

THE LABOUR PARTY, I.L.P. AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

By HARRY POLLITT.

THE process of differentiation in the I.L.P. which showed itself at the York Conference is of all the greater importance in that it took place in a situation of the rising activity of the working class in England.

In the last months prior to the conference there had already been a significant rise in industrial production, especially in the war industries, resulting in a certain decrease in the unemployment figures.

The National Government has also mobilised all its power to carry through a new Unemployment Insurance Bill, the first of a series of new legislative measures that constitute the greatest danger to the whole working class movement. This Bill has since been followed by the introduction of a new Sedition Bill, and both these government acts are part of a single line, i.e., that of strengthening the dictatorial powers of the National Government representing the dominant interests of the capitalist class, through which they hope to attack the revolutionary vanguard of the working class, split the employed and unemployed workers, organise concentration camps and also to develop through the training centres one of the most serious menaces that has yet confronted trade union standards and conditions in Britain. Both these acts are a most important stage in the war preparations of the National Government and together constitute a step forward towards fascism in Britain.

But in the working class movement there is a rapidly developing wave of militancy taking place. It was manifest in the Hunger March and National Congress, in the wide demand for wage increases which at present, involves 2,000,000 organised workers in the biggest wage increase movement we have seen since 1924. Throughout the working class movement there is tremendous desire for fighting the National Government and the employers, there is a steady increase in the radicalisation of the masses, although reformist illusions are still strong. At the same time, there is a growing desire and demand for unity in the class struggle, and resentment against the policy of the reformist leaders of the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress who disorganise the workers' ranks and fight against united action.

Inside the I.L.P. itself, for over a year there has been a big ferment and discussion on questions of policy, of the united front, and relations

with the Communist International; the right wing have been openly fighting for a return to the Labour Party and breaking off of the united front with the Communist Party. Abroad, in the last months, we had witnessed the heroic armed struggle of the Austrian workers, defeated and betrayed by the Austro-Marxist leaders, who are the idols of the I.L.P. leaders; the twenty-four-hour general strike against fascism in France; the tremendous growth in the activity and influence of the Communist Parties in Germany and Spain, and primarily the triumph of Socialist construction in the land of the proletarian revolution—the Soviet Union. This was the background in which the York Conference met.

The dominant group in the I.L.P., represented by the "left" reformists—Maxton and Brockway—deliberately exerted their influence to prevent a clear discussion and decision being reached on all the basic questions facing the Conference. Maxton, in his presidential speech, declared that he refrained from giving any lead on the outstanding issues before the Conference, claiming it was not his duty to give such a lead to the Conference. But, whilst pretending not to lead, he actually gave a most important lead, that is, he confused the delegates and in this manner endeavoured to win support for the N.A.C. line, that of "left" reformism.

The confusion and unclarity of all the issues on the Conference Agenda, and, in fact, in all statements of I.L.P. policy is not accidental. *It is the policy of the I.L.P.* It is carried through in order that the I.L.P. can retain its chief political rôle as a barrier between the Communist Party and the leftward moving workers in the Labour Party.

The most important questions discussed were those of the united front, and relations with the Communist International. It is well known that the Lancashire and South Wales districts of the I.L.P. had refused to carry out the united front with the Communist Party, and at this conference it was expected that they would make a big fight to get support for this line, and the right wing had organised every delegate that it was possible for them to get to take part in the York Conference.

Under pressure of the revolutionary members of the I.L.P., the N.A.C. had been forced to insert in their annual report a paragraph relating

to the refusal of the Lancashire Division of the I.L.P. to carry out the decisions of the Derby Conference on United Front activities with the Communist Party, and when this paragraph came up for discussion, 57 delegates supported the demand of a Liverpool delegate that the paragraph should be referred back to the N.A.C., on the ground that it did not condemn the attitude of the Lancashire division of the I.L.P., led by Sandham, strongly enough. A number of the resolutions in the Conference called for a continuation of the united front on the basis of "energetic participation in the day-to-day struggles of the working class," but the line of the N.A.C., which glossed the question over, finally carried.

It is interesting to note how the carrying of this resolution was prepared. An elaborate questionnaire had been circulated to all branches of the I.L.P. in regard to the results of co-operation during the past year with the Communist Party. Many delegates protested against the character of the questionnaire issued by the I.L.P. As is usual with all I.L.P. documents and policies, it was misleading, confusing and unclear, and those delegates who protested that nobody could understand it were quite right. But on the basis of the replies to the questionnaire the following resolution was put by the N.A.C. to the Conference:

"The National Council of the I.L.P. wishes to further common working class action on all issues, particularly among militant organisations, with a view to building up a united Revolutionary Socialist Movement.

"After surveying the results of co-operation with the Communist Party during the last year, the N.A.C. recommends that the National co-operation of the two parties be based *on specific objects*, as agreed upon by the representatives of the two parties from time to time.

"Every section of the Movement will be required to carry out such a minimum basis of co-operation.

"The N.A.C. recognises that the extent of co-operation beyond this minimum must depend upon local circumstances and leaves this to the discretion of the branches."

In moving this resolution, Brockway, on behalf of the N.A.C., defined it as meaning that the I.L.P. as a whole would continue co-operation with the Communist Party on such specific objects as the anti-war and anti-fascist movement, German relief work and the Congress Campaign, but *not day-to-day activity* (my italics, H.P.), that the whole party would be expected to carry out this decision, but that it would be left, depending upon the local circumstances, for the I.L.P. branches to decide whether to extend united front

co-operation with the C.P. further or not. Need it be stated that this assertion means the limitation of the united front, a limitation affecting burning questions of the economic and political day-to-day struggle against the capitalists and the National Government? Thus, for instance, Brockway firstly deliberately limits the scope of the united front with the Communist Party, at the very moment when the whole situation demands the intensification of the process of drawing in the widest masses of workers in the factories, trade unions and labour parties against the capitalist offensive and against the National Government. Secondly, that at the National Congress of Action in February, the I.L.P. voted for the Congress Resolution of Action, a resolution which is of such a character as can only be put into operation by the most systematic daily activity on the part of all who support the Congress, by their work in the factories, trade unions and working class localities.

The delegation of the Communist Party that is to meet the I.L.P. to discuss the confused and ambiguous united front resolution that was adopted at York will very sharply bring this fact before the members of the I.L.P.

The next and biggest discussion of the Conference took place on the question of the relations of the I.L.P. with the Communist International. It will be recalled that at the Derby Conference of the I.L.P. a year ago, by 83 votes to 79, and in the teeth of the opposition of the N.A.C., a resolution was adopted to inquire how the I.L.P. could assist in the work of the Communist International.

Letters have passed between the I.L.P. and the Comintern. But while the Comintern in its letters strives to develop the tendencies making for transfer to the path of revolutionary class struggle, and rejection of the old paths of reformist policy which showed themselves among the masses of the I.L.P. members at the Derby Conference, the N.A.C., on the contrary, aimed at the very opposite. The objective of the N.A.C. in conducting this correspondence was not to find how they could put the resolution of the Derby Conference into operation, but how they could sabotage it, and find the basis for getting a reversal of the policy at the York Conference. There is no need in this article to enter into any details about the controversy which has taken place. It is familiar to all readers of our magazine. The last letters of the I.L.P. to the Comintern* contained numberless petty questions, their purpose being only one, namely, by discussing details, to hinder the discussion at the Conference of the most important question of prin-

* See No. 7, "C.I."

ciple regarding either a revolutionary or reformist, including "left" reformist, policy which the I.L.P. must carry out in the future. In reply to this last letter, in which the N.A.C. asks that a reply should be sent in time for their York Conference, the Comintern sent the following cable: "We have nothing to alter in our letters in which we showed fundamental differences in principle between revolutionary proletarian lines and the 'left' reformist line of the present leadership of the I.L.P. We appeal to Conference to clearly decide which of these two lines Conference accepts and which it rejects. This, and not those organisational and subordinate questions raised by the N.A.C. in their last letter will decide the question of sympathetic affiliation to the Communist International.

"The members of the National Council are trying to confuse this clear presentation of the main question by continuing the tactics of bombarding the Comintern with an endless series of questions, although all questions of principle in relation between the Comintern and sympathetic Party are clearly answered in our last letter to the I.L.P.

"We do not doubt that the working class members of the I.L.P. will come to a correct decision. But we are very much afraid that even the best decisions which your Conference may make in accordance with the desire of your membership for co-operation with the Comintern, could be frustrated under some pretext or other if the new leadership of the I.L.P. were to consist of members supporting the same line as the former leadership.

"It is self-understood that we are prepared to clarify any particular question which seems unclear to members of your Party, or which may give rise to doubts, and by means of joint agreement settle all questions of the relations of the I.L.P. and C.I. to our mutual satisfaction.

"This can be done without difficulty only if your Party makes a firm clear decision without reservations to affiliate as a sympathising Party to the C.I. on the basis and line of our last letter, and takes steps to guarantee that this decision will be carried out."

The N.A.C. took the view that the Comintern cable made a clear demand that the I.L.P. should accept sympathetic affiliation and remove those that were hostile to this policy from the leadership of the I.L.P. The following statement was therefore issued by the N.A.C.:

"The N.A.C. recommend the following statement of policy in regard to the International Association of the I.L.P.:—

The objects of the I.L.P. in this respect are:

1. To bring about the unification of all

genuinely revolutionary sections of the working class in one International.

2. To secure international common action on immediate issues by all sections of the working class.

In furtherance of the *first* of these objects, the I.L.P. will continue:—

- (a) To oppose the formation of a new International;
- (b) To associate with the Independent Revolutionary Parties with a view to influencing them to work for the establishment of an inclusive revolutionary International.

At the same time, despite the attitude of the E.C.C.I., which makes affiliation or sympathetic affiliation impossible under the present circumstances, the I.L.P. is ready to associate with the Communist International in all efforts which, in the view of the I.L.P., further the revolutionary struggle of the workers.

In furtherance of the *second* object the I.L.P. will take every opportunity of approaching the two Internationals and all other sections of the working class to urge united action against Fascism, War and Capitalist Attacks."

To this resolution a series of amendments were put. Briefly, the line of them was as follows:—

- (1) The straight issue that the York Conference "decides immediately to seek affiliation to the C.I. as a sympathetic body under Rule 18 of the Statutes of the C.I."
 - (2) That the York Conference should accept sympathetic affiliation to the C.I. on condition "that the Conference receives a definite assurance that the Statutes relating to democratic centralism of the C.I. will be faithfully observed."
 - (3) That the I.L.P. shall "maintain its principles and its independence, to co-operate with the Third International in the struggle against capitalism, imperialism and war, but not to affiliate to it, and to oppose the formation of a new international."
- There were two other amendments, one which was for the formation of the new International, and another which condemned the formation of the Fourth International.

For some time prior to the Conference a Committee working for affiliation to the Comintern who are members of the I.L.P. had been campaigning for the line of the Comintern being accepted by the York Conference on the question of affiliation. There is also in the I.L.P., as is known, a Revolutionary Policy Committee, but it had not taken too clear a stand on the question, and some of these members had been raising a number of conditions upon which sympathetic application should be accepted, but the position became considerably clearer when in

one of the Comintern's letters it was clearly pointed out that the issue facing the York Conference would be of deciding which of the two political lines in the I.L.P. was to be supported, the revolutionary, or the "left" reformist line.

It is instructive to note that in a group meeting called to discuss the question of the general policy of the I.L.P., only five delegates were sufficiently interested to turn up. But in a group meeting called to discuss the question of the relations with the Communist International, forty delegates and visitors turned up. The discussion which took place in this group meeting was very good, the support of the delegates for the line of the Comintern was clearly expressed, and at the close of the meeting, it was decided to issue the following short statement to the Conference delegates:

"The National R.P.C. wishes to announce to delegates that at a large meeting held last night it decided (with one dissension) to unite with the Affiliation Committee in full support of the Dumfries Amendment for immediate sympathetic affiliation to the C.I."

The statement of the N.A.C. was introduced by John McGovern, M.P., who had been chosen for this because, as a result of his participation in the Hunger March, he had achieved a certain popularity in the ranks of the I.L.P., and was therefore the most suitable person to cover up the reformist tactics of the N.A.C. by "left" phrases. McGovern, in his speech, did not attempt to analyse the political content of the Comintern letters or to deal with the fundamental issues that were raised. Instead, by a series of such phrases as "the I.L.P. has been on its belly to Moscow too long," "I am not prepared to take my instructions either from Arthur Henderson or Joseph Stalin," McGovern continued the policy of Mr. Brockway, a policy of slanderous attacks on the Comintern and the U.S.S.R.

It is perfectly clear that no attempt was made to show that there is a fundamental difference, involving the very life and death of the workers, as between the policies of Henderson and Comrade Stalin. But this type of demagogic phrase was considered to be the reply to the basic issues that were being raised in the discussion.

A number of delegates then spoke on behalf of sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern, and it should be said at once that, in most cases, their speeches were excellent, and for the first time one felt the atmosphere of revolutionary fervour and enthusiasm coming into the Conference and sincere desire of the revolutionary membership of the I.L.P. to be able to work in the closest manner with the Communist International and to carry out every phase of the work that this in-

volves. That is to say, the development of the fighting united front of struggle, the merciless campaign against reformism and against a "left" reformist line, and for a united revolutionary Party in Britain. The discussion was closed by a statement from Brockway, who, as usual, posed as being the perfect gentleman who would not reply "to the attacks that had been made upon him." In his speech he defended the line of the N.A.C., and stated that the only Communist Party of any importance outside the Soviet Union was in Germany, that the seven "left" parties were all playing a more important rôle in their respective countries than the Communist Parties, and finally very melodramatically informed the Conference that the issue they now had to decide was whether they are going to fight for the Comintern line, which as the last cable showed, meant to clear out the elected leadership of the I.L.P., including such men as Maxton, and "putting in their places the members of the Affiliation Committee, whose speeches they had heard that day." This closed the debate and the vote then took place.

When the voting took place on the straight issue of sympathetic affiliation to the C.I. without conditions, 34 votes were given for this and 126 against. We have knowledge of many branches that were also in support of this policy, but who had been unable to send delegates for financial reasons. For the "sympathetic affiliation to the C.I., but desiring a definite assurance that the Statutes relating to the democratic centralism of the C.I. would be faithfully observed," were 51 votes for and 98 against. Further votes and further amendments are of no importance and have no political significance.

In considering the discussion on the voting on the various amendments we can say that there were fifty delegates at the York Conference who stood more or less consistently for affiliation as sympathisers. For even those delegates who wanted assurance about democratic centralism did not deny the analysis of the Comintern regarding the two political lines inside the I.L.P.. If one has to consider this vote in relation to the vote cast at Derby a year ago, then the following can be stated. At Derby there was no clearly defined group working for the line of the Comintern. At that time all sorts of heterogeneous elements were voting for co-operation with the Comintern without a clear understanding of the implications of the questions connected with revolutionary policy.

As a result of the Derby resolution, for a year a discussion has been taking place within the I.L.P., the result being that, with the help of the Comintern letters, the issues have become more

and more clarified, until finally at York a position was reached where 34 delegates voted for the resolution, the principle of which was affiliation to the Comintern without any conditions. And 51 delegates were prepared to vote for sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern, if some minor questions could be cleared up.

This differentiation represents a step forward and indicates the firm basis for the continuation of revolutionary work inside the I.L.P. It is significant to note that hardly a speech was made at the York Conference but what some reference was made either to the Communist Party or the Communist International! And we will say openly that the results would have been much better had it not been for the bad work of our own Party, the membership of which is not yet fully conscious of the importance of the task of winning the revolutionary members of the I.L.P. for the Communist International and the enormous significance that this would have at home and abroad.

And if full use had been made of the letters of the Comintern in local discussions between local branches of the I.L.P. and Communist Party, locals, if more use had been made of personal connections between members of the I.L.P. and members of the Communist Party, then a much better result could have been achieved. For example, in Lancashire, the stronghold of the right wing of the I.L.P., it was possible to have such discussions with I.L.P. branches and members as resulted in 11 votes being cast from Lancashire for the policy of sympathetic affiliation to the Communist International. But a disquieting thing one has to note is that in Scotland, where we have the best mass contact and influence, hardly any impression was made upon the Scottish delegates, the overwhelming majority of whom stood behind the N.A.C. at the York Conference. In conversations with delegates it became clear, too, that many of our methods of agitation and propaganda amongst the I.L.P. members can be improved, that things which we took for granted have still to be explained to the I.L.P. comrades, that our propaganda is not yet simple enough, that we have not given sufficient explanation to the I.L.P. comrades of how the Communist International works, of the Communist International's policy in regard to trade unionism, and the question of democratic centralism. If these shortcomings had been eliminated in the months prior to the I.L.P. Conference, a very different result would have been obtained.

What is the perspective before the I.L.P.? We doubt if even the N.A.C. themselves feel they have achieved a victory. The right wing which

began to consolidate its forces before the York Conference will carry on a still further sharp campaign in favour of returning to the old reformist policy. It was significant to note the silence of Fred Jowett, one of the founders of the I.L.P., during the whole of the discussion at York. The policy of spreading unclarity and confusion is to be continued so that the N.A.C. can try to hold the Party together by appearing to be all things to all of its members, but as the fight for united front activity and for sympathetic affiliation is and will be carried forward by the revolutionary members of the I.L.P., it is inevitable that the next few months will lead to further political differentiation in the ranks of the I.L.P.

After the Conference, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a statement from which we quote the most important paragraphs:

"Precisely at this moment, when large numbers of workers, influenced by swiftly moving events at home and abroad, are trying to understand how to fight their way out of the capitalist crisis, the I.L.P. leaders are doing their utmost to spread confusion and doubt. This is the worst crime of Left reformism.

"They play with the phrase 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' but deliberately avoid the question of *Soviet Power*, which is the form of the workers' dictatorship and which can only be achieved by renouncing Parliamentaryism and fighting for the overthrow of capitalism.

"They talk about revolution, but pretend it can be brought about by pacifist methods and purely industrial action, thereby preventing the masses from understanding the necessity of preparing working class force to use against the fascist inclined ruling class. They are for the united front, but continually propose limitations on activities and pretend that their united front can be carried on without a relentless fight against the chief saboteurs of united action, the General Council of the T.U.C., and the leaders of the Labour Party.

"They are for 'struggle against the danger of imperialist war,' but in reality help the imperialist war preparations by slandering the Soviet Union and attacking its peace policy.

"They are for a 'revolutionary international,' but persistently attempt to discredit the Communist International by slandering its policy and caricaturing its discipline.

"The York Conference of the I.L.P. shows the imperative necessity of strengthening the fight against 'left' reformism in Britain, and for the winning over of the militant workers for the clear line of revolutionary struggle and support for the programme of the Communist International.

"It showed the splendid possibilities before the militant section of the I.L.P., organised around the Affiliation Committee, of continuing their struggle for affiliation to the Communist International and the most effective daily forms of the united front."

If the local organisations of the C.P. really carry on a determined campaign to explain the policy of the C.I. to the members of the I.L.P. and to expose "right" and "left" reformism, if the Affiliation Committee of the I.L.P. itself will now utilise every opportunity for popularising the Comintern's letters and especially the cable to the York Conference, and carries on systematic work in preparation for the summer Divisional Conference of the I.L.P. supporting the policy of the Affiliation Committee, if this work is energetically carried out, if it is followed by the Divisions of the I.L.P. sending representative delegates to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, then within a very short space of time a real tremendous support can be won inside the I.L.P. for the line of the Comintern.

The issue is now clear beyond all doubt; it is the fight within the I.L.P. of either back to reformism or forward towards revolution. There

is now a firmly established group of revolutionary members of the I.L.P. who are for the line of revolution. If they will now boldly place this position before all members of the I.L.P. and organs of the I.L.P., they will receive an increasing support, and if the Communist Party will also understand the importance of the problem, and will see that in every phase of united front activity, the most sincere and comradely attempts are made to get the maximum results out of the united front that is carried out between the Party and the I.L.P., at the centre and in the districts, then the work begun at York can be carried forward much more effectively, existing doubts will be cleared away, the differentiation between revolutionaries and reformists will be increased, and the revolutionary members themselves will soon begin to feel so strong that they will be able to put forward the demand for a special Conference of the I.L.P. to again discuss the question of its international associations and policy, because bound up with this question is every phase of current policy, in the struggle against capitalism and reformism in Britain, and the building up of the revolutionary forces that can go forward to the winning of Soviet Power in Britain.