

THE COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS AND THE NEXT STAGE IN THE FIGHT FOR UNITY

By HARRY POLLITT

THE keynote of the 14th Congress of the Communist Party was the burning need for working-class unity and the necessity for developing the independence, courage and initiative of the workers to achieve this unity.

At the Congress the Party had shown itself to be united, with no differences on any of the main lines of policy before it. There was a unanimous recognition of what must be the character of the policy and activity of the Communist Party in the period immediately ahead. This can be summed up as follows :—the fight for unity ; the strengthening of the work in trade unions and factories ; the development of a mass movement that can maintain peace and liberty ; the increasing of support to the Spanish Government ; the building up of a Communist Party that, combined with other work among the masses, must conduct mass propaganda for marxism and thus build up a united and powerful Labour Movement.

At the same time as the Congress was bending all its energies to ensure that these tasks should be carried out, the dominant Labour leaders were preparing measures not aimed to help in work of this character, but containing new threats of expulsion to those within the Labour Party who, true to the real interests of the Labour Movement, are striving for unity.

Our Congress understood the meaning of these tactics and their danger to the possibility of any future advance, and we therefore adopted a policy in regard to unity which, if resolutely carried out, will help to prevent the disastrous policy of the Labour leaders being applied. We were

guided in this aim by the Congress resolution on Unity, which described the present situation as follows :

The growth of Fascism and reaction, the Fascist war-mongers threatening, in their lust for a redivision of the globe, to engulf country after country in slaughter ; and on the other side the awakening of the masses of mankind to the danger of Fascism ; the development towards international working-class unity, and the coming together of the workers and of the supporters of democracy and peace in the struggle against Fascism and War ; this is the picture of the world situation to-day.

Wherever throughout the world Fascism has been withstood it has been through unity ; unity and determination of the working class ; unity of all the forces of democracy and peace. In this country only a common policy can enable the workers to go forward with united ranks to improve their immediate conditions, to preserve democracy and peace and defeat the National Government by the united action of a fighting Labour movement.

The present tactics of the Labour leaders greatly increase the responsibility of the Communist Party and active workers within the Labour Party to do their utmost to establish working-class unity in spite of all obstacles.

Having regard to the urgency of the political situation, the needs of the workers, and the grave responsibility which rests upon the British Labour Movement towards the whole international working class, the Congress steadfastly set its face against any phrase-mongering or romanticism. No toleration would have been given to any high falutin talk about " the need for shock troop tactics against Transport House," or " if certain prominent people are expelled from the Labour Party it will help the Unity Campaign," or, " perhaps if Unity were to have a few martyrs it would stimulate the imagination of the workers."

All such arguments as these would have been sternly rejected by our Congress. They have nothing in common with serious politics or policies, and actually embody the very thing that the Labour leaders themselves desire to bring about, in order to place the whole campaign for unity in a false position.

The aim of our campaign for unity is a closer unification of policy and forces ; if, instead, it leads to expulsions, splits and later to complete

defeatism, we shall have exchanged working-class politics for petty bourgeois romanticism. The exclusion of the principal Labour Party supporters of unity from their Party, and of, perhaps, a score of local branches from the Labour Party is just what Transport House is hoping will happen.

Three things were clear to Congress. First, every member of the Labour Party who desires unity must fight as never before inside the local and divisional Labour Parties. Secondly, the Communist Party itself will have to set an example of flexibility in its own campaign for unity and intensify its fight to become an affiliated organisation to the Labour Party. Thirdly, those who claim to be supporters of unity will have to abandon policies and tactics that retard the establishment of unity at home and abroad.

The successes of the Unity Campaign have compelled the Labour Party Executive to give prominence on the front page of the *Daily Herald* to a declaration that the full right to work for unity exists within the Labour Party. That declaration can now be tested in the practical work of those comrades who are leading the struggle for unity within the Labour Party. But if the declaration of the Executive Committee is a sincere one, it should be made to imply the end of heresy hunting, the withdrawal of such circulars as that issued by Arthur Woodburn, the Secretary of the Labour Party in Scotland, the end of discrimination against trade unionists for their political opinions, and loyalty to the aims which the trade union movement was founded to achieve.

The Congress charged the Central Committee of the Communist Party to avoid falling into any of the pitfalls dug by certain Labour leaders and to use its influence to prevent any exclusions from the Labour Party. For if the leading militant workers are placed outside the Labour Party, then the road is left still wider open for the dominant leaders to prepare closer co-operation with the National Government as the present situation develops.

As a result of this warning from the Congress, representatives of the Communist Party placed their views before the Unity Campaign Committee. They gave the opinion that, in future, the Unity Campaign as such should be conducted by members of the Labour Party, while the

C.P. pledged itself to give every ounce of its support to the campaign and, at the same time, to intensify its own work for working-class unity.

The Unity demonstration at Hull has proved how correct this proposal was. Instead of Comrade Strauss being expelled from the Labour Party for speaking on the same platform as Comrade Maxton and myself, the meeting was conducted by Comrades Strauss, Cripps and Mellor. It is worth saying a word or two about this Hull meeting. It was held on June 6th. The day before, the Labour Party had deliberately organised a Conference at which Arthur Greenwood, M.P., was to put over "in a big way" the new Labour Party campaign for a million voters. Over 700 delegates were expected to attend and it was fondly hoped that it would completely overshadow the Unity meeting of the next day. But only 130 delegates were present at the official Labour conference and it was a complete fiasco—as dead as a door nail. At the Unity demonstration, on the other hand, the speakers (members of the Labour Party) got a splendid reception from the 1,500 workers present, great resentment was expressed at the policy of Transport House and a collection reached over twenty pounds. Throughout the Unity demonstration the proceedings were marked by great enthusiasm and determination to support the campaign.

We are confident that the remaining Unity demonstrations which have been organised and which will be conducted on the same lines as at Hull will prove equally successful and will strengthen the prospects of victory for unity at the October conference of the Labour Party.

The Communist Party will give its complete support to the work of the Labour Unity Committee and to *The Tribune*, the weekly paper that fights for unity. It will do all in its power to make the summer campaign a success. At the same time, we must point out that there should be greater efforts made to carry out mass work for unity within the Labour Movement. In our opinion, this means taking part in every phase of the daily struggle against capitalism, and not just relying on mass meetings. It also means the winning of the local Labour and trade union organisations—the Labour Party workers for unity should aim to surround themselves with an indestructible mass basis. The campaign must not be made to appear as if it were only the concern of a few leading personalities, but must show that it has mass backing and

support on the basis of a united struggle against the employers and the National Government.

One way of attaining this position would be a sustained effort within the local Labour Parties, trade union branches and trades councils. It must be explained why unity is so urgently needed, why the present policy of the Labour leaders must be defeated and why British Labour must fulfil the responsibilities that history has placed upon it, both towards the mass of the British people and the peoples of Europe generally. We must also do everything we can to make the official Labour campaign a success, for this can also be used to develop the drive for united action. Whether the Labour Programme for winning the next election is the one we would like or not seems to us to be beside the point. The whole machinery of the Labour Movement is going to be used to try and win a million new voters for Labour. Are we interested in this? We think we are.

We are not just concerned in a campaign which tells people to wait until a general election and then vote Labour, but in turning it into a campaign that, by mass pressure, can help forward the mass movement to win immediate demands and can bring about the changes in the Programme that we desire. To do this, unity must be the keynote which will make it possible to awaken a new political interest and to stimulate action to win the demands of the masses now.

The Communist Party, in helping along these lines, will carry out the greatest campaign in its history for working-class unity; it will also be winning its way towards affiliation to the Labour Party, which is more important to achieve than ever before, so that the fight for changes in policy and outlook can be effectively directed and helped forward.

Branches of the Communist Party should take every opportunity for work with the local Labour Parties. This can be done everywhere on the basis of local conditions and needs. We should try and end our tendency to take for granted that those grievances that specially interest us are of equal interest to other workers and their organisations. The united front will only be built up on the basis of what the workers want to unite and to fight upon. In every locality there is some local issue that affords the possibility of joint co-operation, and all the bells, books

and candles in Transport House cannot prevent this from being carried out. Local wage issues ; conditions in the factories ; the fight against high rents and prices ; Means Test cases ; proposals for developing work of value in areas where unemployment is an urgent question ; aid for Spain—it is along these lines that the links between the Labour and Communist workers should be built up. This is how it was begun in France, till it finally reached a point where the French Socialist leaders were compelled to give the United Front their support. It can also be done here, but we must combine our determination with flexibility and comradely understanding of each other's point of view. The Communist Party branches must not stand aside from any type of work or of committee which gives an opportunity for explaining our aims to workers and others, and for conducting joint activity with them.

At the same time, in our propaganda and personal conversations we must stress far more than has been done up to the moment the question of rank-and-file responsibility for the policy that the Labour leaders are able to pursue. The chief responsibility undoubtedly falls upon the leaders, but there has not yet been worked out sufficiently, a planned method to change this policy. There is still too much defeatism about, too great a belief that it is hopeless to attempt to defeat the aims of the Bevins, Daltons, Citrines and Middletons.

Large sections of the rank-and-file are seriously concerned at the present position. But they do not realise yet that *they themselves have the power to bring about those changes which they say they want.*

Unity has to be fought for. Vested interests must be overcome. It is not easy. But the responsibility of the active workers for what happens in this country and its repercussions abroad must be squarely faced and understood. If this is done, then a more effective drive within the Labour Party for its transformation into a fighting united party of the working class will develop, and this transformation can so affect the entire international situation that millions will be liberated from poverty and the menace of fascism and war.

It is because the Communist Congress felt this so keenly that it devoted all its time to discussing how best it could help to bring about this great change. And this is why it appeals so strongly and so urgently to every

active worker inside the Labour Party to give full support now to every phase of the struggle to achieve working-class unity.

We do this for no sectional aim. We have no other interests at heart but those of the workers. The Communist Party will take no action which might play into the hands of those who wish to disrupt unity or which might lead to splits within the Labour Movement.

Our Congress gave a solemn pledge that every one of its members and organisations would give full support to every effort made within the Labour Party to win it for unity, and at the same time that it would carry forward its own struggle for unity with greater enthusiasm and determination than ever before.

The 14th Congress Resolution on Unity concludes with words which express quite clearly our aims and our confidence in our power to achieve what we believe to be the desire of the overwhelming mass of the Labour rank and file :—

The Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain declares that along these lines of policy it will be possible to overcome all obstacles that prevent working-class unity being established in the Labour Movement. That it will lead to the workers winning their demands *now*, stemming the advance of Fascism and War, and developing alongside this a powerful mass Communist Party and an all-round strengthening of the Labour, Trade Union and Co-operative Movements.

We appeal to every reader of the LABOUR MONTHLY to help the Communist Party to fulfil this objective.

[NOTES OF THE MONTH. *Comrade Harry Pollitt's article replaces, for this issue of THE LABOUR MONTHLY, the usual Notes of the Month.*]