

# The Communist Party and the Labour Party

by HARRY POLLITT

**T**HE application by the Communist Party to be accepted as an affiliated organisation with the Labour Party is an important and serious political act. It conforms to the gravity of the war crisis and tasks that have still to be solved; to the needs of the people as a whole; and of the Labour movement in particular: and, above all, it is one of the decisive questions through which the future of the British people can be very considerably influenced.

It would be easy to suggest that there are no problems in the organised Labour movement to solve. But it would not be correct. It would be easy to make full play with the political differences of the past, as a means of avoiding facing up to the hard new facts of the present position. But if this were to be done it would not represent serious leadership.

No useful purpose will be served if in considering the serious political issue that has now been raised, any attempt either to discuss, oppose or support it, is based upon schematic or academic approaches. It is a new and urgent issue that the situation, and not individuals or parties, has brought forward.

The sober fact is that the question can only be seriously approached in the light of the experiences arising out of the present situation and in this light alone can anyone successfully formulate any future perspective.

Not only so, but there are a number of new international factors also inseparable from any serious consideration of the application of the Communist Party for affiliation to the Labour Party. That is, not only British conditions have now to be taken into account, but the obligations and responsibilities of the working-class movement of Britain to the international Labour movement, so many sections of which have been destroyed or prevented from functioning by Fascism.

It is inconceivable that any serious working-class leaders or organisations can visualise a position where the Labour movement can stand still, as if nothing of fundamental importance in the world had

happened—is happening now as these lines are being written.

The world can never be the same world as it was in September, 1939. Whether we like it or not, there are already many political changes taking place in the minds of millions of people in Britain and all over the world. The relations between States and peoples are being changed, and will change still further. The British Labour movement will not remain static; the Constitutions of its various organisations will not represent the last word in drafting objectives, and methods of achieving objectives. The tremendous sacrifices that the war against Fascism has already evoked, the greater sacrifices that victory will inevitably demand, the problems of winning the war, and the peace, pose before every serious and honest Socialist entirely new questions that prejudice cannot solve and refusal to face can only succeed in aggravating.

It would be inexcusable if it was not recognised that millions are passing through new stages of political development. There is a new awareness in existence, a keen desire to understand, a desire for unity, accompanied by astonishment that political differences of the past can be allowed to prevent mature judgment now being directed to achieve maximum unity while there is yet time.

The war has not only destroyed many illusions. It has also increased the desire to understand politics in a new way; for now, as never before, the fact that war is only the continuation of politics by other means is widely understood; and the old slogan of the last war—"Never Again"—has quite a different significance now from what it had in 1918.

It would be childish to pretend that the influence of the Soviet Union has not grown enormously, or that the whole basis upon which the Soviet Union is established is not now the subject of acute and fundamental discussion everywhere. The reason for this is clear. The Soviet Union is able to exert its vital influence on every aspect of international affairs, not

because of magic, but because it is based on working-class principles, unity, outlook, government; because it has been able to put into practice everything the old pioneers of Labour in every country in the world had in mind when years ago they took the soap box to the street corner, and were greeted as "dreamers" and "men before their time." It is futile to deny that the old bogeys associated with the words "Communism" and "Bolshevism" have been laid low for ever, or that the stand of the Soviet Union has been admired not only for what is new in its military technique, but for what has made it all possible.

It is all these many-sided factors which combine to bring about an entirely new political situation in Britain, in which it is imperative that an entirely new approach should be made by all responsible and authoritative leaders of the working-class movement. It is this situation and nothing else which has prompted the Communist Party to apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. It was its duty to the whole Labour movement that it should do so.

It has been done, not because some tiny political party desired to receive increased prestige because of its association with the powerful Labour Party that represents millions of organised trade unionists, co-operators and individual members. It has done so only in the interests of the Labour movement; the majority of the common people; of the nation; of true internationalism; of victory in the war and in the peace.

In the effort to bring about unity in the Labour movement it is a serious contribution by a growing political party, whose mass influence grows every day; whose 64,000 members cannot be judged only from that numerical standpoint. For none will deny that the members of the Communist Party are among the most active and self-sacrificing section of the organised working-class movement, and that from the point of view of political activity and campaigning it represents a membership many times the size of its actual number.

The Communist Party is proud of its mass activity, of the size of its meetings; the tremendous sale of its literature; the financial responsibility of the workers; the role played by its newspaper, *The Daily Worker*. It is proud of the responsible and

leading positions in the trade union movement held by men like Arthur Horner, President of the South Wales Miners' Federation; Abe Moffat, President of the Scottish Miners; J. A. Scott, member of the Executive Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Of Sam Henderson and A. F. Papworth, members of the Executive Committee of the Transport & General Workers Union, and the thousands of our comrades who hold trusted positions as shop stewards; members of trade union branch and district committees, the number of which would be greatly increased if it were not for "Bans and Black Circulars" that prevent Communists holding official positions in certain trade unions and on the trades councils.

These various bans against any forms of united activity with the Communists that have from time to time been imposed by the Labour leaders have proved in practice to be harmful to the Labour movement. They have held back its whole development. They have enabled the reactionaries at various moments in the political situation to get away with policies that have not only directly injured the daily interests of the workers, as was seen in the application of the Means Test, but also undoubtedly in the international sphere, by preventing the full force of a united Labour movement to be exerted; have encouraged these same reactionaries to pursue a foreign policy that fostered the developments leading to the outbreak of the present war.

The excuse has often been advanced in justification of this policy of discrimination against Communists that it is because they belong to some foreign organisation and are not in a position to formulate their own policy.

It is not true, it never has been true, and it never will be true.

The Communist Party is an important and growing political section of the British Labour movement. It was born and developed out of British traditions and conditions. Its policy is formulated on the basis of the economic, political and social circumstances existing in Britain and at all times are in accordance with the best present and future interests of the British working people. The international association of the Communist Party with working-class parties of all other coun-

tries in the world is only an expression of the true interests of the British working people.

● Anyone who cares to make a study of the political history of Britain since the last war will have no difficulty in seeing on how many occasions policies first advocated by the Communist Party were subsequently taken up by other sections of the Labour movement. More recently, it is very noteworthy to find in how many instances certain aspects of the policy to win the war, at first advanced by the Communist Party, have subsequently been taken up by all parties that are concerned to win the war over Fascism, rather than to win a war of their own making over the Communists.

We believe the time has come when it is necessary to say openly that no good purpose is to be achieved by allowing fear of the growth of Communism to become the alibi for hating Communism more than it has yet been found possible in some quarters to hate Fascism.

No country in the world will have so many formidable problems to solve when peace has been won as Britain. They will require everything that the Labour movement possesses in leadership, power, initiative and unity. If there is unity now, then the position will be easier to tackle, precisely because the Labour movement has a common policy, leadership, aim, united and organised political campaigning.

Here it is pertinent to note the way that the reactionary Tory Press commented on our application for affiliation. Most newspapers made no comment but gave the facts of our application. Not so the newspapers to which we have referred. Both in London and the provinces they showed their hand too soon. They expressed the conviction that it would be refused. If ever there was a case of the wish being father to the thought it is here.

If ever there was an argument that the application should be accepted it is here.

The very newspapers that built up Hitler, that applauded Munich, that opposed the Soviet Union until 1942, that wanted to declare war on the Soviet Union in 1939, that opposed the Second Front in Europe in 1942, that opposed coal rationing, and that now oppose the Beveridge Report—these are the same newspapers that now ask the Labour

Party to refuse the affiliation of the Communist Party.

Why? We suggest that the rank and file of the Labour Party as well as its leaders would do well to think on this.

But let us take another aspect of the situation—that of the international Labour movement. Only in the countries engaged in the present titanic struggle against Fascism can we say there are really legal representative Labour movements in existence, with the full opportunity of carrying out their various activities. They are the countries described in every article and speech by whatever orator or writer as "The United Nations." It is war that has brought these nations together for the first time. Has this no moral or lesson for the British Labour movement? And would not any steps taken to achieve unity in the British Labour movement have profound effects upon the Labour movement all over the world?

In all other lands, the working-class movement is not only illegal, but also those who carry out its work are subject to the most frightful penalties. Yet it is also this experience which has forced Social Democrats, Communists, trade unionists and co-operators to unite in a manner that, tragically enough, they never found possible to achieve in peace time.

We suggest that these facts have now to be taken into account when considering the question of the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

Why? Because we have no doubt, this once achieved, there would open out great possibilities for the unification of the entire international Labour movement, to which, because of the special position that Britain holds in world affairs, we have a serious responsibility. No one can deny that once unity were established in the British Labour movement, it would have enormous effects throughout the rest of the international Labour movement. It is these great considerations which have also prompted our application for affiliation. We urge that they should be taken into account by all concerned.

The times are far too serious for political wise-cracking and scoring off each other. Far too serious for letting the past determine the future, when it is the pre-

sent that counts and can alone really determine what kind of future is in front for the British people.

We do not want here to take up space in analysing the present war crisis; that will have been done in other pages of *LABOUR MONTHLY*. But we do feel it necessary to point out that while it is true that the United Nations have passed from the defensive to the offensive, while great victories have been achieved in Africa and the Soviet Union, the main battles are still in front of us. The war has not yet been won. The victory is *not* "in the bag."

But we would be fools also, if we do not understand that the Soviet victories do not arouse the same hopes in all hearts as they do in those of the common people. Already the dark forces of reaction are more active than ever throwing spanners into the machinery of the United Nations. They will increase their dirty work as the Red Army advances. They will seek out every opportunity of trying to sabotage a tremendous victory in which the Soviet Union will have played such a dominant part.

This is why it is more true than ever before that vigilance and unity are the price of victory in the war and in the peace. This is why at this historic moment in world history nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of carefully considering any proposal that aims to eliminate divisions in Labour's ranks and to unite all its principal sections in defence of the interests of the common people. No alleged "insuperable differences in principle" ought to be manufactured to prevent that unity being established which alone can safeguard all democratic and socialist principles from the menace of Fascism, and give them the hope of triumph in the future.

The affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party would help strengthen real national unity; would strengthen Labour's leadership and authority in the counsels of the Government and the nation as a whole; would make possible united organised political campaigns of a type that would greatly develop the will to

victory and the selfless determination that it shall be achieved in 1943; would result in an all round strengthening of the trade unions, co-operatives, individual membership both of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. It would have as one of its most important effects the realisation that the political unity that had been achieved should also be worked for inside the trade union movement to try to end the many divisions which still exist as between the craft, industrial and general workers' unions.

Unity in the British Labour movement would have a tremendous effect in stimulating the activity of the workers in every country enslaved by Fascism.

These are the reasons why we hope that our application will be seriously discussed in the factories, trade unions, local Labour parties, co-operative societies and guilds, by the District and Executive Committees of trade unions and trades councils.

This is why we hope that the Executive Committee of the Labour Party will arrange to meet representatives of the Communist Party to discuss the application, to allow both sides to get together so that common discussion and exchange of opinion could result in a position being reached where the Executive Council of the Labour Party would then recommend to its annual conference at Whitsuntide that the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party should be accepted.

We close on this note. In 1881, Frederick Engels, commenting on the growing strength of the British Labour movement, used these words:—

There is no power in the world which could resist the British working class as an organised body.

If that was true then, how truer it could be to-day, when on the background of all past experience and struggles, and fortified by the growing strength of the working class, if every ounce of energy we possess was bent on securing the maximum possible unity between all sections of the working-class movement in Britain.

*Readers should note that the period during which payment would be made for returned copies of the LABOUR MONTHLY 1921 to 1941 has now expired*