

A Final Word on Unity

by HARRY POLLITT

IT is possible that when the Labour Party Conference meets on June 14, the new decisive battles of the war will already have opened out. From all that has been said, both by the leaders of the United Nations and by the Fascist Powers, it is clear that the outcome of the war will be decided by the character of the struggles of the summer and autumn of 1943.

The deliberations of the Labour Party Conference are, therefore, of overwhelming importance, for in the last analysis it is the organised workers who have it in their power to determine the course of the present struggle and the successful solution, in the interests of the common people, of the inevitable problems that will arise when the victory has been won.

It is no exaggeration to say that one of the most important questions before the Labour Party Conference is that of the Communist Party application for affiliation to the Labour Party. This question is vital to the present and future of all that the labour movement stands for. It is the issue of Unity—the coming together of every section of the organised working-class movement from which unity can grow and extend throughout every sphere of the movement.

On no other issue affecting Labour has there been such political discussion, such controversy and press publicity, and such a large number of resolutions (over 3,000 at the time of writing, in support of affiliation, from every section of the labour, trade union and co-operative movement).

These figures are all the more significant, because it is common knowledge that in the case of certain trade unions, whose leaders are opposed to affiliation, their trade union branches hardly ever meet; and also because of one of the most disquieting aspects of the situation in the Labour Party, Trade Unions and Co-operative Guilds, is the serious falling off in attendance at the traditional weekly, fortnightly, or monthly branch meetings.

The whole of this support for Communist affiliation represents, therefore, something new and phenomenal in British working-class politics. It reveals the mass instinct for the necessity of Unity, whatever may have been the political differences in the past; it represents the firm acceptance of the pledges given by the Communist Party in applying for affiliation to the Labour Party, and the conviction that alleged present difficulties could speedily be overcome, if open negotiations had taken place, or were to take place, between the leaders of the Labour and Communist Parties.

Those who are supporting affiliation are precisely that active and politically-minded section of the labour movement who are its basic foundation, who carry on the life and activity of the labour movement despite all the difficulties of war-time conditions. Their support for Communist affiliation proves that they and those they represent have learnt the political lesson of the past decade of Fascism: that this menace can only be eliminated for ever on the basis of a united working-class.

This is why the Transport House campaign of distortion, misrepresentation and slander against the Communist Party has not been able to succeed in its objective of preventing the growth of the mass movement in our support.

Every conceivable red herring has been brought out; deliberate misrepresentation of the Communist Party attitude to the first stage of the war; complete silence about the refusal of the Labour leaders to adopt the policy of the United Front against Fascism which could have prevented war ever breaking out; undisguised efforts to destroy among the British workers any conception of, or belief in, the meaning of real Internationalism, in order to cover up the fact that the Labour leaders have even destroyed their own Labour and Socialist International, as Fredrick Adler pointed out in his Memorandum of June, 1939 (a document, by the way, that the Labour Party has not yet made available to its membership).

There have been thinly disguised attacks on the social system of the U.S.S.R., its methods of government and leadership, which all the tributes to the heroism of the Red Army do not cover up. There have been open threats to split the Labour Party, by certain trade union leaders, if the coming Labour Party Conference accepts our affiliation.

Yet despite this barrage of propaganda—a barrage such as has never been organised for any other political campaign but that of opposing Unity—Transport House cannot damp down the rising demand from the best sections of its present affiliated membership, that the Labour Party should be strengthened by the affiliation of the Communist Party.

There is one thing that stands out from the official arguments of the Labour Party Executive Committee against our affiliation. It is that the real basis of their opposition has not yet been openly stated.

None of the arguments noted above is the real reason, nor is their opposition due

to a fear of "political difficulties" arising because the Communist Party, being in a numerical minority, would have to carry out policy decisions with which it might disagree.

The real opposition is based on the knowledge that the unity of thought and action brought about in the entire labour movement by Communist affiliation would mean that majority decisions could be in the direction of a real working-class policy, ceaseless political campaigning, and all round recruitment to every section of the labour movement.

It is the knowledge that Communist affiliation would immediately open out new perspectives for the whole labour movement. Those Labour leaders who organise the opposition to unity do so because they tend to be content with things as they are, and are afraid of the new strength and power that would come to Labour. They realise the new character that would be given to the Labour Party, cutting right across the pre-war policies of co-operation with capitalism and the hopes that the present necessary co-operation could become a permanent feature of Labour Party policy. They realise that it would mean the development of the Labour Party as an active political force, defending the daily interests of the masses inside and outside of Parliament, and consciously linking this with the ceaseless fight for Socialism. Such a perspective does not conform to the political outlook and practice of these Labour leaders.

Communist affiliation would mean a united working-class fighting force throughout the country; a more united and powerful trade union movement; a stronger Co-operative movement more closely linked with the Labour Party and Trade Unions than at present. At once this would strengthen the real national unity of all those who genuinely seek to overthrow Fascism, and thus help to organise fully the total resources of Britain for the speediest victory over Fascism, on the basis of its unconditional surrender,

ensuring a People's Peace and affording the guarantees that post-war problems will be solved in the interests of the common people and not of big business and monopoly.

Moreover, it would lay the foundation upon which a more united and powerful international labour movement could be built.

These new perspectives for Labour—in the full meaning of the term—make the opposition of Transport House to Communist affiliation not only indefensible but extremely dangerous—not for the Communist Party, but for the Labour Party and its affiliated membership and organisations.

One of the most persistent opponents of Communist affiliation, Mr. Arthur Deakin, Acting Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, speaking at Luton on May 6, gave, perhaps unconsciously, the most powerful support to our case for working-class unity when he said:—

Any failure on our part as a trade union or labour movement to face up to our responsibilities would be the greatest act of treachery to our comrades in Europe and Asia who have suffered so much.

That is our case for Unity in a nutshell, and we hope that Mr. Deakin will remember his own words when it comes to registering the very important vote of his Union at the Labour Party Conference.

Previous articles in the *LABOUR MONTHLY* by R. Palme Dutt have traced the historical development of the Labour Party, shown its rise and its present decline, and proved that if the Labour Party is to realise the aims of the old pioneers it can only do so when the Communist Party is affiliated to it, bringing that new outlook, vigour and enthusiasm that represent new life, and not decay.

The Labour Party Conference will reveal many serious political divisions, arising, not from healthy growth and development, but from the grave decline in the Labour Party as a fighting political force and leadership. The electoral truce, participation in a National Government,

alarm at the support given to Common Wealth candidates in by-elections, are in reality not the basis of the present unrest in the Labour Party. They are only the focal points around which the divisions will manifest themselves.

At root, these divisions arise from complete lack of faith in the working-class, and from the absence of the scientific theory and practice known as Marxism. This explains the last twenty years of Labour Party history—its bans and expulsions of Communists, the failure of two Labour Governments, the rejection of policies that could have prevented war, the decline in individual sections of the Labour Party, and the present opposition to Communist affiliation. These are the direct results of the refusal to build up a Labour Party truly representative of every section of the organised labour movement.

In short, the Labour Party Conference has to decide, not the future of the Communist Party, but through its attitude to Communist affiliation the future of the Labour Party itself.

We do not believe the legend about the dominance of the Labour Party by a few trade union leaders representing very big organisations, because the same upsurge and demand for Unity that is expressing itself inside the Labour Party is also at work in the Trade Unions and Co-operative movement. In fact, it is even stronger inside the trade unions than it is in many of the local and divisional organisations of the Labour Party itself. Very profound changes have taken place and will continue to take place on an increasing scale in the Trade Unions of this country. Think of the position a few years ago in relation to Arthur Horner, Joe Scott, Wal Hannington, Bert Pappworth, and Abe Moffatt. Then think of the positions of Trade Union trust and responsibility they occupy at the present time. Is it not significant that in every case these Communist leaders have been elected by record votes of their trade union membership?

What case can be made out to justify depriving the miners, engineers, transport workers and other important sections of the working-class or the service these same leaders could give to the Labour Party just as effectively as they are serving the trade union movement? How can these leaders be loyal to the Trade Unions and disloyal to the Labour Party?

There is another point that may be worth making, in reference to the threat of Mr. Dukes, General Secretary of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, that certain unions would have to consider leaving the Labour Party in the event of Communist affiliation being accepted. This is a line of policy that has also been advocated in certain reactionary sections of the Roman Catholic press. This new interpretation of "democracy," that you remain in the Labour Party so long as you get all that you want, and leave it immediately you cannot get your own way, is one that will be sternly repudiated by the rank and file of the Labour Party and its affiliated organisations.

We are sure that the Labour Party Conference will not be intimidated by threats of this kind. They were made at the Trades Union Congress at Blackpool last year, during the discussion on the T.U.C. education policy. Those who made them got small satisfaction. The Labour Party proved in 1931 that it knows how to deal with those who are not prepared to conform to majority decisions, and what happened to MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas, might with profit be considered by people like Mr. Charles Dukes. The workers have paid too heavy a price for disunity to allow any Trade Union leader, however self-important and opined he may be, to split any section of the labour movement.

The campaign for affiliation has already produced many important results, of a permanent educational political character. It has brought increased class consciousness to tens of thousands of younger men

and women in the Labour Party, and a better understanding of the role of the working-class in British politics. It has given them a more intimate knowledge of the history of their own labour movement, and has increased the feeling of strength and power that unity can bring to the movement as a whole. It has aroused a steadily increasing international interest—in the United States, in all the British Dominions, in India, and among every section of foreign Socialist exiles now living in London; and there is no doubt that when affiliation is won it will have a profound effect on the entire international labour movement.

These facts emphasise the importance of the tremendous issues that Communist affiliation raises, and the service that the Communist Party has rendered to the whole movement in so energetically campaigning for their realisation. But it may be time to emphasise also this point, that the issue of Unity in Britain is one that will only, and can only, be settled in Britain.

In the February issue of the *LABOUR MONTHLY*, in writing on the relations of the Labour Party and the Communist Party, I said:—

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.

Every political event that has happened since February has only served to strengthen the correctness of that analysis. Those who are not prepared to face it render grave disservice to the whole cause of Labour.

We make no magic claim for the Communist Party, but we know for a certainty the new hope and enthusiasm that would be generated throughout the labour movement, and in the Labour Party in particular, if the first step to unity was realised by Communist affiliation.

The issue is as urgent as the situation. I write this article on May 10 in full understanding that there will have been the most profound changes in the entire situation at home and abroad by the time the Labour Party Conference opens on June 14.

Britain will have many eye-openers this year. Sacrifice and struggle will have taken on a new meaning for every one of us, and the people are ready and willing to do and give all that the victory will demand. The more united they are and the stronger their leadership, the shorter the war and the more decisive will be both the victory and the peace. That is why the present process of disintegration of the Labour Party, caused because the Communist Party is not affiliated to it, must be ended.

One other point needs to be touched upon. After the titanic struggle that must still be waged to win this war, no country in the world will have so many difficult problems to solve as Britain. Because there is to-day a certain measure of unity in defeating Fascism, that does not mean the automatic end of imperialist rivalries and contradictions. The British working-class will need a stronger, more powerful and more united labour movement than the workers have ever contemplated, and

one that has the closest possible association with the workers of all lands.

A very great deal of time will be spent at the Labour Party Conference in preparing for post-war planning, in demands that the Government shall declare where it stands in relation to post-war reconstruction; but Labour itself must plan, not on the basis of blue-prints for polite parliamentary discussion and debate, but for the serious use of that power of the working-class that will leave the issue in no doubt. A united labour movement is the only hope of the British people; its achievement rests upon the organised working class. The Communist Party is an integral part of this class; it cannot be separated and isolated from it.

Our country, in common with the rest of the United Nations, stands on the eve of the greatest conflicts in world history. Arrayed against the United Nations are the forces of Fascism, partly weakened, yet still tremendously strong and powerful. Their one hope of evading their complete and unconditional surrender is that they may divide the United Nations. If ever there was a time when the labour movement should set the example of unity in the fight against Fascism, it is now.

The complete defeat of Fascism, the achievement of a People's Peace, and the opening of real possibilities of marching towards Socialism—those are the common aims of the Labour Party and of the Communist Party. It is to help make our contribution towards the speediest realisation of these aims that we apply for affiliation to the Labour Party.

The Editor of LABOUR MONTHLY will be very glad to receive contributions in the form of finished articles or of suggestions and data for articles. The customary proviso must be made that no responsibility is undertaken for manuscripts sent to him nor can he promise to enter into correspondence regarding contributions not accepted.

The articles in the LABOUR MONTHLY are indexed in the International Index to Periodicals, New York City, U.S.A., as well as in the annual index in each December issue.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES : 12 months 7s., 6 months 3s. 6d. Postage paid.