

WHAT NEXT IN BRITAIN ?

By HARRY POLLITT

IN any discussion on the present policy of British Imperialism, note has to be taken that changes in the National Government since Baldwin retired have been, and are, aimed at strengthening the reactionary policy for which the National Government has stood ever since its formation in 1931.

Immediately Chamberlain became Prime Minister, he commenced directly to intervene in foreign affairs, and this intervention was recognised both in the British and Foreign press as being of an important character. It is to be noted also, that the transfer of Sir Samuel Hoare to Secretary for Home Affairs, has a significance, in the sense that this indicates a strengthening of reaction in Britain itself.

At the moment when the press is full of the so-called "firm line" that Britain is now showing in regard to piracy in the Mediterranean, it appears that there is a tendency to believe that the National Government is changing a little its previous pro-Fascist attitude. We believe that this interpretation is an entirely mistaken one. Undoubtedly, important sections of British imperialists are alarmed at the menace to British interests in South China and in the Mediterranean, but the question has only to be asked—what attitude would the National Government have taken if the British Ambassador in Shanghai had been injured by a bomb from a Soviet aeroplane, or if British ships had been sunk in the Mediterranean by Soviet submarines, and that to be contrasted with the inaction demonstrated by the National Government towards Japan and Italy, to see the situation in its correct light.

Britain may now *appear* to be taking a firmer line, but we must have no illusions. It is only to protect *her* immediate interests and will not alter the fundamental line of the Government's foreign policy, even though the Nyon agreement is a very important step forward, both from a political and practical viewpoint.

It is vital to recall at this moment how, immediately Chamberlain became Prime Minister, his first act was to send secret letters to Mussolini—letters which we were assured were of a particularly "warm and friendly character." The world press immediately recognised the importance of this interchange of correspondence, and it needs to be borne in mind at the present time when people are in danger of being deceived by the so-called stronger attitude that is now being taken towards Italy. It

needs also to be remembered that, in spite of the insult commented on by the British press, when Von Neurath cancelled his visit to London at the time of the cruiser Leipzig incident in the Mediterranean in July, Chamberlain renewed the invitation in particularly cordial terms.

British Imperialism, for generations, has fundamentally always had a consistent and very obvious line in all its foreign policy, in spite of certain apparent contradictions and vacillations. This policy is to oppose all popular and revolutionary movements, however much its real rôle may have been disguised, and it has always inspired and on occasions directly led the suppression of such movements. The record of British Imperialism in the Empire ; its treatment of colonial peoples, and its action during the critical years of the Russian Revolution from 1917-20—is ample proof of this. Since its direct intervention against the Soviet Union was put a stop to by the equally direct intervention of the British working class as typified by the strike on the “Jolly George” in May, 1920, British Imperialism has always supported those powers in Europe which it felt would be the vanguard of attacks on the Soviet Union. The proof of this is to be seen in its attitude towards Japan’s conquest of Manchuria ; in its support of Hitler’s rearmament after refusing the right of a democratic Germany to rearm from the time of the Versailles Treaty down to the time Hitler came to power. It has carried forward its policy of support for Japan in the Far East, and Germany in the West, under the slogans of —“supporting bulwarks against Bolshevism in the Far East and West.”

The National Government having financed, armed and given valuable political support to Hitler, now attempts to use this very rearmament of Nazi Germany as the pretext to launch an armaments programme itself, so vast that it has intensified the world race in armaments to an unprecedented extent.

All serious minded people recognise that Britain was responsible for the betrayal of Abyssinia, a betrayal that, as we shall show later, is bound to have further serious repercussions in the international situation.

The policy of the National Government in regard to the Fascist attack on Spain has surely demonstrated the whole character of its policy and its desire to do everything in its power to strengthen reactionary and Fascist attacks against popular movements. It was responsible for forcing non-intervention on France ; it was the first Government to declare that volunteers for the International Brigade were illegal. In fact, the National Government has pursued its pro-Franco policy to such an extent that Britain, whose proud boast used to be that it was “Mistress of the Seas,” has allowed its Navy to become the laughing stock of the world and the subject of cheap music-hall jokes ; it has even put one of its key fortresses in the Mediterranean—Gibraltar—in great jeopardy. It was left to a tramp steamer under Captain “Potato” Jones to reveal to the

people of Britain the lies that were told in Parliament about the entrances to Bilbao being mined and not safe for British shipping.

What then is the basis of the foreign policy of the National Government in relation to the present situation in Spain in particular ?

Some of the most reactionary of Britain's imperialists, like Sir Auckland Geddes, have not hesitated to declare quite recently that British interests in Spain are far safer under Franco than under the Spanish Government.

Furthermore, we believe that the National Government desires the defeat of the Spanish Government in the hope that repercussions in France would strengthen reaction there and lead to the defeat of the People's Front Government. Only children in politics refuse to believe, for example, that the Bank of England and the National Government, too, have not more than a direct interest in some phases of the financial crises that occur from time to time and which have threatened the stability of the People's Front Government in France.

British imperialists undoubtedly hope that with the defeat of the People's Front Government in France, a Government of the Right would come to power with whom Britain could work in closer co-operation, especially towards its main aim in foreign policy—the formation of a Western Regional Pact and the separation of France from the U.S.S.R.

Alongside this it has to be noted that well-informed capitalist opinion in Britain has no hesitation in declaring that decisions have been reached by the Government to recognise the conquest of Abyssinia. Alarm is being expressed in important sections of the Peace Movement in Britain at the substantial rumours that are circulating in political circles about the desire of the National Government to revise the League of Nations—especially those articles of the Covenant which provide for sanctions against an aggressor, in such a way as to facilitate the return to the League of Japan, Italy and Germany.

Because of this combination of factors, Britain undoubtedly occupies the key point in the international situation. In the same way the position of the democratic and peace forces in Britain who are opposed to the policy of the National Government, is of interest to the peace and democratic movements through the whole world. But what is the position in Britain at the present time ? Just as divisions amongst democratic states in Europe prevent a common policy being carried out that would restrain Fascist aggression and safeguard peace, so divisions in the Labour and Peace Movements in Britain prevent the organisation of a really formidable common front against the whole line of policy of the National Government. This weakness is a source of political strength to the National Government, and it is responsible for the present strong position it undoubtedly enjoys in the country.

This is fully reflected in all parliamentary by-elections at the moment. Labour's vote is declining or stagnant, while nearly 50 per cent. of the population who are entitled to vote in these by-elections are refraining from doing so. The Tory Press openly scoff at the position of Labour as revealed in election results.

Of all the possibilities of politics, the swing of the pendulum used to be accounted the most certain. A Government in office, though it might be of all the talents, though its administration might be brilliantly successful, was bound to expect that by-elections would go against it, that there would be a big turnover of votes to the other side. The result of the election at Springburn confirms the lesson taught by the 36 others since 1935, that the pendulum has ceased to swing.

Of the 37 by-elections to this Parliament the Government have won 25, the Socialists nine and Independents three. The preponderance of votes given to the Government is not less striking. Most significant of all is the diminution in the Opposition polls. It has been the exception for a Socialist or Liberal candidate to win even as many votes as his predecessors received in 1935. So far from making any recovery from their overwhelming defeat of that year, both Opposition parties show a further decline. It is clear that the Government now commands an even greater measure of confidence than when an overwhelming majority was given it by the country. (*Daily Telegraph*, September 9, 1937.)

It is clear that there is no definite distinction between the policy of the National Government and those who claim to be in opposition to it, and this is reflected in the abstention of 50 per cent. of the electorate.

In the Labour Movement itself, acute divisions are taking place in regard to the Arms policy of the National Government. In July, 1936, it was quite correctly argued by the Labour Party that the foreign policy of the National Government was of such a character, that it was impossible for the Parliamentary Labour Party to vote for the Arms Estimates in Parliament. In July, 1937, however, when the foreign policy of the Government has become even more reactionary, and when the international situation has reached a most critical point, the Parliamentary Labour Party, by a narrow majority of 6, decide to abstain from voting on the Arms Estimates in Parliament. The Trades Union Congress has adopted a statement of policy, the essence of which is, that while critical of the Government's foreign policy, support must be given to rearmament. The same statement will feature prominently in the Labour Party Conference discussions at Bournemouth.

We have to take note of the fact that even those who oppose supporting the Government's rearmament programme because they disagree with the foreign policy of the Government, are as yet hostile to any suggestion of developing Unity within the Labour Movement, or taking any positive steps that can attract to the support of the Labour Movement the big mass of democratic and progressive opinion which certainly exists in Britain. No one in leading circles of the Labour Party has the slightest belief in

the possibility of a Labour Government being elected at the next General Election, nor if the truth were known, any desire that such a Government should be elected, because of the character of the responsibilities that power would involve.

It is this situation therefore which renders the position of the mass movement of the workers in Great Britain so important to the whole international Labour Movement. It is this situation that demands the ceaseless campaign for Unity and for the gathering together of all the Labour, democratic and peace forces of Britain, so that an effective common fight can be waged against every aspect of the National Government's policy.

We have no doubt at all that if such a common front is built up, mass pressure can soon bring about changes in the policy of the Government. We have no doubt that the present fatalism and defeatism which is rampant amongst the opposition forces can be ended, and that the pressure of the masses would soon lead to entirely different perspectives being opened out than exist at the present time. The forces against the National Government would prepare the way for its defeat at the next General Election and result in the return of a majority of Labour and democratic members to Parliament, who could form a Government which would at once transform the situation at home and abroad.

Such a Government could immediately improve the economic and social position of the masses of the people ; it could repeal the anti-democratic legislation which the Tories have been responsible for introducing ; and it could, by the whole character of its foreign policy, strengthen the peace forces in Europe and safeguard democracy. And if it was found on examination that the collective resources of the powers interested in peace and not war were insufficient to restrain Fascist aggression, such a Government would immediately receive the fullest support for any increase of armaments necessary to defend peace.

In building up the unity necessary to achieve these aims the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party becomes a vital question which cannot be relegated to conferences two years hence. The Fascist aggression and war preparations will not stand still for two years ; the National Government will not suspend its attacks on the working class, through the present policy of rising prices and increased exploitation, for two years ; and the common interests of all sections of the working-class movement demand the all-round strengthening of the Labour Party, a strengthening to which the affiliation of the Communist Party would in no small measure help to contribute.

The working-class forces of Britain must not neglect other sections of the population willing to unite against reaction. Such people as those associated with the professions, the small shopkeepers and business men,

the small farmers—all these people are profoundly disturbed at the present situation. They see no hope ahead. They have watched their standards slowly worsened and are trying to find a way out from their exploitation by the big Trusts and Bankers, from the burdens that rearmament is placing on them. It is from these sections of the population that big sacrifices will be demanded if war breaks out, in the sense that their husbands and sons will be amongst the first to be conscripted.

While conditions may not yet be ripe for the developing of a People's Front movement in Britain, because the development of differentiation in the older political parties has not yet reached a point where dissatisfaction with present policies has given place to a firm determination to pool all resources in a common fight against the National Government, nevertheless a basis of co-operation is undoubtedly possible of achievement in many phases of the current struggle against the policy of the big Trusts, Bankers and National Government.

A further important point in the policy to be adopted by the mass movement in its struggle to overthrow the National Government arises in connection with elections, Municipal and Parliamentary.

All splitting the working class and progressive vote must be avoided so that every reactionary candidate and every supporter of the National Government can be defeated. In this connection the coming November Municipal Elections will have a special significance, for it is quite possible that the National Government will launch a General Election after these November elections because of the confusion and division within the Labour Movement. The Municipal Elections will act as a political barometer of the country.

The successful carrying out of this line of policy, so essential for the maintenance of democracy and peace and the improvement of the position of the mass of the people, demands a strengthening of the whole political life of the working class movement ; it demands more collective thinking, discussion and leadership, more effective linking up of the daily struggle against capitalism with the final aim of the working class ; it demands the raising of the ideological level of the Communist Party and the whole Labour Movement by the wide popularisation of the principles of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

The mass propaganda of Marxism is one of the most urgent tasks that have to be undertaken in the present situation. So many people are perplexed and in doubt ; confusion is so rampant and at the same time the interest in Marxism was never so widespread.

In the struggle against the open class enemy and those false policies within the Labour Movement which have led to the present situation it

occupies, the satisfaction of the hunger for learning is one of the most important weapons.

At the same time the mass movement must exercise vigilance against the penetration into its ranks of elements of an unstable and unsatisfactory character ; thus it will be able to carry out a much more effective fight against the counter-revolutionary policy of Trotskyism.

Our immediate aim is to defeat the National Government. This defeat would give new hope and confidence in the prospects of a better life for the majority of the British people. A Government whose policy was firmly grounded in its intention to maintain peace and democracy could transform the entire international situation ; at the same time as it was hemming in the Fascist aggressors it would be strengthening the struggle against Fascism itself, especially the struggle of the German and Italian peoples, and would be opening up the way for an all round advance towards the Socialist state of society.

If the workers of Great Britain took more serious note of international experiences, and of the successes of mass movements in other lands, if they drew more attention to the amazing achievements of socialist construction in the Soviet Union, the fight for unity would be very definitely strengthened and its aim nearer success.

We are confident that the tactics outlined in this article can be fulfilled. Let us end with a quotation from Dimitrov at the 7th Congress, which time and time again should be studied in order to breathe into our work that note of confidence and inspiration which is sometimes dulled by the intricate character and difficulties of the situation. The words are as follows :

To us, the workers, and not to the social parasites and idlers, belongs the world—a world built by the hands of the workers. The present rulers of the capitalist world are but temporary rulers.

The proletariat is the real master, to-morrow's master of the world. And it must enter upon its historical rights, take into its hands the reins of government in every country, all over the world.

We are disciples of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin. We should be worthy of our great teachers.

With Stalin at their head the millions of our political army, overcoming all difficulties and courageously breaking through all barriers, must and will level to the ground the fortress of capitalism and achieve the victory of socialism through the whole world.