

HOW LABOUR CAN WIN

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THE New Year of 1955 opens when the British people face an international situation far more serious than that which developed after Hitler came to power. This is the fact that needs to be grasped by every lover of peace, and particularly by the organised labour movement.

The year 1954 was characterised by a series of tremendous political events at home and abroad, and unless there is an equally great change inside the British labour movement, it will be looked back upon as the year which, under the leadership of the Tories and right-wing Labour leaders, witnessed the fateful preparations for a third world war.

There were two outstanding contradictions in Britain in 1954: first, that at a time when it was generally agreed that international tension had eased it was Britain that took the initiative in forcing through the Nine Power war agreements to re-arm Germany. Second, that at a time when there had been displayed a greater militancy and struggle against capitalism by the rank and file of the Trade Unions and Labour Party, the official leadership was never so divided, never so openly flouting the feeling in the rank and file, never so openly manœuvring and threatening in order to pull the movement behind the policy of the Tories.

The supreme tragedy of all this lies in the fact that in 1954 Labour had it within its grasp to become the real driving political force in Britain fighting for the improvement of the conditions of workers of all ages. Above all, it should have come forward as the unshakeable opponent of German rearmament and thus placed the Labour Party in an unassailable position to win the General Election as the Party of peace at whatever time it comes.

What is the internal position of the Parliamentary Labour Party? It is important to understand this, for in the last analysis it is this body and not the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party that appears as the Labour Party in British politics. The leaders turn their noses up at any decisions they do not like which may have been made by a National Conference of the Labour Party. Despite the fight made by the Lefts inside the Parliamentary Labour Party to get a front bench leadership more truly representative of

the views of the rank and file, the Front Bench elected up to now has been reactionary, because so many Labour Members of Parliament repudiate the expressed views of their Trade Union or Constituency Labour Party.

This leadership, as typified by Attlee, Morrison and Gaitskell, is the most reactionary and conservative in the history of the British Labour Party. It maintains no daily consistent fight against all phases of Tory policy, and on all fundamental questions lines up with the Tory Government against the wishes of its rank and file, notably on German rearmament, subservience to the U.S.A., the terror in the British colonies, the continuation of the cold war and hostility to the socialist nations of the world. The withdrawal of the whip from the Labour M.P.'s who saved the honour of the Labour Party by their stand against German rearmament; the closing down of *Socialist Outlook*; the threats constantly being made against *The Tribune*; and the expulsion of some of the finest members the Labour Party ever possessed for associating with Communists in striving for peace, are indications of how far the right-wing Labour leaders are prepared to go in their efforts to support the Tory Government's preparations for war.

The policy of the right-wing leaders has resulted in presenting to the people a Parliamentary Labour Party which is divided on the most urgent political issue of the day—peace or war—and this at a time when the maximum unity could have been obtained if the mass opposition to German rearmament on the part of the rank and file of the Labour Movement had been faithfully reflected by these leaders. Furthermore, it has led to feelings of frustration among Labour Members of Parliament that have nothing in common with the magnificent will to fight the Tories expressed in so many directions during 1954, nor anything in common with any serious intention of winning political power at the next General Election.

But the Left and Centre elements in the Parliamentary Labour Party have also to take a measure of responsibility because in all too many cases they have made no consistent and effective appeals for support either to the people who elected them, or to the Constituency Labour Parties and Trade Unions to which they belong. If this had been done, their fight would have been certain of success. If all those Labour Members of Parliament who are opposed to German rearmament had voted against it, the Attlees and Morrisons would never have dared to propose their exclusion from the Labour Party. The rank and file would never have allowed it to take place.

A special responsibility now rests particularly on those Labour Members of Parliament who proclaim their opposition to the policy of the right-wing leaders. It is to try and find the basis of a common policy which can be placed fairly and squarely before the rank and file.

Groups of M.P.'s have in the past issued policy statements such as 'Keep Left'. How much more important it is today to put forward a policy which can command the support of the widest progressive section of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and which would receive the overwhelming majority support of the workers in the constituencies, the factories and the streets. Furthermore, experience in these last few years has also proved beyond a shadow of doubt, that when some critics of the right-wing Labour leaders think it good policy to go out of their way constantly to proclaim they have no association with the Communist Party, or talk and write about 'Communism and Fascism' in the same terms, they are not placing a protective shield around themselves from being attacked by the right-wing Labour leaders, but playing into the hands of those leaders to disrupt the Left. For it does not prevent the right-wing Labour leaders and Tories using the term 'Bevanite' in the same way as they use the term 'Communist' to try to discredit all in the labour movement who want to work for a policy that is based on the principles of Socialism.

The rank and file have proved in a hundred and one ways during 1954 their hatred of the Tories, and their readiness to make great sacrifices during strikes to fight them. They have shown that they do not want another war, but do want socialism and are ready to work side by side with all the sections of the labour movement who have similar aims. This magnificent fighting spirit has brought about a certain differentiation in the Parliamentary Labour Party and on the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party which it is vital should be developed to the point where the policy of the right-wing leaders can be defeated.

The whole situation, therefore, calls for the most immediate and objective examination by every serious minded person in the labour movement of what needs to be done to make absolutely certain that at the General Election the Tories can be decisively defeated. Millions of such persons exist; they are to be found in every factory, pit, shipyard, workshop, field, office, school and laboratory. They have no axe to grind, no thoughts of personal advancement or career. The present and future interests of the movement and the coming to

fruition of its noble aims are their everlasting desire and aim. They are the flower of the British people, its hope and inspiration. They deserve something better than they are getting today from the Attlees, Morrisons and Gaitskells.

If ever time was the essence of the contract, this is the case today. In our judgment 1955 can be the decisive year in all Britain's history. It can be a year of peaceful social advance, or one in which further steps are taken towards the physical destruction of these islands and its people through another world war.

No one can tell what the mad warmongers temporarily in power in the United States of America and Britain will get up to, if through any weakness in the labour movement the Tories are returned to power at the next General Election. A Churchill representing imperialism at its vilest who was prepared in May, 1945, to use Nazi troops against our Russian allies at a moment when Russian soil was drenched with blood, when every Russian home was bereaved, when the fumes from Nazi gas chambers were fouling the air of Germany and Poland, is a ghoul who will not hesitate to use hydrogen bombs to crush Socialism unless he and his like are removed from power for all time.

1955 can give Labour its greatest opportunities, but only if it realises its equally great responsibility and starts now to set its house in order. No one pretends there is any easy road, any short cut, or that no one's feelings are going to be hurt. That would be deceitfully shallow thinking that needs to be pushed ruthlessly on one side. No, there is no magic way of defeating Tory or Labour reactionary leadership and policies, or of ending their defeatism or political opportunism. But there are ways of restoring confidence in the labour movement, of restoring unity, collective thought, collective leadership, and formulating policies that can evoke the enthusiastic support of every section of the organised membership of the labour movement, and the millions of its allies who look to it for political leadership.

A speedy transformation of the whole position of the Labour Party could be secured if the Left leaders and the rank and file of the Constituency Labour Parties, backed up by the local trade union branches and trades councils, would now carry through a great campaign against German rearmament, and for immediate negotiations for a collective settlement of European problems. The organisation of meetings, conferences, the lobbying of every single Member of Parliament demanding to know where they stand on this life

and death issue is what is needed. In the case of Labour Members of Parliament refusing to oppose German rearmament, they should be repudiated and new selection conferences convened to select new candidates who will carry out the wishes of the members.

Alongside such a campaign there could be an insistent demand for a Special Conference of the Labour Party to express the will of the members for peace and against German rearmament.

The local elections in the spring now take on a special significance. They can not only be the means of defeating Tory-controlled local and County Councils, but the battleground on which every phase of Labour organisation is tightened up in readiness for any General Election which may take place.

The trade unionists should press forward, with all the strength, unity and power they possess, their demands for wage increases out of the illgotten gains of the employers, so that both on the industrial and political fields we witness the greatest mass movement Britain has ever seen.

For our part, we express the opinion that one of the most effective measures that could be taken to help in closing the ranks would be for the Labour Party to withdraw the bans it imposes upon any of its members or organisations working alongside members of the Communist Party. It is common knowledge throughout the labour movement that members of the Labour and Communist Parties are working together in spite of the bans on such activity. The proof of this is to be found in the character of the agendas for all conferences of working-class organisations and from the results of these conferences. How much greater could be these results if the bans were lifted and such united work could be done without fear of being suspended or expelled from the Labour Party.

Let members of the Labour Party ask themselves if these bans have strengthened or weakened the Labour Party. The answer is plain for all to see in the present disastrous position of the Labour Party, and the result of the recent West Derby by-election. It is a stupid position, in fact, that exists at the present time. Labour and Communist Party members work with each other in the factories, the trade union branches, trade union district and executive committees, trades councils, and in tenants' organisations, but are proscribed from doing so in local, county or parliamentary elections, or in the fight for peace and friendship between the peoples.

We are very glad when we read the speeches of certain Labour leaders supporting the idea of the peaceful co-existence of the

capitalist and socialist systems of society. But we are a little puzzled when we know how vehemently they oppose any members of the Labour Party and Communist Party working together.

The Left leaders and the rank and file of the Labour Party need to take a firmer attitude against the operation of the existing bans on being associated with the Communist Party. This would be in the interests of the whole labour movement, because the members of the Communist Party have a record second to none in the labour movement for their ceaseless activity in the factories, trade unions and working-class localities, and unity in action with the Communists now is the best way to break through the anti-democratic bans that hold back the membership of the Labour Party from exerting their full strength.

It is time to have a change. Time to stop playing at politics, and above all, time to understand that the essence of politics is that it represents a struggle for power. Concretely in British conditions the task is to do everything possible to defeat the Tories and get a Government that will lead Britain on the road to economic prosperity for its working people, defend our national independence, and ensure that we live in peace and take the first essential steps towards Socialism.

Such a great united campaign could electrify the whole country, lead to gigantic demonstrations for peace and social advance, sweep the Tories away and lead to the return of a majority of Labour and Communist M.P.'s pledged to fight for the people. It could help forward the movement for the much needed special conference of the Labour Party and the removal of all bans on members of other working-class organisations and peace and friendship societies; and as the fight for a lasting peace and for victory at the General Election went forward so too would the demand arise that just as the leaders of nations with different social systems can meet together to discuss complicated problems, so there is a need for the leaders of all working-class organisations in Britain to be brought together.

In preparation for the General Election and for the issues which will dominate the political scene in Britain in 1955, we suggest:

1. The broadest united campaign to mobilise the people against Toryism and the war policy and for the return of a Labour majority for a progressive policy for peace and socialism.
2. Co-operation of all sections in the factory, trade union branches, local Labour Parties and all organisations of the labour movement, Communist and non-Communist, to win these aims.

3. A special Labour Party Conference to reverse the policy of support for Toryism and German rearmament and take up leadership of the fight for peace.

4. To remove the bans on Labour Party members working alongside members of the Communist Party in support of agreed aims.

5. That an exchange of opinion should take place between leaders of the Executive Committees of the Labour Party, Co-operative Party and Communist Party to try and reach agreement on what needs to be and can be done to defeat the Tory Government.

We pledge that the Communist Party will give its unstinted support to help bring to fruition the aims we have set out.

FROM THE *LABOUR MONTHLY* OF 25 YEARS AGO

SOUTH AFRICA

On October 25 at a meeting of the European Associated Chambers of Commerce protests were made against the high taxation of the African on the grounds that 'he was an economic asset'. It was pointed out that Africans getting as low a wage as £12 or £18 a year were taxed, whereas a European did not pay any taxes till he was earning between £300 and £400; that Africans were liable to be arrested if they had not the receipt of their poll tax in their pockets and that farmers often had to pay their African employees' taxes and get it back afterwards from the wages (these two latter instances obviously providing reasons why the European Chamber of Commerce were agitating against this taxation).

In the middle of November a relatively huge concentration of government forces was secretly made at Durban. This concentration was given out as necessary to compel the Africans to pay their overdue poll taxes. At 3 o'clock in the morning of November 14, the barracks of the Africans were surrounded by some 500 European and 200 African police armed with tear gas bombs, bayonets and machine guns. At one barracks some protests were made, but according to the report 'slight pressure by the bayonet proved adequate persuasion' (Johannesburg *Star*, November 14)! Some 350 out of over 5,000 searched were arrested for being unable to produce their tax receipts and in being marched to the police station were watched by crowds of Africans. These, according to the same report—

were cleared away like chaff before the wind by three tear gas bombs. The effectiveness of the new police arm was immediately demonstrated. . . .

From *The Recent Events in South Africa*,
by E. R. Roux, January, 1930.