

After Six Months—

What Now ?

BY HARRY POLLITT

AT THE END of the first six months of what Chamberlain has described as "the strangest of all wars," the ruling class and the working class of Britain are both faced with a series of extremely urgent and grave problems.

The aim of the ruling class, whatever phrases or slogans they use, is to gain at all costs the domination of Europe and the destruction of the Soviet Union, and to prepare the way for a gigantic trade war against their rivals, especially the United States of America—assuming that the present war ends with the capitalist system still in existence.

But the ruling class have to note certain facts—facts that also face the Labour Movement, and which could have an even greater significance for the Labour Movement were it not that the official Labour policy has at present caused a certain degree of paralysis amongst the masses.

In his speech some time ago at Manchester, Mr. Churchill stated that, with "God's helping hand," Britain was certain of victory. At the moment, however, the ruling class are showing a preference for more practical weapons than God's helping hand. They have the B.B.C., the Press, the cinema, and the Labour leaders. Despite the fullest use of all these weapons, one fact emerges plainly for all to note and learn from. It is this. Do what they will, the ruling class cannot get the mass of the people to shout, sing, or wave flags for this imperialist war, any more than they can generate enthusiasm among the armed forces.

The war is being discussed as no other issue has ever been discussed in our lifetime, for it has brought many new and urgent problems into the homes and lives of the workers. Whether these discussions are on wages, prices, evacuation, the neglect of children's education, the conduct of the war ; the contrast between the war on the Western Front and the war on the high seas ; the contrast between Britain's attitude towards Poland in the first weeks of the war and its policy of immediate support to Finland ; always there is present an under-current of awareness that something is wrong somewhere.

It is not easy for workers to see precisely what is wrong, to put their fingers on the cause of their disquiet, but the uneasiness is there. They are not worried because all is quiet on the Western Front, or that lives are not being lost on land as well as on sea, or that bombing

has not taken place. At bottom it is political disquiet, uneasiness regarding the aims, leadership and whole policy of the Chamberlain Government and of the Labour leaders.

There are also, of course, illusions amongst the workers, the most widely held being that this is a war against fascism and that for that reason it is necessary to continue the war. Others believe it is going to be the same sort of war for them as the last one, with plenty of work, overtime, week-ends, and comparatively high earnings. Others still believe that the war may lead to "better times" or to some sort of "new world," but these last two currents do not represent the main current of political feeling amongst the mass of the workers.

But it is not accidental that the principal cause of uneasiness among the core of the labour movement, that is in the ranks of the loyal labour men and women, is the political truce, or as it is now the fashion to call it, the "standstill agreement" that has been reached between the Labour leaders and Chamberlain. This truce has produced exactly the opposite effect to that which was intended. It has aroused suspicion amongst the workers, and this will be considerably deepened now that Chamberlain feels he has got official Labour so hamstrung that he can insolently turn down their suggestion that the Trades Disputes Act should be amended.

The very fact that this can be done by a Government, which Arthur Greenwood, M.P., declared early in the war could not remain in power a single day without the support of the Labour Party, shows two things. First, that the political truce has strengthened the position of Chamberlain at home, and he knows it, and takes full advantage of it. Secondly, that vital time has been lost by not organising the mass movement for active opposition to the war by the paralysis imposed on the movement by official labour policy. It also reveals that this Act is not a dead letter, but one of the strongest weapons in the armoury of the Chamberlain government for fighting labour when once it is roused to take mass action to fight against the imperialist war on their wages, lives and homes.

In all activities to win the masses for action against the war and official Labour Party policy, it is necessary to explain time and time again the fact that the present war is the principal responsibility of the very government which the Labour leaders keep in power.

For six-and-a-half years the Chamberlain Government helped Hitler with money, arms, and political support. They backed up everything he did in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Spain. They agreed with his attacks on the German labour movement. They smashed up the League of Nations; they refused to sign a Pact of Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union; they prevented the building up of a Peace Front that could have made this war impossible; they forced Poland to refuse any help from the Soviet Union to prevent that country from being invaded. They did all this, to build Hitler's war machine

so that he would go and fight against the Soviet Union.

“Oh yes,” some workers say, “we agree with you in all that, but now Chamberlain wants to fight Hitler, surely we should help him to do this?”

This is not the case. This is a misunderstanding of the true position.

When the might of the Soviet Union compelled Hitler to make a pact of non-aggression with the Soviet Union, the Chamberlain Government then declared war on Nazi Germany, *not to crush fascism*, but to extend its own domination in Europe, strengthen the conquests of the British Empire, and find other means through which it could also continue its anti-Soviet policy. Just as Poland became the pawn in the first move, so Finland became the pawn in the new move against the Soviet Union.

The fundamental cause of my own mistake at the beginning of the war is that I did not see this in time, and did not realise that with the signing of the Soviet-German Pact an entirely new international situation had opened up, which meant that the old policy of seeking to bring about a Peace Front in which the Chamberlain Government would participate was now impossible of realisation.

Once war was declared it became for British Imperialism a war to the bitter end—a war against the forces that for the first time in the long history of British imperialism have completely out-manceuvred them.

It was easy for the Chamberlain Government to get support for their war at the beginning, because of the deep hatred that was felt throughout the whole labour movement against fascism. This played a part in my own case in not enabling me to see the fundamental change in the international situation that I have referred to a little earlier. But there was one mistake that we never did make even in the first days of the war, and that was to believe that the Chamberlain Government would be, or could ever be, the instrument through which fascism would be fought or crushed.

I notice now, when my pamphlet written in the first days of the war is being so lavishly quoted from official labour platforms and its press, that they never, never quote the part that deals precisely with this political point. But the fundamental analysis of that pamphlet was wrong, as I have openly stated on every public platform on which I have appeared, and if there was one thing that proves above all else that it was wrong, it is the fact that the labour leaders, the *Daily Herald* and especially Professor Laski approve of it.

It needed only a few weeks to prove that so far from being an anti-fascist war, this war was even more blatantly imperialist than the last. In any mention of war aims the word fascism has completely disappeared from the language of Tory, Liberal and Labour leader alike. The open flirtation to bring Italian fascism on the side of British and French “democracy”; the flirtation with Japanese militarism to

bring it on the side of the "democracies"; the shameless efforts not to limit slaughter but to extend it by bringing every kind of unprincipled pressure on neutral countries to come in on the side of the "democracies"; the efforts behind the scenes to reach agreement with certain leaders of the Nazi Party to do a deal behind Hitler's back, without any intention of crushing fascism, but in order to reach an agreement that would switch the war in the West to a united war against the Soviet Union; the refusal to grant India its independence; the refusal to end the partition of Ireland; the refusal to publish the Royal Commission's Report on the West Indies; while at the same time Daladier was doing more in days to impose Hitlerism on the French workers than Hitler had been able to do in months when he first came to power; the political truce in Britain; the suspension of local elections; the emergency legislation giving absolutely dictatorial powers to the most reactionary government that Britain has had for a century, have all helped to expose the real aims of this imperialist war.

It was on the question of Finland, however, that the ruling class were too clever by half. They have shown their hand too openly for the dirt not to be clearly seen. They were too quick to sing of "their" victory. They were too eager to send war materials, men and money to Finland, when they had refused all these things to Republican Spain when it was fighting a real war against fascism. They were too ready to call together "their" League of Nations to expel the Soviet Union, and to give help to Finland, when they had previously prevented the same League from helping Republican Spain, or allowing it to be called together to discuss the outbreak of war in 1939.

Every time any move is made for peace, it is Britain that leads the offensive against peace. When the negotiations opened between the Soviet Union and Finland, it was Britain which led the most rabid fight to urge Finland to refuse to conclude any form of peace negotiations with the Soviet Union, by the most open and shameless intimidation, covered over with lavish promises of men, arms and money.

It was Britain which by its opposition to a peaceful outcome of the Finnish question laid millions open to slaughter in France, because peace in Finland at once raises the issue in a sharper form than ever before, why not peace in France?

It is British imperialism that is the pace-maker for extending the war, for embroiling the neutral countries, for egging on other countries against the Soviet Union. It seeks by any and every means to find new forms to help in the war against Germany in the West, and against the Soviet Union in the East.

It is being diplomatically defeated and out-manœuvred again and again, and this position has two sides to it. First, it only serves to make British imperialism more reckless and aggressive in its war aims; secondly, it shows the strong position of those who fight the imperialist

war, and this alongside the power of the Soviet Union, which has so completely spiked the guns of British imperialism, means that the peace forces have been greatly strengthened.

This is the basic reason why Britain has so fiercely opposed any suggestion of a peaceful settlement of the Finnish question. It wanted the war in Finland to go on, because this would help it in its efforts to attack the Soviet Union through the countries in the Near East.

Now that the question of Finland has been settled in the teeth of the opposition of British and French Imperialism, it would be a profound mistake to believe that Britain will give up its efforts to crush its trade rivals in Germany or will ease in any way its efforts to crush the Soviet Union.

It is not so easy to switch the war against the Soviet Union as is sometimes pictured. While undoubtedly there are powerful forces working for this aim in all the belligerent countries, we need to remember that the contradictions between German and British imperialism have gone too deep and too far to permit of any immediate calling-off of the war in the West, when the revolutionary movement of the masses has also not yet reached the point of development where it can basically affect the policy of the present rulers of these countries. At the same time, it needs to be remembered that it is one thing to get the support of the British people for a war which they still think is against fascism, and another to get that support for a war against the Soviet Union.

British Imperialism with the cunning of centuries of experience behind it, on the basis of its traditional policy of divide and rule, will still try, despite its present diplomatic defeats, to get others to pull its chestnuts out of the fire. They will, even whilst intensifying the struggle against Germany, and all the frightful suffering and slaughter that this policy involves, still try and find other ways and means of carrying out the same tactics as they have used in the case of Finland. For every time a door is closed to them through which the Soviet Union may be attacked, this only gives added urgency to them in trying to force other remaining doors. This is why workers' vigilance should not for a single moment be relaxed, and why they need keep a watchful and vigilant eye on Turkey, Irak, Iran and Afghanistan.

It is in this light that the moods of the masses have to be considered. It is this which gives such importance to their disquiet, their concern and their political discussions.

There is on the surface an apparent political silence. But it is an ominous silence. Behind it are feelings that can be organised for mass action against the whole policy of the Chamberlain Government, and the entire capitalist system.

Once the working class can rid itself of some of the present illusions, of the deadening hand of the official leadership, then a really mighty

mass movement is going to sweep all before it despite all the obstacles that may be placed in the way. For there is a deep gulf between the feelings of the rank and file of the labour movement and the leadership of that movement.

It is to get this mass movement into speedy action that is the heart of the political situation in Britain to-day, and from it arise the heavy tasks that face not only revolutionary workers but all thoughtful labour men and women as well.

There needs to be widespread explanatory propaganda to convince the people that the ruling class mean business, that they are fighting for the maintenance of their system, that they are not going to hesitate to spend millions both of money and of precious workers' lives, and impose terrible burdens on the workers in their efforts to realise their aims.

The workers must be shown that if the plans of the British imperialists are allowed to mature, this will be a long and bloody struggle with an aftermath far worse than last time. The workers must be shown that the efforts to force down their standards of living to pay the cost of the war, and to drive up exports, are meant to become a permanent feature of working-class life, so that at the end of this war the trade war now being carried on, especially against America, can be intensified. The day the military war ends, the trade war for the domination of the world market will begin and every slogan being used to win the military struggle will then be replaced by new ones to the effect that if Britain is to live "she must win the peace as well as the war."

Any illusions that what happened in the last war for certain sections of the workers is going to be repeated in this war need to be smashed down right now. Unless the workers fight back, and fight back now, they are going to see their standards reduced to a level that may appear unthinkable. No light and airy talk about "the workers will never stand for this" will suffice if there is no class struggle to make certain now it is not going to happen. The ruling class mean business, and they do not hide this fact, as the speeches of their responsible spokesmen go to prove.

There is not a worker in France who, a year ago, would not have laughed at you if you had suggested his working and living conditions would be reduced to the low level they are at now.

The ruling class have powerful allies in the Attlees and Citrines, and these in turn are assisted by the so-called "left" in the labour movement who support the war, but pretend that they are against the workers having to make heavy sacrifices to help pay for the war. The blunt truth is that if you support the present war, sooner or later you reach the position, whatever phrases you use, where you are forced to support the methods by which the ruling class is carrying on the war.

The propaganda coming from this "left," the Bevan, Laski and

Strauss group, for a Labour Government to come to power is only moonshine and desertion of the masses so far as it suggests that the aim of such a Government would be to fight against war and capitalism. They only want a Labour Government that will conduct the imperialist war "more efficiently," and to damp down any genuine revolutionary movement for the ending of war and capitalism.

Their type of propaganda is useful to the Chamberlain Government in, at a later stage of the war, taking selected safe labour leaders into the Government to damp down the rising discontent of the workers.

There is urgent need for more fundamental socialist propaganda on what imperialism means—the struggle for markets, for profits, for new territory and sources of raw materials, for cheap labour; how for a time these issues are settled by diplomatic and trading agreements, but that sooner or later a point is reached where the trading and diplomatic struggle gives place to a bloody struggle called war.

There is need to recall time and time again the fact that the Soviet Union is as yet the one Socialist country in the world, and that it is surrounded by hostile capitalist states; that the class enemy never gives up the struggle to crush the Soviet Union in peace time, and that it becomes more urgent to crush it in war time, when the revolutionary example of the first Socialist State in the world gains more and more influence amongst the more thoughtful section of the working class.

There is need to recall all the old slogans of the last war, unknown to millions who are now grown to manhood and being conscripted into the armed forces and industry—the slogans such as "The war to end war," "Hang the Kaiser," "Independence of Small Nations," "England Fit for Heroes to Live In," "No Territorial Aims"—and to show how they are all being used again with hardly a change in the wording; to recall the lying propaganda about the atrocities of the enemy, the faked war photographs, the wanton slaughter of millions by the Generals who, too late for their victims to be saved, were sacked, censured or exposed.

We need to remind the present generation and their elders of the aftermath of the last war, the trade depression, wage cuts, unemployment, reduced unemployment benefits and pensions; how Britain has become a land fit for the Means Test to be applied in, yesterday to unemployment benefits, to-day to old age pensions, to-morrow to workmen's compensation and wages.

Above all we should tirelessly encourage and help develop the idea that the workers must end the capitalist system, which is the cause of all their poverty and unemployment, and which twice in our lifetime has dared to send them to the shambles of war.

To do this means far more effective propaganda on the question of what we mean by ending the war. We Communists will support every mass movement for peace, and encourage the development

of every anti-war movement, knowing that this can lead to the growth of the idea of the defeat of capitalism, through which alone a real and lasting peace can be obtained. While working alongside all who strive for peace now, we have to show clearly and frankly that when once the war machines of the imperialist states have been unleashed, only the rising mass movement of the workers against the war, its effects, and the ruling class, can give any effective guarantee of peace.

We can never be parties to deceiving the workers about the kind of peace that will be made while capitalism is in existence. All talk of a durable and lasting peace, all talk of an honourable peace, of a new world after the war, of a peace with no annexations, indemnities or territorial gains by the victorious powers is a sham and a fraud.

It is this which makes the Labour Party Peace Aims Programme such a deceitful and shameful document, for apart from the fact that *the only way through which a really lasting and honourable peace can be obtained is by the ending of the capitalist system, which is only possible by the development of the very revolutionary movement that the Labour Party is trying to prevent by every means in its power,* these so-called Peace Aims contain proposals that strengthen imperialism and deny the right of independence to the colonial peoples.

Only by the German, French and British workers strengthening their mass movement to the point where they can end the rule of the Hitlers, Daladiers and Chamberlains, and the system they represent, is there any guarantee of a Peace that represents a victory for the workers of all these countries and the defeat of all their class enemies.

This is why now as never before more international propaganda is needed. The slogan of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels "Workers of the World Unite. You have Nothing to Lose but your Chains, You have a World to Win" has to-day a deeper significance than ever before. It was never meant to mean unite to kill each other, but to unite alongside each other to end capitalism.

Fear that this will happen, fear of the spread of Communism, is now dominant in the minds of the warmongers of Germany, Britain and France alike.

This explains the attacks on the Soviet Union and on the Communist Parties all over the world—for the spectre of Communism does haunt the ruling class, especially in war time, in which, as all history shows, revolutionary movements do tend to develop and, as in the case of the last war, mature to the point where they can overthrow Czarism. The last war led also to the rise of powerful revolutionary movements in a number of other important countries that were involved in that war, and these helped to end it.

For years the Communist International has declared that the present age is one of wars and revolutions. Never was this so true as at the present time. Every event taking place only serves to emphasise the accuracy of this analysis.

To-day is the testing time for every man and woman in the labour movement. For all it is now no longer a question of standing aside, but of taking sides. There can be no half-way house, no easy course. It is the question which side of the fight are you on, that present history puts to us all—the side of the working class in its struggle to end the war and capitalism, or the side of the ruling class in its prosecution of the war, the crushing of the labour movement and the whole future of mass misery, unemployment and new wars.

The policy of the Labour leaders, of reformism, leads not to peace and socialism, but to an imperialist revenge, travestied by the name “peace”; an imperialist peace treaty, which will bear within itself the seeds of future wars, different only from Versailles in that the struggle for the domination of the world market will be so severe with the growth of monopoly control and of the productive forces through new developments during the war, that the breathing space between the end of the present war and the beginning of a new world war will be much shorter than between 1918 and 1939.

Or the path of Communism. Not an easy path. Full of fights, struggle, and persecution, fighting against the stream, against popular illusions, against war hysteria and spirit of revenge, facing every foul slander and calumny that a ruthless class enemy and the labour leaders in its service can bring into use. But victory is certain at the end. Workers' power is certain at the end. A real and lasting peace on the basis of a socialist economy is certain at the end.

Those who say “it cannot be done,” or “we have to wait until the war is over,” are not only taking up a cowardly attitude, they are helping the Chamberlain Government and reactionary labour leaders to strengthen their position and thus make it easier for the imposition of Hitlerism on the British working class and making the future struggle of the workers far harder and more difficult than they are now. For every day that is lost in not fighting now a bitter price will have to be paid in the near future.

Here we are in Britain boasting that we have one of the most powerful labour movements in the world, boasting of our education, our political understanding, our class consciousness, and yet we are a thousand miles behind our Indian comrades in fighting spirit and militancy. Why, they put us to shame by the magnificence of their fighting capacity and solidarity. We are content to be fobbed off by wage advances that fall far behind the rise in the cost of living, or the promise of a new world after the war is over, but the Indian textile workers and railwaymen are striking to improve their conditions, and this is how to fight also against the war. The workers in Cyprus and the West Indies too are conducting mass struggles against British Imperialism. It is high time the same kind of struggle was organised in Britain.

The fight against war cannot be conducted in the abstract, it must be a concrete fight for concrete things. That is why the ruling class

give an inch now, to fob us off, and then to-morrow they will take a yard. Let the British workers be made aware of the danger they are in, that everything they have won from the ruling class, every gain of the past, every hope for the future, is now at stake. It is not in peril from Hitler. It is in peril from Chamberlain. The German and French workers are fighting back against their own real enemies. We must fight back against ours.

This is why if May Day, the day of international solidarity, has any message for us at all, we shall aim to make it a landmark in the age-long struggle against capitalism; that the workers will leave the factories, that they will come on the streets, assert their right to demonstrate for all their immediate demands, and against the imperialist war. The ruling class compel the members of the armed forces to parade the streets to whip up enthusiasm for their war; the workers must assert their right to demonstrate for peace and socialism. Gigantic May Day demonstrations in Britain could give a lead to the workers of all lands now involved in this imperialist war. *Not on the first Sunday in May, but on the first day of May.* The workers' day, the day when for fifty-one years workers of all lands have pledged their common solidarity, their faith in Socialism, their call for international unity, and if ever the call for international unity was necessary to echo over all the frontiers, it is now—the call for solidarity in life for a fuller life, not in death to reap profits for a handful of British, German and French millionaires.

That is why the question of unity of action must be raised. All the forces opposed to war and imperialism have now the urgent duty of finding the way to such agreement as to how the whole of their efforts, organisations and power can now be exerted in a single direction. There are many difficulties to be overcome, many prejudices and suspicions to be removed; but the urgency of the position should be the overriding consideration in the thoughts of all who are able to influence and lead the work of such organisations.

But it is inside the labour movement itself that the first drive should be organised. For once the mass movement begins to develop here, it will soon begin to influence all other types of organisations who are opposed to the war. It will at the same time produce its effect among the workers in the armed forces. It is a fact of tremendous political significance that for the first time there are now in the British armed forces tens of thousands of class-conscious, politically educated workers, who are in a position to explain the political situation and the class struggle to the rest of their comrades.

The policy of the labour leaders must be repudiated by action, by mass demonstrations, breaking through every form of the political truce. It was done in the last war, it can be done in this.

The first blows have to be struck in the factories and trade unions. There must be established the will for action and forms of organisation

that will make the mass movement indestructible—the strengthening of workshop organisation, the election of shop stewards for every grade of industry, linked up on a factory, district and national basis, backed by the local, district and national trade union organisations ; the strengthening of the trade unions, not only by a 100 per cent. membership, but by full attendance at trade union branch meetings, by ensuring the carrying out of all normal trade union branch procedure, conferences, democratic election of officials, and firm opposition to every attempt to use the war as the excuse for placing dictatorial powers in the hands of the trade union executive committees.

If such activity were generated it would not be long before the political truce was smashed. For the feeling against this grows every day, for more and more it is being realised that it not only applies to parliamentary by-elections, but serves to dampen down the struggle on the industrial field.

Alongside these activities should go the drive for the strengthening of the local trades councils as well as the federation of trades councils, so that they not only reflect more closely the demands of the workers in the factories and affiliated trade unions, but become the local unifying centres of the workers' struggles.

Develop the tenants' associations, and every other form of mass movement which brings the workers together in defence of their rights and conditions.

Seek by every means to increase the power and organisations of the Co-operative Movement, in which there is not only a traditional anti-war movement, but which can be one of the most effective class weapons against monopoly capitalism.

Above all, while carrying out all these types of activities, it is necessary to intensify revolutionary propaganda against capitalism as a whole, to deepen class consciousness and political understanding.

The masses are serious-minded as never before. They are thinking, they are eager to know, to read and study, to have things explained to them. This is a situation of great possibilities, if only the militant section of the working class will but realise it.

Since the last war Marxist education has enormously increased. There are to-day in the factories tens of thousands of revolutionary workers who are able to explain and show the way forward. Inside the armed forces are the same types of workers. None of these can be led astray by imperialist propaganda, they are the steel framework around which the working class must now build up a mass structure.

On these workers in particular is a great responsibility. From them can come the drive, the leadership that can lead the whole mass movement forward to a new level of class activity and initiative. If they do their part, they can be sure that the workers of France and Germany will not lag behind.

We believe that if the policy that has been outlined here is now

vigorously taken up in every factory, trade union and local Labour Party branch, Co-operative guild and labour exchange, then we shall soon see the beginnings of a gigantic mass movement of solidarity and struggle against the whole policy of the Chamberlain Government, war and capitalism.

If it is made the central point in all the preparations to make May Day, 1940 a real workers' day of demonstrations of their unity and solidarity, then the coming annual conference of the Labour Party in Bournemouth at the end of May can become quite a different kind of conference from what the labour leaders are banking upon.

For them it is to be a war conference, a conference of support to the Chamberlain Government in carrying on the war, a conference of hostility against the Soviet Union. But there is time to change all this, if the serious-minded section of the labour rank and file will but organise and fight to bring this about.

The Bournemouth Conference can be made to mark the end of the political truce, the end of collaboration with Chamberlain in his war policy ; it can be made to end the terrible position where the Labour Party under its present leadership has become the chief war party in Britain, which means it has surrendered Socialist principles, theory and practice.

We know there are obstacles and difficulties in the way. The workers can surmount them. They can clear out the reactionary leaders, they can change the policy of the Labour Party, they can once more develop that type of working-class activity that will allow the whole labour movement to be guided and led in the fighting spirit, the unity and singleness of purpose and aim that animated the pioneers of the movement, when for them the slogan "Workers of the World Unite" was not a platform peroration in peace time, but the guide to action in every phase of the struggle against capitalism and war.