the resources of Britain, the Soviet Union and America are, they are not yet brought together, organised, and pooled on that common basis which makes them totally effective at the present time. Furthermore, weakened as fascism is by the terrific blood-letting inflicted on it by the Red Army, it is a long way from being exhausted or finished. To wipe fascism off the face of the earth will still require enormous efforts; victory will never come by itself; and in Britain especially there is still a tremendous way to go before the entire people realise that they are engaged in a life and death struggle, without parallel in the past, which will demand

far more drastic adjustments in our lives and habits before we are finally through with the job.

At the same time it is necessary to emphasize in the sharpest possible manner that there needs to be a far greater equality in sacrifice than exists at present, because the National Government is not as yet truly representative of the people. We may be sure that the man-power decisions, affecting the life and work of millions of the working people, will be enforced far more effectively than the emergency Orders in Council regarding property—announced with such a flourish of trumpets in May, 1940—have been. That this opinion is shared by large sections of the people was shown in the votes registered against the Government in the recent Parliamentary debate on the new man-power proposals. They were not votes, so far as the Labour and Liberal Members of Parliament were concerned, against the Government and national unity, but against the one-sided character of sacrifices that are imposed on the working people, and the sincere belief that public ownership of certain industries would lead to increased and more efficient production. The votes registered were of great significance that will compel due attention being paid to them.

There are still too many shameful contrasts in Britain between the lives of the rich and those of the poor. These represent in fact a barrier to the supreme efforts that have to be made. War, with all its horrors and hardships, is still a million miles away from the lives of a small section of the people, whose political influence in the Government and its policy has nothing in common either with the wishes or aspirations of the majority of the people. So long as these harmful influences are allowed to flourish, the national effort loses much of its power and its future possibilities.

Since the invasion of the Soviet Union millions of people in Britain have read and studied everything they could get hold of that told them about the new world that has been organised in the Soviet Union. They now understand that the resistance of the Soviet people has reached such heroic heights because the sacrifice is a common one, because

no rich and poor classes exist side by side, no one makes profit out of war, no craft obstacles impede production, no Black Markets exist, because there is complete equality as between man and woman, and the care of children, the equipment of nurseries, and communal feeding are organised and encouraged to allow women to play their full part in helping to destroy fascism—and this understanding has led to a growing impatience that we still tolerate so many things that could be abolished to-morrow and thus give an enormous stimulus to the united will and determination to secure victory.

Victory in this terrible war will go to that group of nations which has the greatest preponderance of war materials, and men and women ready and eager to bear arms. Pious hopes about "the righteousness of our cause," that "we always win the last battle," that "things will turn out all right in the end," these have no place in the world of to-day. The scandal is that the countries allied against the Axis Powers have this overwhelming preponderance in their grasp, if only it was organised. Nothing would go further in achieving it than for our Government in particular to make now the same relentless attack on wealth and privilege as it is making on the man-power problem by the proposals now coming into operation.

In this setting the unity of the people takes on added urgency and importance, for the more united they become the sooner they can root out all the old methods, habits, obstacles, vested interests, hesitations and wishful thinking that are yet preventing the full and complete organisation and use of our resources and people.

At this moment the Communist Party places the question of unity as the central political question facing the people in general and the working-class movement in particular. Everything depends on how quickly and effectively this unity is organised. On its rapid growth and its strength depends the speedy and decisive defeat of Hitler. On this, too, depends the success of the movement for the reorganisation of the Government into a government more united and really representative of the people, with the

Men of Munich eliminated. On it depends how effectively we fulfil our obligations under the terms of the Anglo-Soviet Alliance.

Above all, the Communist Party in this situation places in the forefront the whole question of the independent role and responsibility of the labour movement, upon which in the last analysis everything finally depends.

In this fight for unity, sectional aims or motives cannot be allowed any place. There is only one issue in politics to-day: who is for or against the defeat of fascism? Everything else is secondary to that, for every question of future development depends on whether fascism is defeated or not.

This is why the Communist Party in December addressed a new appeal to the membership of the Labour Party, Trade Union Congress, and Co-operative Movement. It did so because it believes this is the time when an entirely new approach should be made to remove the barriers and obstacles still hindering the full development of that mighty movement of working-class and national unity which would bring about a remarkable change in everything associated with the mobilisation of the whole people, and ensure their future when the peace has been won. We believe that all serious-minded members of the Labour Movement will agree that such a new approach should be made. More and more the conviction grows in the factories and workers' organisations that if the Governments of Britain and the Soviet Union can, in the hour of their mutual peril and crisis, find the way to alliance and agreement, why not the working-class movements of Britain? Since the signing of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Agreement this question has been increasingly asked.

The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the resistance of the Soviet people have aroused a mass movement of solidarity of a really remarkable character. It has taken forms of activity never before witnessed in Britain. It has brought together people of the most diverse views, who have been astonished to find so many points of agreement in their common desire to go about their lawful occasions as free citizens, not menaced

by the bestiality of fascism. It is something new, that has tremendous possibilities for the future when many serious questions will have to be solved if the people are to reap the full reward of their present sacrifices and fortitude.

Why then should it be impossible for every section of the working-class movement that works for the defeat of Hitler, to work together? How can bans, and prohibitions against working with Communists, be defended in this terribly grave emergency? How petty and small it seems for instructions to be given that a Labour man must not speak on the same platform as a Communist! What purpose is now served by an attitude that takes the form, in actual fact, of saying, "The only good Communists are those who are dead or dying in the Soviet Union"? However hard that expression may seem, it is what the present attitude of refusing to work with British Communists amounts to.

The past has its memories for all of us in the working-class movement. They can be as strong for Communists as for Labour men. But what are they in the light of the events of to-day? What are they in the light of what we all know is the position of the Labour movement and common people in Nazi-occupied Europe, where we may be sure long ago all sections of the working-class movement have found the way to come together? What are they in the light of conditions in Nazi Germany itself, where we know that all sections of the working-class movement work together in the limited ways open to them, for the overthrow of Hitler? What are they in the light of the sacrifices that the British people have made since September, 1939? Or the gigantic sacrifices of the Soviet people?

And who will deny that once the way to a new understanding is found between the Communist Party and the Labour Party, for example, it will be warmly welcomed by the whole movement; or that it will not result in a great impetus in every section of the activities associated with winning the victory?

Who will dare to deny that once such unity is made possible, then an entirely new situation can open out? The sense of us all being together, all in it, all

giving of our best in a united manner, would wipe away many of the present feelings of frustration, of confusion and doubt.

If the way to any kind of united action can be found, however limited at first its scope may be, experience will soon pave the way to more important and decisive developments. This is why the Communist Party will do everything in its power to make such an understanding possible; and we will do it in such a way as will serve the common cause, and in a manner that will add to the power, unity, dignity and prestige of the whole Labour Movement.

Unity between every section of the working-class movement inevitably means a strengthening of national unity, bringing with it a strengthening of the National Government because it will then represent a stronger mass basis in the factories; and resulting in an all-round increase in everything that has to do with mobilising our resources to the maximum. This, in turn, will weaken the influence of the Men of Munich, and lead to a stronger and more united National Government.

Unity can help remove present social injustices and legitimate grievances that at present impede the maximum production and the best use of all available man and woman power. It can inspire the whole nation with the will to work, fight and sacrifice on the scale that the present situation demands, and to go into the coming gigantic battles to obliterate fascism from the face of the earth with the readiness that springs from political conviction rather than from automatic compulsion. Such unity in Britain will be hailed with joy by the working people in Nazi Germany and occupied Europe.

Why would it do all this?

Because it would lead to a renewed faith in the masses. A new revival of activity, that would soon result in stronger and more united forms of workshop, trade union, trades council, local labour organisations' activity: that would result in recruitment to the Labour Movement not by breaking any political truce, but by a united Labour Movement carrying out in a new way and a new spirit the every-day activities of the

movement. The need for such a revival is a matter of common discussion in the Labour Movement; and we believe the Communist Party can help bring this revival about. We know that is the meaning and realisation of what this unity represents and what it would achieve, that will be the spur to action.

This is why, in the new political campaign that the Communist Party is opening, it will place the question of unity right in the forefront of its agitation and propaganda. We will aim to organise the greatest political demonstrations that Britain has ever seen. We will see that it is taken into every factory, every trade union branch and every local labour organisation. We will do everything in our power to help the nation to victory, but we know that this will best be realised when once the forces of labour, whatever their political label, have been brought together, working in unity to secure their common aim.

We shall aim to win fifteen thousand new members for the Communist Party, so that more organised people can work together to help forward unity in the working-class movement and a greater and stronger unity amongst the people as a whole, that will lay the basis not only for strengthening the present alliance between Britain and the Soviet Union, but for an international alliance of every democratic country that seeks the defeat of fascism.

These aims, and these alone, represent the policy of the Communist Party in the New Year now opening out before us. It will be a year of terrible trial and anxiety. It will be a year of selfless sacrifice and devotion. There will be many homes that will suffer bereavement. There will be many who will face death unafraid and proud to die in defence of democracy against fascism. There will be millions in the workshops who will show the world what Britain can produce. The people of Britain and the Soviet Union will come closer still as they fight against the fascist beasts.

But 1942 can also be the turning point, the year that will make sacrifice worth while; the year that will see blows struck at Hitler from the East and the West; the year that will see the mass movement against Hitler in the occupied

countries rise to new heights of daring and courage; the year that will see the working people of Nazi Germany also strike blows at the tyrants.

Let it also be the year when the working men and women of Britain, and their organisations, at last got together, at last pooled their resources of leadership and strength, and embarked upon a united campaign for victory that brought to its banner the entire people of our country.

We appeal with confidence to every reader of the *Labour Monthly* to assist in hastening this unity.

The grim and terrible realities of the present have extinguished the differences of the past. A new perspective is opened out. Already there is much discussion about the fruitful possibilities before the peoples of Britain and the Soviet Union, when the peace has been won and we build again in peaceful construction.

Surely we of the Labour Movement, too, can get together, can forget the past because we are mindful of our present and future responsibilities? We owe it to our courageous and unconquerable

people. We owe it to the mothers of our people now in the Armed Forces, who will have to face and give so much in our defence.⁴ We owe it to the wives and families of these men. We owe it to the men and women in industry, working and slaving as men and women never did before, who have given up cherished and hardly-won trade union rights and practices, to help in the destruction of fascism.

Unity in the Labour Movement means unity of a new kind between the men and women in the Armed Forces and industry—something that is new in Britain; something that prevents misunderstanding and avoids the one being played off against the other. It is this something new, this unity, that, once established, is the guarantee that after the victory over foreign fascists no reactionaries in Britain will dare take advantage of the colossal sacrifices the workers are making now. It is this unity of purpose and endeavour that alone can guarantee a peace of fulfilment and not of betrayal as was the case in 1918.