

BRITAIN AND THE HUNGRY MILLIONS

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Britain's future depends upon an expansion of world trade, upon making effective the vast potential demand of 1,500,000,000 customers in underdeveloped territories. The age of exploitation is over; we must raise the standards of those to whom we hope to sell.

(Labour's Colonial Policy: Economic Aid, June 1957.)

DURING the long years of Tory rule Mr. Harold Wilson waxed most eloquent on the need to extend far more 'economic aid' to the under-developed countries, to assist in raising their living standards, and so provide an expanding world market. His original plan was to devote 2 per cent of Britain's national income to an 'international fund for economic development'. In Labour's official policy this was reduced to 1 per cent—at that time about £160 million a year. In actual practice, total 'economic aid' under Tory rule reached £160 million only in the peak year of 1962, but due to the rapid rise in Britain's national income this was far less than 1 per cent. In 1962-63 the total dropped to £148 million, and is likely to have been less for 1963-64. There is every sign it will be lower still during the first year of the Labour Government.

In the eight years since 1957 the tragic problem of world hunger and poverty has become even more serious. The United Nations gives a moderate estimate that in 100 of the under-developed coun-

tries, with a total population of 1,250 million, the average national income per head is less than £40. On the other hand, in Western Europe and the United States it is more than £400, ten times as much. Economic transformation lags seriously behind the political transformation in the pattern of world relations. Since 1957 the world scene has changed rapidly. The majority of the former colonies have won political independence, and nearly sixty new states have emerged since the second world war. Within the United Nations, the new states, together with the socialist countries, are making a tremendous impact on world affairs. Faced with this rising opposition the imperialist states apply the dual strategy of making minor political concessions while resorting to new methods to maintain their domination—the strategy of neo-colonialism.

Great political victories have been won against imperialism, but the distorted economic pattern of the capitalist world still remains. Apart from the socialist world (where the economy and living standards are rapidly growing) poverty and hunger still remains in all the under-developed countries. This spectacle of growing mass hunger and poverty alongside the 'affluent' countries, is often presented as a contrast between the 'poor' and the 'rich' countries, with the Soviet Union included among the latter. In reality, it is a contrast *within* the capitalist world, between the imperialist exploiters and the exploited under-developed countries.

The Soviet Union, together with other socialist countries, is doing its utmost to assist the new states to transform the backward economies and low living standards which they have inherited from colonial rule. The strategy of neo-colonialism is to maintain this gap, and even to extend it. Together with the drain of the gigantic profits of the big overseas monopoly firms and banks from the new states, (politely termed the 'developing' countries) there is the widening gap between what the new states get for their exports and what they pay for their imports. Few have reached the stage of exporting manufactured goods, and those who do can export only a tiny fraction. In the main they are dependent on the export of raw materials and primary products, and have to import most of their manufactured and capital goods.

The *volume* of exports from the 'developing' countries rose from the index figure of 70·7 in 1951 (taking 1960 as 100) to 111·2 in 1962. In the same period the *value* of these exports dropped from 125 to 95. Taking both together, the 'terms of trade' for the developing countries went down from 116 in 1951 to 96 in 1962. Prices rose

slightly in 1963, but dropped again in 1964. Put in more graphic terms, what the 'developing' countries had to export for every ton of steel imported from the 'developed' countries is given in the following revealing contrast:

<i>Product</i>	<i>1951</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Ghana (lbs. of cocoa)	202	571	283
Brazil (lbs. of coffee)	158	380	240
Malaya (lbs. of rubber)	132	441	334

This serious drop in the prices of raw materials and primary products on the capitalist world market brought no benefit to British consumers. On the contrary, they have had to pay more for cocoa, coffee, chocolate and rubber. The benefit of the steep decline in prices has gone in to the coffers of the big overseas monopoly firms dealing in these products.

By this process it is estimated by United Nations experts that the 'developing' countries have been robbed of no less than \$13,000 million between the years 1951 and 1961. If this trend goes on, they calculate that by 1970 this widening gap will have robbed these countries of no less than \$7,000 million in one year alone. No wonder the 'developing' countries (which include the new states and the Latin American Republics) have exercised the utmost pressure in recent years within the United Nations to change this pattern of world trading relations. They had the full support of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries—in contrast to the strongest opposition from the imperialist countries.

Despite this opposition the United Nations was obliged to convene an international conference on trade and development (U.N.T.A.D.) at Geneva during April-June of last year. Reluctantly forced to take part, the representatives of the imperialist countries did their utmost to oppose and sabotage all the proposals made to ensure more equitable world trading relations. In the final voting on 15 'general' and 13 'special' principles, Britain and the U.S.A. voted against or abstained on 11 of the first principles, and 8 of the second. The Soviet Union voted in favour of all the 'special' principles, and all but one of the 'general' principles. The Geneva conference has not solved the problem. Its value lies in the overwhelming vote in favour of more equitable principles in world trading relations, and in the exposure of the attitude of the imperialist countries. But the real solution lies in the extension and growth of the solidarity struggle against all forms of imperialist domination. And this is in the basic interests of the British people, no less than the hungry millions in the 'developing' countries of the world.

What is the root cause of this situation? World hunger and poverty is the inevitable consequence of imperialist exploitation. It arises from the incessant drive to get cheap raw materials and primary products from the 'developing' countries, and in turn to sell them manufactured and capital goods at the highest prices. Moreover, the pattern of imperialist exploitation is to distort and impede the growth of an independent economy in the 'developing' countries, thus forcing them to rely on specialised exports. A few examples will suffice to reveal how this works in practice. For Malaya 76 per cent of exports consist of rubber and tin; for Senegal 86 per cent of exports are oil-seeds; cocoa and timber account for 93 per cent in the Ivory Coast; tea and rubber exports from Ceylon consist of 82 per cent, and 77 per cent of Bolivia's exports consist of tin, lead and silver. What is essential to change these colonial types of economy into an independent balanced economy is the creation of an industrial base, and a diversification of agriculture, with the most rapid expansion of the public and co-operative sector of production. This is not just a matter of blue-print plans, though well-prepared economic plans are the first step. *It is primarily a matter of carrying forward to a higher stage the solidarity struggle to end the imperialist system of exploitation.*

The political effect of all the philanthropic schemes to feed the 'hungry millions' has been to conceal the real cause of world hunger and poverty, and enable imperialist robbery to continue on an increasing scale. The Duke of Edinburgh is a patron of the 'Feed the Hungry Campaign' and the Queen is a patron of the 'Save the Children Fund'. Oxford Famine Relief (OXFAM) raised just over £2 million in 1963, which works out at a penny divided between three people for a whole year! True, there may be thousands of well-meaning people who sacrifice money, time and effort for this altruistic aim. But it is important to convince them, not only that their self-sacrifice fails to touch even a tiny fringe of this vast problem. The fact is that their genuine efforts are actually being exploited to cover up the real causes, and to enable imperialist exploitation to increase the volume of world hunger. So at the end they are back behind the starting point!

Even the most zealous champions of imperialism cannot conceal the widening gap between the living standards of the 'developing' countries and those of the 'developed' capitalist countries. But they try to hide the process of imperialist robbery by means of all kinds of schemes for 'economic aid' to the 'developing' countries. These

range from the 'multilateral' schemes of the United Nations, World Bank, the Colombo Plan, and the Organisation for European Co-operation and Development (O.E.C.D.) to the 'bilateral' schemes of the United States, Britain, and other capitalist countries.

In December 1961 the United Nations launched a 'development decade', for which the aim was set for the 'developing' countries to increase their national income by 5 per cent in the first half and by 6 per cent in the second half of the decade. Taking into account an estimated population rise of 2½ per cent, it was calculated that this would double living standards within 25 to 30 years. It was estimated that it would take 80 years for living standards in these countries to reach the *present* level in Western Europe, and 120 years to reach the present level in the United States. All these estimates assume that the imperialist system of exploitation will go on for ever. Just as United Nations estimates of dates for colonies to achieve their independence were shattered by the rapid advance of the liberation struggle throughout the world, so it is also possible that new political victories will shatter their estimates of the rate of economic advance. Within only five years, liberated Cuba, with vast socialist economic aid, has already destroyed these forecasts. And in Algeria, Ghana, and other countries, living standards are increasing rapidly in the process of advancing towards socialism, even before it is actually achieved.

In a subsequent article we shall examine the various projects for development and aid which have been adopted and how they have worked out in practice.

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