

THE BRADFORD I.L.P. CONFERENCE AND AFTER

By HARRY POLLITT

AT the Bradford Conference of the I.L.P., attempts will be made to repeat the old game of the left wing of the reformist Labour Party of trying to deceive the workers into believing that disaffiliation from the Labour Party means a break in the reformist policy of the I.L.P.

It is not the first time that this thunder has been heard ; it will not be the last ; but it takes place at a most critical moment in the history of the working-class movement, when the capitalists are planning greater attacks upon the workers' standards than have ever been attempted before, preparing to launch these at a moment when, in spite of the disorganising rôle of the reformists, the workers in economic struggles, mass demonstrations and battles with the police are slowly building up their fighting united front against hunger and war.

When the Communist Party was fighting for affiliation to the Labour Party, not on the basis of affinity of aims and objective but on the basis of the constitution of the Party at that time, and with the firm intention of carrying out a merciless fight against the whole practice and policy of reformism as expressed both by the Labour Party and the I.L.P., the delegates of the latter Party always used to oppose the fight of the Communist Party for affiliation. Their reasons were in keeping with the tactics of the I.L.P., namely, that once there had been a complete repudiation of any connections between the Labour Party and the Communist Party, once the taint of "Moscow's dictation" had been removed from the Labour Movement, the way was clear for the I.L.P. to come forward as a "real left-wing," conforming to all the traditions of the British working class movement: "no dictation from outside," "no harsh discipline," but a perfectly gentlemanly left-wing that could keep the leftward-moving workers from the Communist Party.

How experience itself has shattered this fond hope ! How the big schemes of "bold policies," of "forward moves," of "sane treatment of purely British issues" carried out in accordance with the "special peculiarities and circumstances of the British Labour Movement" have all revealed themselves in their revolting nakedness !

The I.L.P. has never been a revolutionary opposition inside the Labour Party, but it has suited the politicians of the Labour Party to

pretend that it has in order to deceive the workers and hold them back from the Communist Party.

Now, with the deepening of the crisis and the sharpening of the attacks on the workers, a growing radicalisation of the workers is taking place, profound discontent is manifesting itself, and this is the moment when the I.L.P. choose to make the break with the Labour Party.

The same I.L.P. that now declares it must break with the Labour Party never made a fight against the Labour Government during its period of office. Did not Maxton himself declare at the Birmingham Conference of the I.L.P. in 1931 that if he had to form another Labour Cabinet it would not be very different from the one that was in power? Did not the I.L.P. urge the workers to return another Labour Government at the last election? And don't they now urge the workers to return a third Labour Government? The Labour Party is not one whit different now from what it was then when it was openly carrying through its line against the working class with all the authority and support of the capitalist class, but the I.L.P. did not break then. And they are not going to break now in the sense of a complete break with the line of reformism.

What they are banking on is that the so-called "break," the sham that they now represent an "independent political force," will give them a bigger backing amongst the workers and will retard the workers finding their way to Communism. Does anyone who knows the Labour Movement believe for a single moment that this tactic is not being carried out with the knowledge and tacit sanction of the Labour Party chiefs?

Look how the game is played. Here is an extract from the call of Maxton and Brockway to the members of the I.L.P. in connection with the Bradford Conference :

Under these circumstances, no course is open to Socialists who realise the necessity for an uncompromising policy of resistance to the worsening of working class conditions and of decisive change from Capitalism to Socialism, except to break with the Labour Party.

The National Council of the I.L.P. will now proceed to call a special conference at Bradford on July 30 and 31, and will lay proposals before it for the reorganisation of the I.L.P. as a completely independent political force, with a programme and policy appealing to all Socialists who realise the necessity for a break with the past and a new approach to the future.

A. FENNER BROCKWAY

(Chairman of the I.L.P.)

JAMES MAXTON

(Chairman of the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group).

Just note the language used: "a decisive change from Capitalism to Socialism," "the reorganisation of the I.L.P. as a completely independent political force" . . . "appealing to all Socialists who realise the necessity

for a break with the past and a new approach to the future," while only a few weeks before, Brockway writes in the *New Leader*, the official organ of the I.L.P., as follows :

The I.L.P. accepts the objective of the Labour Party—Socialism—and, in general, its programme. There are isolated issues upon which we differ in that programme. But on the major issues we accept it.

—Fenner Brockway (*New Leader*, May 20, 1932).

Talk about three card and confidence tricks, the leaders of the I.L.P. have got them all beat ! But the point we need to stress is that Brockway is right when he says there is complete agreement " on the major issues." What are the " major issues " ? They are the vital questions, for they are : *how will the workers conquer power ? How will they unite in class action now to resist the capitalist offensive ? They are the denial of the workers' revolution, of the workers' dictatorship. They are the denial of every class issue and every aspect of the class struggle that alone can lead to the building up of the workers' strength and power so that through revolution the workers can conquer power, can dispossess the ruling class, can give freedom and independence to the colonial peoples, can, in short, commence the task of building up a free Socialist Britain.*

This is the crux of the question, not the namby-pamby phrases that are the stock-in-trade of the Maxtons and Brockways. The latter writes a pamphlet, called " *The Coming Revolution,*" in which we find such a statement :

Every sincere pacifist must, therefore, be a Socialist, and cannot be indifferent to a struggle to replace Capitalism by Socialism. His duty is to contribute to the revolution a technique in which the main method will be not armed conflict, but action by the working class to take control over industry in their disciplined strength.

And so one could go on giving quotation after quotation showing that the line of the I.L.P. is that of reformism, having no fundamental differences with the Labour Party, but using cunning language to disguise its real political line and policy.

The trouble that many workers find is to pin this slippery bunch down. Everything under the sun is covered by them ; every week in the *New Leader* the most amazing variety of statements are made by the leaders of the I.L.P. and, as I tried to point out in my recent debate with Brockway, this is no accidental carelessness but a deliberate policy of creating confusion in order to disorganise the workers' fight. When their own members get tired of trying to find out the real meaning of all the talk about a revolutionary policy, no answer is given to their questions. For example, in connection with some of the recent statements of the leaders of his Party regarding the anti-war campaign, a member of the I.L.P. wrote as follows to the *New Leader* :

REVOLUTIONARY ACTION.

To what lengths are the leaders of the I.L.P. prepared to go? Do they realise that ultimately the only way really to stop war on the Soviet Union is by Civil War against the Home Government, resulting in Workers' States, lending support to the Union? What are their intentions? At present the vaguenesses to action increases in direct proportion to the growth of the "revolutionary tempo."

This is not good enough! As a rank and file I demand clarity as to the policy to be adopted, I demand, moreover, words whose meaning cannot be misunderstood, not ambiguous phrases that may be interpreted as desired.

—Max Nichols (*New Leader*, July 1, 1932.)

Here are some direct questions asked not by Communists but by their own members. Was an answer given? Was this member clearly told what the policy was, what was meant by the revolutionary phrases that were being so freely used? He was not.

Another trick that is always being worked is that of sham support for the workers in their economic struggles while protesting that these do not go far enough, that what is wanted is a more vigorous drive for Socialism. Typical examples of this are two recent Editorial Notes on the fight of the cotton and railway workers.

I.L.P. AND COTTON.

The I.L.P. must continue to encourage resistance to the cuts and to the tyranny of the employers; but it must also point out to the cotton workers that they are doomed under Capitalism and that a thorough-going to Socialism is their only hope.

(Editorial, *New Leader*, July 1, 1932.)

I.L.P. AND RAILWAYMEN.

Whilst we welcome every sign of resistance to worsened conditions, all railwaymen must realise that their only hope lies in the socialisation of transport, in combination with the socialisation of finance, industry, and wealth. The rationalisation of industry should mean shorter working hours and an improvement of conditions. It will not mean that within competitive Capitalism.

(Editorial Notes, *New Leader*, July 8, 1932.)

The building up of the workers' resistance to wage cuts, &c., is the fight for Socialism. The fight to develop the unity, power, leadership and organisation that alone can lead to the overthrow of capitalism and the Socialist reorganisation of industry is only possible through the daily class struggles against every phase of the capitalist offensive, and this is completely and deliberately missed out of these leads of the I.L.P.

What does this result in objectively? *It gives the lead to the fighting workers that nothing can be done now, that struggle against daily attacks is useless*, but it is carried out under the cloak of high-sounding phrases about a "a thorough going to Socialism" (whatever that means), giving

the impression that this magic formula is the way out of the problems confronting the workers, apart entirely from their daily fight and struggles.

Brockway, in his article on "The Coming Revolution" and what should be done, writes :

How is the struggle to be met? By a series of struggles by one trade union branch after another in isolation, by a united struggle to maintain the present working hours and wages? Both are doomed to failure. (*New Leader*, January, 8 1932.)

What is to be done by the miners living on starvation wages, deprived of the seven-hour day, the railwaymen menaced by the Pooling System, the dockers attacked on conditions that are vital; the millions of unemployed rendered desperate by the Means Test; the cotton workers living under a reign of police terror and incessant attacks by the employers, in face of this lead of the I.L.P.?

Brockway tells them in the same article, where he writes :

The struggle of the working class must, therefore, be to end capitalism, if there is to be any positive purpose in it.

(*New Leader*, January 8, 1932.)

What does all this amount to? Only the creating of doubt, hesitancy, division of the ranks, disorganisation of the fight, splitting of the workers. This is what it is meant to do, for the vital rôle of reformism is to damp down the fighting spirit of the workers and to prove in deeds to their masters the ruling class that reformism, both its Right, Centre and Left brands, are the chief social support of capitalism.

The working class have to resist every attack that is made upon them; in this they must be actively supported by every other section of the workers. All militant class-conscious workers have the duty to rally such support, to stimulate and encourage such resistance, to develop the leadership and organisational forms of all these partial struggles, for out of them will come the class power and strength, the political consciousness, the knowledge and the conscious aim that through these struggles is being opened up the path for the revolutionary way out of the crisis.

The struggle for Socialism is not something apart from the fight against wage cuts, the Means Test, solidarity with the colonial peoples, the fight against war, &c. It is precisely the carrying forward of these struggles and the building up of the workers' power that alone will make the realisation of the workers' revolution and the workers' dictatorship possible, and there is no other way forward for the working masses. The I.L.P., as the Left Wing of reformism, endeavours to hold the workers back from the partial and decisive fights and is therefore to be branded as the most dangerous enemy within the ranks of the working-class movement, and will become all the more dangerous after the Bradford

Conference by its attempts to pose as an "independent political force" within the working-class movement.

In their efforts to hide the real meaning of their political line from the working class, the I.L.P. are always talking about "unity." The nauseating appeals of Brockway in his debate with me were an outstanding example of this. Their aim is to create the impression that they want unity because the crisis is sharpening, and what a "pity it is that the advanced workers and parties cannot get together."

But it is an unprincipled unity they are after. While the results of their policy are disorganising the actual struggles of the workers, the I.L.P. leaders call aloud for unity to cover up their daily practice. They "regret that the Communists employ tactics that make it difficult to work with them," they cry to the heavens that the Communists will not drop their criticism of their reformist policy.

The Bradford Conference will be treated to a full dose of this from the Maxtons and Brockways on the one hand, and the Revolutionary Policy Committee of the Cullens and Smiths on the other.

The Communists are not interested in any false and unprincipled unity with the leaders of the I.L.P.

The Communists are interested in building up united front action of all the workers for the purpose of the fight against the capitalist offensive—a united front, not for making clever speeches and shouting about unity, but for action against wage cuts, against the Means Test and imperialist war. The Communist Party declares to all its members that the most urgent task confronting them is the building up of this united action, of stimulating and encouraging the workers' daily struggles, of drawing into this united front every worker, whatever his political associations, who is anxious and eager to fight, of destroying the defeatist illusion that the workers cannot fight back, that there is nothing to do but work for the return of a third Labour Government of "convinced Socialists" like Maxton and Brockway, of showing the workers that they have power, that if they get together in the factories, at the Labour Exchanges and in the Trade Unions, they can resist the attacks of the ruling class. This is the aim of the united front work of the Communist Party.

The argument that in such united front activity as this there must be no criticism of reformism and the reformists is bunkum. How can the fight of the workers be led to-day, without bringing it into conflict with reformism? Isn't the whole fight of the workers retarded and held back precisely because of the fact that reformism has split the workers' ranks, has paved the way for the present policy of the National Government?

Does criticism weaken or strengthen the workers' fight? If we all behave like little gentlemen on a common platform, and only talk about the immediate aims of the united front programme, does that retard or advance the workers' fight?

The greater the understanding of the situation the more simply the issues are put, the more clearly the differences in principle between the workers' organisations are explained, the stronger does the fight of the workers become for the winning of this united front programme. The reason for the workers having to form their united front independently is that the reformist leaders and their policy are the enemies of the working-class struggle against capitalism.

How can any militant worker in a factory or a trade union, advocating the united action of the workers to resist wage cuts, do so unless he shows how and why the trade union leaders declare that "the time is not opportune for struggle," or recalls the lessons of the betrayal of the General Strike or exposes the line of the I.L.P. that sectional struggles are "doomed to failure."

How can a worker advocating united action against the Means Test do so without explaining who appointed the Royal Commission that recommended the Means Test, namely, the Labour Government, or how the I.L.P. made a sham fight against it in Parliament, while recommending the workers to vote for the same Labour gang again at the last General Election?

How can a worker advocating united front action to release the class war prisoners do so without pointing out the record of prosecutions against the workers carried on by the Labour Government both here and in India and the treacherous comments of the I.L.P. on the Communist agitation to support the fight of the Invergordon sailors that led to the prosecution of Allison, Priestley, Shepherd and Paterson?

How can we call for solidarity and help for the Belgian miners who were shot at and bombed without showing how the idol of the Second International, Vandervelde, was sent to Charleroi to beg the strikers not to fight back, but "to be calm and peaceful"?

And so one could go on. If the I.L.P. workers in united front activity point out the differences between their principles and those of the Communist Party, if trade union militants argue that whilst supporting the united front activity they believe that all political parties are wrong, that Parliament is played out, isn't this expression of differences all to the good? Doesn't it lead to animated discussion and interchange of opinions? Doesn't it provoke ideas, suggestions, arguments, varying points of view? Doesn't it put every worker on his mettle? Of course it does, and the curse of the British working-class movement is that there is so little discussion, so little threshing out of the issues.

The demand of the I.L.P. for no criticism is put forward to sabotage the growing working-class unity that is slowly being built up in every locality.

There should be no illusions as to the future developments within the I.L.P. itself. Bradford does not mean a break with the whole practice and policy of reformism. Later on we shall find that, as the situation develops, doleful laments will be heard about "divisions in the movement," about the need for "getting together again," we shall be treated to large doses of "unity medicine," the present breach will be healed, the I.L.P. and the Labour Party will come together again and the workers be told that all is well once more.

If readers of *THE LABOUR MONTHLY* doubt this let them recall the situation in 1920 when the Centre parties throughout the international working-class movement came together in the Two-and-a-half International. At Berne in December, 1920, they declared in favour of "world revolution," of "the defence of the Soviet Union," of support "for the revolutionary movements in the East," proclaiming the "union of all revolutionary forces against Imperialism." The Berne Manifesto stated that "the world war has destroyed the Second International," that what was left of it is only "the reformist and nationalist wing of the Second International," that the Second International was only "an element that destroyed the unity of the class proletarian struggles." And in 1921, under the cloak of such high-sounding revolutionary phrases as quoted above, the Centrists formed the Two-and-a-half International.

Two years later, the centrists and the "reformist and the nationalist wing of the Second International" came together at the Hague, they drew up a joint Manifesto in which it was stated :

It is, however, clear that the goal of a united Socialist Workers' International which is both all-embracing and has a united programme cannot be attained at one stroke ; it can only be the result of long tireless work.

And this was used to pave the way for the Hamburg Congress of June, 1923, where the Second International and the Two-and-a-half International celebrated their reunion in a hall decorated with every national flag in the world, including the old Czarist flag, but no Red Flag anywhere. The marriage was consummated and the bastard of the reunion, the Labour and Socialist International was born.

Everybody knows how, under pressure from the masses in 1920, the I.L.P. applied to the Communist International for answers to certain questions before they could decide whether or not to apply for affiliation. Everybody knows that the trump card of the I.L.P. has been their differences with the Labour Party during the late world war, but one

will look in vain for any fight, any relentless exposure of the Labour Party during the war by the I.L.P. On the contrary, immediately the war was finished, "let bygones be bygones" becomes the motto, and the I.L.P. leaders, MacDonald and Snowden become the leaders of the Labour Party, together with the "hated" Henderson and Clynes, the War Ministers, in the fight against the Communist International.

These things are mentioned now because the I.L.P., like all the reformists, bank on what they describe as the short memories of the workers. But it is very necessary to remind the workers of these things, because precisely the same type of revolutionary language is again being used to pretend there is a difference between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party.

The judicial separation that is now being staged at Bradford is only a temporary one. Soon the leaders of the Parties concerned will meet in "Judge" Henderson's room behind the Court, a touching reconciliation will take place, the same marital bed will once more be occupied, and the events of 1923, when the Second and the Two-and-a-half Internationals united will be repeated all over again.

The rank-and-file members of the I.L.P., and the rank-and-file delegates to the Bradford Conference should not be deceived by the game that is now being played by their leaders. The gravity of the present situation, the new offensive on the workers now opening, the war stage of the capitalist crisis that has now been reached, demands the greatest drive on our part for the building up of a mighty fighting united front of the working class against Hunger and War, now being undertaken by the Communist Party.

In this urgent and imperative task the members of all working-class organisations can and should take an active part. The development of the mass action of the working class to fight against the capitalist offensive and the disorganising rôle of the reformist leadership, is the only way in which the workers can build up their power, leadership and organisation, that will not only realise their immediate demands, but will lead to the revolutionary solution of the urgent problems of Bread, Work and Peace now confronting the working class.