

Forum

The Communist Party and Labour

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THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND LABOUR

This is the third of a series of articles dealing with problems of the British Communist Party being issued in the period prior to the November 1965 Congress.

The purpose of this and other publications in this series is to develop discussion on the most vital issues affecting our Party today. The comrades who produce these articles look to readers for their comments, frank criticisms and suggestions to help improve them.

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THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND LABOUR

INTRODUCTION

In this article we deal with the nature and role of the Labour Government, and what should be our attitude towards it and members of the Labour Party.

The Labour Government is following policies deeply harmful to the people. Abroad, there is submission to the Americans and attempts to shore-up British imperialism; at home, the same policies that Labour in opposition attacked as Tory "stop-go".

The Communist Party criticises the Government on many issues - but at the same time supports it against a Tory come-back. It depicts the Government as under the control of right-wing leaders and implies that sufficient pressure from the rank-and-file could change the Government's direction. The main emphasis in Party work is placed on extending our electoral participation and activity.

Despite the Party's criticism of what it calls the negative aspects of Government policy, such as the incomes policy, it consistently fails to make an overall political analysis that connects the many different aspects of the situation, that explains the basic nature and role of the Labour Government and how the Party should determine its strategy and tactics.

We do not pretend to offer, in the limited space at our disposal, more than an outline of an overall political approach. But this outline is essential in order to establish the connection between today's problems and tasks and our aim of transforming Britain into a socialist country.

Our views are set out in the following sections:

- I. The situation of British imperialism
- II. The role of the Labour Government
- III. The nature of the Labour Party
- IV. Policy for Communists

I. THE SITUATION OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

For many years now the Party has been talking about the decline of British imperialism. But at the very moment when a major landmark in that decline has been reached, the Party has failed to recognise the new stage or to call for a bold seizure of all the political opportunities arising.

Since the end of the War British imperialism has been under attacks both from the national-liberation forces and from its imperialist rivals, and has been forced into retreat. But the vast extent of the British Empire -- at its peak a quarter of the world, in both territory and population -- means that there was a lot to retreat from. Despite losses, the British imperialists have managed to retain a great deal. They have clung in particular to three key elements: Middle Eastern oil; the tin and rubber of Malaya; and the Sterling system.

These are now in danger. In both the Middle East and Malaya the British position is visibly crumbling, as can be seen from the failure of the London talks on the future of the South Arabian Federation and the secession of Singapore from the ramshackle Malaysian Federation. These setbacks point to the inevitable future defeat of the British imperialists in these areas.

The crisis of sterling, however, is no hazard of the future. It is on at this moment, and it is not merely a repetition of previous difficulties but a major crisis involving the whole position of the City of London built up over many decades.

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Tory intentions to hold the General Election in 1963, when the U. K. economy was making some advance, were frustrated by the Profumo scandal and the swing of opinion against them. They were forced to wait until late in 1964. Hoping to promote a pre-Election boom, they gambled with the balance of payments. But by the end of 1964 a deficit of £745 million had been incurred which had absorbed most of the reserves Britain had held at the start of the year.

The Labour Party has replenished the reserves through loans which have used up its borrowing rights from the International Monetary Fund. Additionally it can count on a £350 million borrowing facility held open by the Americans and about £450 million of dollar securities owned by the British Government. Thus the potential reserves, to meet the deficit continuing in 1965 and expected still to continue until the end of 1966, appear to total around

£1750 million, three-quarters of which represents borrowed money. From this it is clear that the fate of sterling no longer depends on the British Government, which is deeply in pawn. It is the foreign lenders, above all the Americans, who have the decision.

Why has sterling fallen into this situation?

The fundamental reason is the accelerating decline of British imperialism, now at its most critical stage. During the Second World War many overseas assets were lost and Britain, deprived of the revenue they had brought in, needed a large expansion in exports in order to pay for her imports, to sustain the high level of export of capital which continued to flow from London, and to meet the cost of Government overseas spending (partly military spending, partly politically-motivated 'aid') which was steadily being increased in the attempt to combat the rising pressures against British imperialism.

While a good deal was achieved in improving Britain's export/import ratio as compared with pre-war, it was not enough. Even allowing for receipts from foreign investment in Britain (including massive American penetration), Britain's balance of payments did not improve sufficiently to cover Government overseas spending and private export of capital.

There was a rhythmical cycle: some expansion of the U. K. economy, bringing a growth of imports disproportionate to the growth of exports, thus a drain on the reserves; then measures of deflation to check imports and reassure foreign financial interests; in consequence of the deflation, a curbing of the investment needed to modernize Britain's factories, public utilities, and services.

Each revolution of the cycle left Britain weaker, with her industries falling further behind those of her rivals, with Government spending on imperialist adventures rising, and with her share of world trade steadily falling.

That these policies were persisted in reflects Britain's imperialist character. Imperialism generates parasitism in the economy, and this, as Lenin shewed, is in the long run self-weakening. But imperialism also means the exaction of super-profits through unequal methods of trade and intensified exploitation. Whatever the contradictions and hazards of imperialist policies, super-profits are not abandoned voluntarily by those who enjoy them. The dominant British imperialist groupings will do no other than continue as imperialists.

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At the centre of British imperialism is the City of London, the powerful complex of banking, insurance, merchant and shipping interests which

extract profits from all over the world. The interests of the City and of much of British industry have become interlocked in vast aggregations of finance-capital, the policy of which is determined primarily by the City's ruling groups who constitute the leading forces of the British ruling-class.

Sterling as an international currency is a key element in the City's position. Something approaching 40 per cent of world trade is conducted in sterling. For many commodities the London markets, with their pricing in sterling, are the focus of world trading. London's banking facilities are utilized intrading and financing all over the world. London insurance is a great international business. It is through the London money market that the funds are raised for the overseas investment which constitutes the essence of the imperialist relationship between the metropolitan and colonial countries.

After the Second World War the Americans set out to take over as much of the British imperialists' interests as possible. They exerted strong pressure against sterling, forced its devaluation in 1949 and pressed for relaxation of British measures of exchange-control. This weakened the Sterling system, making it more open to American penetration.

The 1949 devaluation was both a consequence of British imperialist weakness and a cause of further weakness. Today, with Britain's position yet weaker, another forced devaluation of sterling would not be a repetition of 1949 (even if in intensified form) but an end of sterling as a major international currency. At stake in the present sterling crisis is the whole traditional position of the City of London, the lynch-pin of British imperialism.

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There can be no doubt about the earnest, even desperate, desire of the British imperialists and of their Governments - Tory or Labour - to defend sterling. The point is, what can they do?

First and foremost they must seek to transform the balance of payments from a deficit to a surplus position. There are three main possibilities:

- a) to improve substantially the ratio of exports to imports;
- b) to reduce Government overseas spending;
- c) to reduce or eliminate private investment overseas.

Without radical policy changes we cannot expect under any of these heads action to bring a really important improvement in the balance of payments. Moreover, what is necessary is not the mere ending of deficits, but the earning of substantial surpluses to repay past borrowings. So we come back to the question: what can the Labour Government do?

Its answer is, continue what it has already been doing: borrow to meet current difficulties and hope in time to squeeze extra resources, with which to close the payments gap, out of the British people by intensifying exploitation and depressing living standards. This is the significance of the incomes policy. It goes without saying that the Government is reconciled, as the condition of foreign borrowing, to obeying its creditors.

The only line of policy open to any British Government, Tory or Labour, so long as its aim is to maintain Britain's imperialist position, is to intensify the exploitation of the workers. Devaluation and deflation, much as they appear to differ as lines of policy, both involve pressing down the people's standards. Whatever differences of form imperialist policy may take, its essential content will be the same.

II.

THE ROLE OF THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT

When the Labour Government took office in October, 1964, it began with a few measures of social reform - higher pensions, the abolition of certain health service charges, legislation on the Rent Act, and so on. But this was the surface-froth, the public-relations 'image'. On the main questions affecting the country's future, the Government in all cases continued Tory policies. It accepted the defence of sterling as its main task and raised taxes and prices, lowering the people's living standards. It continued all the main overseas commitments which on the one hand have drained the country's strength but, on the other, have assured continued profits to the main imperialist groups. It turned to the American and other imperialists for loans, giving in return full support to their policies. The Government at first talked of using the loans to gain time for thorough industrial modernization and expansion, but when the lenders demanded deflation and retrenchment in Britain in order to fortify Sterling, the demands were hastily accepted, and credit restrictions and investment cuts were introduced.

In this situation there is no scope for the Government to proceed with measures to improve the life of the people. There may be an occasional piece of political showmanship which is not too costly financially, but there can be no substantial measures enabling the British people to live better. On the contrary, they must live worse so that resources can be freed to meet the requirements of foreign lenders and sustain British imperialism overseas.

Labour's continuation of Tory policy is crystal-clear in its unreserved support for the Americans in Vietnam; its intervention in British Guiana; its grant of the use of Ascension Island for the American-Belgian action in the Congo; its policy on Aden; its introduction of an immigration policy which

shamelessly accepts the racist approach; its pruning of social services; its back-tracking on housing policy. The examples could be multiplied.

Why does the Government behave in this way? Is it because it is controlled by right-wing personalities? Because it is uninformed or unaware of the consequences of its policies? Because of pressure from the Tories which it is too weak to resist?

To such questions the Communist Party gives no really clear-cut answers. But its line implies that the policy of the Labour Government represents some regrettable falling-away from Labour's own aims and that all that is needed is popular pressure to counter this. This disguises the true nature of the Labour Government.

The truth is that the Government's real aspirations and aims are to serve the interests of imperialism. The objective situation of British imperialism today is such that it has little choice of the path it can take on all main questions of policy. The policies of the Labour Government are inevitably those of a government defending British imperialism.

The Labour Government may be destroying the illusions of many of its supporters but it is not betraying the interests which it is really concerned to serve.

III.

THE NATURE OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Bourgeois democracy was established earlier in Britain than in other capitalist countries and developed its own national features and characteristics. The British Labour Party similarly developed its own features as a social-democratic party. In particular, unlike social-democratic parties elsewhere, it is not based simply on individual membership but includes as affiliated members large numbers of trade unionists. This enables the trade union leaders, through block-voting strength and finance, to dominate the Labour Party machine.

From its beginning the Labour Party has been essentially a parliamentary and electoral organization. The constituency branches and the national conferences serve as vents through which active members can, within limits, spout militancy. But the parliamentary leadership has always been in safe middle-class hands; the trade union block votes in the Labour Party organization have been wielded by right-wing leaders who have come to terms with capitalism. These two elements have worked together to ensure that the Labour Party has

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At the end of the War the British people turned strongly against the Tories. They were ready for major changes in society. Exactly what, and how these might be achieved, was not too clear, but the mood for change was strong, particularly among the members of the Forces - armed workers in uniform.

What did the Labour Government do? It carried through a number of social reforms (education; health; national insurance;) and nationalized coal, railways, some road transport and steel. These were measures not seriously challenged by the capitalists, who understood that in the prevailing political conditions it was in their own interests to blunt the edge of militant feeling among the people by making concessions.

Had there been a Tory Government in office very similar measures would have been introduced. After all, the Education Act was agreed under the Coalition Government; there was little argument between the parties about the main features of the Health Service; the nationalization of coal and of the railways was not disputed. Some differences arose between Tories and Labour over such questions as steel nationalization, but they were secondary to their agreement over policy essentials - that some concessions at home were necessary and timely, and that imperialist overseas interests could also best be served by some concessions or partial retreats (e.g. the independence of India in 1947).

These changes were considered well worthwhile so long as the capitalists could keep their representatives in decisive positions in the state machinery (which they did under the Labour Government), maintain their control of the British economy (e.g. determining investment, capital exports, and the nature and extent of industrial development) and align Britain internationally with all the forces in the world hostile to Socialism.

Since 1945 a most important feature of the line of the British capitalists has been their policy towards America. On the one hand, they wanted to resist American encroachments on their interests; but they recognised that they could no longer hold the British Empire by their own strength alone and sought assistance (economic, financial, military and political) from the Americans. As the price for this, they resigned themselves to becoming America's junior partner (becoming steadily more junior over the years). This policy has shaped the course of British politics and is fully accepted by Labour.

Given the record of the 1945 Labour Government it is no surprise that it ended with a whimper in 1951. It had achieved some social reforms, but nothing very much that a Conservative Government would not equally have conceded. It had dissipated the hopes and enthusiasm of its supporters. It had tied Britain close to America in the Cold War. It had maintained Britain

as an exploiting imperialist power, with all the consequences this entailed in weakening the British economy and burdening it with military and financial commitments abroad.

Left-wingers in the Labour Party who opposed various measures made no consistent exposure of, or opposition to, the Labour Government's basic role, namely that of serving the interests of imperialism. Indeed, in a sense, the very existence of a certain amount of left-wing dissent had its usefulness to the imperialists. It encouraged the opinion that the policies of the Government were due to "mistakes" or bad leadership rather than to its capitalist character. In this way illusions among the people about the Labour Party were preserved.

Some of these same left-wingers now hold office in Wilson's Government and carry out its policies faithfully. This should cause little surprise; it has repeatedly happened before, as the names of Cripps and Bevan will recall. The fact is that Social-democrats, right or left, do not have the Marxist conception of destroying the class-power of the capitalists and replacing it by that of the workers. They accept the continuing existence of capitalism, even though they may feel that this or that feature of it should be modified. On fundamentals they share the same outlook as the Tories. When the objective situation offers little choice about the policy appropriate to the needs of capitalism, Labour inevitably echoes the line of the Tories. It is not that Labour "surrenders" to the Tories, but that both Tories and Labour agree on the policies necessary.

The Labour Government does not of course spell all this out to its supporters. It wins its support from the workers only by making them feel that it is concerned with their interests and is prepared to attack capitalism on their behalf. It has to make some anti-capitalist noises to retain their support. But the objective role of the Labour Party is to harness the support it attracts to policies which buttress capitalism.

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What we have said about the Labour Party is not original. During the first great controversy within the international socialist movement, that between Lenin and his supporters on one side and the reformists led by Kautsky and Bernstein on the other, the role of social-democracy was thoroughly explored.

The nineteenth century saw the establishment of working-class and socialist parties in most countries of Europe. Among them were many different views on what socialism meant and how it could be achieved; but there was broad agreement that capitalism was an unjust system, exploiting and oppressing the majority of the people, and socialism could come only through its overthrow in a decisive, revolutionary change.

Later, when the imperialists were completing their scramble for colonies and while their system was still expanding, two features marked the development of the social-democratic parties. On the one hand they grew in membership, in organization, in capacity for tackling practical work and activity, in electoral support. On the other, they moved away in practice if not in profession from the earlier ideas of making a decisive challenge to capitalism. This shift of line was keenly argued between the right and left wings of the parties. The issues were most clearly brought into the open in the controversies within the Russian Social-Democratic Party. Lenin and the Bolsheviks emerged as irreconcilable opponents of the right-wing line. It was Lenin who clearly analysed the abandonment of Marxism which this line represented and foretold with great accuracy what the consequences would be.

The right-wing opportunists regarded bourgeois democracy as capable of being changed into socialist democracy by observance of its own rules (electoral work, parliamentary legislation, and so on), while the Marxists believed, to the contrary, that any serious challenge to the bourgeoisie through the exercise of full democratic rights by the workers would be met by the withdrawal of those rights and a stepping-up of repressive action. The Marxists held that important as it was for the workers to make the fullest use of bourgeois democracy in order to gather their forces, build their organizations and inform and politically educate the people, the conquest of power could only be a revolutionary act in which the class-power of the workers conquered the class-power of the bourgeoisie. Acceptance of the ideas of the opportunists, the Marxists held, must lead to surrender to bourgeois policy on current questions and would make working-class parties the supporters, not of socialism, but of social reform. The line of right-wing opportunism was reinforcement of capitalism.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 came the moment of truth. Each party in the Socialist International supported its respective national bourgeoisie. The line of international socialism and revolution was upheld only by left groups in various countries, with the Bolsheviks as the staunchest and most far-sighted of these.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the collapse of the Central Powers in 1918, mass attacks on capitalism swept Europe. In every country the right-wing opportunists entered into open cooperation with the capitalists. They had ceased to be "social-democrats" in the original meaning of the term and had become petty bourgeois democrats, i. e. supporters of the existing bourgeois order, opposed to socialism which threatened it.

The immaturity of the young European Communist Parties prevented them from taking proper advantage of the revolutionary potentialities at the end of the First World War. Capitalism re-consolidated itself. The

Social-Democratic parties played a role, well understood by the bourgeoisie, of serving as a political reserve force for capitalism by advocating policies of reform and concessions. The Communist Parties became divided from the Social-Democrats not merely by differences of outlook and principle but by bitter memories of treachery and deceit. The working-class was divided between the parties.

When the economic processes of capitalism led in the 'thirties to the Great Depression, with its unprecedented unemployment and poverty, the class struggle sharpened. The capitalists turned to Fascism. In France and Spain, where some limited measures of collaboration between Communists and Social-Democrats were agreed in defence of bourgeois democratic rights, there was considerable resistance. In Germany, where the Social-Democrats shewed themselves with no will to stand against any policies, however reactionary, demanded by the capitalists, and where the Communists made leftist tactical mistakes, resistance collapsed. Despite all the hatred of capitalism aroused by the Great Depression, the policies of social-democracy led to the triumph of Fascism, the virtually complete destruction of the German organized working-class movement, and the launching of the Second World War.

What Marxists learned from these experiences was the true nature of Social-democracy - something irrespective of personality or position of this or that leader. All parties must be judged by what they are objectively, not for what adherents may subjectively believe them to be. This applies to the Labour Party and no less to the Communist Party.

Many Social-democrats hate capitalism, want socialism, and believe their support of social-democracy to be the best means for achieving their aims. But what experience shews is that social-democracy, by its nature, is a support for, not an opponent of, capitalism. Social-democracy is against revolution, against the working-class conquest of power from the capitalists, and therefore against Socialism.

IV

POLICY FOR COMMUNISTS

Despite this evaluation of social-democracy, the Communist Party has made repeated efforts to establish a united front with it. On such pre-war aims, for example, as maintaining bourgeois-democratic rights against Fascism and preserving peace, this was correct since these aims were opposed to the necessities of capitalism.

United work on agreed issues with members and supporters of the social-democratic parties gives opportunities for influencing understanding of the meaning of Socialism and of how it can be achieved. The united front policy has to be two-sided, however. On the one hand, firm unity in support of the agreed aims; on the other, frank and persistent explanation of the Communist analysis of the situation, of the tactics that should be pursued. Freedom to criticise errors must be retained, but there is no incompatibility between firm united action on agreed issues and lively discussion of the nature of the situation and the best line to follow. If Marxism be indeed the key to correct political action, Communists have a mandatory duty to express the Marxist view. Not to do so is an unprincipled sacrifice of the future interests of the workers.

What the Marxist attitude towards social-democracy should be has been established by hard experience over a long period of time. The problems of the British Communist Party's attitude towards the Labour Party arise from the fact that it has buried all this experience and replaced it by the muddle-headed notions of the "British Road to Socialism" based on no experience at all. *

The British Communist Party has, correctly, striven to strengthen relations with the workers who support the Labour Party. That many of these workers are under the influence of capitalist ideas, do not want socialism, and support imperialism makes the development of relations with them more, not less, important. Winning them over to socialism is a necessity for the conquest of power. The question is how to do this.

For many years now the leaders of the Communist Party have seen this question mainly as one of organizational relationships. They have refused to face the real problems of British politics. British imperialism has over a long period of time "bourgeoisified" the British workers. Social-democracy has played a leading part in this. This all-pervasive pressure has affected the Communist Party itself. Despite the organizational experience and staunchness in struggle of the British workers, there can be no socialist transformation of Britain without a revolutionary theory firmly understood and supported by the leading sections of the working-class.

The conclusion which clearly follows is that the British Communist Party, properly led by principled Marxists, has as its first task the building up of understanding of revolutionary theory and the development through practice of a revolutionary working-class leadership. A continuing controversy is needed between the theories and practical policies of the Marxists and those of the Labour Party, with every effort on our side to explain our ideas clearly and patiently. If we believe that events will confirm the political position taken by the Marxists to be correct and that taken by the Labour Party wrong, over a period of time the Communist Party is bound to gather support (and

*(For a full analysis of the "British Road", see Publication No. 2, of this series).

durable support) from the workers who thus acquire political experience. This was in some measure the Party's experience during the 'thirties when it stood against Fascism and war.

To work in this way, the Party cannot gloss over its differences with the Labour Party nor deceive the workers about the real nature of the Labour Party. Instead of first making the correct Marxist analysis of the political situation and then spreading this among the workers with proposals for necessary action, the Party has looked for short-cuts to political influence. The Party has repeatedly re-organised its own machinery, basing itself at different times on localities, factory branches, wards, constituencies. Its education of its own membership has been limited and mechanical. It has worked hard in the trade unions but rather for the election of Communist officials than for the Marxist education of the workers. It has equated unity of the working-class with unity of the Communist and Labour Parties, glossing over differences of their political outlook and objectives.

It is this confusion about "unity", which bedevils a proper Communist approach to the Labour Party. If the latter is capitalism's Trojan horse within the working-class movement, unity with it is tantamount to unity with the class enemy. If the main enemy is imperialism, those who aid and abet imperialism are part of the enemy force. This may sound harsh and brutal, especially when it is clear that the Labour Party contains thousands of genuine socialists not yet ready to accept the Marxist assessment of the fundamental role of a social-democratic party - which is what the Labour Party is. But there can be no escape from reality. The longer that illusions about the Labour Party are left unchallenged, the more confused, cynical, opportunistic and a-political the working-class movement will become.

A permanent, general, strategic united front with the Labour Party is a contradiction of Marxism, yet this is the line of "The British Road to Socialism". This is the line of the present leaders of our Party, the British Communist Party.

Unity of action with varying sections of the Labour Party and trade union movement on specific issues is essential, and Communist politics makes no sense without this. But such unity must be specific and conditional, and related to the particular objectives of such united actions. At the same time, the political implications of these united actions must be explained and clarified. This is how limited unity of action can be gradually transformed, stage by stage, into political, ideological unity.

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To preach unqualified unity with the Labour Party is to surrender to the ideology of social-democracy. It smothers important differences,

obliterates questions of fundamental principle, and condemns Communists to the role of camp-followers.

The glossing over in this way of differences has eradicated Marxist influence in the peace movement, damped down militancy in the factories, mines and trade unions, and caused confusion in the minds of rank-and-filers in the Communist Party.

What do we do when a General Election is sprung on us? Do we once again call for the return of a Labour Government? A government which is certain to abandon, as have its predecessors, every principle on which the socialist movement has been based; a government clinging fast to the alliance with mankind's worst enemy, the U.S. ruling-class?

The reply that a Tory government would be worse, or that the workers would not understand such criticism of the Labour Government only shows that the leaders of the Communist Party are prepared to trail behind the working-class. Already many workers know that there is no difference between Wilson and Heath, Stewart and Maudling, Callaghan and McLeod, Greenwood and Sandys, Soskice and Henry Brooke. As regards those who have not yet caught on, our job is to speed this realisation.

To support the present Labour Government, to fight for the return of the next one, is to practise deception on the working-class and hold back the process of removing its Social-democratic blinkers. The duty of Communists is to expose the continuous coalition between Toryism and Social-democracy, and not to harp on their supposed differences. Only in this way can a change in the ingrained habits and outlook of the British working-class be effected.

The task of the Communists is to make clear their differences with the basic theories and actions of the Labour Party. Is this sectarian, or dogmatic? Will this widen the gap between the Communists and the working-class voters? Will this isolate us from the workers in the factories, the mines and the docks? In 1935, Gallacher polled 13,462 votes in West Fife; in 1964 Laughlan polled 3,273. In 1935, Pollitt polled 13,655 votes in East Rhondda; in 1964 Powell polled 3,385. In the 'thirties a growing section of the working-class recognised the Communists as militant workers and revolutionaries who offered a real alternative to the compromisers in the Labour Party. Today we have blurred these differences and the Communist Party plays the part of the old ILP.

The position is no better in the factories than in the constituencies. Communist militants - and there are many - in the middle of class battles are constantly being persuaded to "pipe down" by Party functionaries and

Communist trade union officials following the Party's line. They are advised not to undermine the position of officials seeking to cement their relations with reactionary colleagues in the trade union hierarchy. In factory after factory, Communist workers are being pressured to curtail their militancy and to urge the workers to accept official trade union advice. The recent "Jack Dash" fiasco is a clear example of the road that Communists are being asked to travel for the sake of a spurious "unity". If readers doubt the authenticity of this observation, let them consult their Communist colleagues in trade unions and factories where similar frustrating experiences are daily causing them disquiet and distress.

Now it is possible to understand why the Communist factory branches were wrecked in the period directly before "The British Road to Socialism" was officially launched in 1951. They were destroyed because the leaders of the Party had forsworn mass struggles by the workers, and amongst the workers, for petty-bourgeois parliamentarianism.

In "The British Road to Socialism" the Marxist analysis of the role of social-democracy as a support to capitalism has been dispensed with. The Labour Party is represented as some sort of socialist party albeit misled by right-wing leaders. Having characterised the Labour Party as socialist, cooperation or even unity with it is made the first essential of the Party's line. As nobody can possibly be persuaded to believe that the Labour Party will unite with the Communist Party on the basis of Marxism and revolution, the "British Road" discards Marxism and revolution - and holds out a perspective of socialism through parliamentary elections hoping thereby to make Communist/Labour collaboration look feasible.

This turn away from Marxism is a reflection of the trend in British politics during the last three generations. As the position of British imperialism weakens under the blows of both the national-liberation forces and of Britain's imperialist rivals, British capitalists become more and more concerned to secure their political and economic base at home. Under pressure of this necessity the Labour Party has swung more and more to the right, both ideologically and in its current policies. As the Labour Party has moved to the right, the Communist Party has clung to its coat-tails and moved right with it. The Communist Party has done this because of false notions about unity.

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The Party's duty is to lead a vigorous campaign to enlighten the workers and stir them for struggle, but it has failed to do this.

The Party has made no deep analysis of the economic situation today. The Economic Report prepared earlier this year was a bland, neutral review of past trends, adorned with an occasional phrase about imperialism.

It avoided all concrete exposition of the dangerous situation looming up. It scarcely mentioned the Americans, the principal pawn-brokers to whom Britain has been pledged. In place of a comprehensive analysis, it focussed attention on a few selected points, such as the Government's incomes and prices policy. But suppose the incomes policy, George Brown and all, disappeared tomorrow, Britain's basic problems would still remain, the problems of a declining imperialist power. The Party has done very little to make people understand the really fundamental nature of these problems, the imminence and profound depth of the crisis already threatening and of the radical steps needed to tackle them.

Has the Communist Party given an adequate lead on Vietnam?

It has not done much on its own, other than to introduce the notion of medical aid. Political campaigning has been left largely to joint bodies such as the British Vietnam Committee. It has been quite right to support these bodies as united front organizations gathering broad support, but within them the Party has the duty of advancing its own viewpoint. On Vietnam there has been a great deal of confusion among many well-intentioned people over questions of a cease-fire and negotiations. Because of this confusion Noel Baker, when presenting the Vietnam petition to the House of Commons on the day of the June lobby was even able to represent it as support for Wilson's Mission! Why did the Party fail for so long to give a proper lead on these matters? Only after the return of its delegation from Hanoi did it unequivocally demand the withdrawal of the U.S. forces as the prerequisite for settlement. But what is being done to back this demand with action?

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We are as much opposed to imperialist policies emanating from the Labour Government as from a Tory Government. Our starting point is the struggle against imperialist policies. Whether or not we are strong enough to frustrate these policies today, backed as they are by Tories, Labour and Liberals, we must take our stand on positions that are correct, and build our strength on a sure foundation.

At Congress the Party must clarify its policy towards the Labour Government and take a clear position on fundamentals.

The Labour Party is a capitalist party. Its line is a line of support for imperialism. The Party's task is to help the workers understand this, not merely in general but as regards all the main policies and acts of the Government:

- its alliance with America, its fight against the national-liberation forces, its insistence on strength "East of Suez" to protect British interests in oil, tin and rubber;

- its concern to maintain the Sterling system and the role of the City, and its placing of Britain in pawn to do this;
- its failure to fight for a policy of British economic independence against American domination and penetration;
- its attacks on the living standards of the British people.

To defeat the Government's policies requires more than a limited struggle on isolated questions. Better schools, more housing or higher wages cannot be achieved without a radical turn in the whole line of British policy. This will not come without an unprecedented mass political struggle; and people will engage effectively in this only if they are helped to understand the situation and why struggle is necessary.

If the people are told why we are experiencing today's difficulties; why imperialist policies can make them only worse; that the only alternative to these policies is a root-and-branch break with imperialism and a fight for the independence and reconstruction of Britain, we shall be speaking for the true interests of the British people and can be sure that they will respond.

The Communist Party must analyse, explain and lead; it must stand up for Marxism; it must re-examine comprehensively its ideas on the Labour Party and its relations with it.

At the present stage in Britain a socialist revolution is not on the immediate order of the day. What has to be done at this stage is to analyse correctly the political and economic realities, to build up understanding among advanced sections of the working-class. As wider and wider sections of the workers become engaged in organized struggle, as political understanding deepens, as leadership becomes more experienced and politically mature the conditions develop for a more radical challenge to capitalism.

Of course many questions regarding unity on specific issues remain to be examined. They must be dealt with in detail and concretely, and this we do not attempt in this article. We shall return to these problems on another occasion.

Marxism deals with political realities, not illusions. The discarding of illusions is the first step towards making the British Communist Party an effective Marxist force in our country.

The destruction of illusions about Social-democracy is an essential prerequisite for the advance of the British workers.