

The Labor Party Conference

An Unreal Assembly

By Harry Pollitt

THE Labor Government is out of office. That is the outstanding result of the British elections.

The Labor Party, which must not be confused with MacDonald's government increased its total vote, however, and the conservative victory was won at the price of the demoralization of the Liberal party, which went partly to the Labor party and partly to the Conservatives. Having achieved their principal object, the carrying into effect of the Dawes plan, for which the Labor Party was allowed by the capitalist parties to enter office, MacDonald was promptly kicked out.

During the elections MacDonald again demonstrated his petty-bourgeois orientation, befuddled the issues, and tried to obliterate as much as possible the distinction between the forces of labor and the capitalists. The most spectacular instance of this was the "exposure" of the fake Zinoviev letter. Learning that the Tories were about to spring it as an election canard, MacDonald himself published the forged letter in an attack upon Soviet Russia and the Communists. How little political profit he got out of this is seen in the fact that the Communist Party of Great Britain was able to call a mass meeting of more than 8,000 persons in Trafalgar Square, London, in protest against the unsavory incident.

More important than the loss of office by the Labor Government, more important than the growth in the Labor Party vote, is the gradual development of a left-wing section within the British labor movement and, thence, in the British Labor Party. As yet indecisive and faint-hearted, it is still the sign of deep stirrings going on within the British working class. The stories by Harry Pollitt and Tom Mann, in this issue, take on added significance in the light of the events in Great Britain since they were written.

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THE Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference of the Labor Party was held in an atmosphere of unreality and emotionalism. It was clear from the start that the delegates and the Executive were dominated by the political crisis, and that any attempt at facing the real fundamental issues which confront the workers, and which, if faced, would have resulted in strong criticisms of the government, would be suppressed.

In Mr. MacDonald's opening speech there was no attempt to give an analysis of the economic and political situation that we find ourselves in and what the next steps are. Nothing but platitudes and high-stepping, and above all, under all the bravado, a strong feeling of personal pique running all the time. That Mr. MacDonald is surely the most commanding figure in the British labor movement, so far as the offi-

cial type of delegates are concerned, was seen in the slavish adulation that was lavished on his every sentence and gesture. If the working masses think they are ever going to smash their oppressors by eloquence and high moral talk and ideals, they are in for some sad disappointments. Especially when these things are only the cloak under which capitalist rule is still being carried on. MacDonald's letter to Zaghlul Pasha, and his adoption of the Experts' Report, are the real guides to what MacDonaldism really means in action, not in phrases.

Because the general election dominated the whole conference the Executive were not only anxious to suppress criticism, but were doubly anxious to expel the Communists from the Labor Party. They felt this necessary in order that the middle-class politicians now dominating the Party could carry still further the policy of "liberalizing" the Party, and making it easier to appeal to the petty-bourgeoisie and renegade liberals, by throwing out of the Party the only real revolutionary forces in Great Britain.

This issue thus became the main question at the Conference. The debate was the best I have heard at any conference. Of course, it was known that the Communists were going to be defeated, so Mr. MacDonald very astutely let the debate have full rein. The discussion took place on the following recommendations of the Labor Party Executive.

(1) That the application for affiliation from the Communist Party be refused.

(2) That no member of the Communist Party shall be eligible for endorsement as a Labor candidate for Parliament, or any local authority.

The Executive would have liked to have gone much farther. In fact, they would have done so, but they were afraid that the trade unions would object. However, a very small local Labor Party, the Sutton Divisional Labor Party, had placed on the Agenda the following resolution:

"That no member of the Communist Party be eligible for membership in the Labor Party."

Now this resolution hadn't a dog's chance of passing if it had been left to the Sutton delegate to fight thru. So by a really magnificent piece of strategy, MacDonald decided to tag it onto the end of the discussion that was taking place on the report of the Executive Committee. This meant, of course, that it had a better chance of being accepted, and if any criticisms were levelled against it afterwards, the Executive would say it was a conference decision arising out of a resolution placed on the agenda by an affiliated organization.

The result of the debate is, of course, known. We were defeated on all three issues. How that will work out remains, of course, to be seen. To my mind one fact stands out as clear as daylight. These decisions represent the first open steps being taken by the leader of the Labor Party to exclude Communists, not only from the Labor Party but the trade unions as well. So long as the Labor Party is built up

on the basis of the trade unions, so long is it impossible to keep the Communists out of the Labor Party. Mr. Hodges and Mr. Morrison both knew this, that is why they were so paternal and anxious that we should "go into the highways and byways," to "fight for our principles." True, this advice comes a little strange to a Party whose work is carried in every workshop and every trade union branch in this country. And these men know it and under the cover of fine phrases they are slowly preparing the way.

But the comments of all the press on these decisions make interesting reading. The leader writers knew that this issue is not a sham issue. It is the fight for the leadership and direction of the labor movement that is at stake. And that fight so far, as both the capitalists and the right wing labor leaders are concerned, can but be impelled by pursuing the policy of exclusion to the bitter end. The following two extracts are a clear indication of what may come, for they only express publicly what the reactionaries think privately.

"For self-preservation either the unions will follow the Labor Party in repudiating the Communists,

or they must accept the risk of seeing their funds used for purposes utterly foreign to the objects for which they were created. The struggle which began on Tuesday is certainly not finished, and it will be curious to watch its development in the coming months; or rather, for it is not a matter which will be decided in a few months, in the coming years, in the years which will make the next generation."

"The Times," Oct. 8, 1924.

Or to see the same thoughts more brutally expressed:

"When we perceive them (the labor leaders) actually expelling the Communists from their ranks we may believe in the sincerity of the disclaimer."

"The Morning Post," Oct. 8, 1924.

When the voting on the resolution took place it was very curious to observe in the first two resolutions, that the bulk of the votes against the Labor Party Executive's recommendations came from the Trades Councils and Local Labor Parties. This is not surprising, and it provides the key to our future tactics. These are the organizations direct from



DEMONSTRATION OF 8,000 WORKERS ADDRESSED BY COMMUNIST SPEAKERS
In Trafalgar Square, London, in protest against MacDonald's forged Zinoviev letter. Comrade A. M. Wall, speaking.

the localities where Communists carry out their daily work in the labor movement, and they are the places where we must intensify our work, and we can, in twelve months, beat the Labor Party Executive at their own game. Mr. Hodges and Mr. Morrison will regret their kindly invitations to "fight for a place" in the labor movement. The truth is, we cannot be shut out by the compromisers and vote-catchers at present in command.

The discussion on the Annual Report of the Executive Committee and the Parliamentary Labor Party came in for fierce criticism. The Communists led the attack on the whole policy of the Party and the government. Russia, the budget, armaments policy, unemployment, foreign policy, all these questions were raised, and the significant thing was the general feeling and undercurrent all the time, that the government had not made the most of its opportunities. This was perhaps best expressed by T. Kenneburgh, of the Electrical Trades Union, when he declared "some of us are getting sick of hearing that the government is only in office, and not in power."

When any resolution appeared likely to be construed as a censure on the government or the Executive, appeals would be made to withdraw it in order to preserve unity in face of the election, and this stuff went down, despite the fact that the previous day, on the initiative of the Executive, the Conference had expelled the Communists in order to catch votes and placate a certain section of the enemy.

One other small thing, but very significant, the Executive Committee made desperate efforts to get the eight organizations, which had resolutions down about court functions and the flunkeyism of the Labor ministers, to withdraw these resolutions. Unfortunately, they did, but this will give the reader an idea, of how much the democratic leaders like to hear their democratic followers express themselves in their own democratic way.

On Thursday morning came the news of the government defeat. "Back again to emotionalism," was the slogan. Every-

thing and everybody was cheered. The Conference that expelled Tom Mann, the workers' fighting leader on the Tuesday, sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" to Sir Patrick Hastings on the Thursday. Then came Mr. MacDonald. The Communists led the way in the singing of the "Red Flag" and "The Internationale," much to the disgust of many leaders on the platform, who would have preferred "Lead Kindly Light." And so it all ended. The Conference is a machine. It does not represent the workers. It is dominated by Parliamentary candidates, Labor Party and trade union officials, and intellectuals, all of whom have forgotten the bitterness of the class struggle. Consequently, an air of unreality, intrigue and compromise is ever present. Resolutions are passed without any intention of trying to mobilize the masses to struggle for their realization. The class struggle is suppressed because it isn't gentlemanly.

The Communists are expelled because they are a growing menace to the present leaders and because their influence among the masses is rapidly increasing. Every day the Communist issue in British politics becomes more and more the main issue. The Labor government which had given the word that the Communists must be expelled will now have had this lesson. We are not living in 1914. There has been a revolution in Russia, and that is still supreme. So much so, that it has been found necessary by the government to make a treaty with the Russian Soviet government.

In Britain, there is for the first time, a well-disciplined revolutionary Party, the Communist Party. Its anti-war propaganda has resulted in the Campbell case.

The shadow of Communism is over the British labor movement.

All efforts to banish Communism and Communists are bound to fail. The good old times of playing at politics are gone. Revolution has stepped upon the stage.

That is probably why the "great" Labor Conference ended with the singing of "Auld Lang Syne," instead of the workers' battle cry "The Internationale."

Roots of the British Minority Movement

By Tom Mann

THE minority movement in Great Britain is not so new as many seem to think. Special activity has been shown recently, and considerable changes are taking place in the trade union movement as a result of these activities of the revolutionary minorities. The beginning is to be found, however, many years in the past.

In the year 1910, fourteen years ago, the present writer, then as now a member of the Amalgamated Engineers, was identified with kindred spirits who associated together to form an Industrial Syndicalist League. This was done because the trade union movement was badly organized numerically and objectively, and increasing reliance was being placed upon parliamentary action. The League issued a monthly pamphlet—"The Industrial Syndicalist," the first of which appeared in July, 1910.

I have said reliance was placed on parliament; it is necessary to say also that among the more militant of the workers increasing dissatisfaction with the results of par-

liamentary effort was expressed, as no rise in the standard of life took place and the associations in connection with the parliamentary institutions had a detrimental effect on the characters of the workmen members returned to parliament. In short, neither by political nor by industrial action was any real militancy shown. The term syndicalist was used to popularize the industrial movement on the lines that the French movement was then growing. As the French at that time were attaching less importance to legislation and increasing importance to industrial organization, so in England there were those who felt the necessity for similar action.

We were not anti-Parliament, but indifferent to it, holding that the first essential was a revolutionary objective, and solidarity on the industrial field to achieve this. We were entirely opposed to the starting of new unions, contending that rank and file activity of the right kind and right amount would make the unions what they ought to be. In setting