

The New Political Course of the British Communist Party.

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The decision of the Ninth Enlarged Executive of the Communist International on the **English question**, with special reference to the coming General Election, is a landmark in the history of the British Communist Party and the British working class movement.

The essence of this decision is that the British Communist Party will henceforth advance beyond the former policy of supporting the opportunist Labour Party together with criticism, and go forward as an independent party to direct and open conflict with the official reformist leadership of the Labour Party on behalf of the revolutionary working class. This policy will receive its clear expression at the coming General Election, when the maximum number of independent Communist candidates will be put forward and will fight against the official Labour Party social traitors, without allowing themselves to be held back by the corrupt machine-discipline of the reformist bureaucracy in the Labour Party, or by the fear of the pos-

sible consequence in certain cases of letting the (open) capitalist candidate in.

This decision extends in its significance far beyond the immediate issue of the coming General Election, and is of governing importance for the whole future line of development of the Communist Party, of the Labour Party, and of the British working class movement. It marks the advance of the British Communist Party to a new stage as the independent leader of the revolutionary working class, conscious of its growing strength, directly fighting the reformist traitors at the head of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions who have completely merged into coalition with capitalism, throwing off the shackles of the bureaucratic Labour Party discipline which have hitherto restricted its advance, and entering on to the direct path to the revolutionary mass party of the working class. This advance corresponds to the sharpening issues of class

struggle in Britain, as well as to the general international line of sharpening the fight against Social Democracy.

What is the change in the situation in Britain which has made this advance on the previous policy of seven years (1920—1927) possible, justified and inevitable? Why has the change been decided on at the present moment rather than earlier or later? What are the consequences likely to be of the new policy in Britain?

The change is the consequence of the complete transformation of the British situation during the past seven years, following on the continuous heavy capitalist decline (the gigantic economic depression began in the winter of 1920 and still continues unabated and even intensified), which has effected a radical alteration in British economic and political conditions. British Capitalism has been finally transformed from its old surviving "liberal" traditions, which received their last blossoming under Lloyd George, into the prototype of reactionary, decaying capitalist repression and dictatorship, exemplified in Baldwin and Chamberlain (the smashing of the General Strike and the miners, the Trade Union Act, the break with the Soviet Union, the offensive against China and India). The British Labour Movement has been transformed from its former boasted liberal "unique" character of all-inclusive "tolerance" and "unity", freedom from doctrinal dissensions and imperviousness to revolutionary theory (actually the reflection of its old-time dependence on capitalist prosperity and world-monopoly), into a rapidly evolving process of differentiation and revolutionisation: the upper strata of the Labour Party and Trade Unions evolving to complete and open coalition with capitalism and persecution of the revolutionary workers closer and closer to the model of Continental Social Democracy and Amsterdam (the Mond-General-Council Industrial Peace Conference, the Baldwin-MacDonald united front of imperialism and counter-revolution, Liberal-Labour coalition preparations, expulsion of revolutionary workers and local sections in the Labour Party, and beginning in the Trade Unions); while the mass of the workers have been driven to increasingly revolutionary struggle against capitalism and the capitalist state (the General Strike and miner's struggle; growth of the Minority Movement a million strong; new left wave signs to-day). The militant left workers have been transformed from scattered elements into a united and cohesive fighting force, following ever more clearly the leadership of the Communist Party. The new policy is the inevitable and necessary expression of this new situation.

The former tactics of the Communist Party, originally laid down by Lenin in 1920 and 1921, were based on the situation when the Party was formed and on the early years of its growth up to the present point. When the Communist Party was formed in 1920, it was formed of scattered elements, with many sectarian traditions, and with little or no experience of systematic work in the mass organisations of the working class. It was confronted with a very large, long established and deeply entrenched reformist-controlled organisation in the shape of the Labour Party, based on the trade unions and nominally expressing the principle of political unification of the working class forces. The workers were streaming into the Labour Party after the war (its vote rose from 2 1/4 millions in 1918 to 5 1/2 millions in 1924), which was proclaiming a rapid advance to Socialism by its programme of a "New Social Order". The task of the newly formed Communist Party was therefore to throw itself into the midst of this larger movement, there to fight the reformist bureaucracy from within in this wider field, assist forward the advance to a "Labour" Government in order to expose the hollowness of the reformists' pretensions in the practical experience of the working class, and on this basis to advance to the fight for the direct leadership of the working class.

The unique character of the Labour Party assisted to make these tactics possible. The Labour Party was nominally a federal bloc of all working class organisations, trade union or socialist, allowing complete liberty of expression and policy to its constituent organisations (the old British Socialist Party, which was already affiliated to the Communist International in 1920, was at the same time affiliated to the Labour Party). Thus the Communist Party, both by the demand for affiliation, through individual membership, and through trade union delegations, could act with considerable freedom within the Labour

Party, and even secure the adoption of its candidates as Labour candidates.

To-day this position is completely changed. The exposure of the reformist Labour Party leadership in government, has now taken place by the experience of the "Labour" Government of 1924, which revealed itself as the willing tool of the bourgeoisie in the enforcement of the Dawes Report, terrorist repression in India, armaments expansion, anti-strike action at home etc. This exposure has been carried further by the experience of the General Strike and miners' struggle, which laid bare the pretensions of the "left" reformist leaders who sought to lead the left wave following on the disillusionment after the Labour Government, and which consolidated the reformist leadership into a single reactionary bloc. By the acceptance of the Trade Union Act, the Industrial Peace campaign, the increasing transformation of the Labour Party programme from the last vestiges of socialism to a liberal imperialist programme, the disciplining of the Labour Party in Parliament into a "responsible" governmental party of capitalism, and the campaign of persecution and exclusions against the revolutionary workers, the Labour Party and Trade Unions are being steadily transformed, by the active co-operation of the reformist leadership and Baldwin, into auxiliary organs of capitalism and of the capitalist state.

Corresponding to this change, the Labour Party is completely changed in organisation. Although still based on the trade unions, the old "free" all-inclusive character no longer obtains. Communists are excluded from individual membership, candidatures or official positions; this is being extended to left wingers; left wing local labour parties sympathetic to the Communists have been excluded; local labour parties have been reorganised and reconstructed wholesale to bring them under the dominance of the reformist machine; even the last avenue of Communist activity in the Labour Party, as elected trade union delegates, is now beginning to be closed. The Labour Party is thus almost completely transformed into a Social Democratic type of party, based on reformist control of the trade unions.

Finally, the Communist Party has advanced, on the basis of its systematic activity in the mass organisations of the workers, and its active leadership in every phase of the workers' struggle, to a position of a definite measure of organised wider support and influence in the working class. Its press has a steady working class circulation of sixty to eighty thousand; through the Minority Movement it is able to speak to a million workers; in the last phase of the miners' struggle its slogans were being followed by the miners in their fight in the face of the opposition of the entire reformist leadership. Recent signs, such as the Scottish Miners' Elections, show important left developments and a sweeping turnover of votes to the Communists against the reformist officials, who are now using every form of manipulation and obstruction to retain their positions against the workers' votes.

Thus the situation is ripe in every way for the advance of the Communist Party to the new stage of direct fight against the reformist leadership.

More than this. There are signs that, unless the new leadership for which the workers are beginning to look were forthcoming, there would be grave danger of growing stagnation, apathy and disintegration in the British working class movement, owing to the machine-discipline and discrediting of the reformist leaders. During the last six months the Labour vote in the industrial centres has begun to fall; and this is widely attributed to the disruptive policy of the reformist leadership and growing apathy and disillusionment of the left wing workers. In the municipal elections last autumn, although the aggregate Labour representation for the whole country increased, in the ten largest industrial centres (Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Edinburgh, Bristol, Bradford and Newcastle) the aggregate Labour vote between 1926 and 1927 actually decreased by 25,000 or 9%, while the Conservative vote increased by 120,000 or 28%. In the recent Northampton bye-election, the Labour vote fell below the level of 1923; in the Lancaster bye-election, the Labour vote fell from 9000 in 1922 to 6000 in 1928. Thus there is considerable indication that the Labour Party, though still advancing in the agricultural and backward areas, is beginning to lose its hold

in the industrial working class. This, if true, is a very powerful demonstration of the need of the new policy.

The new policy does not mean that the Communist Party will cease to carry on agitation within the Labour Party (all the more, of course, within the Trade Unions) to the full extent of the possibilities still remaining, or will in any way diminish the tactics of the united front. On the contrary, the Communist Party will continue through the trade union delegations, so long as these are not finally closed, to conduct propaganda in the Labour Party, and to utilise the machinery of the local labour parties, so far as possible. The Communist Party will press for the calling of new Selection Conferences of the local labour parties, on a basis of unrestricted and equal workers' representation, to select new candidates in place of the reformist candidates. But where this is refused, or the local labour parties are made unrepresentative of the workers by reformist manipulation, the Communist Party will call unofficial selection conferences in union with the left wing workers to select independent candidates against the official Labour candidates. The Communist Party will organise support for its candidates among the left wing workers on the basis of a **united front programme**. Labour candidates in constituencies where there is no Communist candidate or independent left candidate approved by the Party, will be confronted with the united front programme, and will only receive support in special cases where they pledge themselves to the united front programme: in other cases they will receive no support.

The consequence of the new policy are likely to be

1. clarification of political issues in Britain, and a rapid stimulus to the process of differentiation in the working class;
2. the possible defeat in certain cases of prominent reformist Labour leaders, consequent on Communist opposition;
3. mobilisation of the militant workers around a clear revolutionary programme;
4. advance of the Communist Party in political influence and mass support.

The reception of the new policy in the reformist Labour press is instructive. Very considerable attention and prominence is given to it; and although the words of the editorials proclaim complete indifference etc., the very loudness of the protesting and the prominence betray the apprehensions that are felt, as the seats of prominent Labour leaders are known to be endangered, unless (as is possible) the bourgeoisie rally to their support to save them. The bourgeois press also gives very prominent attention to the new policy. Both bourgeois and Labour press universally endeavour to brand the new policy as a sudden "order from Moscow" sprung from the blue upon the British Communist Party against its opposition and in ignorance of British conditions. Isolated sentences from the preceding discussion in the British Party, expressing views critical of the new policy, are torn from their context and reprinted broadcast by the bourgeois and reformist Labour press with high praise as the last word in political wisdom, in order to suggest a division of opinion between the British Communist Party and the "Moscow dictators". Apart from the usual ignorance thus displayed of the democratic working of the Communist International, the whole suggestion of a division between the British Communist Party and the International is of course fantastic nonsense. The new policy was unanimously reached by the International Executive, with the unanimous agreement of the British Delegation. The whole question is now subjected to complete and thorough discussion throughout the British Party; and there is no question that the entire British Party will stand united behind the international policy.

The new political course of the Communist Party will undoubtedly receive the enthusiastic support of the revolutionary workers in Britain, who have already been chafing at the restraints imposed by the machine-discipline of the reformist bureaucracy. It should help to sharpen and intensify the entire political fight and development of the class struggle in Britain, and carry the Communist Party a whole stage forward in the advance to a revolutionary mass party and independent political leadership of the working class.