LABOUR'S BIG THREE

by the same author

NEW HORIZONS
RUSSIA ON THE MARCH
STALIN
VICTORY PRODUCTION!

Photo : *News Chronicle*

Ernest Bevin, Clement Attlee, Herbert Morrison

at the Labour Party Victory Rally, August 1945

J. T. MURPHY

LABOUR'S BIG THREE

a biographical study of

CLEMENT ATTLEE

HERBERT MORRISON

AND

ERNEST BEVIN

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Cartoons by Low of *The Evening Standard* and Vicky of *The News Chronicle* are to be found on pp. 54, 117, 161, 175, 198, 206 and 258.

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK is in no sense a definitive biography of Clement Richard Attlee, Herbert Morrison, and Ernest Bevin. The time is not opportune nor is the subject-matter yet available for such a work.

It is a study of the rise to power of the men who fill the foremost positions in the government of Great Britain. Attlee is Prime Minister; Morrison is the leader of the House and the dominant leader of the Labour Party; Bevin is Britain's Minister for Foreign Affairs and is unquestionably the outstanding leader of his generation in the British Trades Union Movement.

Attlee springs from the middle class; Morrison and Bevin are from the working class. All three were born in the same decade, at the close of the Victorian era. They arrived at manhood and were drawn into the newly formed Labour Party at the dawn of the twentieth century in the midst of a social turbulence such as Great Britain had not known for more than sixty years.

Their roads to power were different. Bevin fought his way forward in the world of trade unionism. Morrison rose with the growing strength of the Labour Party, a politician rather than a trade unionist. Attlee came into the Labour Movement *via* the University Settlement and the Fabian Society. Their converging paths met with the triumph of the Labour Party in the 1945 elections and the formation of the first Labour Government with the necessary majority to back its programme.

They are not alike except in purpose and a general acceptance of the philosophy of the Labour Movement. Powerful Ernest Bevin is of an entirely different stock and type from either Clement Attlee or Herbert Morrison. The heavy, egoistic Bevin is as unlike the genteel, precise Attlee as any man could be. And both are different from the sturdy, eloquent political administrator Morrison, whose occasional touches of pomposity vanish under the influence of a sense of humour which enables him to keep 'the common touch.'

They represent not only three types of men but three trends of thought in the development of the Labour Movement. Each of

them has contributed his quota to the shaping of the policy of this movement and at various stages each has played an outstanding rôle in varied circumstances even before their paths met in the common tasks of government. It is with these aspects of their lives that I have been concerned in writing this book.

In making this study I have not sought for secret documents or attempted to dig out hidden scandals and indiscretions or to unravel intrigues. There may be masses of correspondence between them and others to which I have not had access. Likewise there may have been countless conversations between them and others, the hearing of which may have revealed aspects of their development. However that may be, their lives have been lived in the limelight of publicity. The speeches and writings which represent their considered views and judgements have been published, their actions are reported. The data I have used are published data.

Their lives have been so intimately related to and integrated with the Labour and Socialist Movement that their story is inseparable from its history. Their rise to power as leaders of the Labour Government of Great Britain was possible only because they had first risen to power in the Labour Movement. This is therefore more than a narrative of their personal utterances and actions; rather is it an assessment of their influence in the development of the movement whose policy they have sought to shape and for which they have become responsible in the leading positions of power in the land. The book is also a study of the Labour Movement in so far as it is the medium through which they have expressed themselves and to which they have given their thought and energy.

To have recorded all the speeches they have made and every incident of their careers would not have been possible nor desirable. I have selected what I consider the most significant and important so as to illustrate their thoughts and deeds, to show them to be the men they are, and what course they have pursued and are pursuing.

The movement which to-day they represent and in which they have played so great a rôle was in its formative stages when they as young men joined it and decided to devote their lives to it. Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Sidney Webb, George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Henderson, Robert Smillie, J. R. Clynes were its outstanding leaders. The times were out of joint. The First World

War was on the way. The epoch of war and revolution was knocking at the door of history. Drama too big for any stage except that of the world was about to begin, and they and all mankind were caught up in vast social movements on a scale such as the world had not seen. And there could be no going back to the complacent times of the nineteenth century. Crisis followed crisis until the condition became chronic throughout the world. Social upheaval and two world wars shattered the old order of things—if 'order' is not a misnomer—and man sought for a new one to take its place.

The Labour Movement grew from strength to strength as the British social revolution unfolded itself during the twentieth century. Strikes great and small, threats of strikes, demonstrations, protests, declarations, election victories and defeats, Governments of varying hue came and departed. These manifestations mark the course of the years in which Attlee, Morrison, and Bevin advance in the ranks of Labour, supersede the 'Old Guard,' rise to power and the highest positions in the State, charged with the task of fulfilling the dreams of their youth.

They replaced the 'Old Guard' in the midst of a staggering crisis in the Labour Movement—under the impact of the great 'economic blizzard' which was the prelude to the regrouping of the Powers as they drifted towards the Second World War, the most devastating conflict of all time. There were no long periods of quiescence for them, no opportunities quietly to reflect and consolidate their positions. They had to lead the movement out of defeat and through crisis after crisis, from isolation to coalition in wartime and from coalition to power.

Throughout their dialectical battles with each other concerning their interpretation of events and the shaping of Labour's policy they have each shown one great loyalty as they grew in political stature and responsibility—a loyalty to the Labour Movement—even when they have not seen eye to eye with each other or the party of which they are the unquestioned leaders.

This loyalty has been put to the test repeatedly, and even as these lines are written they are in the midst of one of the periodic crises of Labour history through which the Labour Movement clarifies its policy. It began as a protest from the trade unions, who were deeply concerned at the apparently growing cleavage between the Labour Government and the Soviet Union and at the fact that Bevin as Foreign Secretary appeared to support

every reactionary force in Europe. Their whole history made them think that a Britain with a Labour Government and the Soviet Union should be greater friends after the war than before it. They could not understand a Labour Government supporting a monarchistic, reactionary, anti-working-class government in Greece and being supported throughout Europe by all the social elements they had been taught to regard as their enemies.

Attlee made the mistake of thinking the growing protest to be nothing more than a communist-inspired propaganda and foolishly flouted the Trades Union Congress of 1946 by using his position as a fraternal delegate of the Labour Government to castigate the protesting unions and leaders as 'communist stooges.' He received in consequence the most severe rebuff of any leader in the history of the Labour Movement in a public statement from the Executive of the Electrical Workers Trade Union, and despite all the efforts of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the Congress supported the Government's policy only by a three-to-two vote.

Instead of the revolt subsiding, it was followed by a revolt within the Parliamentary Labour Party, which expressed itself in outspoken critical speeches from the Labour benches in the debate on foreign policy; and more than two hundred Labour M.Ps. refrained from voting for their own Government even while Bevin was at the Assembly of the United Nations.

Superficially it appeared that the Labour Party was on the verge of a split greater than any in its history. Attlee, Morrison, and Bevin challenged the challengers, each in his own way, but they also came to recognise that the storm was really an outcry of the socialist conscience of the Labour Movement to which they must give heed and will give heed. There will be no split or desertions, for the fundamental loyalty to the Labour Movement will once more prove paramount.

(Fifteen months have gone by since this was written. There was no split and there were no desertions.)

I know these men personally, have read their speeches and heard them deliver them, belong to the same Movement and the same generation, and have participated in the same struggles and crises. This book is an appreciation of three big men, a critical history, and, as far as I could make it, an objective study of their rise to power and the course they are pursuing.

Here I must express my gratitude to S. Bale, F. Sharland, Mrs. Ballard, Wm. Bevin, H. Cattrell, J. H. Alpa, M.P., for valuable details of the early years of Ernest Bevin, and especially to A. G. Doubt, of Bristol, for diligent research activities undertaken to assist me. My thanks are also due to: Harold Clay of the Transport and General Workers Union and H. Tracey of the Publicity Department of the Trades Union Congress for much information and help in relation to the later history of the Labour and Trade Union Movements; to the Labour Party's Research Department and the *Daily Herald's* Record Department, for the use of their valuable stores of information.

To Sidney Elliott, Vincent Brome, H. W. Leggett, Kenneth Muir and W. F. Hickinbottom I am greatly indebted for much helpful criticism and information. Nor can I fail to express my gratitude to my brother-in-law, Horace Kemp, for his generous assistance at every stage of the preparation of this book.

CHAPTER ONE

Clement Richard Attlee

OF COURSE, it was entirely fortuitous that Attlee should be born in the same year as the Fabian Society was founded. His birthday was January 3rd, 1883, and in that year, under the influence of a Mr. Thomas Davidson of New York, a group of people, men and women of the middle class, some brilliant, some dull, met frequently in London parlours and drawing-rooms to discuss the problems of their day and generation. One part of this group formed an association known as the 'New Fellowship.' They held the view that the main emphasis must be laid on ethical and spiritual changes as the driving forces for improving society. The other part of the group were convinced of the urgent need for social and political changes to precede the transformation of society's ethical and spiritual life. These latter formed the Fabian Society. The prime movers of this society, Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw, Edward R. Pease, Annie Besant, Graham Wallas, and Hubert Bland, gathered around them a brilliant group of intellectuals and began the task of propagating socialism as a cure for the ills of society.

Clement Attlee, the fourth son of Henry Attlee of the firm of solicitors 'Druce and Attlee' was born and grew up in Wandsworth, just on the border of the constituency. It was not then, as now, a borough of London. At that time, before the days of the motor-car, motor-buses, and tube railways, when horse-drawn buses trundled along the gas-lit streets, Wandsworth was a country town. His grandfather lived near Wandsworth Common. The whole family were fairly well off—comfortable, Conservative, church-going, as was to be expected of a family whose head was a Putney solicitor

All the circumstances of his family and his environment until he reached manhood were calculated to lead him away from politics altogether and, instead, add one more lawyer to the legal profession. He has something like sixty first cousins, most of whom

are Conservatives; and Alexander Thomson tells the story of one day meeting one of them in the days when Clement Attlee had become a minister in the first Labour Government. Alex asked 'if he might be a relation of Clement?' He received the lamenting reply that 'the fellow was unfortunately a sort of cousin' and was assured that 'his people are quite respectable.' Desperately annoyed, the cousin added, 'I cannot imagine how the fool got mixed up with that gang.'

Neither his parents nor his relatives could be blamed for that. His father was a staunch Conservative and set out to rear his boy as one. It is doubtful whether his mother had any political views. One of his brothers is a Church of England minister. His home was therefore all that a comfortable, Christian, Conservative, middle-class Victorian home should be, and calculated to produce offspring true to type.

When Attlee was old enough he was sent to a preparatory school. The headmaster was Hilton Young, now Lord Kenneth, about whose conservatism there was no doubt. Hilton Young later became the Minister of Health in the Conservative Government when Attlee was Deputy Leader of the Labour Party Opposition. A few months after entering this school he was put in the charge of one who later became a leading Liberal lawyer, and, later still, a Labour Attorney General and Lord Chancellor. His name was William Jowitt, now Lord Jowitt.

From the preparatory school he was sent to Haileybury, where he spent a happy boyhood. A slightly built youngster, shy and reserved, he lived the normal life of the children of his class. On leaving Haileybury he went to Oxford.

It was after a year or two at University College that he made his first political speech in a debate in the junior common room. Here he revealed how truly he had developed according to his family's tradition. He seconded a motion in favour of Protection and declared himself an ardent adherent of Joseph Chamberlain and Kipling. It has been said that: 'With gusto the future socialist leader banged the big drum of Empire supremacy.' I find it difficult to think that Clement Attlee ever 'banged' any drum. He is not built that way. He spoke quietly, precisely, rationally, appealing to reason and not to the emotions. He has never learned how to 'beat the drum' and pull out the right stops for stirring the crowds. Nature did not bless him either with the right kind of

voice or the temperament for that. He prefers serenity and sweet reasonableness to storm and battle.

But he had also been brought up in a religious atmosphere, and he says in the introduction to his book *Labour Party in Perspective*: 'I think that the first place in the influence that built up the Socialist Movement must be given to religion. . . . To put the Bible into the hands of an Englishman is to do a very dangerous thing. . . . I think that probably the majority of those who built up the Socialist Movement in this country have been adherents of the Christian religion—and not merely adherents, but enthusiastic members of some religious body.'

It is true to say that a large number of those who have become leaders of Labour were earlier associated with religion and were enthusiastic members of some religious organisation. Indeed, many remained closely associated with one or other section of the Christian Church. But it was neither the Bible nor Christianity which was primarily responsible for the growth of Socialism. Much more important was the fact that in the period in which Attlee was born, reared, and reached maturity there was a great social and political awakening in the ranks of the working class and the middle class which certainly seeped into the Churches, stirring with new ideas a fair number of their members, but in the main left them untouched. In the ranks of the working class, and especially amongst the unskilled workers, the social awakening was immense.

Ever since the fading out of the Chartist Movement of the 'forties a few socialists, some Christian, others not, had ploughed a lonely furrow in their endeavours to keep socialist thought alive in England. But it was not until the great depression of 1878–9 that the middle-class intellectuals became conscious of the social upheaval impending in the conditions of the people. The East End of London, with its dense masses of poverty-stricken people existing in unparalleled wretchedness, was suddenly revealed in all its horror, and every social investigator was staggered by what he saw. The social conscience began to stir in the hearts of the middle classes and the rulers became afraid. They could hear the rumbles of oncoming rebellion. From this East End came the great unemployed demonstrations led by militant socialists like Ben Tillett, Tom Mann, John Burns. From here sprang the great dock strike and the strike of the gas workers which heralded the mass awakening.

It was out of this social awakening, which spread to the universities, that there was born the University Settlement Movement, which was later to claim Clement Attlee himself. Out of it, too, the modern socialist organisations came into being, the Social Democratic Federation led by Hyndman, the Fabian Society led by Sidney Webb, and the Independent Labour Party. The social stir disturbed the Churches and many of their members were drawn into one or other of the socialist organisations. These usually left the Churches behind, a fact which may account for the moribund condition of most of the Churches to-day. The stirring of the Christian conscience at this time was not the cause but a symptom of the changing times marked by the upsurge of the working class, the strikes of dockers, gas workers, and general labourers who began to lay the foundations of the greatest labour unions of to-day.

But one of the by-products—shall I call it?—of the middle-class awakening was the founding of a boys' club in the East End of London by one-time students of Haileybury. After securing his M.A. degree with second-class honours in history, Clement Attlee had little, if any, interest in politics, although he had declared himself a Tory Imperialist. He adhered to the family tradition, studied law and became a barrister. After being called to the Bar in 1905 when he was twenty-two years of age, he one day met an old school friend who had become greatly interested in the Haileybury Boys' Club. His friend persuaded him to give a hand one evening a week in caring for the young arabs of the streets. After a time his friend went on holiday and in his absence Clement Attlee took charge of the club.

This experience gave him his first real contact with working-class people and the terrible conditions of the poor. It was a terrific shock to him. He had been reared with all the creature comforts which a well-to-do middle-class home could provide. He was clever, sensitive, and earnest in his beliefs. He was a Christian, but it never dawned on him that such things as he now saw every day in the streets surrounding the club could possibly exist. He was brought face to face with the question which sooner or later presents itself to every social worker. Are social conditions primarily responsible for what people are, or are the social conditions what they are because of the inherent character of the people? This question worried him continuously and drove him to

an even deeper study of social and economic questions. He gave little time to sport. When he went home at the week-ends he would occasionally play tennis or go for a long ramble into the open country. But his thoughts always returned to the East End of London. It absorbed him increasingly, until finally this new experience and his social studies decided him to devote his life entirely to the social betterment of the people through politics.

Shortly after he left Oxford he had begun to read the works of William Morris and John Ruskin. But while engaged on this social welfare work at the Haileybury Boys' Club he also came in contact with Sidney and Beatrice Webb. The Webbs had made their London home in Grosvenor Road into a recruiting centre for the Fabian Society. Here intellectuals of all kinds forgathered to discuss what was wrong with the world and how to put it right. The meeting with the Webbs began a friendship which endured through the years. Clement Attlee joined the Fabian Society in 1907. Now he had answered in his own mind the all-important question of the relation of the individual to society and had come to the conclusion that the emphasis must be laid upon changing the conditions in which people live and have their being. He became a Fabian socialist. The teachings of the Fabian Society became for him integral with Christianity, the mode of Christian fulfilment.

For a time he shared a tenement flat with a clergyman in Stepney, doffed his middle-class suits and took on labouring jobs 'to see what it was like to be a manual wage worker.' He earned his keep as a dock worker and studied economics with the Webbs. He joined the Independent Labour Party, which popularised the gospel according to the Fabian Society. And at last he was enlisted for open-air work in the highways and byways. His first effort was in Barnes Street, Limehouse.

He has never succeeded in making a reputation as an orator who can stir the emotions of the crowd, but he did build up a reputation among the people of Stepney as a young man who sent his audience away thinking about what he had said more than of the way in which he had said it.

The Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society kept him busy propagating the Webb doctrine. During the next year he addressed more than eighty meetings at the street corner. But in 1909 he stepped into a wider arena than that of Stepney and

Limehouse. This year was not only famous for Britain's budget proposals put forward by Mr. Lloyd George and for the great Liberal campaign launched from Limehouse, but also for the publication of the famous Minority Report on the Poor Law. The authors of this report were, of course, Sidney and Beatrice Webb. They formed an organisation to secure support for the reforms which it advocated and to make it widely understood among the people. Attlee took on the job of lecture secretary for this organisation, and for a year he was busy arranging for others to address meetings and often had to take the place of speakers who failed him and deliver the lectures himself.

It was at this time—when he was twenty-six years of age, a slim but athletic figure of a man, quiet and reserved in temperament, a very earnest and enthusiastic churchman, convinced that the socialist gospel of the Fabian Society was practical Christianity—that he toured the country and widened his knowledge of the awakening working-class movement.

It was a natural sequel to these experiences that he should become a resident of Toynbee Hall, in the East End of London. This hall, named after Arnold Toynbee because of his devoted service to the ideas behind the University Settlement Movement, is situated in Commercial Street near Aldgate East Tube Station. The University Settlement Movement was one of the answers of a large number of university people of the middle class to the problem set them amidst the great social awakening of the 'eighties and 'nineties. They sought to 'bridge the gulf between the classes' by creating settlements where university people could go, live a community life together amidst working-class surroundings, engage in social research, and make personal contact with people in all walks of life.

Attlee was a resident at Toynbee Hall only from August 1909 until May 1910, but his interest in it and in the Settlement Movement continued.

It was from here that he ventured forth into local government work of all kinds. It was from here that he became intimately associated with the people of Stepney and Limehouse, who had shaken him out of his middle-class complacency. Verses he wrote for the *Socialist Review* in 1910 show that his eyes and ears were wide open to the life around him and his heart was responding to the cries of the oppressed:

In Limehouse, in Limehouse, before the break of day
I hear the feet of many men who go upon their way,
  Who wander through the city,
  The grey and cruel city,
Through streets that have no pity,
The streets where men decay.

In Limehouse, in Limehouse, by night as well as day
I hear the feet of children who go to work or play,
  Of children born to sorrow,
  The workers of to-morrow.
How shall they work to-morrow
Who get no bread to-day?

1910 was a year of great political crises: the Liberal Governments challenged the House of Lords; there were two General Elections and the beginning of a wave of strikes; and it saw the development of the women's suffrage agitation. Attlee gave much of his time in the elections to the Independent Labour Party. But when in 1911 the Liberal Government passed the Health Insurance Act he took on a job as an official exponent of the Act. This once again carried him to all parts of the country and brought him before all kinds of audiences. The appointment was a tribute to his powers of clear exposition and helped him considerably to improve them.

After a year of this kind of work, Sidney Webb suggested that he should become a lecturer in economics and sociology at the London School of Economics. This was a job after his own heart. It gave him great opportunities not only to expound but to learn, and this he appreciated greatly. At the same time he kept up with his political and social work in Limehouse.

He was maturing rapidly, but large stretches of the Labour Movement were yet untouched by him. He had had no experience of industrial struggles. He had joined a clerks' union, but that gave him little opportunity to get this experience. Nor had he attended a national conference of the Labour Party or the Trades Union Congress. He was thus still largely on the fringe of the working-class movement. But his study of Fabian socialism and his association with the Webbs and the brilliant group of men and women around them had seasoned his opinions of their doctrine into convictions.

He was fortunate in the fact that his steady emergence into the

Labour Movement did not break up his home life. Indeed, the very week of August 1914 when the 'lights of Europe went out' he and his sister were on holiday together in Devonshire. He was then thirty-one years of age, unmarried and thought to be a confirmed bachelor, showing no signs of being attracted by feminine charms and completely absorbed in his social and political activities. There is no evidence of his having had, at this time, any clear opinions on international affairs or having been conscious of the imminence of war. He was caught, as the whole Labour Movement was caught, unawares. The Fabians had no distinctive views on international affairs. His views were therefore the views of a Christian liberal Englishman. He was young. He was single. He must at once join the forces.

He did.

CHAPTER TWO

Herbert Morrison

HERBERT MORRISON was born in Brixton, London, in January 1888. His father was a Brixton policeman and his mother had been a housemaid in a London hospital.

Shortly after he was born he had an accident which deprived him of the sight of one eye. How it happened he does not know, but he is 'sure no one was to blame.' He was unfortunate, too, in that his ankles were weak, and it was not until he arrived at middle age that they were put right by the famous manipulative surgeon Sir Ernest Barker. From his earliest years he was well acquainted with pain. Sometimes he could hardly walk because of his ankle trouble. Probably it was this which kept him out of most boy's games, such as football and cricket. Later, when his ankles permitted, he did learn to dance, and that he enjoys to this day. If he is at any social function where there is a dance floor, he and his wife can be counted upon to lead the dance.

He went to an elementary school when he was old enough and left when he was thirteen, as did most working-class boys of his generation. He was always fond of reading, and probably because of the physical defect which barred him from games, it became a passion with him. Like lots of boys of his day, he was particularly fond of the boy's papers of those days, *Boy's Friend*, *Boy's Realm*, *Jack*, *Sam and Pete*, *The Union Jack*, and the 'bloods' of all kinds. The story is told that it was a phrenologist who encouraged him to read more serious publications. He had paid sixpence to this man to 'read his bumps.' The wise man told him, 'You have a good head, my boy. You might even become Prime Minister one day; but you will have to read the right stuff first. Why don't you read serious stuff and get to know something about public questions?' It may be that Herbert learned very little about phrenology on this occasion, but he got good advice and he was wise enough to act upon it.

When he left school he began work as an errand boy, and that meant being on duty thirteen to sixteen hours a day. This did not

stop him from reading. He read whenever he could make a break, in a café over a cup of tea or by candlelight when he should have been asleep. He dropped a lot of the boy's yarns and turned to Macaulay's *History of England*, Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, Blatchford's *Merrie England* and *Britain for the British.* Then he went on to the works of Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, Chiozza Money, Karl Marx, and many more.

He was a youth when he joined the Social Democratic Federation well 'on the left.' When he was twenty-one years of age he joined the Independent Labour Party, while working as a telephone operator at Whitbread's brewery.

His father did not like his socialist activities. Morrison senior was a stubborn Conservative and let Herbert know it. A friend of his tells how Herbert and he on their way to a meeting suddenly discovered that Herbert had forgotten a book which he had intended to bring with him. They returned to his home, and as they entered his father noticed that Herbert was wearing a red tie—apparently not for the first time, for his father angrily exclaimed: 'I see you've got that b—— red rag round your neck again!' What Herbert said in reply is not recorded, but they got out of the house as quickly as they could and when they had reached a safe distance roared with laughter.

The Brixton branch of the Independent Labour Party elected him as chairman, and in this office he created a reputation for keeping people in order. For a number of years, he could be seen regularly studying the proceedings of the Lambeth Borough Council from the public gallery. He also joined the National Union of Clerks. But most of his spare time was spent in socialist propaganda at indoor and outdoor meetings.

Morrison was at this time a thin, pale-faced young fellow, clean-shaven, blue-eyed, and wearing spectacles. His dark brown hair, parted on the left, was swept across and upward, showing a broad high forehead. He was rather straight-lipped and had a habit of pressing his lips together so that the lower one seemed to protrude a little beyond the upper. His chin stood out pugnaciously too. But he had a good sense of humour and was well liked.

In these days he thought to become a journalist. But from the time he became part-time secretary of the London Labour Party his course was set as a 'professional politician.' Henceforth his fate would be bound up with the fate of the Labour Party.

CHAPTER THREE

Ernest Bevin

IN THE little village of Winsford in Somersetshire in the years before 1880, a courageous little Methodist woman became notorious among the villagers and squires for her persistent agitation for the building of a local Methodist chapel. She didn't like the way the Church folks worshipped God and she was determined that the Methodists should have a chapel of their own. Week by week and month by month she collected coppers from her neighbours towards a building fund for this purpose. A little chapel stands to this day on the road leading out of Winsford towards Devon.

Her husband was a farm labourer. The farm labourer's wage in the year 1880 amounted to a few shillings a week. The hours of labour were from sunrise to darkness. The name of this farm labourer, husband of the 'Methodist agitator,' was Bevin. In the year 1881 he was the father of Ernest Bevin, his seventh child, but he died before Ernest was born.

Some time later Mrs. Bevin married again. This second husband, also a farm labourer, died before Ernest was old enough to know much about him. Soon the mother became ill and would ask her boy, then about six years old, to tell her as much as he could remember of what the preacher had said at the chapel. He says it taught him 'to remember essentials.' Her illness proved fatal.

The bitterness that existed between the Christians of those days has its parallel in that which exists between the Social Democrats and the Communists of to-day. When the cortége reached the church door there was a conference between the vicar and the churchwardens to decide if the little woman who had worked so hard for the Methodists should be given a Christian burial. The grief-stricken little lad and the relatives and friends waited. At last they were allowed to move on and the boy's mother was laid to rest. Intolerance lost the day, but the boy did not forget.

From there he went to live with his sister at Copplestone near

Crediton, where he attended a day school. Ernest's schooldays ended at eleven years of age, when he reached the fourth form: he was taken to work on a farm. He 'lived in,' and he says: 'The farmer paid me ninepence a week—paid me quarterly, nine shillings and sixpence a quarter; and he always asked for the change out of ten shillings.' He left this farmer and went to another, who paid him a shilling a week. This was his first 'labour victory.'

Though not tall, he was broad and strong, and even in those days self-assertive. It was here, working as a farmer's boy, that he began to learn about politics. Because of failing eyesight the farmer could no longer read the newspapers and an additional task for the lad every evening was to read to his employer, the parliamentary speeches from the *Bristol Mercury*. There are certainly not many working-class leaders who began to read the parliamentary reports at eleven years of age. He may have felt bored with the job at first, but soon it awakened his interest and he was as anxious to read the speeches as the farmer was to have them read.

This experience came to an end when one day the farmer's son belaboured Ernest with a pick-shaft because of his slow progress in cutting mangles and turnips. Ernest was not standing for that; he collected his belongings, and tied them in a red handkerchief, and with a few coppers he had received from visitors for attending to their horses, he set off for Exeter, fourteen miles away.

From Exeter he took train to Bristol, where he lived with one of his brothers and got a job washing dishes in the Old Priory Café. He did not remain long on this job. He moved from job to job, served in a grocery store, hawked ginger-beer, became a drayman, a tram conductor, and had spells of unemployment. Life was hard and harsh. But he grew up tough and strong with not a little bitterness of spirit.

But other formative influences were at work in making him the man he is. When fifteen years of age he was introduced to the Bristol Adult School Movement. Here were classes for study of all kinds of social and religious problems. He had never lost interest in these matters since the days when he had to read the parliamentary reports to his farmer employer. He says of these classes at the adult school: 'They offered a fine balance between study, sport, and idealism. The social study was admirably developed

and members were encouraged to recognise their responsibilities not only as individuals but as members of a group. I also owe a lot to the debating society run by the Reverend Moffat Logan, a wonderful little man who opened his platform to anybody who had anything to say—freethinkers, parsons, or socialists.'

Then the school organised a course of lectures by university men and prominent leaders in social and political affairs. H. B. Lees-Smith, who was then a lecturer at Bristol University and later became the acting leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, lectured there on 'Free Trade.' Such prominent politicians as A. J. Balfour, Haldane, Joseph Chamberlain, and Campbell Bannerman gave lectures there, and Ernest Bevin heard them all.

When he was eighteen years of age he was baptised at the Mullen Chapel, in St. George Street, Bristol. At one time he joined a class for the study of theology and preached in the Methodist and Baptist chapels. It is said that he could quote from the Acts of the Apostles almost verbatim. It is recorded, too, that he was active in the affairs of St. Mark's Baptist Church, Easton, in 1905, and on one occasion he astonished a meeting by giving a thirty-minute lecture on the history of Israel.

Whilst there is no evidence of his rejecting religion, he became more interested in practical social reform. That he clings to his old religious associations is clear from his message of congratulation to St. Mark's on its jubilee celebrations in 1946.

His first contact with socialism is told by J. H. Alpa, M.P. for the Thornbury Division. Alpa was addressing an open-air meeting at Almondsbury, a village about five miles outside Bristol, and speaking on labour and socialism. Bevin, at that time in charge of a van delivering mineral waters, was passing with his van and stayed to listen. After that incident he came in contact with Robert Sharland, W. R. Oxley, and T. Phillips, well known leaders of the Bristol Socialist Society, a section of the Social Democratic Federation led by H. M. Hyndman.

He soon became an active member of this organisation, but as with religion, he was not greatly interested in its theories, but in its practical day-to-day social reform activities. Marx's 'theory of value' as expounded by H. M. Hyndman did not interest him as much as 'he who will not work shall not eat,' 'the right to work,' and 'the right to live a decent life.' He read *Justice* and *The Clarion*, edited by Robert Blatchford. Of the influence of the latter

upon him there can be no doubt. He says, 'The same may be said of thousands of others; educationists, philosophers, and preachers are in its debt, for it widened their outlook on life and gave them a new conception of society.'

It was in these days of young manhood, when he secured a regular job delivering ginger-beer for fifteen shillings a week plus seven shillings a week commission, that Bevin married his wife Florence, and for the first time in his life he had a home of his own. There is one child of the marriage, a daughter, who arrived five years later. They lived in Saxon Road, Bristol, and paid five shillings and sixpence a week rent.

In this period too he met Dan Hillman, a young man of his own type, who introduced him to the life of dockland. They became firm friends and met almost every day between the years 1906 and 1910 at the 'Old Sceptre.' Hillman on his way to the docks, Bevin starting his rounds with his van. Here over rum and coffee they discussed how to put the world right. They entered the ranks of trade unionism and socialism together.

In the slump of 1908 the Social Democratic Federation started an agitation for the setting up of 'Right to Work' Committees to fight the battle of the unemployed. Bevin became the Secretary of Bristol's 'Right to Work' Committee. This, of course, was a voluntary job and entailed a lot of hard work. He organised conferences, led deputations, and reported to mass meetings the results of their interviews with the authorities.

By the end of the year there were more than twenty thousand unemployed in Bristol and the distress in the working-class part of the city was very great. On Christmas Day, Bevin and Hillman stood at the door of Bristol Cathedral, each with a large poster written with chalk announcing the thousands of unemployed in the city. They were collecting money to buy bread. They also campaigned the factories. The Bread Fund later published the results. They spent £37 15*s*. on bread, printing costs were £1 10*s*., stationery and postage 11*s*., and they distributed 3,545 loaves.

In 1909 Bevin was a socialist candidate for the St. Paul's Ward of Bristol. A slogan of the campaign was 'Vote for Bevin, who fought for the unemployed.' In his election address he said, 'Docks are a national necessity, and as a socialist I believe they should be nationalised.' He polled 663 votes against a Liberal who secured 1,052. Bevin ran that election at a cost of seven pounds.

Joining the Dockers' Union was also a decisive step. No body of workers had a harsher life than those working in and around the British ports. Bristol was no exception. They were dealt with as casual labourers, and the fighting and scrambling for jobs in dockland had to be seen to be believed.

To get these men to combine in a union demanded organisers as tough as themselves. Bevin became a branch secretary of the Dockers' Union and the recruiting of members for this organisation became his next big job, in 1910. He was now a broad-shouldered and deep-chested young man. He had a strong voice and a strong face. He was dogmatic in utterance. His language was not that of the university, but that of the dockers and wharfmen and draymen, enriched by diligent reading. He spoke with the conviction that he was right, and he was intensely practical in the application of his preaching. He had plenty of courage. One day whilst holding a meeting near the docks a rival speaker at a nearby meeting became abusive and insulting. Bevin went over to him, knocked him off his stand, picked him up by the scruff of the neck and his trousers and flung him into the docks, to be fished out by a boatman. The dockers liked that. He won them to his side by his toughness and crude eloquence and by getting concrete results for them.

He was not only a defender of the men, he had a love for horses. It was in these days at the beginning of his career as a 'concession squeezer' that he won a battle for the horses. It was a practice in Bristol to pay a small bonus to the carters on every ton they loaded. So most of them overloaded their drays, often putting on more than the horses could pull. Bevin made a row about this practice and loads were restricted to three tons. For months afterwards he went around the streets of Bristol checking the size of the loads and reporting members of the Union who overloaded. That limitation set by Bevin remains to this day.

Hardly had he begun to function as a trade union organiser for the dockers than he was called upon to show his mettle in the great strike movement which swept through the ports of the whole country. He soon proved that he was an organiser of exceptional ability. His work extended to the western ports, and whilst Tillett and Gosling and Mann led the way in London, Liverpool, and other key centres of water transport, Bevin played an effective part in tying up the western ports and Bristol.

He was then nearly thirty years of age and his course was set. He was about five feet six in height, thick-set, of a rather serious demeanour, and with a heavy sense of responsibility in anything he undertook to do. He was quick to act and passionately devoted to the cause to which he had committed himself. His socialism was a humanistic reform activity without being too particular as to theoretical considerations. He was a practical class-war leader of the trade union, pugnacious and confident of his own powers and already showing a strong tendency to personalise all issues and make them his own. Attack, if you dare, *his* union, *his* socialism, *his* views, and you attacked *him*. Honest, blunt in speech, he gave himself wholeheartedly to trade unionism.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Times were out of Joint

BEVIN WAS the first of the three to take the plunge into the rising Labour Movement. And his way lay through the trades unions. If, when he became an organiser of the Dockers' Union, he had any illusions about the nature of the job, he soon lost them. It was quickly thrust upon him that this job had no recognised limit to the working day or to the amount of human energy it would call forth.

The times, too, were out of joint. He had become a dockers' organiser just at the turn of the century when the working classes of the British Isles were experiencing the greatest awakening since the days of Owen and the Chartists early in the nineteenth century. For more than fifty years the great mass of the workers had largely ignored the unions and left their political fate in the hands of the Liberals and the Tories. In 1895 there were only 1,500,000 trade unionists in the United Kingdom and the Dockers' Union was only six years old. The Social Democratic Federation, oldest of the socialist organisations, was only fourteen years old. The Independent Labour Party, the Socialist League, and the Fabian Society were younger still. All were political fledglings. There was no Labour Party, although ever since the days of the Chartists a few socialists had been agitating for one to be formed.

The Social Democratic Federation was a Marxist organisation led by H. M. Hyndman. Although Hyndman assimilated much from Marx's analysis of capitalism, he was not a political leader. He was a great propagandist of socialism. But he failed to hold his organisation together and it soon split into small sectarian groups. When it debated the relation of socialism to the trade unions it lost such leading men as Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, and John Burns. When it debated the relation of socialism to parliamentarianism William Morris and others went off to form the Socialist League. When it debated the question of the relation of socialism to revolutionary industrial unionism it split again, and another

group formed the Socialist Labour Party, with James Connolly propagating Marxist socialism according to the teachings of Daniel de Léon of America. Still another offshoot formed the Socialist Party of Great Britain. All the groups proclaimed themselves to be the real interpreters of Marxism.

Although the Social Democratic Federation gave the working class its new impetus in the direction of an independent struggle by providing the leaders for organising the masses of unskilled labour into the trade unions, the Marxist organisations continued as small sectarian groups concerned more with phases of socialist doctrine than political mass-leadership. The Marxist movement did not grow up. There was no one of the stature of Plekhanov and Lenin to relate Marxism effectively to the social and political struggle in this country. The working class was not trained in scientific methods of thinking concerning its problems, and the intellectuals such as Hyndman and Morris proved unequal to the practical tasks which faced the Social Democratic Federation.

Nevertheless there were certain features of their Marxism which they held in common. All held the view that the working class should become the predominant power in the land; that the policy of socialists should be determined by the exigencies of the class struggle; that the working class should unite to wage this struggle successfully on a programme and policy based upon its own interests; that only by its triumph would socialism be possible and the class conflict thereby brought to an end in a classless society. But they could not agree upon how the prerequisites of socialism should be secured.

The Fabian Society, formed two years later than the Social Democratic Federation, was composed almost entirely of intellectuals. It has always been small in number and never sought a mass membership. Nevertheless it has had a greater influence on the modern British Labour Movement than any other political group. Indeed, there is a parallel between the rôle played by the Fabians of Britain and that of the Bolsheviks of Soviet Russia, although their views on so many things are fundamentally different. Both parties were small and emphasised quality of membership rather than numbers. Both sought the fulfilment of their policy through their members obtaining the key positions of authority and influence in the mass organisations. Their doctrines were different, but their methods of infiltration and permeation were the same.

The Fabians were at the centre of a British 'solar system' of institutions while the Bolsheviks were at the centre of a 'solar system' of Russian institutions. Maybe the Fabians were more subtle than the Bolsheviks. The latter told the world what they were doing. They theorised about the 'nucleus' and the 'fraction' and how they should be organised. The Fabians did not, and hence they never brought down upon themselves and their organisation any denunciations of their own 'nuclei' or 'fractions.'

But there was one all-important difference between the Fabians and all other socialist groups, including the Bolsheviks. They did not form themselves into a party to put up candidates against other socialist and Labour bodies, but only into a propaganda society—an ideological organisation. Hence when the Labour Party was formed it became the the principal party through which the Fabians exercised their influence and avoided constitutional conflicts with the other organisations of the Labour Movement.

The Fabian Society eschewed all class-war theory and policy. Sydney Webb, in his 'Fabian Essay,' stated their position clearly. He wrote: 'The social ideal from being static has become dynamic. The necessity of the constant growth and development of the social organism has become axiomatic. No philosopher now looks for anything but the gradual evolution of the new order from the old, without breach of continuity or abrupt change of the entire social tissue at any point during the process. . . . All students of society who are abreast of their time, socialists as well as individualists, realise that important organic changes can only be (1) democratic, and thus acceptable to the majority of the people and prepared for in the minds of all; (2) gradual, and thus causing no dislocation however rapid may be the rate of progress; (3) not regarded as immoral by the mass of the people, and thus not subjectively demoralising to them; and (4) in this country at any rate, constitutional and peaceful. Socialists may therefore be quite at one with radicals in their political methods. Radicals, on the other hand, are perforce realising that mere political levelling is insufficient to save a State from anarchy and despair. Both sections have been driven to recognise that the root of the difficulty is economic; and there is every day a wider consensus that the inevitable outcome of democracy is the control by the people themselves, not only of their own political organisation, but, through that, also of the main instruments of wealth production;

the gradual substitution of organised co-operation for the anarchy of the competitive struggle; and the consequent recovery, in the only possible way, of what John Stuart Mill calls "the enormous share which the possessors of the instruments of industry are able to take from the produce." The economic side of the democratic ideal is, in fact, socialism itself.'

The Independent Labour Party, formed under the leadership of Keir Hardie in 1893, was the 'hot gospel' organisation of the ideas of the Fabians. It banged the drum and blew the trumpets and delivered the socialist message for the masses. It provided the apocalyptic vision of Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. It provided the emotional drive, while the Fabians provided the light. It aimed at becoming a mass party, which the Fabians did not. But there was no essential difference in their programmes. And it nevertheless remained a small party.

But the closing five years of the nineteenth century saw the unions increase their membership by half a million members. In the year 1900 the Labour Representation Committee was formed by the socialist organisations coming together with representatives from a number of the largest trade unions.[1] The Dockers' Union, with 14,000 members, was among them, but Ernest Bevin did not figure in the early negotiations which established the Labour Representation Committee as the foundation organisation of the Party in which he was later to play a dominating rôle. Ben Tillett was then the leader of the Dockers. But Bevin was associated with the Social Democratic Federation, which for a year remained a member of the Labour Representation Committee and then split away for a number of years because the committee would not subscribe to class-war doctrine and state its aim to be that of socialism. And ever after that he continued to belong to Bristol Labour Representation Committee through the Bristol Socialist Society.

This action of the Social Democratic Federation naturally left the leadership of the Labour Representation Committee in the hands of the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society, with the body of trade unionists who were just beginning to move out of the orbit of the Liberal Party and strike the line of Labour

[1] The Socialist organisations altogether had not more than 23,000 members, and only a fraction of the unions, mustering less than 400,000 members, affiliated at this early stage. (See Beer's *History of British Socialism*, vol. 2, p. 320.)

independence. The new Labour Party was a peculiar form of political organisation, a federation of organisations without individual members. The trade unions each took a vote of their members, and on securing a majority in favour of affiliation all the members of the union automatically became members of the Labour Representation Committee. The socialist organisations each exercised their influence by the process of infiltration, 'nuclear organisation,' or 'boring from within,' and securing the outstanding positions of influence and authority. They became expert in these methods long before the rise of the Communist movement. And of course they earned their right to leadership by their superior ability, political knowledge and enthusiasm, and understanding of the social problems of the time. The trade union leaders were experts in their own line of collective bargaining for their trades and occupations, but as a rule had little general knowledge and were unaccustomed to dealing with the broader problems of society. For fifty years they had accepted the *laissez-faire* policy of Liberalism as a condition of nature and rejected the idea of the State interfering with industry as emphatically as any employers of labour. They wanted a 'square deal' from the boss: their imaginations did not take them further than that. It was only when the State did interfere and threatened the very existence of the unions that they at last turned favourably towards the Independent Labour Movement then in Parliament.

It was this combination of forces, however, which represented the great working-class breakaway from its sixty years' political subservience to the capitalist parties and the resumption of Labour's independent march to power. If there were any doubts about this fact in the minds of the ruling class, and especially of the Liberals, there were none six years later, when twenty-six Labour candidates were elected to Parliament alongside the great Liberal landslide which swept the Tories out and brought the Liberals to power.

Mr. Lloyd George, who became the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Liberal Government, at once recognised the significance of the new portent. Speaking at Cardiff on October 11th, 1906, he said: 'I have one word for Liberals. I can tell them what will make this Independent Labour Party movement a great sweeping force in this country. If at the end of an average term of office it were found that a Liberal Parliament had done nothing to

cope seriously with the social conditions of the people, to remove the national degradation of slums and widespread poverty and destitution in a land glittering with wealth, that they had shrunk to attack boldly the main causes of this wretchedness, notably the drink and this vicious land system, that they had not arrested the waste of our national resources in armaments, nor provided an honourable sustenance for deserving old age, that they had tamely allowed the House of Lords to extract all the virtue out of their Bills, then would a real cry arise in this land for a new party, and many of us here in this room would join in that cry. But if a Liberal Government tackle the landlords and the brewers, and the peers, as they have faced the parsons, and try to deliver the nation from the pernicious control of this confederacy of monopolists, then the Independent Labour Party will call in vain upon the working men of Britain to desert Liberalism that is gallantly fighting to rid the land of the wrongs that have oppressed those who labour in it.' [1]

But it was too late. The very efforts of the governing parties to stem the tide of independent working-class activity only served to widen and deepen it. The vast social and political revolution had begun. Try as they might, whether by coercion or by persuasion, they could not stop it. The Tory Law Lords attacked the trade unions by the famous Taff Vale Decision, which made the unions liable for damages arising from strike action on the part of their members. The Liberal Government of 1906 reversed the decision to win back the support of the Liberal trade unionists, and proceeded with a great programme of social legislation, giving Old Age Pensions, transforming the budget into an instrument of social reform, distinguishing between earned and unearned income, attacking the landlords, introducing Unemployment and Health Insurance.

The Law Lords attacked the unions again with the famous Osborn judgement, declaring the method whereby the unions financed the Labour Party to be illegal, a decision which the Liberal Government reversed by the Trade Union Act of 1913. The actions of the Lords angered the trade unionists and turned them towards the Labour Party. The social legislation of the Government and the educational campaigns necessarily associated with it did not bring the workers back to the Liberal Party. They

[1] Beer's *History of British Socialism*, vol. 2, p. 348.

only served to awaken the social conscience of the masses, and made them into more willing listeners to the new leaders who were urging them to march along the path of independence.

This new social movement which had swept into the House of Commons broke the power of the House of Lords. This Tory institution had no intention of being a party to making Parliament into the instrument of social change. It rejected the budget of 1909 and set its face against the new legislation. The Liberal Government, led by Asquith, Lloyd George, and Winston Churchill, was compelled to choose between breaking the power of the Lords or foregoing its programme of social legislation. If it did the latter, then Lloyd George's forecast of the fate of the Liberal Party would undoubtedly be quickly fulfilled. Without hesitation the Liberals took up the challenge. Twice in 1910 they appealed to the country and were confirmed in their majority, while the Labour Party increased its representation to forty-two. A great political revolution was under way. The Lords retreated and finally accepted what became known as the Parliament Act of 1911. This deprived the House of Lords of all control of financial measures and limited its powers of delaying any other legislation to two years.

Thus the impact of the rising working-class movement drove the Liberals into making as profound a constitutional revolution as the Cromwellian Ironsides had made in the seventeenth century. The Cromwellian revolution made the monarch responsible to the Parliament. The revolution of 1911 deprived the Lords of their power and made the House of Commons the supreme political authority in the state.

So with social reform on their banner the Liberals ushered in the social revolution of the twentieth century which was destined to wipe out the Liberal Party.

That this great constitutional crisis was the direct product of a greater social stir outside Parliament is clear from the fact that the social movement did not stop with the passing of the new legislation. The whole country was plunged into industrial strife on a scale not seen for a century, and the women of Britain, led by a number of brillantly equipped middle-class women, challenged the men with the demand for political equality of the sexes.

The great strike movement, however, was not planned. It began spontaneously with a strike of seamen and firemen at Southampton, which was quickly followed by strikes at Goole and Hull.

Photo : *Planet News*

Clement Attlee addresses a young audience, July 1945

From there the movement spread to Manchester and Liverpool, and culminated in bringing the whole of London to a standstill. The dockers were demanding a minimum rate of 8*d.* per hour and a 1*s.* an hour for overtime, a working day from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., and a working night from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. Carmen, lightermen, and other grades of workers had other demands, and what some of the conditions were like against which they struck work can be realised from the fact that when the carmen made a settlement which provided for a six-day week of seventy-two hours, this was regarded as a great victory.

While Tillett and Tom Mann and Harry Gosling marched scores of thousands of strikers through the City to Tower Hill or Trafalgar Square and brought London's traffic to a standstill, Bevin marched the Bristol dockers and halted the transport of Bristol and of the West Country ports. Bevin was, and is, an organiser by nature. Now he was in his element. He was a fighter who did not mince his words, especially when dealing with men whose lives were tough and harsh. When once they were roused they would go any distance under a leader in whom they had confidence; and they had confidence in Ernest Bevin because they knew he would never ask them to do what he would not do himself. He applied himself to the organisation of the Bristol dock strikers as thoroughly and completely as he was later to organise a union of a million members. The strikers won.

Hardly had the other transport workers gone back to work than the spirit of unrest spurred the railwaymen to action. A series of 'unofficial' strikes began. Nearly a hundred thousand railway workers were receiving under £1 a week wages, and the remainder varied between 21*s.* and 30*s.* a week. The executives of the four principal railwaymen's unions acted together, and gave the companies twenty-four hours' notice to meet them for negotiations about these conditions or face a national stoppage. The Asquith Government intervened with the offer of a Royal Commission and the threat to use troops if a national stoppage took place. The unions refused the offer and 200,000 railwaymen struck work. Winston Churchill was Home Secretary. Whether he and the Cabinet had been taken by surprise by the dock strike we do not know, but troops were not used on that occasion. He was intent, however, on standing no nonsense from the railwaymen, and a policy of repression had been decided on, when at the last moment

wiser councils prevailed and the Cabinet instructed the companies to send their representatives to meet the union leaders and the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party (Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald) at the Board of Trade. The mass pressure from outside Parliament was forcing the Government to use its powers in new directions: for the first time in our history, the House of Commons secured a joint meeting between the companies and the unions.

The strike led not only to an improvement in the conditions of the railwaymen but to the amalgamation of four unions into the National Union of Railwaymen. This was but one of the big steps in the centralisation of the union forces; by the time this great strike movement ended a still greater combination appeared in the form of the Triple Alliance of miners, transport workers, and railwaymen. But before that happened the miners had swung into action. While the railwaymen and dockers were grappling with their own problems, the Miners' Federation was balloting the whole of its members on the question of a national strike to secure the adoption of the minimum wage for all mine workers. After negotiations with the mine owners the demands of the miners were turned down, and again they balloted for strike action. In February 1912 the strike began, and spread through every coalfield.

Once again the Government had to intervene. It announced its intention of introducing a Bill adopting the principle of the district minimum wage determined by a joint board of mine owners and union representatives under the chairmanship of an impartial chairman. It was a hasty piece of legislation, but the miners gained from its operation.

Then the London dockers struck again, and made a stout resistance for sixteen weeks. But this time Winston Churchill was ready, and 25,000 soldiers and sailors were brought into the Port of London to act as strike breakers; and as a result, this time Lord Devonport, head of the Port of London Authority, won.

But in 1913 the tide of action reached a crescendo with the lock-out of the Dublin transport workers, led by James Connolly and James Larkin. This struggle to survive caught the imagination of the working class of the entire British Isles, and drew much support from other classes too. It was directed against the union-smashing Martin Murphy of Dublin, who had determined to

clear Dublin of any form of unionism. He failed in that, but he succeeded in no small measure in spreading trade unionism in Britain as well as Ireland, and stirred up class feeling throughout the Labour Movement to a degree rare in the course of British history. Larkin and Connolly sent the fiery cross of socialist revolt throughout the length and breadth of Great Britain. For the first time in our history, co-operative foodships sailed from the shores of England to Ireland to help the strikers of Dublin. For six months the fight went on, until it ended in a draw.

The effect of this struggle and the general wave of strikes was far-reaching. By 1914 the Labour Party membership had risen to a million and a half through trade union affiliations of members who had paid the political levy according to the Trade Union Act of 1913. There was no doubt about the mass break-away from Liberalism. The working class was finding its way to new loyalties, new leaders, new aims. What those aims were was not yet quite clear, beyond the fact that the movement must be independent of the old capitalist parties. It had no clear-cut theory guiding its practice. Although from one end of the country to the other people were discussing socialism, it was essentially eclectic in its practical opportunism.

The days when it was dangerous for a socialist to speak at the street corner were passing away. Socialism was discussed freely in the unions, in the factories, in the highways, and the public halls. Robert Blatchford and his *Clarion* readers spread the message with a million of copies of *Merrie England* and *Britain for the British.* The Labour Party published the *Daily Citizen.* Militant socialism launched the *Daily Herald.* The Fabians poured out their tracts incessantly. Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, George Hicks and others stormed through the land with militant syndicalism. The 'Plebs League' fought the battle of 'independent working-class education.' Hyndman and Harry Quelch battled for the Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation. Keir Hardie and Philip Snowden asked, 'Can a man be a Christian on a pound a week?' G. D. H. Cole and William Mellor propounded their theory of guild socialism in the columns of the *New Age.* The Parliamentary Labour Party of forty-two members under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson, and Keir Hardie were holding their own in the parliamentary struggles. Bevin, the young dockers' leader, plodded along with his organising work at

Bristol and gave not a little of his time to propagating socialism according to the tenets of the Bristol Socialist Society. And Morrison and Attlee were expounding socialism as understood by the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society.

But few there were who realised that these events were taking place in the shadow of impending war. The whole movement was so preoccupied with its tremendous domestic problems that it was giving little attention to world affairs. Nevertheless, delegates had been sent from the various socialist parties to international socialist conferences and there they had participated in discussions as to what the working class of the world should do in the event of war. The young Labour Party had become affiliated to the Labour and Socialist International Bureau, although there were some doubts as to whether it should be admitted, the ground for objection being that it was hardly a party in the full sense of the word, having no programme other than its separation from the old capitalist parties. But it subscribed to the general sentiments of working-class solidarity, and through its representatives to international conferences it was a party to some drastic resolutions. Keir Hardie had moved at the Copenhagen Conference of 1908 a resolution in favour of an international general strike should the capitalists declare war. But he must have known that such a resolution could not possibly be applied unless there had first been a tremendous ideological and organisational preparation which was certainly never begun in this country.

In 1910 the Labour Party and the trade unions affiliated to the Second International were parties to the famous Resolution of the International Socialist Conference held at Basle (more famous after the war than before it), which declared that:

> 'If war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved, supported by the co-ordinating activity of the International Socialist Bureau, to exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of war by the means they consider most effective, which naturally vary according to the sharpening of the class struggle and the sharpening of the general political situation. In case war should break out anyway, it is their duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule. . . ."

Immense as the progress of the British working class had been since the dawn of the twentieth century, such resolutions never reached the masses upon whom the burden of operating them would fall. Neither the trade unions nor the Labour Party had reached the stage of political maturity necessary for them to make these resolutions operative. They were not the subjects of debate at the Trades Union congresses or the Labour Party conferences in the years preceding the war, nor did they form the material for mass propaganda and agitation.

So when the hour for action arrived they could not be expected to influence the actions of the Labour Movement; nor did they. The actions of the young Labour Party were governed only by unco-ordinated trends of political theory sponsored by the various socialist and syndicalist organisations, while the masses of trade unionists and their fellow-workers reflected little beyond the philosophy of the 'square deal' and the 'collective bargain.'

Common to all these trends, it is true, was a sentiment of internationalism. The class-war sections called upon the 'workers of all lands to unite.' The others were in favour of international brotherhood of the nations, some in the name of Christianity, some in the name of the socialist ideal, and some as humanitarians. But nowhere were there clearly thought-out ideas backed by organised deeds. The internationalism of socialism was as loose and varied as the immature British Labour Party itself; and one and all were caught unprepared when the war drums rolled and suddenly, on August 4th, 1914, the internationals of socialism and labour were swept apart. From all directions the armies of Europe marched on to the battlefields. A hush fell upon industrial Britain. In the first six months of 1914 there had been 9,000,000 days of strike action. In the last six there were fewer than a million. Mature or immature, young or old, parties, like men, had to make decisions as to their course of action. Among the men were Attlee, Bevin, and Morrison.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Valley of Decision

THERE WERE no consultations between our three leaders-in-the-making as to the course of action they would take on the outbreak of war. They were as yet almost unknown to each other, and such a situation as they had now to face had never been visualised by them or by the leaders of the Labour Movement.

The Fabians were liberals and nationalists in foreign affairs. The Independent Labour Party was pacifist either from religious or anti-imperialist motives. The Marxists of the Socialist Labour Party, the British Socialist Party (another offshoot of the Social Democratic Federation), and the syndicalists were opposed to the war for anti-imperialist reasons. The Marxists of the Hyndman school were for the war. The trade union leaders were still liberal and intensely nationalistic in regard to foreign affairs, and consequently pro-war. No wonder, therefore, when the leadership of the Labour Movement represented all these varying points of view, there was no common policy when war came, and the movement split, leaving most people to decide for themselves as to what they should do.

Our three future leaders each made his own decision and went his independent way.

Attlee, now a young middle-class Christian gentleman of thirty-one years of age, a Fabian social worker, did not like the war and thought war a stupid means of settling international differences. Nevertheless he did not think Britain would be waging an imperialist war. Nor did he accept the guidance of the Basle International Socialist Conference. It is doubtful whether he saw the resolution until after the war. (I also was a young man in the Labour Movement at the time and did not see it or hear of it until long after the war had started.) Attlee's attitude was decided by the fact that, as there had to be sacrifice, he, as a loyal citizen, must share it. True, therefore, to his class upbringing and his

social standing, he secured a commission in the South Lancashire Regiment and went out to fight.

Bevin was not inclined to pacifism, either by nature or upbringing. Born amidst social struggle, reared in social struggle, a militant fighter on behalf of his fellow workers, he declared that he had been ready to participate in an international general strike against war had the German Social Democrats been so prepared. But they were not. Therefore he was a British social democrat and not an international socialist. While fully realising that Britain was ruled by capitalists he resolved that so far as it lay in his power, he would protect the interests of the workers, but the war must be won and the winning of it would be paramount.

Morrison had grown up in somewhat different circumstances. He was not a trade union leader. He was a member of the Independent Labour Party and had a job in the circulation department of the *Daily Citizen*. He was keenly interested in politics and had a flair for theory. He was a 'left socialist' at this time, acquainted with Marxism and almost an anarchist. He had a few reservations. But he was in entire agreement with the Marxists as to the nature of the war that had crashed upon the world. He was opposed to the working class being sacrificed to decide which imperialist power should dominate the earth. I don't think he had become acquainted with the policy advocated by Lenin at this time. The latter advocated the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war. This view was little known then in Britain. Had Morrison held this view he would have joined the army and steadily proceeded to spread his ideas amongst the troops, ready for the decisive moment when the masses were ready to turn against the war. But whatever his knowledge of Marxism at the time, he did not hold such views. So he registered as a conscientious objector and faced the military tribunal. He stated his case clearly, frankly, and courageously faced the consequences. He could have avoided both. His blind eye and his weak ankles would have secured him exemption on physical grounds, but he did not take advantage of these weaknesses.

The Tribunal ordered him to work in agriculture, and he was sent to a farm at Letchworth. This turned out to be a fortunate decision in more ways than one. First, the farmer to whom he was allocated was also a socialist, and that made for a sympathetic understanding between the two. Secondly, it did not cut him off

labour and peace in industry, and socialism was relegated to post-war consideration.

Bevin pursued this policy. While Attlee donned officer's uniform and set off to battle and Morrison, rejecting both courses, went off to Letchworth, Bevin continued without interuption his climb into the ranks of leadership. In 1915 he was elected for the first time to be a delegate to the Trades Union Congress, the industrial parliament of organised labour. Ben Tillett was with him, leading the dockers' delegation. Little Ben was the dockers' human dynamo. Warm-hearted, generous, emotional, with a fine command of language, he was one of the most popular figures in the world of labour. He had a big opinion of his young organiser. He introduced Ernest to the leaders of his generation. And Ernest Bevin was not backward in getting to know men. He intervened in one or two discussions in the Congress. That was the way to get known and to let the rest know that he was on his way. To his joy he was elected by the congress to represent it, along with C. G. Ammon, a delegate from another union, at the American Federation of Labour's annual convention to be held in San Francisco. Although he had wandered about dockland in Bristol and other ports he had never yet sailed for a foreign shore. It was therefore a great day in his life when with his co-delegate he watched the shores of England recede and turned his face towards the new world in the wake of the Cabots who had sailed from Bristol on their voyages of discovery more than four hundred years earlier.

Two organisers of the American Federation of Labour met the two British delegates, and the next day the Englishmen were presented to the great Samuel Gompers, the famous president of America's Labour organisations. There was a good deal of similarity between America's biggest trade union boss and England's future trade union boss. They were both short men, and both carried plenty of weight. Both placed a lot of emphasis on the personal pronoun 'I.' Both liked power. Gompers was a powerful orator, Ernest could also say what he had to say with not a little emphasis.

Although they had much in common and could each appreciate the qualities of the other, there were great differences in their respective positions. Gompers was the leader of the skilled labour unions of America and represented a definite period of American

labour history before the triumph of mass-production and the rise of the mass organisations of unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Bevin was rising to power with the organisation of precisely that mass of general labour which, in America, Gompers ignored. Gompers was not a socialist. Bevin had raised the banner of socialism as the hope of the world. They belonged to different stages of social history. But such a meeting as they now had was not for the discussion of differences. They were met to convey the greetings of two great trade union organisations of working men and women to each other and to re-affirm their common interest in each other's struggles.

They travelled across America together to San Francisco. The Convention was held in the Californian Building of the famous Pacific Exhibition. There were 341 delegates and many visitors, but Ernest Bevin was not at all nervous when he was called upon to address this assembly of representatives of America's labour aristocracy. His job was to explain British Labour's attitude to the war to a convention which was one hundred per cent. behind its government's policy of neutrality. To the surprise of the British delegates the Convention proved itself more class-conscious than the Englishmen had had reason to expect. The resolution declared that 'organised Labour of the world should meet simultaneously with the diplomats of the governments to discuss peace in the same town or city in order to leave Labour's impress upon the new peace of the world.' Unfortunately Labour was so much divided against itself that this resolution was never implemented.

From San Francisco the two Britishers went to Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, Milwaukee, Buffalo, Washington, and New York, addressing meetings, conferring with the Labour men and the socialists as they went along. It was a great trip. They returned early in 1916.

By this time Ernest Bevin's course had become clearer than it had ever been before. His ideas concerning his future in the Trade Union Movement and the part he was determined to play were taking definite shape. While Ben Tillett was engaging in the recruiting of men for the forces and visiting the Western Front, Ernest was concentrating on the organisation of the dock workers. He could now count on being a regular delegate to the Trades Union Congress and to the meetings of the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen, and transport workers formed just before the

war. He was not yet in the front rank, but he had his eyes on it and beyond.

The life of a trade union official is a life of almost continuous conferences. He is either conferring with his members or with people who ought to be members, with employers of labour and local and national authorities. He is either in conferences of his union or other unions with whom they are in association, or he is attending Trade Union Congresses or conferences of the Labour Party. To some people such conferences and congresses are boring affairs. To men such as Bevin they are life itself. Here they report on things done and discuss the tasks to be done, gathering new strength from association with those engaged in the common struggle. These conferences are also the means whereby leaders gather power to themselves and measure their strength.

Bevin was ambitious. It is said that Winston Churchill once remarked of him when they were cabinet colleagues, 'You know, Ernest has a lust for power and doesn't know what the devil to do with it when he has got it.' It was a shrewd observation. But there can be no doubt that when he got the job of organiser for the dockers it suited his temperament, his capacities, and his longings. He was passionately devoted to the task of raising the standard of life of his class, and particularly of those for whom he was directly responsible. He also thanks the dockers 'for having given him *his* chance in life.' His ambitions were integrated with his service to the men. He studied diligently the details of every case he handled and of every organisation he had to deal with. He could dominate men as well as serve them, and was gifted with an ability to put his ideas in order. But he personalises everything and every issue. His egoism is sometimes overpowering, and it is difficult for people to differ from him without giving him personal offence. Nevertheless he can be generous, cordial, and has a good sense of humour when he is in the right mood. He is relentless in the pursuit of anything upon which he has set his mind, and anyone who has stood in his way must not forget he has a good memory and can be very petty as well as generous.

It was not until September of 1916 that he had an opportunity to capitalise his visit to the U.S.A. The Trades Union Congress on this occasion was held in Birmingham Town Hall. It is a fine building, spacious and with good seating accommodation. There were 670 delegates present and visitors filled the gallery. The

Congress presented a magnificent scene. On the platform were the members of the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress, the Labour Members of the Government, representatives from the trade union movements of America, Canada, Belgium, France, the Labour Party and the Co-operative Movement. The Lord Mayor of Birmingham was at this time Mr. Neville Chamberlain. On behalf of the City of Birmingham he gave an address of welcome to the Congress.

Having recently returned from America and been greatly impressed by the American Federation of Labour convention, Bevin felt in a strong position to intervene in the discussion on a resolution of the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress proposing that an international trade union congress be held simultaneously with the Peace Conference, and in the neighbourhood of the conference, in order to influence its proceedings. Ernest seconded a motion for the reference back of the committee's recommendation. He mounted the platform with that weighty, ambling motion with which all Labour Conference delegates have now become familiar, and with powerful voice proceeded to make his impact upon the Congress.

'I believe' he began, 'that in order to discuss this matter properly . . . the attitude of the American Federation of Labour needs to be laid before this Congress. . . . I believe an injustice has been done to the American Federation of Labour. Let me quote one of President Gomper's statements at that great convention. He said, "I am one who for years had hoped that the working classes of the world would come together in unity; but the gospel we have preached of love and mutual understanding has been shot to pieces in this war, and the peoples of every country have rushed to their particular flag without distinction." Now in sending out this circular from the American Federation of Labour, I believe it was done with the sole idea that the impress of Labour might be made upon the future peace of the world. . . . I stand here for the Republic of Europe absolutely, for the complete democracy ruling throughout Europe. But that seems impossible for the moment. . . . I hope this reference back will not mean the wiping out of the recommendation altogether, but that it will lead to a reconsideration and a more representative consultation of the Labour Movement in respect to this matter. You have got to take the Germans into consultation after this war. You have got to

reckon with the German as an economic factor. . . . There will not be many scruples about the settlement when the diplomats are in conference together. When these cold-blooded lawyers and politicians settle at the peace table they will be more concerned about the division of Persia than the abduction of the women of Lille.'

Ernest did not then dream that he would one day become a politician or be involved in a diplomatic fracas about the future of Persia. He was simply capitalising his visit to America and letting the Congress know he was on his way. His proposition was defeated, but his stock had gone up. Within a few months he was sent by his union for the first time to the Labour Party Conference at Manchester.

It was held in the Albert Hall, Peter Street. Manchester at the best of times is a grim and grimy place. But the excitement of those days of January 1917 was such that one hardly noticed that. After the first lull following the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, the great unrest in the ranks of the working class continued to develop and take on new forms. The trade unions were bound by agreements not to strike and were operating under the Defence of the Realm regulations. They were pledged to subordinate every issue to the over-riding purpose of the war, while the grievances of the workers multiplied under the rapidly changing conditions caused by industry's turn-over to war production. The trade union leaders could not cope with the numerous grievances. At the same time full employment gave the workers in the factories a sense of power which is absent when unemployment is rife. Unable to get quick remedies for their grievances by referring them to the executives of the unions, they adapted their organisations to the factories. They elected shop stewards and these formed workshop committees. The shop stewards movement in the engineering industry set the pace to this new form of direct representation of the workpeople in industry. The syndicalist and anti-war elements in the Labour Movement became associated with the workshop movement. From the beginning of 1915 strike followed strike over which the trade union leaders could exercise no control. A few weeks before this Conference of the Labour Party in Manchester, a great strike had occurred in Sheffield, a centre of the armament industry. At the moment when the Conference met, the engineering workshops of Manchester itself were seething

with unrest, which in a few weeks' time would burst into action and sweep from town to town.

In the conference hall there was great excitement. The delegates were conscious of the coming storm, although they were primarily occupied with the burning question of Labour's entrance into the Lloyd George Government. Arthur Henderson, the ebullient J. H. Thomas, and cautious J. R. Clynes would be defending Labour's coalition with Lloyd George. Philip Snowden would lead the pacifist attack and make the air sizzle with acid comments. It was expected, too, that MacDonald would join in the fray. But no one expected that Bevin would join in and set about the old trade union leaders who were strongly in favour of the coalition. Arthur Henderson was a powerful speaker, deliberate in the presentation of his case and logical in argument. He possessed a resonant voice that carried to all parts of the hall. He was then in his prime. So were J. H. Thomas and J. R. Clynes, both of whom could hold their own in any gathering of spokesmen.

The storm broke in the very first session. Arthur Henderson justified Labour's entrance into the Government. Philip Snowden bitterly assailed Henderson as only Snowden could. Clynes followed Snowden and lashed him, supporting Henderson. Then, with grim face, the newcomer Ernest Bevin hurled himself into the fray with an assurance and confidence equal to that of any of the elder men. He began a class-conscious attack on the Coalition Government while dismissing Snowden as a mere politician. He made no attempt to analyse either the social forces represented in the Coalition or their relation to the war. He personalised the issues and dealt with them only in the form of attacks on persons. He said:

> 'I wish to emphasise some of the fears with regard to Labour joining the Government. I am not concerned with the dialectics of a clever man like Mr. Snowden, who could use terms about the "drink-sodden democracy" and say the workmen were wrong when they went on strike. . . . It had been stated that the Party had joined the Government purely on account of the national crisis. If the crisis was so urgent and the difficulties so great, surely they ought to have considered the character of the people who were going to deal with such problems. They ought to have remembered that the man who was forming the Government had lied to the Bristol Trades Union Congress. Of

all the men in politics, that man did not represent the sane portion of the citizens of this country.

"Then there was Lord Rhonda. . . . Then there was Lord Devonport, whose treatment of the kiddies in the East London strike was as bad as anything which von Bissing had done in Belgium . . . a man who refused arbitration to the employees of the Port of London Authority and who, just before the creation of a new Goverment, stated in the House of Lords that the country could save millions of money by cutting down the allowances of the wives of the men who had gone to shed their blood. These were not the kind of men Henderson should associate with. . . .' On he went: 'Then there was Lord Derby, who called the postmen "bloodsuckers" when he was Postmaster General, and Lord Milner, the "Damn the consequences man." I cannot understand why, when Labour decided to join the Government, it did not receive assurances as to whom it was expected to associate with. . . .'

He would learn in due time that this kind of attack buttered no parsnips in politics. But it certainly got him great cheers and he was pointed out as a 'coming man.' He walked back to his seat among the dockers' delegates frowning a little and feeling that had he had more time he could have emphasised his point of view considerably.

The next day there was a storm about the deportation of the shop stewards from the Clyde after the 1915 strikes in which Henderson and Kirkwood figured prominently. Bevin did not take part in this debate. The next day, however, he was on the losing side again when supporting a resolution from the dockers favouring special measures being taken to organise the agricultural workers. It was regarded by the conference as a matter for the Trade Union Congress rather than the Labour Party. Later he again intervened, on the question of a veto being placed on coloured labour in this country.

Once more he showed his contempt for politicians. Moving to the attack, he said: 'Mr. Henderson wanted to lay down that the Conference ought to oppose an absolute veto on coloured labour.' Henderson here interrupted to deny the charge, and the chairman came to his aid to explain that 'Mr. Henderson really said the Conference had to be careful as to what it did lay down.'

Promptly Bevin retorted: 'In the language of the politician that meant that they ought not to do it. If it was ever attempted that

coloured labour could be brought in to supplant British labour immediately the Government Departments concerned would make British labour insufficient to carry on the work. . . .'

He got his way this time, and summing up his experiences of this, his first Labour Party Conference, he had done well. People were saying that 'a new leader from the "left" had appeared.' But that was more apparent than real. Actually he had been logically applying his trade union experience and practice to politics. He was a trade unionist first and politician afterwards. It was only the fact that he was challenging the existing leadership that gave the impression of his belonging to the 'left.' Not that that impression worried him in the least.

The war had been raging for two and a half years when this conference met in Manchester. Strange as it may seem, there had still been no attempt on the part of any leader, not even of aspiring leaders like Ernest, to estimate the significance of the war in world affairs. The Labour Movement still pursued its course with its empirical methods, neither taking stock of history nor attempting to analyse the significance of the social revolution that was developing before its eyes. When it debated the Clyde deportations it was concerned only with a particular grievance of the deportees and the part played by Henderson; the significance of the upheaval on the Clyde and the strike movement that was spreading in England was unnoticed. The Labour outlook on the world at large was governed by the idea that the war was nothing but a ghastly interruption of a normal mode of life which would be resumed after the restoration of pre-war conditions.

Nevertheless, Bevin was making good progress. Meanwhile Morrison was still farm-labouring and Attlee was in hospital, having been severely wounded in the fighting in Mesopotamia. Now he was recovering and getting ready for more battles in France. We were still some distance from the days when the three should once more ride into the political arena and set about the social struggle that would bring them to the top.

CHAPTER SIX

The Great Surprise

WHATEVER MAY be said of the unpreparedness of the Labour Movement to meet the war situation applies also to the ruling class of Britain and its Government. The only institution that was really ready for the fray was the Navy. And that was due not to any prescience on the part of its leaders, but to the force of habit. Through the centuries since Britain had ranked as a leading power in the world, every government had concentrated attention on naval power. Its army was a small voluntary army. No government had contemplated the kind of war that had now burst upon the world. No government had thought it would ever be necessary to organise an army of millions or dreamed of such a thing as total war, in which the full resources of the nations would be flung into battle. Although Britain had been committed for many years by secret treaty to fight in Europe should Belgium be invaded, this commitment had not led to any comprehensive foreshadowing of the nature of the war that a violation of the treaty would call forth.

From the moment of the declaration of war every department except the Navy was a prey to improvisation. A vast conscript army had to be created piecemeal and from scratch out of a population definitely opposed to conscription. Industry had to be revolutionised to equip a war machine entirely different from any war machine in our history, and whose shape, size, and character we did not know. Habits, customs, and practices of generations had had to be set on one side by an industrial population which had within it a considerable number who were opposed to the war. The turn-over from peace production to war production became an improvisation at every successive stage as the character of the war was revealed. No wonder that every new measure served to stir up the maximum of opposition and to fan the flames of the revolution already developing when the war intervened.

The lull in the field of industry which occurred at the outbreak of war quickly passed. In 1915 there were several million days lost

in strikes. In 1916 the days lost in strikes numbered four millions. In 1917 there were still more. Social discontent spread throughout the country despite the fact that all the trade union leaders co-operated with the Government on behalf of industrial peace.

The ruling class of this country owes more to Mr. Lloyd George than to any other political leader of his generation. He may have made mistakes—he did, and some of them were big mistakes. But he was the one man amongst British political leaders who appraised the real significance of the mass awakening of the working class which had found expression in the formation of the Labour Party and the wave of industrial struggles prior to the war. He was also the first of the leaders of the old parties to appraise the character of the epoch ushered in by the war. The first point was clear in his Cardiff speech of 1906 and in the new social legislation of the Liberal Governments of Bannerman and Asquith, in which he played the rôle of initiator. He saw the working class rising to power, and calculated how to prevent it. Then, as the war proceeded, he became convinced it had ushered us into an epoch of violence and revolution. These leading ideas guided him in his policy with regard both to winning the war and to stemming the revolution.

But no leader in the ranks of the British Labour Movement approached the problems of the day with similar appreciation. The Labour Party modelled itself on the Trades Union Congress, and the trade unions had never felt it necessary to present to their national assemblies anything in the form of an analysis of the conditions amid which they lived or to appraise them in relation to the development of society as a whole. Always they dealt with some detail grievance and aimed at squeezing some particular concession. The nearest approach to an analysis of the general situation was contained in the chairman's address to a Trade Union Congress or the congress of some particular union. But such addresses were not the subject of discussion by the conferences. When the Labour Party began to assemble in the same way it adopted the same practice. The chairman gave his address, and that was that. There was scope, if he chose, for an analysis, but it would not be discussed. No wonder, therefore, that when young leaders such as Bevin came along there were few opportunities for them to show their abilities in this direction or to learn from their predecessors.

The National Labour Party Conference at Manchester met in the midst of a developing strike wave and on the eve of the Russian revolution. It ignored the strike wave and its significance and was completely oblivious to the imminence of the event in the East. Yet only a few weeks afterwards, while a quarter of a million engineering workers were on strike, challenging the Government on such questions as the dilution of labour and conscription, the Russian revolution burst upon the scene. Czardom had always stunk in the nostrils of every British socialist and liberal, and the news that the masses had at last thrown over this régime sent a never-to-be-forgotten thrill from east to west. The British Government and the party leaders sent messages of congratulation and rejoicing. The socialists were stirred as never before.

But with the common rejoicing there was not a common understanding, and people rejoiced for different reasons. The governing parties rejoiced because they thought that the Russian revolution would produce a new and better military offensive against the Central Powers and an extension to Russia of the liberal democracy prevailing in England. Labour rejoiced because the masses appeared to have taken things into their own hands and put an end to a tyranny. But all these different forces thought of it as a purely Russian affair, and not as a world phenomenon related to the social unrest everywhere and signifying that a new epoch of world history had begun.

The effect on the Labour Movement, however, was amazing. The Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party together organised a great Labour Convention in Leeds on June 3rd. The press of the country railed against it as if we were on the verge of civil war, and some people honestly thought that such was the case. Hotels refused to accommodate delegates. Only after much assuring and reassuring of the authorities in Leeds were the organisers able to obtain the Leeds Coliseum. Here gathered on the appointed day 294 delegates from the Independent Labour Party, 88 from the British Socialist Party, 371 from trade unions, 209 from trade councils and local labour parties, 119 from the Union of Democratic Control and peace organisations, 54 from women's associations, and 16 from miscellaneous socialist groups—in all 1,151 delegates. In addition to the delegates there were more than two thousand visitors, and the great theatre was crowded.

The grey-haired, bushy-browed veteran leader of the miners, Robert Smillie, was the chairman. At this time he was probably the most beloved leader of the working-class movement. This slightly stooping, kindly figure held the audience in easy control. On the platform beside him was the upstanding figure of Ramsay MacDonald, then in the fullness of his powers as orator and spellbinder, who would speak of the Russian revolution with such fervour and eloquence that people would believe he was intent on leading the way to the barricades of England. Philip Snowden was there too. Pale-faced, crippled though he was, he too would hold his audience and incidentally draw the fire of young Ernest Bevin. Beside Snowden sat chubby-faced, inspiring W. C. Anderson, waiting to call loudly for the immediate formation of 'Workers' and Soldiers' Councils' in Britain. Robert Williams, the wordy firebrand of the Transport Workers' Federation, was to support him. In the gallery was Tom Mann in the full vigour of his days.

In the body of the hall among the rows of delegates sat Ben Tillett from the Dockers' Union. He kept silent throughout the proceedings. He was sulky and angry, waiting to spill his violent words of condemnation of the whole proceedings in a report to his union members. Like his colleague Bevin, he was annoyed that the occasion should find them mixed with the pacifists.

But Ernest did not remain silent. He was steadily advancing to the leadership of the Dockers' Union, and would soon be in front of Ben. He was young, vigorous, blunt of speech, and ready to mix it as he thought the occasion demanded. He now waited for the opportunity to address the Convention. He would do so in no uncertain way, making clear that at this stage his special antipathies were the 'politicians' and the 'pacifists.' Ernest has always mistaken rudeness for strength and forcefulness for conviction. He was to do so on this occasion.

Robert Smillie opened the proceedings, amid tremendous enthusiasm. Ramsay MacDonald hailed the Russian revolution 'without reservations':

> 'It is fashionable in this country, in some quarters, to say we congratulate Russia upon the Revolution, but in some respects we regret it. We to-day congratulate them without any drawback whatever. We do it not because the Revolution has happened, but because for years we wanted it to happen. It has

burst out into a great flood of light and hope, not only for Russia, but for the whole world. Our congratulations are absolutely unstinted and unqualified. . . . The old Russian Government was a sink of corruption, the most corrupt of all the governments of Europe. Its diplomacy was of the very worst type. It made for suspicion and was bound ultimately to make for war. To-day the people and the government are one, and we welcome the government just as we welcome and enjoy the friendship of the people. . . .'[1]

On he went with his words of congratulation and praise; and at the end of it there were great cheers. Philip Snowden moved a resolution which read as follows:

'This conference of Labour, Socialist, and Democratic Organisations of Great Britain hails with the greatest satisfaction the declaration of the foreign policy and the war aims of the Russian Provisional Government, and it shares with them the firm conviction that the fall of Czardom and the consolidation of democratic principles in Russia's internal and external policy will create in the democracies of other nations new aspirations towards a stable peace and the brotherhood of the nations. In that belief we pledge ourselves to work for an agreement with the international democracies for the re-establishment of a general peace which shall tend towards either domination by or over any nation, or the seizure of their national possessions, or the violent usurpation of their territories—a peace without annexations or indemnities, and based on the right of nations to decide their own affairs; and as a first step towards this aim we call upon the British Government immediately to announce its agreement with the declared foreign policy and war aims of the democratic Government of Russia. . . .'

'For three years,' Snowden said, 'we have been appealing to the Government to state their peace terms. The time has come for us to tell the Government what our peace terms are.' . . . The Russians had left us in no doubt as to what was meant by 'no annexations.' They had very clearly and explicitly stated that no territory which had been conquered during the war should be retained after the war by right of conquest alone. 'No annexations,' as understood in Russia, did not mean that there should not be any change of territorial boundaries after the war. He

[1] *Leeds Citizen*, June 8th, 1917.

thought all would agree that if permanent peace was to be established there would have to be a re-arrangement of territories by giving to all peoples the right to control their own destinies. *There they had the method by which the questions of Alsace-Lorraine, Poland, Austria, the Balkans, Ireland, and he might* add Egypt, might be settled. Instead of a so-called peace settlement being made by the men who were responsible for the war all questions should be settled upon the democratic principle of the peoples themselves deciding their own destiny. By doing this Britain would be placing herself in alliance with the new-born Russian democracy.

After several speakers had supported Snowden up rose Bevin, the future Foreign Secretary of a Labour Government. He first tackled the pacifists and asked where his 'fatuous friends' of the Independent Labour Party would stand if the Allies declared for a policy of peace and there was no response from Germany? Would there then be a vigorous prosecution of the war, until Germany *did* respond? His experience of the German Social Democrats was not altogether happy. He himself had moved a resolution which had for its purpose the placing on the international agenda of the policy of the general strike against war. He was prepared to stand for that whether it meant life or death, but the German friends had said: 'This cannot go on the International agenda. This means that we are declared a political organisation, and we shall be snuffed out in Germany.' Had there been any evidence that the German democrats were prepared to reverse their policy? Were the majority or the minority in Germany prepared to respond to the Russian declaration? He was so prepared, but having declared his adherence, if Germany did not respond he had no right to be a pacifist: he would have to fight for the Russian declaration. (Cries of No, No.) It was all very well to shout 'No,' but they could not have their cake and eat it. He was not a pacifist and he objected to the present alignment of Labour with those forces.

He went on to say, 'I regret that Mr. Snowden uses the time at his disposal in mere dialectical cynicism rather than in helping us with concrete advice.' He said that it was easy to talk platitudes on their own platforms, but how difficult they found it sometimes to handle the industrial workers they represented! It was easy to 'reel off' that the people of Alsace-Lorraine should have a

plebiscite vote, but they were not told how that vote should be taken, and no mention had been made as to whether they were prepared to put the question of the Government of Africa to the natives of Africa. (Laughter.) These subjects had been dealt with not from the point of view of instruction being given, but rather as a form of political agitation. They said, 'The tide is on the rise for us.' For whom—the professional politician of the Labour Party?

The disorder was too much for him to continue, and the chairman reminded him that his time was up. He stepped down and returned to his seat feeling angry with Snowden and the pacifists in general, but satisfied that he had let them know how much he detested them. He did not participate further, although the Convention went on to discuss the resolution which had stirred the press of the country to an exhibition of anger that had rarely been seen in the history of newspapers. This was the resolution on the formation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. It read as follows:

> 'This conference calls upon the constituent bodies at once to establish in every town, urban and rural district, Councils of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates for initiating and co-ordinating working-class activity in support of the policy set out in the foregoing resolutions, and to work strenuously for a peace made by the people of the various countries, and for the complete political and social emancipation of international labour. . . .
>
> 'And, further, that the convenors of this conference be appointed a provisional committee, whose duty shall be to assist the formation of local Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils, and generally give effect to the policy determined by this conference.'

There was no doubt about the interpretation and the meaning of this resolution. W. C. Anderson, M.P., after introducing it, said:

> '. . . They say this is revolution. Well, my friends, it depends. What is revolution? If revolution be the conquest of political power by the hitherto disinherited class; if revolution be that we are not going to put up in future with what we have put up with in the past; that we are not going to have the shames and wrongs of poverty of the past, the sooner we have a revolution in this country the better. . . .'

Robert Williams, flamboyant as ever, was still more definite in his interpretation of the resolution. He said:

> 'It means the dictatorship of the proletariat. We stand by this resolution. We are not going to weaken one jot or one tittle. You have a most capable governing class in this country. They have taken your own leaders and used them against you. We want a mandate to proceed with this resolution. If any amongst you have cold feet about it, slip out before it is put. . . . Have as little consideration for the Constitution as the Russians had for the dynasty of the Romanoffs. The need for revolutionary reforms is as great for you as it was in Russia.'

Mrs. Philip Snowden followed and assured the conference that 'Anything at all which one person can do to help in the formation of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils I shall be happy and honoured to do. . . .' Miss Sylvia Pankhurst welcomed the resolution as a straight cut to the Socialist Commonwealth that they wanted to see. She believed that the Provisional Committee would some day be the Provisional Government, like the Russian Socialist Government. After further contributions along similar lines the resolution was put and carried with about a dozen dissentients. Whether Ernest Bevin was among the dozen who voted against, I do not know, but there is no evidence of his having spoken against it.

Indeed, the whole proceedings provide a classic example of the eclectic method of thinking so characteristic of the British Labour Movement. It did not appear to dawn on even the leaders of this convention, from Smillie down to any on the floor of the gathering, that what they had decided to do was in flat contradiction of the programmes and policies of the parties which had called the conference. There had at no time been any discussion within the ranks of these parties on the desirability, practicability, and implications of either of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' or of the 'Workers' and Soldiers' Councils' as the form of government such a dictatorship should take. When these questions did come up for discussion later on, most of those who had been on the platform of this conference opposed them and did not like to be reminded of this day when fervour and romanticism took charge and overwhelmed their judgements.

After the revolutionary speeches and tumultuous enthusiasm for the resolutions on 'peace without annexations and indemnities'

and the immediate formation of 'Workers and Soldiers Councils,' another resolution was put forward and sponsored by the Convention, for implementing the policy agreed upon. It was agreed that the country be divided into thirteen areas, each of which should hold its own mass conference to initiate the setting up of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in these areas. But the social and political conditions of the time were unfavourable. Although conferences were held they effected nothing in the way of creating actual British Soviets. In a few months the Convention itself had become an episode in the history of the working class of Britain.

Ben Tillett and Ernest Bevin went back to the Dockers' Union headquarters. Ben sent a document to the union members denouncing the Convention in unqualified terms. Tillett said the conference was unrepresentative and the resolutions were 'jockeyed' by a few. J. R. MacDonald delivered a revolutionary speech, which, coming from the late statesman of the Labour Party, lent a Pecksniffian sententiousness to the discussion: '. . . So far from the conference helping a solution in the midst of this bloody Armageddon, it has been merely a stage army of fiddling Neros, unconscious of its cant.'

The Labour Party Executive at its meeting on July 18th, 1917, passed the following resolution by a majority:

> 'That this Executive Committee, in reply to the Leeds Labour Party, desires to state that it has nothing to do with the Leeds Convention, and that in our opinion no local organisation affiliated to the Party ought to convene conferences which are not in harmony with the general policy of the Party as laid down at its annual conferences.' [1]

This was rather late in the day, for the organisers of the Convention were affiliated to the Labour Party and so were the great majority of the organisations which had sent delegates. But so immature and loosely formed was the Labour Party at this stage of its history that its Executive was incapable of exercising disciplinary action upon its affiliated bodies. It could only express 'an opinion' and wait on events.

It had not long to wait. A new fateful Russian offensive on the Eastern Front and the tremendous fighting on the Western Front

[1] *Leeds Citizen*, July 20th, 1917.

when Haig opened up the terrible battle of Passchendaele, with its frightful losses, diverted all attention from internal affairs and even from the Russian revolution. The latter half of the year 1917 was the most sombre period of the war, when the slaughter on the Western Front seemed to be both unending and futile. The strike wave subsided and leaders of 'subversive movements' such as 'Workers' and Soldiers' Councils' had to wait on events.

Bevin, however, was not among those idly waiting. He continued his work as the dockers' organiser definitely on the side of those who were seeking a military victory over the Central Powers, denouncing the pacifists and marshalling for victory. He attended the Trades Union Congress two months after the Leeds Convention. The Congress ignored the Convention and its decisions and so did Bevin. He intervened in the debates on several occasions, urging the setting up of a Congress committee to prepare the nation's post-war policy. He did not get far with that proposal, but again his stock improved. He was elected to represent the Trades Union Congress at the next Co-operative Congress.

He did not like the idea of 'politicians' riding the tide which brings them to power, but that same tide was carrying him forward and he felt well satisfied with his progress.

POLITICAL HARA-KIRI PARLOUR

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Unfolding Revolution

THE RAPID growth of the Labour Party during the war years soon forced upon the leaders a realisation that the time had arrived for it to function as something more than an enlarged Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress. In August 1917 a committee was appointed to prepare a scheme of re-organisation; and in February 1916 a special conference was held at Nottingham to adopt a new constitution and a programme.

Contrary to the generally accepted way of forming a party by enrolling those who subscribe to a definite set of principles and aims, the Labour Party had been formed as a party of the working class based upon the trade unions. The trade unions are associations of wage workers only. True, the small socialist societies and parties affiliated had their principles and programmes, but the rest were governed only by a mass loyalty to the principle of labour independence. Whether all the implications of this method of building a party were present in the minds of the founders of the Labour Party is doubtful, although it seemed then to be the only practical way of organising mass support.

The method rested on two things. First, upon the general loyalty of the trade union members to the majority of those who voted by ballot in favour of the payment of a levy to be used for political purposes. This 'majority' was always a small percentage of the membership of a union. For example, in the analysis of trade union ballots published by the Labour Research Department in 1919 rarely more than 20 per cent. of the members voted in the ballots on any question. The majority of this 20 per cent. carried the support of the union as a whole. Those who objected to the decision could 'contract out.' But only a few did so.

Secondly, it rested on the degree of tolerance existing between the various socialist groups within the unions. Just so long as the socialists were united in support of the Labour Party and the

opponents of Labour politics could contract out, all was well and would remain well. If, however, intolerance should at any time prevail, the unions would be turned into a battle-ground of contending parties fighting for power and for the union finance. Then both the leaders of the unions and of the Labour Party would have to think again about the mode of organisation.

In 1918 the age of intolerance between the socialists had hardly arrived. The ideological battle was only just beginning and the 'open door policy' prevailed. Indeed it was about to open still wider. Having organised the breakaway of the working class from the Liberal Party, the Fabians now led the way to making it possible for the middle classes to enter directly into the Labour Party instead of, as hitherto, compelling them to apply first to one or other of the socialist organisations.

Sidney Webb was the architect of the new constitution. Soon Morrison would be the apostle and custodian of the interests of the local and divisional labour parties, and Bevin would be wielding trade union power with a watchful eye on the 'professional politicians.' The Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party were not told to close down because of the changes in the constitution. Indeed, they were given plenty of scope to assist the Labour Party in its new mode of development, and their own fate was left for time to decide. Sooner or later a situation would arise in which there would be a division on policy that would force the members of the Independent Labour Party to decide on abandoning their party in favour of the Labour Party or breaking away to become a 'splinter group.'

But the Labour Party had yet to hammer out its policy and formulate its own theories out of its experience, and therefore there was ample scope for different views and much tolerance at this stage. Although there had been discussions among the socialists about socialism in general and revolution *versus* reform, there had been no discussion comparable either in range or thoroughness with the discussions in Russia at the time of the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. We had no Lenins or Plekhanovs among our intellectuals. We had only liberals who, amidst the comforts of middle-class prosperity, with no social urge of their own to be revolutionary, had become convinced that liberal capitalism would gradually evolve into socialism. They had, indeed, a contempt for the revolutionaries

and sweepingly relegated them to the infancy of sociological thought. As Sydney Webb put the matter, 'No philosopher now looks for anything but the gradual evolution of the new order from the old, with no breach of continuity or abrupt change of the entire social tissue at any point during the process. . . .'

And there were circumstances favourable to their policy which were wholly absent in Russia when the Russian Labour Party was formed. The Russian working class had no political democracy in which to operate. Faced by a despotism, the rising working class had to overthrow the despotism by civil war. In Britain the first stages of the social revolution were led by a bourgeois Liberal Party under pressure from the rising working class. They had broken the power of the House of Lords and turned the Parliament into an instrument of social change. By the end of the war, they were to extend the franchise to 8,000,000 people who were rapidly breaking away from their old allegiances and flowing into the Labour Party.

But neither the Fabian intellectuals nor the trade union leaders realised that in striving to replace the Liberal Party by the Labour Party they would have thrust upon them the task of leading a social revolution. While the Fabians were so anxious that there should be 'no breach of continuity' they would not see the wood for the trees, and the trade union leaders approached most of their problems in a very pragmatic way without regard for any theory or historical process. Most of them had an ignorant prejudice against theory and theorists. Ernest Bevin had this prejudice highly developed in his young days, as was so well illustrated in his attacks on the 'professional politicians.' He was to lose it somewhat as he grew older and begin to do some theorising himself, although he would always assert his theories to be 'practical politics' while those of the other fellow were just word-spinning.

The new constitution of the Labour Party, with its inclusion of the middle class to membership, did not mean, therefore, the making of a conscious alliance of the working and middle classes. It was the abandonment of the idea of the Labour Party being a 'working-class party,' as it had at first proclaimed itself to be. It meant that it had now become a 'people's party.' The social composition remained overwhelmingly working-class and trade unionist, but its policy is not based on this fact, but on the mixture

of classes called 'the people,' theoretically transcending the class struggle.

Sidney Webb put the matter thus: 'It transformed the Labour Party from a group representing the *class interests* of the manual workers into a fully constituted political party of national scope, ready to take over the Government of the country and to conduct both home and foreign affairs on definite principles—and the principles were presumed to be 'natural' without regard for the social classes that composed the 'nation.'

Labour was now faced with the task of formulating a programme at the very moment when the whole world was involved in war and revolution This fell to the Fabians, for the majority of the trade union leaders who comprised the remainder of the leadership had only just shed their adherence to the *laissez-faire* outlook of the nineteenth century.

The programme the Fabians submitted consisted of a series of propositions. As they had no fundamental quarrel with the established institutions, there was no need for them to discuss their relation to socialism. Having nothing to do with the struggles in industry, they did not analyse the relation of the party to industrial matters or discuss the industrial conflicts developing throughout the country. The Fabians did not think they had any political significance. Accepting orthodox capitalist economic theories, and rejecting the theory of the class struggle as the driving force of social change, they did not think it necessary to present any analysis of the social struggle or to appraise the character of the epoch in which they would call on the people to make radical changes. The war was not regarded as the beginning of the general crisis of capitalism, nor was the Russian revolution regarded as anything but a strange national aberration. For them it had no relation to the development of socialism in this country. They were essentially nationalists, holding international ideals based upon the principle of maintaining fraternal relations between nations.

Hence with a programme consisting of a chequer-board of demands, broken down into groups of items, the debates which ensued consisted of little more than a criticism of some particular grievance and an exposition of the virtues of some proposition. The Fabians did not think of themselves as leaders of a class with any historic purpose or rôle in society. In fact, they were renounc-

ing such an idea. The chairman of the Labour Party declared that:

> 'The new constitution aimed at making our platform wide and broad enough to embrace all who, like Abou Ben Adhem "loved their fellow men." We aim in the years to come to be the people's party—a party not parochial in its conception, but national in its character and broad in its aspirations; constructive in its programme: watching keenly the foreign policy and international relations of the nation; and bringing to the service of the state all that makes for the social and industrial improvement of the people.'

And nobody had anything to say about this all-embracing mush. The general principles and policy would emerge more clearly in practice. But here at this conference for the first time appeared a visitor from Soviet Russia, by name Maxim Litvinov. He was accepted as a delegate and given a great reception. No one appeared to be conscious of the irony of the situation—the conference which had just abandoned the idea of a working-class party fighting for working-class interests, cheering to the echo the representative of a party which had led the working-class to power in its own country. The executive let the conference cheer and said nothing. But they excluded Litvinov's speech from the report.

The Conference adjourned and within a few weeks came to London. This time it was held in the Central Hall, Westminster, and Litvinov was not accepted as a delegate, but pushed into the visitors' gallery, while the Fabian Henderson ushered on to the platform Kerensky, late of Soviet Russia, who, according to Lloyd George, had sought his aid for a war of intervention against Soviet Russia to secure his return to power.

The leaders did not bring before the Conference any clear issue concerning the political significance of their choice, but clouded it by a dissertation on good manners. There was great uproar and protest, but the platform won and there was no discussion of the principles involved in the choice. The anomaly of Nottingham was removed. The bosom of Abou Ben Adhem was not big enough this time to embrace a 'working-class party delegate,' but only the representative of counter-revolution. Nobody was permitted to discuss the speech, but it was included in the Conference report.

This was the first national conference of the Labour Party to which Morrison had been elected as a delegate. Fresh from the farm, he looked fit and well. He was now thirty years of age and ready for his climb into national leadership. He had been elected to the post of London Labour Party secretary and welcomed the creation of the individual membership section of the Labour Party. He had not grown up in the right kind of work to play an important rôle in the ranks of the trade unions. The new development offered him scope and he set about his job with enthusiasm. He did not play a very active part in this conference—he was content to listen and watch the proceedings and get accustomed to the atmosphere of these big assemblies. He could afford to wait.

Ernest Bevin was also present. He intervened in the discussion on one or two items of the programme and felt the limitations imposed upon the rank and file delegates, who rarely get an opportunity to speak for more than five minutes on any subject. On this occasion the agenda was crowded. It contained twenty-five resolutions covering the sections of the programme with which the party would enter the next general election. Philip Snowden was allotted five minutes in which to move a resolution of five paragraphs dealing with the organisation of national finances. He bluntly declined, and it was agreed to without a discussion.

Nevertheless from this Conference the party emerged with a new constitution and a full social democratic programme indicating what it should do if, after the next election, it were called upon to form the Government of the country. Its objects were now comprehensive. Its national aims were set out thus:

(*a*) To organise and maintain in Parliament and in the country a Political Labour Party, and to ensure the establishment of a Local Labour Party in every county Constituency and every Parliamentary Borough, with suitable divisional organisation in the separate constituencies of divided boroughs;

(*b*) To co-operate with the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress, or other kindred organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the Party constitution and Standing Orders;

(*c*) To give effect as far as may be practicable to the principles from time to time approved by the Party Conference;

(*d*) To secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution

As a boy of fourteen

Photo : *Picture Post*

Photo : *Picture Post*

In 1930 he sits for a bronze bust for the board room of the Transport and General Workers Union

thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

(*e*) Generally to promote the Political, Social, and Economic Emancipation of the People, and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life.

(*f*) To co-operate with the Labour and Socialist organisations in the Dominions and the Dependencies with a view to promoting the purposes of the Party and to take common action for the promotion of a higher standard of social and economic life for the working population of the respective countries.

(*g*) To co-operate with the Labour and Socialist organisations in other countries and to assist in organising a Federation of Nations for the Maintenance of Freedom and Peace, for the establishment of suitable machinery for the adjustment and settlement of International disputes by Conciliation or Judicial arbitration, and for such International Legislation as may be practicable.

The party published an election programme under the title 'Labour and the New Social Order,' proposing the immediate nationalisation of the mines, railways, and electricity and the extension of municipal enterprise to the retailing of coal and the organisation of the local supply of milk. It proposed a reformed taxation system with a steeply graded super-tax, the taxation of land values, regraduated death duties, and a capital levy to free the nation from the heavy national debt. It proposed the progressive development of home rule in the British Commonwealth and a foreign policy akin to the fourteen points advocated by the liberal American President Wilson.

It was in this manner that the Labour Party adjusted itself to the rising tide of working class interest, the entrance of women into the political arena, and the turning of the middle class away from the old capitalist parties. There were now 123 trade unions, with a membership of nearly two and a half millions, affiliated to it, besides 239 trade councils and local labour parties, the British Socialist Party with 10,000 members, the Independent Labour

Party with 35,000 members, and the Fabian Society with 2,140 members.

At this Conference neither Bevin nor Morrison made any important contribution. They were both on the floor of the Conference and not on the platform. Morrison had just arrived and was taking the measure of the situation. Bevin was further ahead, for at this conference he topped the list in the ballot vote for membership of the Conference Arrangements Committee. Morrison was still hampered by his farming commitments and would have to wait awhile before he could get into his stride. Attlee was still a major in France.

But this unfolding social revolution and surging movement of the working class was developing much more than an independent head in the form of the political Labour Party. It was invading domains hitherto forbidden to the workers and sacred to the masters of industry. Although the syndicalists, led by Tom Mann, in the last decade of the nineteenth century had raised the cry of 'workers' control of industry,' there had been no widespread attempt until the war years to organise the direct representation of the workers in the workshops and factories, mills and mines. The employers were adamant against any encroachments into the realm of managerial functions. Nor had the socialists—except those of the Socialist Labour Party—in their conceptions of the structure of a socialist society conceived of the productive organisations participating in the control of industry. Only the socialists led by James Connolly, the syndicalists, and later the guild socialists (a young section of the Fabians led by G. D. H. Cole and William Mellor) had foreseen and advocated that the trade unions should assume new functions and adjust themselves in structure and in activity to the demand for 'workers' control of industry.'

But before ever the unions were ready to assume such functions the wartime conditions thrust this question into the foreground, and the workers in industry invaded the sacred precincts of hitherto unchallenged authority. The trade union leaders by almost universal consent became party to the cause of industrial peace and collaboration with the Government, when suddenly a great unofficial strike swept the Clydeside district. The figure of the shop steward stepped into the foreground of the industrial stage. A shop steward is a trade union representative elected by the workpeople in the workshop or factory. Until this time the

few shop stewards there were had played a very subordinate and somewhat perfunctory rôle. Now, however, they came together into workshop committees and became collective leaders of all the workers in the factory. The workers invested them with authority to act on their behalf, for the workers were determined to control the conditions in the engineering industry, where the changes were far-reaching and most rapid.

From the Clyde this movement spread into every engineering district and came under the direction and influence of the syndicalists, the Marxist socialists, and guildsmen. Then, in varying forms, it spread from the engineering industry to other industries. A completely absence of unemployment gave it strength. The demand for control of the changing conditions by the man on the job was translated from words into deeds, and the Government, the employers, and the trade union leaders had to retreat before the pressure from below.

The authorities had to canalise what at this stage was essentially a working-class movement and bring it under control. This was not a difficult task, because neither the shop stewards nor the workers supporting them were aiming to supersede their union executives.

In this process of controlling the new trends of the workers in industry Bevin played a not unimportant rôle. Shortly before the war he used to meet with a group of lead miners along with Arnold Rowntree at a little place in the Mendip Hills called Shipham. Arnold Rowntree was a member of the famous cocoa firm and known as an earnest reformer. These meetings were for informal discussion of ways and means of organising joint activities on the part of employers and the trade unions with a view to solving problems in industrial relations by discussion and agreement.

They drew up a report which became known as the 'Panescot Report' on industrial relations. This report, along with another of a conference held in Leeds in 1917 under the chairmanship of Rowntree and organised by Harold Clay of the Leeds section of the Transport Workers, went to Lloyd George and formed the basis of what became famous as the 'Whitley Report.'

Mr. Whitley was the Speaker of the House of Commons. The report contained proposals for the setting up of 'Joint Industrial Councils' of employers and workmen. These were to be not merely

central organisations of the employers and the trade unions in council, but were to reach down through district councils to 'joint workshop councils or committees of employers and workpeople.' These councils were to be established in all industries where the employers and the workpeople voluntarily came together for the purpose.

These far-reaching proposals were applied in several industries and civil service establishments. Bevin was responsible not only for some of the initial ideas of the scheme, but, along with Robert Williams of the Transport Workers Federation, for creating a Joint Industrial Council for the transport industry.

The Whitley Councils scheme met with some strong opposition from the syndicalist elements within the trade unions, who rejected the 'class collaboration idea expressed. (I myself, then a leader of the engineering shop stewards, wrote a pamphlet denouncing 'Whitleyism'.) Nor did 'Whitleyism' make much progress in the engineering industry. Nevertheless the development of these councils encouraged the idea of direct representation in the factories and direct participation of the 'workers on the job' in the control of the conditions of production.

By this time Bevin was a fully fledged 'professional trade union leader' as definitely as Philip Snowden was a 'professional politician.' Although not a theoretician of trade unionism, he was learning from practice and was on the way to creating a reputation as a first-class 'concession squeezer' on behalf of the workers. He had played a part in the formation of the Transport Workers Federation and was a representative of it in the Triple Alliance of miners,' railwaymen, and transport workers. He had ideas, too, concerning the fusion of the Transport Workers Federation and the General Workers Union into a massive unified organisation. In his judgement the bigger the organisation and the greater its potential striking power, the easier it would be to bargain with the employers and the less the need for strikes. He was more interested in economics than politics, in securing a concession which meant more bread and butter for his members than in abstract ideas and great principles.

This interest in finance has stood him in good stead on many occasions. He himself tells the story of how, when he was General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, he sent John Cliff to Manchester to negotiate about the tramwaymen's

wages. That morning he had learned that the Bank of England had decided to deflate 40 per cent. At that time the wages of many transport workers, including the tramwaymen, were governed by 'the cost of living.' Convinced that no tramway manager bothered his head about currency questions, he advised John Cliff to cut clear of the 'cost of living standard' and simply ask for the consolidation of the existing wage rates. The tramway managers thought John Cliff had become very conciliatory and promptly agreed. The fall in the cost of living did the rest.

The 'provincials' were not originally alone in being outmanœuvred in this way. Bevin was on one occasion negotiating for the trasport workers of the London Passenger Transport Board. Lord Ashfield was the negotiator for the Board. The wages on this occasion were geared to the 'cost of living,' and Bevin had asked for 8*s*. a week advance. Ashfield had got to the point of offering the stabilisation of the wages at a 6*s*. increase.

In the midst of the discussion Ernest asked for a few minutes respite in order to telephone. On going out of the room to the telephone box he met John Hilton, who at that time was the statistical expert at the Ministry of Labour. Greeting John, Bevin asked him, 'How is the cost of living, John?' Hilton answered that on the following day it would be down so many points. Bevin says he thought rapidly. 'This won't do. If I keep to the 'cost of living business and get the 8*s*. I'll be faced with a demand for reduction in a few days.' He walked back to the conference table and speaking very deliberately to Lord Ashfield said, 'You are in favour of 6*s*. week on the present basis?' Ashfield answered, 'Yes.' 'All right,' said Bevin, 'we will wash out the 'cost of living' and consolidate it at 6*s*.' Lord Ashfield agreed. The next day, as Hilton had predicted the cost of living fell and continued to fall, so that Bevin got much more for his men than they had originally asked for.

These were the kind of experiences he was accumulating in the trade union world of collective bargaining, and his reputation was growing all the time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

High Tide

IT WAS not until the Labour Party Conference at Southport in June 1919 that Bevin, Attlee, and Herbert Morrison found themselves in the same conference hall as fellow delegates. Attlee had retired from the army, disappointed and disillusioned by the war and its outcome, and returning to Limehouse, had again taken up residence at Toynbee Hall.

Glad to be back among the people, he flung himself into the activities of Limehouse Labour Party with great enthusiasm and energy, joining in the great drive for membership which the new constitution of the party made possible. Now that Morrison could give all his time to his job as the Secretary of the London Labour Party the organisation and influence of the party grew rapidly. In the April elections of the London County Council they won eighteen seats and Morrison himself was elected as L.C.C. representative for East Woolwich. It soon became evident that a new star had risen in London's political firmament. In the November borough council elections he led the London Labour Party to sweeping victories. Half the metropolitan borough councils returned Labour majorities. Clement Attlee was returned to the council in Limehouse, was made an alderman, and became the mayor. Herbert Morrison was returned for Hackney.

Fresh from triumph in the L.C.C. elections, both men were elected to the 1919 National Conference. It was Attlee's first National Conference, Morrison's second. The Major kept quiet, watched events, and made friends and acquaintances. Morrison had done that the first time, but did not on this occasion. Watching for his opportunity, and true to the form of every aspiring leader, he set about the existing leaders with a vigour and style which demonstrated to all and sundry that he was on his way to the top. He had done a good job in local politics and had already achieved a reputation as one who knew most of what there is to know of local government. He was now determined to let it be

seen that he was not tied to the parish pump, even if it was a big one. Listen to him as he stands before the huge gathering, sweeps his hair from his forehead and grips the speaker's desk. He had chosen for his attack the report of the Parliamentary Party on its work since the General Election of November 1918. Starting quietly and confidently on a note of tolerance for the difficulties with which the Parliamentary Party had had to contend, their limited numbers and inexperience, he proceeded:

'When every allowance was made, we who, after all, are upholding the Party in the country, developing its organisation, taking on our shoulders many of the failures of our Parliamentary representatives—we have got to admit that the Party has been a failure in the present Parliament. Apart from mere wage and industrial questions, the Parliamentary Party has failed in voicing its aspirations on great national questions of principle, on great matters of liberty and on great matters of international policy. . . . What has the Party done in the matter of the war on the Socialist Republic of Russia? I want you to realise that it is not a question of disagreeing with the Bolshevik Government of Russia; it is not a matter of believing or disbelieving the atrocities. You have got to realise that the present war against Russia on the part of this country, France and the other Imperialist powers is not a war against Bolshevism or against Lenin, but against the international organisation of socialism. It is a war against the organisation of the trade union movement itself, and as such should be resisted with the full political and industrial power of the whole trade union movement.

'But what has the Parliamentary Party done? They have done so much that the matter was not worth a single reference in the report which is under discussion. This report is an insult to the energy, the intelligence, and the vigour of the whole Labour Movement of the country, and I appeal to the Conference for the sake of the rank and file, and of the Labour Party itself, for the sake of the international labour and socialist movement, to vote solid and determined for the reference back of the report, in order that the Parliamentary Party may know that we demand vigorous, straightforward, and energetic politics on the part of the Labour Movement. . . .'

Willie Adamson, the then leader of the Parliamentary Party, stubbornly defended its record and defeated the reference back, but there was no doubt in anybody's mind that Morrison had

captured the ear of the conference. And when he appeared at the next conference with still greater municipal triumphs to the record of the London Labour Party he was elected to the National Executive of the Party. The London Labour Party now had six hundred Labour aldermen and councillors and fourteen Labour mayors in the metropolitan boroughs, and half of them had Labour majorities.

Herbert's election to the executive made him the first of the three future leaders to arrive there. Ernest Bevin had not yet been a candidate for the honour, and probably Clement Attlee had not yet given it a moment's thought. Morrison was the youngest member, too, and would soon prove to be one of the most able. He was thirty-one, and was riding the tide in fine style.

The moment was propitious. The Labour Party was growing at unparalleled speed. The trade unions were at the peak of their strength, with nearly nine million members. A militant spirit was abroad in the land. The surging upward movement of the working class had begun again immediately after the war. And just as the leaders of labour had been caught unawares and unprepared for the war, so they were unprepared for the peace. What Morrison had said about the leaders of the Parliamentary Party during this period applies equally to the leaders outside Parliament and at the head of the trade unions. They had no coherent philosophy to guide them. The Labour Party managers, unready for the 'Khaki Election,' deemed it their job to wait for the next election in due course and hope to be better prepared. The trade union bosses each looked after the economic interests of their own particular union, failing to understand the class character of the struggle in which they were involved and the class strategy which was being applied to the situation by the ruling class of the day.

When at the end of the war, Lloyd George, in the very hour of victory, sprang the 'Coupon Election' upon the country, there was an outcry. The Labour Leaders looked upon this as a dirty trick in which Lloyd George was trying merely to capitalise the victory. But it was much more than that. He had a comprehensive grasp of the class relations in the country and the revolutionary situation throughout Europe. He was scoring over his political enemies, but he was also conducting a great piece of class strategy in British politics. This he subsequently made clear in two remarkable utterances. One is contained in a famous memorandum to the

Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 and the other in an appeal in 1920 to the Asquith Liberals to join him in a coalition with the Tories. In the first Lloyd George wrote:

'Europe is filled with revolutionary ideas. A feeling not of depression but of passion and revolt reigns in the breasts of the working class against the conditions of life that prevailed before the war. The whole of the existing system, political, social, and economic, is regarded with distrust by the whole population of Europe. In some countries, like Germany and Russia, this unrest is leading to open revolt and in others, like France, England, and Italy, it is expressed in strikes and in a certain aversion to work. All signs go to show that the striving is as much for social and political changes as for increases in wages.'

Now read him on the situation in Britain in particular:

'The new danger was known as Socialism in Germany, as Bolshevism in Russia. In Britain it is the Labour Party which strives for the collective ownership of the means of production. For the Liberals this is unacceptable in principle, as the Liberals are for private property. . . . Civilisation is in jeopardy. . . . The Liberals and Tories must unite. . . . If you go to the agricultural areas, I agree that you have the old party divisions as strong as ever. It does not walk in their lanes. But when they see it they will be as strong as some of these industrial constituencies now are.

'Four fifths of this country is industrial and commercial; hardly one fifth is agricultural. It is one of the things I have constantly in mind when I think of the dangers of the future here. In France the population is agricultural and you have a solid body of opinion which does not move rapidly, and which is not easily excited by revolutionary movements. That is not the case here. This country is more top-heavy than any country in the world, and if it begins to rock, the crash here, for that reason, will be greater than in any other land. . . .'

By the 'Khaki Election' of 1918 he kept political power in the hands of the Tories and the Liberals united in an anti-Labour coalition. That was the prerequisite of his subsequent strategy. He knew the tide of working-class revolt was not yet on the ebb and that therefore the hour had not struck for him to use the overwhelming political power in his hands for the purpose of attack. For that he had to wait until the tide turned. But he must keep

the Labour Movement divided against itself; and that, at its present stage of development, was all too easy. Hardly had the excitement of the general election subsided than the new storms of working-class revolt began to sweep the country. They started on the Clyde with a call for a general strike on January 27th, 1919, in demand of a forty-hour week as a means of checking unemployment. Sixty thousand Glasgow workers responded. From there the strike spread across the southern part of Scotland and to Belfast, where another sixty thousand struck work and brought the city to a standstill. Official and unofficial organisations were involved. The Scottish Trade Union Congress headed the movement. In Glasgow, when a vast crowd under the leadership of Shinwell, Gallacher, and Kirkwood assembled outside the City Chambers, the Riot Act was read by the Lord Provost. Gallacher and Kirkwood were floored by truncheon blows from the police. In the evening the City square was barricaded and Glasgow became an armed camp. In Belfast the workers were in control of the situation. On February 5th Barrow engineers struck work and on the 6th the London engineers followed. But then the spontaneous outbursts began to subside. On February 11th the strike was called off, and Gallacher, Kirkwood, and Shinwell were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment.

But in every industry the unions were pressing forward their demands. Assisted by the Government, the employers retreated. On February 1st the railway unions were conceded the 48-hour week. Then the engineering unions were conceded the 47-hour week. The cotton unions secured a reduction of hours from 55½ hours per week to 48. The iron and steel trades secured the eight-hour shift. This left the Government free to deal with the miners, who were demanding increased wages, shorter hours, the nationalisation of the mines, and the democratic control of the mining industry.

Soldiers demobilised from the army were pouring back into the mining villages, and servicemen everywhere were seething with discontent and resentment over demobilisation conditions. The mine-owners, as usual, were stubbornly resisting the demands of the miners. But coal stocks were exceedingly low. Never had the miners been so favourably placed for bringing the owners to account. The Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen, and transport workers was supporting the claims. The Government stepped

in. At all costs it must gain time. It secured from the miners the postponement of strike notices by agreeing to the setting up of a Royal Commission on the Coal Industry under the chairmanship of Lord Sankey; half the commission to be nominated by the Miners' Federation.

The Coal Commission provided one of the most remarkable exposures of the ruling class of Britain that had ever been staged. Under the cross-examination of Smillie and his team they completely wilted and stood self-condemned. But Lloyd George did not worry about the exposure or even that the Government had pledged itself to accept the findings of the Royal Commission and act upon them. What he wanted was time, and time he won. A month later the miners were conceded 2*s*. a day increase and the reduction of hours from eight to seven per shift. These concessions kept them at work. But although the Sankey Commission majority recommended the nationalisation of the mines, the Government never implemented the recommendation. This was left for a Labour Government to do twenty-six years later.

At the same time as the Government was outmanœuvring the miners it was trying to secure a National Industrial Conference of employers and trade unions to ensure peace in industry. It failed because the miners, railwaymen, and transport workers, and the engineers refused to attend the conference.

Hardly had the mining crisis subsided than in June the cotton workers struck work for higher wages. Then, in July, 150,000 Yorkshire miners struck for higher wages and were on strike for a month. Troops and naval ratings were drafted into the areas affected. In July also the Government decided to put an end to trade unionism among the policemen. A strike was provoked. The radical elements were eliminated and the Government won.

In September crisis conditions seized the railway industry. The cost of living was soaring under the inflationary conditions of the times, and the railwaymen demanded increases of wages. The Government resisted. Indeed, it admitted having foreseen this struggle and having been preparing counter measures since February. The railway stoppage was complete and lasted nine days, though under the leadership of J. H. Thomas the union did not appeal to its partners of the Triple Alliance for any assistance. After the railway strike came the strike of 65,000 iron moulders and core makers for 105 days. During the whole of 1919 there

were nearly 35,000,000 days of strike action. It continued through the greater part of 1920, in which there were 27,000,000 days of strikes. The workers flocked into the unions and the affiliations to the Labour Party rose to 4,359,807 members.

It was during the year 1920, while the offensive of the workers was still in full blast, that Bevin triumphantly broke his way into the forefront of the Trade Union Movement with one of the greatest victories of his career. He had secured through the Transport Workers Federation the setting up of a court of enquiry to hear the claims of the dockers for an increase of wages and the decasualisation of their labour. The enquiry was held in the London Law Courts. The chairman of the court was Lord Shaw, and the court consisted of three representatives from the unions, three from the employers, and one from the Ministry of Labour. The court was open to the public and every day of the proceedings it was full to overflowing.

Bevin had been briefed to present the case for the dockers. As he rose to open it he was very self-conscious and very much aware of the unusual environment, but he soon adapted himself. He was already a powerful figure. What he lacked in height was made up in breadth and depth. After a few introductory remarks he quickly got into his stride, dividing his case into (*a*) cause of the claim, (*b*) effects of the claim, (*c*) justification for the claim, (*d*) the ability of the employers to pay, and (*e*) the imperative need for re-organisation of the docks. He recalled that the earliest wage claim of the dockers was made in 1872, when the wage was fixed at 2*s.* 6*d.* a day. Following the Mansion House agreement of 1889 and the famous strike of that year the dockers in the Port of London received 6*d.* for each hour worked. 'It is true,' he said, 'and we say it with pride, we have by sheer weight of organisation effected improvements, but never yet in this dockers' calling can I remember a single concession being handed out to the workmen willingly. We received a penny an hour increase in 1900. With that modification the position remained the same until 1911. . . . You will note that during the first 31 months of the war we were receiving about 3*s.* a day to meet the increased cost of living of 109 per cent. . . . I am advised that the shipowners pocketed in the period £350,000,000.'

The chairman, Lord Shaw, evidently a little perturbed by the introduction of this figure, enquired whether he was making a

claim to share the plunder or on the increased cost of living. Bevin was not to be diverted and replied, 'With very great deference, my lord, we were met at the preliminary negotiations with the claim of inability to pay, and I intend to show . . . the shipowners' profits and their ability to pay.' Then he went on to give the facts about the lives of the dockers. He showed that the cost of living had risen 295 per cent. and said, 'Wages may have doubled, but the real cost of living has been multiplied by four. How can you ask the worker's wife, who is the greatest chancellor of the exchequer that ever lived, to keep her man on half what she had to do it on in 1905? Is there an employer who does his job on half what he had before the war? . . . As regards the cost of the dockers' present claim it would amount in a year to £4,875,000, but this means not more than 1*s.* 9*d.* per ton, or only 1½*d.* per hundredweight. And they were asked to believe that this would ruin industry! . . . I challenge the employers, I challenge the council to show that a family can exist in physical efficiency on less than I have indicated. . . . I say that if the captains of industry cannot organise their concerns so as to give labour a living wage, then they should resign from their captaincy of industry. . . .'

Then came more drama. Sir Lynden Macassey had been briefed to put the case for the employers. He argued that '. . . having regard to the diversity of the work and methods in various ports it is impossible to standardise and fix a national minimum.'

After Sir Lyndon came the head of the Cunard Shipping Company, and Ernest put him through a cross-examination. He asked Sir Alfred Booth whether he thought £2 13*s.* 7½*d.* and £2 8*s.* 4½*d.* for forty-four hours represented in his opinion a living wage.

Sir Alfred: 'I am not satisfied with it.'

Ernest Bevin: 'What is the pre-war money value of £2 8*s.* 4½*d.*?

Sir Alfred: 'Roughly speaking, £1 4*s.* 2*d.*'

Ernest Bevin: 'Assuming that a man works 44 hours, what would he earn in Liverpool?'

Sir Alfred: '£3 4*s.* 2*d.*'

Ernest Bevin: 'Do you suggest that is a living wage?'

Sir Alfred: 'I do.'

Ernest Bevin: 'I put it to you very straight. Could you keep your wife and family on it?"

Sir Alfred: 'No.'

Ernest Bevin: 'Do you think it right to ask a man to live on what you could not?'

Sir Alfred: 'It is not a question of what I could do, but what the economic system demands.'

But the most dramatic moment of all occurred when Bevin proceeded with his cross-examination on the morning of February 18th, 1920. He had caused to be brought into the court a table on which there were ten white plates. Five had on them small portions of cabbage and potatoes and on the other five were little bits of cheese. The exhibit, Ernest explained, showed what the diet submitted by counsel for the employers would amount to in practice, so far as the exhibited items were concerned, for a family of five. 'Suppose,' he asked a witness, 'a docker's wife placed such a dinner before him and his family, would it conduce to domestic peace?'

'There would be a row in our house! I could eat the lot myself,' exclaimed the witness.

Another witness, the chief assistant to the traffic manager at Avonmouth Docks, made heavy weather when under cross-examination on the question of overtime. Ernest Bevin asked him: 'If you were bushelling wheat at 60 lb. a bushel for eight hours, and at the end of the day somebody said to you, " Go on working three or four hours," do you think you would feel over-energetic?"

'It would be hard, but if I was fit I should do it.'

Ernest: 'The average amount of wheat carried by a man on his back in the course of a day is 71 tons. Do you know the average haulage for a horse for a week?'

'No.'

Ernest: 'Fifty tons.'

The dockers were awarded the 16*s.* a day and other recommendations relating to their labour, although the problem of decasualisation remained. Ernest Bevin was that day hailed as the 'dockers' K.C.,' and though not yet elected formally to a leading position in the Trades Union Movement as a whole, stepped at once into its front rank.

It was during these months of terrific turmoil and the assembling of the working class under its own leaders that the first of the great ideological battles on policy began to rage throughout the Labour Movement. It turned upon industrial *versus* parliamentary action. Should the power of the strike be used as an alternative to

parliamentary action, or as supplementary to it, or only for collective bargaining on economic questions traditional to the trade unions?

The syndicalist movement was strong in the big trade unions, although it was losing its anti-parliamentary tendencies and was more sympathetic to the ideas of the guild socialists, who favoured a Consumers' Parliament and the self-government of industry through the unions. The socialists of the Socialist Labour Party and the British Socialist Party, which were Marxist organisations, a part of the Independent Labour Party, and several other socialist groups greatly influenced by the Russian revolution allied themselves with the syndicalists in favour of what was called 'Direct Action,' *i.e.* strikes leading to the general strike. In the Trade Union Congresses and Labour Party Conferences the 'Direct Actionists' were led by Frank Hodges, Robert Smillie, and Robert Williams in the 1918 and 1919 assemblies. J. R. Clynes, Tom Shaw, and J. H. Thomas led the fight against them. Ernest Bevin spoke in one debate, but did not commit himself. He played the rôle of the cautious leader warning the 'politicians' to be careful lest they be unable to get a response from the industrially organised workers. Herbert Morrison, in his first speech at the 1919 conference of the Labour Party, defined his position when he called for the full power of the industrial movement to be used to stop the war on Soviet Russia.

The discussion could not escape the effect of the impact of the Russian revolution on the ideas of the socialists and the Labour Movement. Most of the Marxist socialists saw in the Russian revolution an answer to their impatience with the 'corrupt politicians' and saw Soviets arising from the mass actions of the workers, with working-class dictatorship as the outcome of activity developing into civil war. But in these 1919 conferences of the trade unions and the Labour Party the parliamentarians such as Clynes and Tom Shaw accused Smillie and Hodges and Williams of wanting these things to happen and denounced the use of the strike for political objects. Robert Smillie and Robert Williams conveniently forgot their participation in the Leeds Convention of 1917, when they had called loudly for the immediate setting up of 'Workers' and Soldiers' Councils throughout Britain,' and denied the accusation. But they did want to support parliamentary action with industrial action when occasion

demanded it. Once more it was left for a concrete situation to decide the issue, and this was not long in forthcoming.

The whole Labour Movement and all liberals were stirred by the war of intervention then being waged against Soviet Russia. A 'Hands-off Russia' movement had been set going by the socialists and the feeling was widespread that the Labour Movement should take drastic action to force the Government to make peace with the Soviet Government. During 1919 the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen, and transport workers urged both the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress to call a special conference of the Congress, the union executives, and the Labour Party to consider action along these lines.

It was just after Ernest Bevin had become famous as the 'Dockers' K.C.' that he figured prominently in an action that brought the matter to a head. Arms were being shipped to Poland from the ports of England. Members of the Dockers' Union came to Bevin and asked him if the union would support them should they refuse to load the ships engaged in this work. Bevin answered, 'Go ahead! The Union will back you.' And they refused to load the *Jolly George.*

The news of their action spread like wildfire, and the whole Labour Movement became alive to this great question of stopping the war on Soviet Russia. On August 13th, 1920, a great conference of the national executives of the unions, the Trades Union Congress, and the Labour Party met in the Central Hall, Westminster, to hear a report and to decide on action. On the previous Monday there had been a joint meeting of the Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee, the Labour Party executive, and the Parliamentary Labour Party. After this meeting Bevin made his first official intervention into foreign affairs: he was the spokesman of the deputation to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George.

'Behind the resolution of the Councils of Action,' Bevin said, 'lay the power of 6,000,000 trade unionists of the country, who by their resolutions had passed their opinion on the matter That opinion and the decision were based upon democracy's inherent sense of fair play. Since the Revolution of 1917 the conduct of the Allies, including Britain, towards Russia had been unparalleled—at war the whole time, yet not declaring war.

'We believe' he went on, 'that the hidden forces at work in Europe (especially in Paris) have been responsible for the

prolongation of this terrible conflict with Russia; that the Polish war is but a climax (or at least we hope it is the climax) of the series of wars promoted by influences outside Russia in the form of the wars of Kolchak, Denekin, Yudenitch and later Wrangel. We believe that the hidden forces—these reactionary forces—have been endeavouring to manœuvre the diplomatic situation so as to make Russia appear in the wrong, so as to find the excuse to declare war with all the forces of the Allies against her.

'. . . Another fundamental principle at stake is that we cannot admit the right, in the event of a revolution in any country, of every other nation sending immediately the whole of their armed forces to crush out or stem the changes that are taking place. Czars have murdered thousands and we have not interfered—but if a people's revolution takes place we appear to be called upon, according to the policy of the last three years, to stamp out a "terrible menace." This is a principle that Labour can no longer stand idly by and see develop.

'In conclusion, we have no hesitation in putting our cards on the table. We are satisfied of this, that if war with Russia is carried on, either directly or indirectly, in support of Poland or General Wrangel, anyone who is responsible will be setting a match to material so explosive in its nature that the result none of us can forsee. We know our people are with us. It is not merely a political action, but action representing the full force of Labour, and we believe, judging by the enormous support we enjoy from other classes of the community, we are representing the desire and will of the great majority of the British people.'

This was an historic speech, the like of which he never uttered again.

The delegates did not get a satisfactory answer from Lloyd George, and the great Councils of Action Conference assembled to hear Bevin's report and act upon it. There was no doubt about the prestige he had now achieved. Here he stood before the greatest assembly of the *power* of British Labour that had ever forgathered. This was not a Trades Union Congress recommending that others do this or that. It was not a Labour Party Conference deciding what the members of the Party should propagate and what its representatives in Parliament should do. It was a gathering which included all the executive power of the Labour Movement, and Ernest Bevin was the man who would call on the working class of Britain to a political general strike to challenge

the constitution of the country and create nothing less than embryo soviets. W. Adamson was the Chairman of the conference. Ernest Bevin told the story of the negotiations and how the three executive organisations had passed the following resolution:

> That this Joint Conference, representing the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party, and the Parliamentary Labour Party, feel certain that war is being engineered between the Allied Powers and Soviet Russia on the issue of Poland, and declares that such a war would be an intolerable crime against humanity; it therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war; that the Executive Committees of affiliated organisations throughout the country be summoned to hold themselves ready to proceed immediately to London for a National Conference; that they be advised to instruct their members to 'down tools' on instructions from that National Conference; and that a Council of Action be immediately constituted to take such steps as may be necessary to carry the above decisions into effect.

After Bevin had made his report and J. R. Clynes, who had so fiercely denounced all industrial action for political purposes, had told what the Parliamentary Labour Party had done in the House of Commons, and Thomas had moved the endorsement of the course taken, W. H. Hutchinson of the Amalgamated Engineering Union moved a resolution, seconded and supported by Bowen of the Post Office Workers, Smillie of the Miners Federation, and Williams of the Transport Workers:

> 'That this conference of trade union and Labour representatives hail with satisfaction the Russian Government's declaration in favour of the complete independence of Poland, as set forth in their peace terms to Poland, and realising the gravity of the international situation, pledges itself to resist any and every form of military and naval intervention against the Soviet Government of Russia.
>
> It accordingly instructs the Council of Action to remain in being until they have secured:
>
> 1. An absolute guarantee that the armed forces of Great Britain shall not be used in support of Poland, Baron Wrangel, or any other military or naval effort against the Soviet Government.
> 2. The withdrawal of all British naval forces operating

directly or indirectly as a blockading influence against Russia.

3. The recognition of the Russian Soviet Government and the establishment of unrestrained trading and commercial relationships between Britain and Russia.

This Conference further refuses to be associated with any alliance between Great Britain and France or any other country which commits us to any support of Wrangel or Poland, or the supply of munitions or other war material for any form of attack upon Soviet Russia.

This Conference authorises the Council of Action to call for any and every form of withdrawal of Labour which circumstances may require to give effect to the foregoing policy, and calls upon every trade union official, executive committee, local council of action, and the membership in general to act swiftly, loyally, and courageously in order to sweep away secret bargaining and diplomacy and to assure that the foreign policy of Great Britain may be in accord with the well-known desires of the people for an end to war and the interminable threats of war.'

This threat of a general strike brought the Government to heel, and the day was won. Sidney Webb, however, was not quite sure whether this was the case or whether it was just a coincidence that the Government announced its withdrawal of forces. Of course such a flouting of Fabianism was unkind. But it would be a mistake to assume that organised Labour did not know what it was doing. When the Trades Union Congress met a few weeks later Thomas was the Congress chairman and in his opening address said:

'During the past few weeks we have gone through what is, perhaps, the most momentous period of the Trade Union and Labour Movement in our long history; a period which found, for the first time, a united and determined working-class effort to challenge the existing order of Parliamentary Government. . . . That our course of action was bold none can deny; that it definitely challenged the constitution there can be little doubt. In a country such as ours, where the people possess a franchise sufficiently broad to enable them to determine their own destiny, such a change of method requires an explanation. And although a precedent has already been made, both with regard to Ulster and the Curragh, not to mention the Education

Act, merely to justify our action on the ground of precedence is to beg the question. I feel satisfied, therefore, that I speak for the whole of the movement when I say that dangerous as was our remedy—and it was dangerous—it was justified by the result. . . . Our action regarding Russia does not carry with it an acclamation of the Soviet method of government, and many of those who advocate a Russian peace do not subscribe to Soviet methods. We can, by unity and by the exercise of our political powers, determine our own form of Government, and if the Russian people prefer the Soviet system it is their business. . . .'

The matter was not further discussed. Nevertheless Morrison had seen the policy he had advocated in his first speech to a Labour Party Conference adopted, and Bevin had played the leading rôle in the greatest example of class-struggle politics in the history of British Labour. It was directed against a capitalist government. It was the mobilisation of the industrial power of the workers for political purposes. It was a threat to the constitution of the country. It had in it all the potentialities of a revolutionary situation, and had the Government not given way it would in all probability have led to civil war.

The object before the Labour Movement was a liberal one, namely, the right of Russia to have her own form of government and peace by negotiation. The means to these ends were those of class struggle, which had already been rejected as a policy of the Labour Movement. So when Ernest Bevin led the British working class he was giving on a grand scale an advance lesson to the as yet unformed Communist Party of how to make a successful political somersault. Nevertheless it was a great victory and a great service to the Russian revolution.

But the tide was on the turn.

CHAPTER NINE

At the Turn of the Tide

THE GREAT days of August 1920 represent the highest point yet reached in the history of the British Labour Movement, when many thought we were on the threshold of revolution. Few realised that already a turn in the tide of affairs had been signalled and the hour was near when Lloyd George and the class he was so ably leading would be ready for their counter-offensive and the regaining of much they had lost. In July—that is, a few weeks before the August days of revolt—wholesale prices had begun to fall. The spectre of large-scale unemployment was approaching.

In September the Trades Union Congress met and Ernest Bevin spoke well of a report on the 'High Cost of Living' and the ways and means of securing a fall in prices. But there was no reference to the fact of the wholesale price drop without anyone having had to wait for the proposals of the Congress to be put into operation. Hence there was no discussion of the situation developing for the working class.

Superficially it would appear that this very Congress was about to prepare itself for great events. It was proposed that the Trades Union Movement should have a 'general staff.' Such a military term sounded mighty fine. It gave the impression that the leaders now considered themselves leaders of an army on the march to some distant goal. Actually it was a proposal to transform the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress into a General Council which would co-ordinate the activities of the unions, conduct research, and bring aid to unions engaged in struggle. It was hailed as a 'general staff.' And one of the principal architects of the changes to be made in the constitution of the Trades Union Congress was Ernest Bevin.

The Parliamentary Committee of the Congress had, since its formation in 1868, been the Congress's leading committee, making representations to Parliament on the various matters discussed by Congress. It had given birth to the Labour Party,

now performing on a larger scale, and more continuously, some of the functions of the committee. It was time to clear up the confusion as to the functions of the Parliamentary Committee and to strengthen the central authority within the Congress. At the 1919 Congress a special 'co-ordinating committee' was therefore set up for the purpose, and Ernest Bevin was a principal member.

The proposed General Council was to be more than a committee for making representations to Parliament. It was to be a co-ordinating and leading committee, large enough and having at its disposal the necessary apparatus for carrying out its larger duties. Ernest supported the new proposals and thoroughly thrashed J. R. Clynes, who opposed them. The Congress had by this time become accustomed to him and listened attentively as he opened fire:

'I know your dialectical ability, Mr. Clynes, which is a greater power than your consistency, but I am not in the least moved by that debating ability. . . . What I do want to do is to create a greatly improved equipment and efficiency, so that strikes will be less because of the power of our organisation.'

Therein lies the clue to Ernest Bevin's trade union policy—build the unions on the massive scale—the bigger the threat of action the less the likelihood of necessity to use it.

So the re-organisation scheme of the Congress was approved. But the power of the General Council to call the unions into strike action became no greater than that of the Parliamentary Committee. It was a larger body, had more forces at its disposal, and was more efficient. And Ernest Bevin liked efficiency as well as power—the power was coming his way.

It was at this Congress, too, that the idea of 'workers' control of industry' secured its maximum support. To every resolution dealing with the nationalisation of industry there was always added this demand for functional democracy. The tone of the Congress in these days was that of a movement on the threshold of power instead of one on the edge of a slump.

It was in these days of the turn of the tide that the revolutionary socialists of the Socialist Labour Party and the British Socialist Party and kindred organisations came together and formed the Communist Party. Influenced profoundly by the Russian revolution, they had at first set up a Socialist Unity Committee with a

view to forming one revolutionary socialist party. But in March 1919 Lenin and his colleagues had formed the 'Third (Communist) International' and issued a call for all the revolutionary socialist organisations to assemble their delegates in Moscow in the ranks of the new International. All the revolutionary socialist groups in Britain responded and sent their representatives to Moscow. They were attending the Second Congress of the Third (Communist) International in Moscow while the groups at home fused into the Communist Party.

It will be remembered that the Second International and the Trade Union Internationals had been shattered at the outbreak of war. Lenin and the revolutionary socialists had denounced the leaders of the Second International as traitors to socialism because of their support of the 'imperialist war,' calling them 'social Chauvinists' and 'treacherous opportunists.' The Russians were determined that the new International arising from the ruins of war should be an International freed of opportunism. Thus the leading social democratic and labour parties, such as the British Labour Party, were not invited to the Moscow Congress, but were looked upon as enemies of the revolution and true socialism.[1]

The formation of a Communist Party in Great Britain was not, therefore, something peculiar to this country. It meant that the international working-class movement would not be able to reassemble under a single banner, but under two banners and two ideologies. It was assumed by the Communist International that the revolutionary tide was still flowing fast and that the revolutionary upsurge of the working class everywhere would sweep the 'opportunists' aside and make way for the real leaders of revolution. But such was not the case—the tide was ebbing already. The Second International re-formed, and the working-class

[1] Only those organisations could belong to the new International that accepted the following:

'The aim is the immediate universal dictatorship of the proletariat in view of the dissolution at present proceeding of the capitalist system of the whole world: this involves (1) the seizure of the governmental power in order to replace it by the apparatus of proletarian power; (2) the disarming of the bourgeoisie and the general arming of the proletariat in order to make the revolution secure; (3) the use of the dictatorship to suppress private property in the means of production and transfer it to "the proletarian State under socialist administration of the working class." The method is "the mass action of the proletariat as far as open conflict with arms against the governmental power of capitalism."'

The Two Internationals, R. P. Dutt, p. 24.

movement everywhere was split into two camps destined to fight each other more bitterly than they fought the capitalists.

The process of uniting the working class and making it conscious of its historic rôle as the class primarily responsible for the triumph of socialism ceased to be an aim within a single Labour Movement and became a bone of contention between rival parties, each seeking to assemble the working class round their rival ideologies. This was a fundamental departure from the method pursued by Marx and Engels in the First International and of the Marxists in the Second. They had regarded the unification of the working class as something which should be crystallised in one party; Communists should not form a rival body, but should become the party's vanguard by virtue of their better and more scientific grasp of history and their devotion to socialism.

Lenin now propounded the policy of unification by splitting the working-class movement and organising the communists into a separate revolutionary party which would become the *one party of the working class* through the liquidation of its rivals organised in the parties of 'social chauvinism and opportunism.' He had thought out this policy and applied it in Russia in circumstances peculiarly favourable for it. The assumption now made was that, especially with the coming of the Russian revolution, the situation was everywhere favourable for the same policy. That circumstances favoured it in some countries where the labour movement was young cannot be questioned. But in countries where industrial capitalism was strong and political democracy highly developed, and where powerful labour parties existed and the tide of revolution was already beginning to ebb, it could lead only to the isolation of the communists into small parties on the fringe of the large labour movements. Instead of becoming the vanguard and securing the leadership of the mass working-class movement, this method would consolidate the very leaders whom the communists were anxious to depose. By this abitrary decision, taken without sufficient regard for the historical development of the labour and socialist movement in each country, the Bolsheviks subordinated the class struggle to the ideological struggle of rival parties.

The Communists held the view that on a world scale the choice for everybody was now that of revolution or counter-revolution—if you were not for the Russian revolution you were against it; and

further, that as the Russian revolution had begun the world revolution, the class struggle everywhere would grow in intensity and favour the growth of communism. The Second Congress of the Communist International, held in July 1920, did not see, as the Labour Movement in this country did not see, that the tide of revolution had begun to ebb. It assumed that it was at the flood and likely to continue so. Indeed, the chairman of the Congress saw all Europe as a Federation of Soviet Republics within two years. It was a wrong assumption, and the split of the working-class movement was not supported in Europe and Britain by a leftward sweep of the masses.

So the Communists sought to extend their bases by establishing the Red International of Labour Unions as a new international centre of unions pledged to wage the revolutionary struggle. Leagues and other organisations of political conflict on all fronts were formed for the purpose of waging the revolutionary mass struggle. The Communist International itself set out to become an International Party, highly centralised and strongly disciplined to the main tenets of Lenin's interpretation of Marxism and its application to the struggles of to-day. Unity in the class struggle became the slogan of battle against the leaders of the parties and unions of the Second International, whom the Bolsheviks regarded as the 'last bulwarks of capitalism.' Communists had to seek unity with the social democratic workers in order to win them over to Communism. They must enter the trade unions, however reactionary the unions might be, in order to win the workers to the policy of the Communist Party and get them to throw out their 'opportunist social democratic leaders.'

The net effect of this development in Britain was to secure the self-isolation of the Marxists as completely as the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist Labour Party had isolated themselves before the war. The British Socialist Party was affiliated to the Labour Party. The Socialist Labour Party was not affiliated and was opposed to affiliation. So also were the other organisations which in 1920 joined together in forming the Communist Party. Only under the great pressure of the Communist International did the new Communist Party agree to apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. Any declaration that its purpose at this time was to function as a left-wing group of the Labour Party would have been regarded as an outrage on

Communism and downright opportunism. 'Support the Labour leaders,' said Lenin, 'as the rope supports the men about to be hanged.'

The situation, however, was complicated by the peculiar structure of the Labour Party itself. When the Labour Party was formed by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, the Fabian Society, and the Independent Labour Party, they modelled it on the Trades Union Congress. It was a federal party of trade unions and socialist organisations. The Communists were in the main members of the trade unions, and by virtue of their trade union affiliation also became members of the Labour Party. This applied to the local labour parties as well as to the National Labour Party. Hence when the Communist Party made application for affiliation to the Labour Party and it was rejected, the Labour Party was placed in a most anomalous position. The Communists were in the Labour Party as members of their trade union and out of it as members of the Communist Party. Having split away on grounds of ideology and formed a rival party, they could, by holding on to their rights as trade unionists, place the onus of splitting the working-class movement on to the Labour Party leaders, and could do it on the grounds of uniting the working class in the struggle for socialism against capitalism. It was to be the lot of Morrison to lead the fight of the Labour Party against the Communist Party.

But with the formation of the Communist Party came also what has been described as its 'solar system,' the most important section of which started in the trade unions. The Communists did not adopt the same policy in the world of trade unionism as in the labour and socialist parties. They sought to establish a new international trade union organisation with the Russian trade unions at the centre and to wipe out the re-formed International Federation of Trade Unions with its headquarters in Amsterdam. This was designated the 'Yellow International,' and the issue as 'Moscow *versus* Amsterdam' representing revolution and counter-revolution. While seeking a new international which would work in collaboration with and under the direction of the Communist International, they would nowhere aim at splitting the unions or favour the setting up of new rival unions. The old socialist policy would apply here, namely that of seeking to win the leadership by the constitutional methods of the union rules. By this means,

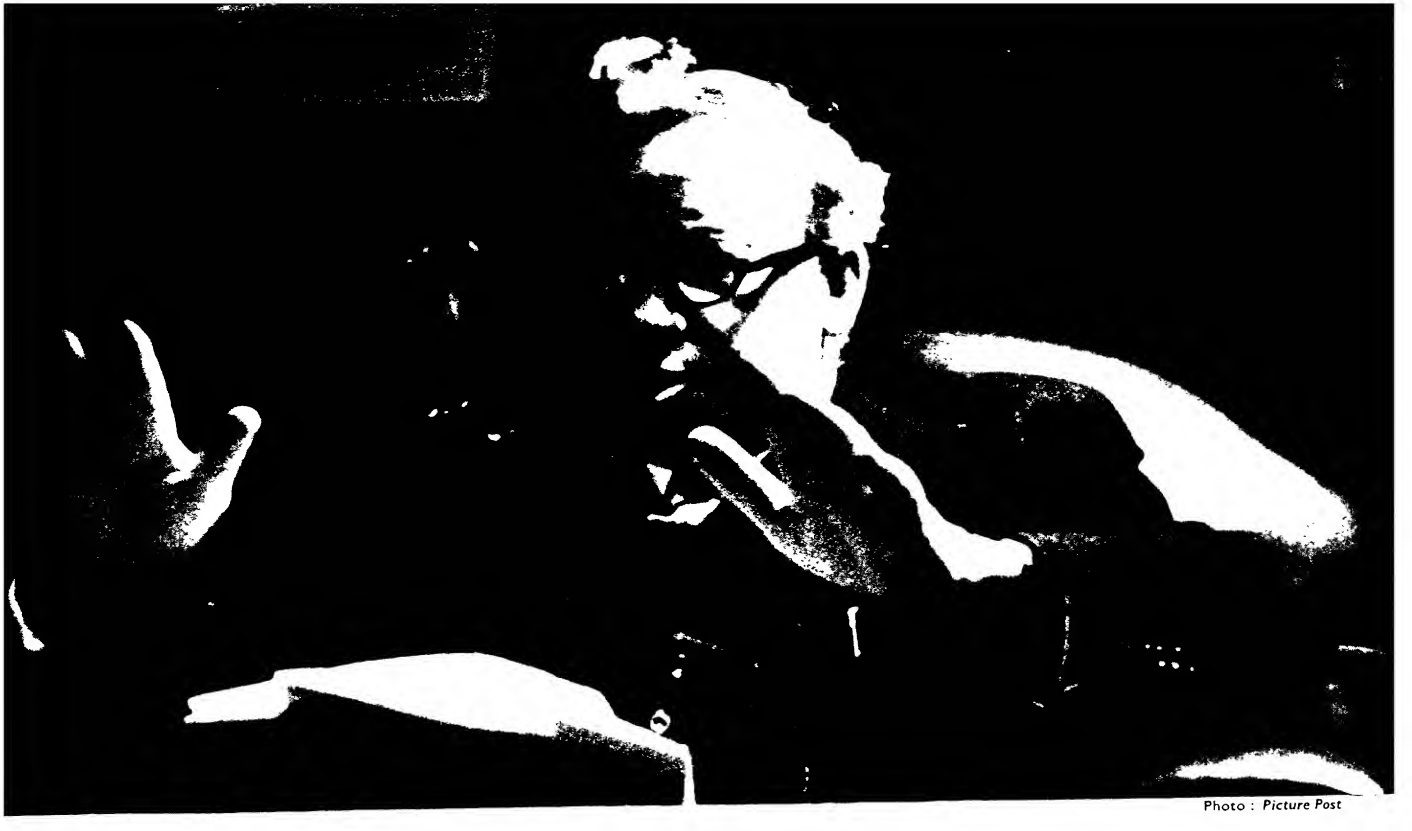


Photo : *Picture Post*

Herbert Morrison as Minister of Home Security 1944

too, the Communists would seek to win the unions away from the Amsterdam International and to affiliate with the Red International of Labour Unions.

This policy had been decided by Lenin and his colleagues in consultation and agreement with Robert Williams, leader of the Transport Workers Federation (who joined the Communist Party in 1920) and Albert Purcell of the Furnishing Trade Union when they went to Russia as part of the delegation of the Trades Union Congress. These two, along with Tom Mann, A. J. Cook of the Miners Federation, Ellen Wilkinson of the Distributive Workers, Ben Smith (now Sir Ben) of the Vehicle Builders, Richard Coppock of the Builders Federation, Harry Pollitt, myself, and a number of others prominent in the Shop Stewards Movement, established a bureau of propaganda for the Red International of Labour Unions. It later became known as the Minority Movement, with Harry Pollitt as its leader. This was to conduct propaganda in favour of the main tenets of the Communist Movement and to seek to develop 'working-class unity' on the immediate issues before the trade unions, with a special line of exposure and challenge to the supporters of the 'Yellow' International.

Bevin became infuriated by this movement, and along with Walter Citrine was to play a leading part in securing its liquidation. By this time he was fast becoming the most dominant trade union leader of this generation and had set in motion the process of amalgamation among the transport unions destined to become the most powerful combination in British trade unionism with himself at the head.

Although the Transport Workers Federation, formed in 1910–11, had been responsible for a great deal of the collective action within the transport industry and for the 'Dockers' Enquiry' at which Ernest had won renown, it was not adequate for dealing effectively with the problems of the industry. To have to consult a dozen executives or more before any action could be undertaken was an absurdity which Ernest Bevin determined to remove. In 1920 he brought two of the largest unions of the dockers together and began the campaign for amalgamation. By December nineteen unions were considering his scheme. At the first effort, fourteen secured the necessary majority in favour of the scheme. By January 1922 the Transport Workers Union was

established with 300,000 members and Ernest Bevin was elected its general secretary, with Harry Gosling its president.

In the process Ben Tillett was passed over and suffered the greatest disappointment of his career. He had felt confident of becoming either president or general secretary of the new organisation, and never quite forgave Bevin for striding past him in this way. Of course whenever amalgamations of unions take place there are always too many claimants for leading positions in the new organisation and the path of unity is often strewn with political casualties. With the passing of the Transport Federation Robert Williams was also eclipsed. He drifted into isolation and finally, feeling deserted by all, committed suicide.

Soon the Transport Union became known as 'Bevin's Union' and there was no doubt in anybody's mind as to who was the boss. He had no rivals. But he had no intention of being content with an organisation of 300,000 members. Organisation brings power, and with power one can talk more effectively. He had his eye on the Workers Union, which at its peak had 500,000 members; and by 1929–30 he had succeeded in securing its amalgamation with the Transport Union. To-day the Transport and General Workers Union has more than a million members. It is a remarkable organisation. It has nine national groups: Docks; Waterways; Passenger Road Transport Services; Commercial Road Transport; Power Workers; Metal Engineering and Chemical; Clerical; Fishing; and General. The latter group includes such sections as (1) Food and Drink; (2) Sugar Beet; (3) Artificial Silk; (4) Linen, Hosiery, Blankets; (5) Municipal Non-Trading; (6) Gas and Electricity Supply; (7) Civil Engineering Construction; (8) Cement, Clay, Chalk; (9) Paint, Colour, Varnish, etc.; and (10) Markets. In addition, the group has attached to it two sub-sections; (*a*) Flour Milling and Agriculture and (*b*) Building Trade.' [1]

The Union has an Executive Council composed of representatives of each national group committee and one or two from each area representing 50,000 to 150,000 members. The Council appoints full-time officials, except the General Secretary and Financial Secretaries, who are elected by ballot and hold office during the pleasure of the union. Ernest Bevin was to hold the General Secretary's post until the retiring age set by the union,

[1] *British Trade Unionism To-day*, by G. D. H. Cole, pp. 314–5.

sixty-five years. Under his leadership the T.G.W.U. became a power to be reckoned with. It affected between 200 and 300 national agreements between employers and workers, and became represented on twenty-three Joint Industrial Councils, eight Government industrial councils, twenty-six trade boards, fourteen concilliation boards, and many other negotiating bodies for making collective bargains concerning the conditions of workers in industry.

It was brought into being in stormy days. It was while the negotiations were afoot for the first amalgamations, in the autumn of 1920, that Lloyd George, his Government, and the employers began their counter-offensive. Since the end of the war they had retreated on all fronts, but had kept the reins of power in their hands. While they had conceded wage advances in all industries, reduced the hours of labour, established trade boards in many industries, partially conceded the worker's claim to participate through his trade union organisation in the administration of industry, extended social legislation, and had been forced to withdraw their military forces from Soviet Russia, they had succeeded in home affairs in handling the workers' organisations one by one.

Although the working class had become organised on an unprecedented scale and its political organisation had become centralised, its leaders were inhibited by their political ideas and theories from consciously pursuing the class struggle *as a policy.* But they could not escape the struggle. The conflict of interests in the economic structure of society forced them into action on behalf of the working class. Twice in three years they had acted in flat contradiction to the theories they had adopted from the Fabians, who had provided the programme, the policy, and the leaders. All had subscribed to a programme and policy committing them to strive for political power only through Parliament. Yet MacDonald, Smillie, and Williams had led a great convention of organised labour to demand the immediate setting up of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, and Bevin, with the great Councils of Action Movement behind him, challenged the whole constitution of Parliamentarism if the Government should refuse his demand for the cessation of war on Soviet Russia.

The working-class movement had organised itself independently and on a massive scale, but the heads of the movement were being

driven into situations they did not comprehend and made to subscribe to programmes and policies which few of them understood. It is true that the Labour Party now had the programme, in 'Labour and the New Social Order,' that Sidney Webb had propounded in the Fabian Essays of 1889. But there was only one Sidney Webb in the leadership, and social and political crises had no place in his philosophy. The majority were trade union leaders whose thinking did not range beyond the practice of their own particular union in the realm of collective bargaining. Their working-class instincts were sound enough, but none had the breadth of vision and theoretical equipment to see and understand the great social revolution they had been called upon by history to lead.

Nor did Bevin differ greatly from the rest. He was convinced that socialism was a better way of life and a better means of organising society. He was developing fast as a great trade union bargain-maker and organiser, and he was capable of dominating a situation by sheer personal power and the backing of numbers behind him. But there was no evidence that he had yet become acquainted with socialism as a science as well as the goal of the working class. He was still an eclectic with his instincts deeply rooted in the working class, a heavyweight courageously accumulating power and learning from experience to be quick on the uptake, ruthless against men and things which stood in his way, impatient of fools, and pretty sure that he was never wrong.

Hence it was only to be expected that the approach of the slumps should pass unrecognised as was the approach of the boom and that neither the Labour Party nor the new 'General Staff' of the Trades Union Congress should have any considered policy ready for application as the days of crisis approached. Each union would take what was coming to it with courage and fortitude and fight back with the stubborness so characteristic of the British workers; but it would be a retreating fight before a class that had leaders who were consciously waging a class war, who had deliberately waited, and prepared as they waited, for the moment to strike and regain the positions they had lost.

CHAPTER TEN

Stormy Days

EARLY in January 1921 Ernest Bevin addressed a big meeting of Bristol workers with that confident assurance that brooks no contradiction. Looking on the world at large, he declared: 'The ghastly failure of the capitalist system is indicated in the grave unemployment. That shows that capitalism is causing its own demise. It is going to its death and the Trade Union Movement is not ready, as it ought to be, to take its place.' [1]

How the Trade Union Movement could take the place of capitalism he did not explain, but on January 21st, 1921, he said at another meeting: 'The root problem lies in the revival of industry and commerce abroad. Until the countries of the world, and particularly the importing nations of Europe, are able to re-establish their economic life, the world's foreign trade will be seriously restricted.' [2]

A day or two later he regarded the growth of unemployment as the result of a sinister conspiracy on the part of the capitalists. Speaking at a rally, he said: 'Unemployment at the present time is not accidental. It is deliberate on the part of the capitalistic system. The one weapon in the hands of the capitalist is starvation, not his brains, ability, or managerial capacity, but his ability to hold or withold the means of life to break you when your children cry for bread.' [3]

On February 27th, 1921, before another Bristol audience he became more precise as to the form of the conspiracy and ventured into the realm of prophecy: 'I believe that the fall in prices was only a passing phase arising from the realisation of stock to get capital, and that in April prices will go up again.' [4]

Unfortunately for Bevin's effort in the realms of economic diagnosis April brought a further fall in prices and they continued

[1] *Daily Herald*, January 3rd, 1921
[2] *Ibid.*, Jan. 22nd, 1921
[3] *Ibid.*, Jan. 24th, 1921.
[4] *Ibid.*, Feb. 28th, 1921.

to fall during 1921 and 1922 and only began to rise again at the beginning of August 1923. At the time when Ernest Bevin held forth on the subject the cost of living index registered 251 as against 100 in 1914. In April it had fallen to 233, and continued to fall until in June 1923 it registered 169.

Of course Bevin was not alone in his faulty diagnoses and miscalculations. They were general. Communists and socialists alike were talking generalities about the 'collapse of capitalism.' The only difference between them at the time was that the Communists thought that 'revolution was just round the corner' and were searching for it, and the Bevins knew things were in a bad way and were searching for means to prevent them getting worse.

The whole Labour and Socialist Movement in this country was slithering confusedly into a new crisis of capitalism and again without any definite policy. The Labour Party leaders worked on the assumption that the slump was a passing phase of short duration, to be met by measures for the stimulation of trade without any change of ownership of industry and by relief measures to mitigate the conditions of the unemployed. The trades unions would fight a retreating fight most stubbornly, but their leaders were afraid of united action by the unions being fully aware that, should the unions act in concert as on the occasion of the threatened war on Russia, a political crisis would ensue which would threaten the constitution of the country. The Communists, convinced that the collapse of capitalism was at hand would support every relief measure not as an end in itself but as a means of directing the working class to fight for political power. Believing that without political power there could be no change of ownership of the means of production, and dismissing the possibility of socialism through Parliament, they would seek to unite the workers for direct mass action.

If these features alone had marked the situation it would have been confused enough, but the organised split in the international working-class movement caused by the formation of the Communist International and therefore of an independent Communist Party, with its attendant satellites, turned every struggle for unity in the class struggle into a conflict of parties for their particular ideologies.

By September of 1920 unemployment had become a serious

problem. Ernest Bevin on behalf of the Transport Workers Federation put forward proposals based upon the findings of the famous Court of Enquiry into the Conditions of the Dockers. Unemployment was growing among the dockers and they were feeling the situation severely. He now proposed that casual dock workers should receive a guaranteed minimum of £4 a week when unable to secure their five days at 16*s.* a day and that the additional cost above that derived from the national insurance should be provided by a levy of 4*d.* a ton on imports and exports.

While Bevin was advancing these proposals Morrison and Attlee were busy trying to cope with the unemployment situation in the metropolis. Attlee was now Mayor of Stepney. The County of London alone had at this time 1,992 disabled ex-service men and 31,747 fit ex-servicemen on the register of unemployed. The unequal rates of the boroughs and the uneven distribution of the burden of unemployment were producing acute problems for many borough councils. Attlee and fourteen other Labour mayors met in conference and decided to make representations to the Government.

Morrison as Secretary of the London Labour Party convened a conference of the borough councils and secured unanimous support for a resolution contending that:

> 'local no less than national taxation should have regard to the ability of the individual to pay and the undesirability of the accumulation of unearned wealth by monopolists. . . . Rates should be equalised in London instead of the penalisation of the poor districts for the benefit of the rich districts which takes place to-day. . . . National grants in aid of local services should be extended. . . . Empty property should be rated at its full assessment.'

It was also planned that the mayors' deputation to the Prime Minister should head a great demonstration of the unemployed. Attlee was not likely to forget this event. Twenty thousand unemployed workers marched behind him that day in October, and while he and the labour mayors of London were at Downing Street the police charged the waiting crowd lined up on the Thames Embankment.

The deputation really achieved little beyond publicity, and as the unemployment spread increasingly throughout the country

such demonstrations became commonplace. By December 1920 there were more than a million registered unemployed. Nor did the new year bring any change for the better, and the time soon arrived, for which Lloyd George and the employers of labour had waited, to start their counter-offensive against the workers. On March 31st the Government decontrolled the mines. That was the signal for the battle to begin. Almost at once the mine owners faced the miners with demands for reductions of wages and the lengthening of the hours of labour.

The whole Trades Union Movement had had due warning of this. In July 1920 the miners had demanded an increase of wages and a decrease in the price of coal, claiming that the industry could afford to meet both demands. But the demands were rejected outright. A ballot of the miners was taken, showing a large majority ready to support their cause with strike action. Notices were handed in and were due to expire on September 25th. Then the miners approached the Triple Alliance for aid. This organisation unanimously agreed that the claims of the miners were just and proper.

Bevin represented the Dock, Riverside and General Workers Union in the Triple Alliance. He thought the miners had a sound case and was a party to the above decision. He was also at the Trades Union Congress at the beginning of September, and moved that the Standing Orders Committee of the Congress be asked to report on the miners' situation. This Committee came forward with a resolution which read:

> 'This Trades Union Congress, having heard the statement of the miners' case for a reduction in the price of domestic coal by 14*s.* 2*d.* per ton and an advance of wages of 2*s.*, 1*s.*, and 9*d.* per shift for adults, youths, and boys respectively, is of the opinion that the claims are both reasonable and just, and should be conceded forthwith.'

After Hodges had stated the case for the miners the resolution was carried without a dissentient voice. Then followed days of fruitless discussion in which the leaders of the Triple Alliance seemed more concerned with preventing a strike than of ensuring that the purpose for which the Alliance had been formed should ever be fulfilled. The Alliance had been formed with a view to simultaneous action by all three sections, each putting forward

and fighting for its own programme, with assurance of support from the others. The railwaymen and the transport workers were now being called upon to strike on an issue which was primarily a miners' issue. After the Trades Union Congress it was certainly expected by the whole movement that the Triple Alliance would take common action. But by September 24th it was clear for all the world to see that there was no prospect of this.

The miners suspended their notices for a week and resumed negotiations with the Government and the coal-owners. The coal-price issue was dropped for lack of support and new wage proposals were worked out. Again the notices were suspended, this time for a fortnight, in order that a ballot of the miners could be taken. The terms were rejected, and the miners struck work on October 16th, 1920. The strike lasted until November 3rd, when revised terms conceding a wage increase were accepted by the strikers. On the eve of the settlement the railwaymen had voted in favour of strike action, but with the miners' consent this was cancelled because it was too late and too much harm had already been done by the collapse of the Alliance in the early part of the dispute.

Bevin has to share the odium attached to the failure of the Alliance. It would have been better for all concerned had the Triple Alliance been wound up at this stage and relegated to the dustbin of history, for its failure on this occasion was insignificant when compared with the calamity which was later to befall it.

The previous settlement with the miners was a temporary affair, to last only until March 31st, 1921. The Government had used the 1920 dispute as the occasion for rushing through Parliament an 'Emergency Powers Act' which empowered the Government, on the issue of a proclamation stating an emergency existed, by Order in Council to do anything it deemed necessary for the 'public safety.'

The fateful days of March arrived in the midst of a growing slump in trade. The mine owners now demanded not only wage reductions but also district settlements. They wanted to destroy the national wage basis and machinery of negotiation, and in the process to destroy the Miners Federation as a national organisation. For the first fortnight there was a great campaign by the Triple Alliance in support of the miners, and everybody, including

the rank-and-file of the Alliance, was led to believe that this time it would fulfil the purpose for which it was formed.

The spotlight of publicity was not on Ernest Bevin in these proceedings, although he was at the centre of the stage, but upon J. H. Thomas, Robert Williams, and Frank Hodges. If there was to be glory in the event, such glory would fall mainly on them, and Ernest Bevin would get only his lesser share. If ignonimy, however, were to be their due he would also have to take his share. Such are the vagaries of publicity that when nowadays 'Black Friday' is recalled only three names are identified with it, those of Thomas, Williams, and Hodges. But Bevin was there, helped to make the day 'black,' and, of course, justifies himself in the action he took.

It happened thus. The proposals for settlement advanced by the Government and the mine owners had met with a categorical rejection by the miners, who put forward alternatives—the establishment of a National Pool made up of the surpluses of the most profitable mines to maintain wages in the less profitable, and the fixing of the level by a National Wages Board. Result—they were locked out from March 31st until the end of June.

At the very beginning of the dispute the miners appealed to the Triple Alliance for aid. On April 12th, although the Government had on April 8th declared a 'State of Emergency' under its new Emergency Powers Act, the Alliance called for a strike of all sections. Parks were requisitioned and filled with troops. Reservists were called to the colours. A Special Defence Force was enrolled. A great display of Government force was in evidence everywhere.

Attempts were made to re-open negotiations with the Government, but the latter refused unless the safety men of the pits resumed work. This in turn was refused by the miners, but they issued an instruction that the men who were manning the pumps should not be interfered with.

The Government accordingly agreed again to meet the miners. The Triple Alliance therefore postponed strike action from April 12th to the 15th. On the 14th the negotiations between the miners and the Government again broke down because the Government sided with the owners against a national basis of settlement.

Then an incident occurred which burst the Alliance wide open and led to its collapse. At an informal meeting of M.Ps. in the

Photo : *Picture Post*

Ernest Bevin

At the Blackpool Conference 1945

Herbert Morrison

Photo : *Picture Post*

House of Commons on the evening of the 14th Frank Hodges, in the presence of other miners' leaders, who did not contradict him or the interpretation placed upon his remarks, was understood to offer a temporary wage settlement and to put on one side for the time being the main demands of the miners. The leaders of the railwaymen and the Transport Workers seized upon this statement, despite the rejection of the proposal by the Miners' Executive, to call off the strike of the other sections of the Alliance. This is the day that henceforth became known as 'Black Friday.' Therefore the miners were left to struggle alone until, at the end of June, their resources being completely exhausted, the executive of the Miners Federation capitulated.

The defeat of the miners was overwhelming, and their wages went down and down until they were far below the level of 1914. In January 1922 the Miners Federation went cap in hand to the owners asking them to join in an appeal to the Government for help. But the mine owners had no mercy. Instead of aid they took advantage of the helplessness of the miners to wipe out every advantage the men had gained from the Coal Commission of 1920, with the sole exception of the Miners' Welfare Fund.

Bevin gave a 'K.C.'s' justification of the collapse of the Alliance, which undoubtedly heralded the series of disasters that befell the working-class movement. 'If,' he said, 'I had to live "Black Friday" over again I would repeat my action of that day. There was no common council, and without that there could be no common action. When that position was realised I voted to call off the strike.' It appeared there had been sufficient common council to call a strike, to postpone it, and to call it off. However, Bevin continued his explanation as follows: 'The débâcle, as it was called, was due to the lack of preparation and to the fact that each section was autonomous. Joint action and autonomy are impossible.'

Whatever the value of these reflections may be, the fact is that Bevin, with the rest of the Triple Alliance leaders, deserted the miners at a moment when they and everybody else concerned with the dispute were expecting them to carry out their publicly declared decision. It was a late hour at which to discover that there had been a 'lack of preparation' and an absence of 'common council.' Can it be that there was an absence of will in the Triple

Alliance leaders, including Bevin, or perchance a fear of the implications of such a strike and its outcome?

The attack on the miners was the start of a far-flung counter-offensive by Government and employers. The assault on the wage levels of the workers extended from industry to industry. In April the shipyard men, already severely handicapped by large-scale unemployment, were forced to accept wage reductions. Then came the building workers and the seafarers, ship stewards, cooks. On June 4th the cotton workers were locked out, and by the 24th had to accept substantial wage reductions.

Nor did Bevin's union escape. He had repeatedly denounced the 'fodder basis' for determining wages, but the fall in the price of the 'fodder' forced him and his union to accept an agreement that the 'Dockers' 16*s*. a day' should be reduced on August 4th, 1921, to 14*s*. a day, and from January 1922 to 13*s*. a day. Whether it ever entered his head to apply to the Triple Alliance for aid is not known. Perhaps the shadow of 'Black Friday' darkened the situation too much, for after that calamity no more was heard of the Alliance except in the form of echoes of disappointed men.

And the counter-attack continued. The Government's control of the railways ceased in August, and in the same month the Railways Act was passed reorganising them, still on the basis of private ownership. With this vanished the plan for workers' representation on railway directorates which the Government had put forward in 1920.

After the railways came agriculture, and the Government rushed through Parliament the Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Act, sweeping away guaranteed prices for the farmers and a minimum wage for the agricultural labourers. Labour protests in Parliament were unavailing. Twenty-five shillings a week became the normal wage of agricultural labourers in many counties. The engineers next had to face the storm. Rejecting demands made by the employers, they faced a three months' lock-out charged with interfering in 'managerial functions.' The employers won when the funds of the unions were exhausted.

By the end of 1922 practically every industry had been 'dealt with' and the workers had suffered wage reductions to the extent of £10,000,000 a week. The unions were beaten heavily and declined in membership.

All through this period unemployment continued to increase to unprecedented dimensions. Although Clement Attlee and Herbert Morrison had begun by being little more than spectators of the industrial conflict, they were thrust into the limelight of publicity by the growing army of unemployed workers. In December 1920 so alarming was the growth of unemployment that the Labour Party, which had called a special Party Conference to deal with the Irish situation, brought forward a resolution to define its attitude to this question also. Morrison at this time was a member of the Executive, still Secretary of the London Labour Party, and Mayor of Hackney.

The Conference resolved that:

> 'the growing volume of unemployment and under-employment is due in large measure to the interruption in world trading following the war and the defective peace treaties, in addition to the folly of British and Allied policy in relation to the Soviet Government of Russia. . . . It calls upon the Government to take effective steps to secure the restoration of the economic life of central Europe by a scheme for providing adequate credits; to remove immediately all blockading influences; and to discontinue the destruction of normal trading facilities by means of indefensible legal quibbles.'

Having called upon the morrow to return to the dead yesterdays, it next called for ambulance measures on behalf of the unemployed—'work or maintenance,' the rate of maintenance to be at least 40*s*. for each householder and 25*s*. a week for each single man or woman, with additional allowances for dependants.

By September 1921 the situation had grown far worse. Through the London Labour Party Morrison initiated a conference of Labour mayors, party leaders, party whips, and secretaries in the metropolitan boroughs, and launched a week's agitation. This kind of agitation had been going on all over the country during the year, and the unemployed were being organised by the Communists into an independent organisation which they were seeking to link up with the Trades Union Congress. The Communists were interested primarily in securing the maximum of relief for the unemployed and developing a general political crisis, but Morrison and his colleagues, who had responsibilities for local administration in many boroughs, were also greatly

concerned about the burden thrust upon the ratepayers, who were having to bear an undue share of the cost of relief.

They determined to raise both aspects of the problem with the Prime Minister. But Lloyd George at this time was in Inverness for a special meeting with Irish representatives concerning the Irish question. The London Labour mayors sent a telegram to him intimating their intention of proceeding to Inverness to discuss the Government's intentions for dealing with unemployment. Lloyd George replied that 'No useful purpose can be served by a meeting in Inverness' and referred them to a Government Committee. Morrison replied, 'We are coming. We are determined that the Government shall not continue to neglect unemployment, and we are coming also in the fundamental interests of our ratepayers, who have already borne too large a share of what should be a national burden.' Still Lloyd George would have none of it, and again referred Morrison and his mayors to the Cabinet Committee, whose chairman was Sir Alfred Mond.

They went to see the Cabinet Committee, but got no satisfaction and so continued in their determination to see the Prime Minister. Then Lloyd George said he was ill, but would see them when he was better. Off went the mayors with Morrison as their leader, and finally, after waiting several days at Gairloch for Lloyd George's convenience, met him. The Prime Minister promised to make new proposals to Parliament on October 18th. Morrison closed the interview by saying, 'I am bound to say that we go back pretty empty. The unemployed have had hopes and hopes and hopes and everyone of these hopes has been dashed to the ground. There is a bitter feeling, and sheer lack of faith in the whole institution of the State, which are growing among those bands of hungry and desperate men. As time goes on the leadership of the unemployed organisations will tend to be rather distinct from the organised Labour Movement and may get into hands which cannot be looked upon with ease, having regard to the possibilities of the situation.'

Lloyd George here intervened and asked, 'You mean into irresponsible hands?'

Morrison answered, 'Yes, sir. I say there is a distinct tendency in that direction, which is dangerous to national government and to local government, and to talk violence in such circumstances

is exceedingly popular, while to talk law and order is a subject of laughter. . . .'

Whether Morrison realised the full implications of this statement, which raised the spectre of revolution before Lloyd George, is not clear. But it must have been obvious to him that the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress would not lose the support of the workers to the new leaders of the unemployed unless the Labour Movement had convinced the workers that it had itself failed to deal with the problem.

The statement also bore another implication—that at some point Labour would abandon the mass agitational methods which at this stage marked its handling of the unemployment situation, and at that stage the Communists would take over and turn the affair into a revolutionary struggle for power. Attlee had led the London Labour mayors at the head of twenty thousand unemployed in a march to Downing Street. Here was Morrison crowning a great all-London agitation, consisting of weeks of meetings and demonstrations, by leading London's Labour mayors on a chase of the Prime Minister into the wilds of Scotland. The Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress had held special assemblies of their delegates on the issue of unemployment and the position of the unemployed. The Parliamentary Labour Party had maintained a consistent bombardment of the Government in the House of Commons. The Government had been forced to make concessions, however inadequate. In all these assemblies it had been proposed, and on each occasion rejected, that Labour should force a political crisis by means of a general strike.

Thus rejecting the direct struggle for power as proposed by the Communist leaders of the unemployed movement to the Labour Party Conference of June 1921, Labour could pursue only the indirect method and wait for popular opinion to support the Labour Party in some general election of the future. They knew that without political power they could do only two things—make political criticism of the Government's policy and organise political ambulance work on behalf of the unemployed.

And this became their policy. They were assisted by some important facts which were often overlooked by the Communist leaders of the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement. Most of the trade unionists received an unemployment benefit from their union as well as from the National Unemployment Insurance

fund. This fact divided the unemployed. The cry 'Go to the Guardians' was important as an appeal only to those not receiving a union benefit or who had exhausted it. Consequently, only a minority, of the skilled workers in particular, were inspired by the campaigns of the Communists. Also many unemployed received aid from various charities, and this had a similar effect toward narrowing the basis of appeal of the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement.

Those who received the trade union unemployment benefit naturally looked to the unions and the Labour Party, and were satisfied with the party's agitation in Parliament and the frequent conferences of the Labour Movement. After Morrison's chasing of the Prime Minister the mass methods of agitation such as the 'hunger marches' and street demonstrations came to be left more and more to the Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement.

Meanwhile the Trades Union Congress, in the first flush of excitement at mass unemployment, set up a special National Unemployment Committee which at first co-operated with the Unemployed Workers' Committee, but later isolated it because of its Communist leadership. Instead, therefore, of Morrison's spectre of revolution being substantiated, it turned out to be the beginning of isolation for the revolutionaries and Labour's retreat from direct mass action on behalf of the unemployed to parliamentary and municipal politics.

But this was not a simple matter, and Morrison found himself in the most difficult of situations. In his triple capacity as leader of the London Labour Party, Mayor of Hackney, and leader of the opposition in the London County Council, he was concerned only about the amount of relief that should be paid the unemployed and their dependents, but with 'where the money was to come from.' In the London area, Poor Law administration was divided among a large number of separate boards, and certain charges fell upon the County Funds of the London County Council. The distress was more severe in some areas than others, and these of course were usually the very poor areas.

Out of this state of affairs a crisis developed in which Morrison came into conflict with George Lansbury and his colleagues of the Poplar Board of Guardians. The strain on the resources of the Poplar Guardians became so severe that the Poplar Borough Council refused to pay the sums required of them by the London

County Council. The Poplar councillors faced legal proceedings, and on September 1st, 1921, were committed to prison for contempt of court. Morrison meanwhile did not like the course taken by them, and when they issued an appeal for other Labour councils to support them by taking similar action he got the Executive Committee of the London Labour Party to issue a counter-appeal that they should do nothing of the kind, but continue to pay their quota to the London County Council. He was alarmed. Indeed, he appeared to be in a panic and to believe the Poplar councillors were really setting the Labour Movement head-on for revolution.

But he was powerful enough to 'save' the situation. Not one Labour borough supported the Poplar councillors until they had been sent to prison, when Bethnal Green and Stepney came into the fray and offered their support. It was a sad position for Herbert, and he and his colleagues of the London Executive cut sorry figures during the outcome of the dispute. Lansbury and his comrades were in gaol for six weeks, but by the end of that time the Government had rushed through Parliament an Act placing the cost of outdoor relief in London for the next twelve months on the Metropolitan Common Poor Fund, thus distributing the burden more equitably between the richer and poorer districts of the metropolis. The Poplar Labour leaders had won their fight, while Morrison had lost his and had good reason to cogitate on the morality of hitting Labour colleagues in the back when they are preoccupied with a fight against the common enemy. That he was right in standing up for equalisation of rates no one would question, but that could not justify the issuing of a letter to the borough parties of London urging them not to support the action of the Poplar Labour Party.

It was in this period of growing unemployment that the battle with the Communist Party began, and even before the question of the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party had been decided in the National Conference of the Labour Party Herbert was leading the struggle against the Communists in the London Labour Party.

In keeping with the decision of the inaugural conference of the Communist Party in 1920, the party branches applied to the local Labour parties for affiliation. The London Labour Party conference was held in November 1920. Here Morrison declared

that 'They [the members of the Labour Movement] had built a movement and they were not going to stand silent or submit to any organisation coming into the party for the purpose of splitting the movement.' The resolution against the affiliation of the Communists was won by 349 votes to 241. He had won round one of a struggle which was to continue for many years.

In June 1921 the issue between the two parties reached the National Labour Party Conference, and the Communist Party's application for affiliation was defeated by 4,115,000 votes to 224,000. What was the struggle about? The Labour Party had declared its aim to be socialism, *i.e.* that the ownership of the means whereby wealth is produced and distributed should become the property of the people by means of nationalisation. So also said the Communist Party. Both agreed that socialism is anti-capitalist and that a socialist policy is an anti-capitalist policy. Both agreed that there was a class struggle going on in society between the capitalists and the working class or proletariat and that this struggle must continue until capitalism was superseded by socialism. Wherein then did they differ?

They differed, as they still differ, in their appreciation of the significance of the social struggle and in the ways and means of achieving socialism. The Labour Party 'recognises' the class struggle, but deplores it and seeks to transcend it by moral persuasion and the political methods of liberalism. The Communist Party declares that the class struggle should be the determinant of policy and therefore that a socialist policy must be based upon the interests of the working class. The Labour Party accepted the economic theories of liberal economists and an interpretation of history which conceived of socialism coming through an organic transformation of prosperous capitalism. The Communist Party held the Marxist view of capitalism passing from crisis to crisis into a general crisis, and socialism coming through social conflict and civil war. To the Labour Party the parliamentary institutions are permanent, though developing, and are the means of political and social change. To the Communist Party these institutions are representative of capitalism, to be used as a means of furthering the class struggle and to be finally replaced by soviets which the Communists regarded as the political institutions of socialist society.

The Communist Party was prepared to accept the constitution

and programme of the Labour Party, while claiming the right to propagate its own views, as in the case of other affiliated parties. But convinced that the Labour Party was moribund, the Communists were prepared to support it only until they could replace it. In its decline and fall the Labour Party would be superseded by the mass 'Communist Party,' the party of the triumphant working class.

The struggle between these two parties, so much in accord in aim and social composition, however different in theoretical opinion as to the course of history and the means to their common end, began at a time when the world revolution had begun and civil war was raging on the continents of Europe and Asia, and these questions were being disputed there amid the clash of arms. Here too the newly developing loyalties to doctrines associated with revolution and counter-revolution engendered a bitterness which on both sides precluded all tolerance. Instead of the giant Labour Party, with more than four million members affiliated to it, treating the newly born small party of not more than ten thousand members with the tolerance of maturity, confident in its capacity to assimilate the varying trends of socialist thought and sure that the application of a socialist policy would remove the basis for the existence of a rival party, intolerance prevailed. The 'little David' attacked the giant and made its application for affiliation in order to destroy the 'Philistines'. The giant fought back, refusing to be destroyed. And the idealism, the comradeship, and even the goal of socialism was lost in mutual recrimination and bitterness.

The question of affiliation of the Communist Party came again before the National Conference of the Labour Party, and this time the Communists were defeated by 3,086,000 votes to 261,000. So the ideological conflict went on, and whatever the voting the Labour Party steadily developed a body of doctrine far in advance of the days when first the working-class movement had struck the path of independence. But as yet none of our three future leaders had stamped his impress upon it.

Then, suddenly, the Coalition Government led by Lloyd George could no longer coalesce. In November 1922 there was a general election in which the Labour Party put forward 414 candidates and 142 of them were elected to Parliament. One of these was Clement Attlee, who was elected by the Limehouse Division of Stepney.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Attlee comes to the Fore

IN THE summer of 1920 Attlee went with a party of friends to Italy for a five weeks' holiday. He was thirty-seven years of age and unmarried. His friends had begun to look upon him as a confirmed bachelor wholly absorbed in his political and social work in the East end of London. He had little leisure time, and what he had was sparingly used in an occasional game of tennis or golf. But his favourite pastime was quietly to smoke a pipe and watch 'the flannelled fools at the wicket.'

This summer, however, he was intent on a more drastic break from work, and Italy attracted him. The holiday proved a landmark in his career. One of the party was a young lady named Violet Millar, and his meeting with her marked the beginning of the end of his bachelor days. Shortly after their return they became engaged, and following a short engagement were married and went to make their home on the outskirts of London, at Stanmore. For many years they lived there, until Attlee became Prime Minister and they moved to 10 Downing Street. To-day they have three daughters, and a son now grown to young manhood.

There were great rejoicings in the new home when, in the election of 1922, Attlee was returned to Parliament. He had done well when he 'bridged the gulf between the middle class and the working class' and had chosen Stepney for his 'bridge.' It is an overwhelmingly working-class constituency, subject to all the ills which usually beset an overcrowded industrial area. A goodly proportion of the population of this district consists of Jews and Irish Catholics. Clement had won the admiration and affection of the people associated with the Mile End Labour Movement. His quiet manner and diligent service to the Labour cause made him the 'natural' candidate of the local socialists.

His election to Parliament brought him new honours and responsibilities. On this occasion the Labour Party superseded the Liberal Party as His Majesty's Opposition, and the Leader of the

Opposition, Ramsay MacDonald, appointed Attlee his Parliamentary Private Secretary. Naturally he had visited the House of Commons many times, listened to the debates, and watched the procedure decked out with a great deal of traditional mumbo-jumbo. There is no doubt, too, that he had become acquainted with the debating calibre of many of the politicians. But it is one thing to be a spectator and another to be a participant. He had little opportunity to become 'acclimatised' to the House of Commons before being called upon to make his first speech. In the debate on the Address he was suddenly called upon to hold forth on the question of unemployment. Without hesitation he rose and spoke with the self-assurance of one long accustomed to dealing with the problem.

He was not acclaimed as a Fox or a Sheridan, a Gladstone or a Lloyd George. He would never reach their standards of oratory, but he would do in the House of Commons what he had done in his own constituency. There he had established himself as a man who had something to say, precise and clear in utterance, seeking to convince by the rationality of his case rather than by the warmth of emotional appeals. This he has done also in the House of Commons, and in the process the sincerity of the man has shone through his work.

But the 1922 Parliament was short-lived. The ruling classes were divided on fiscal questions. The majority of the Tories wanted their hands free for a full protectionist policy and were of the opinion that the time was ripe to push it through. The Government therefore resigned in order that the Tories might get a mandate for this purpose.

In the meantime, at the national conference of the Labour Party which preceded the election of 1923, Attlee let himself in for a severe political defeat. He had been greatly disillusioned by the war of 1914–18 and its outcome, and almost became a complete pacifist. He had shown this early in 1919 when he was Mayor of Stepney. Asked by Lord Esher to assist in a recruiting campaign for the Territorials, he had answered, 'I am not prepared to do anything in the matter. After four years of active service I have seen every ideal I fought for betrayed at the Paris Peace Conference.'[1]

At the Labour Party Conference of 1923 he was in the same

[1] *News Review*, March 15th, 1937.

mood, for he supported the pacifist resolution of the Independent Labour Party, moved by Hudson, that 'This Conference is of the opinion that it should be the policy of the Labour Party in Parliament to vote against all military and naval estimates.' This resolution had been put forward after the conference had agreed that party policy should be to demand of the Government the calling of an international conference for the purpose of securing international disarmament by agreement among the nations of the world.

Attlee, supporting the proposal for unilateral disarmament, said:

> '. . . It has been suggested that we should be tying up the Labour Party in the House of Commons if we gave them orders to vote steadily against all military expenditure. That might have been true ten years ago, when the only alternative to turning out a Liberal Government was to put in a Conservative Government, but to-day we have a party which is prepared to put into operation a different policy. If we went to the whole world and said we were against armaments, and at the same time we continued to vote for armaments we should only be piling up the great heap of British hypocrisy. It has been said we shall be in an awkward position when we come into power, but this will not be so if the abandonment of armaments is part of the general policy. At any rate, I maintain that so long as we have capitalist governments we cannot trust them with armaments, even though they may say that those armaments are not intended to be used. But when Labour comes into power, our first duty will be to call this World Conference for Peace. Our first duty will not be that of reducing the Army in order to increase the Navy, or reducing the Navy in order to increase the Air Force, or reducing the Air Force in order to increase the gas bombs. Our policy will be a universal reduction of armaments. I know that in the meantime we shall require some small armaments. I know something about armies, and I know that we cannot demobilise all arms in one week. But there is all the difference in the world between making a temporary arrangement with regard to armaments, until we can do away with armaments, and in voting for armaments for Governments that are carrying out a policy to which the Party is opposed. . . .'

Henderson dealt with Attlee ruthlessly. He answered him by saying:

'If this resolution is more than a gesture—and I am not sure, after that speech, that it is—it is absolutely absurd and foolish. . . . I should like my friend Major Attlee to say what it meant to carry it out logically. . . . We should have to tell the world that . . . if Labour was returned to power in two years, the first thing we should have to do would be to scrap all the Army, all the Navy, all the Air Force, regardless of the position the nation might be in and regardless of the menacing attitude that other nations might be taking up. . . .'

The resolution was defeated by 2,116,000 votes. Whether Attlee was convinced by Henderson that he was wrong or whether he decided to drop the argument as a result of the voting I don't know. But after the General Election of 1923 MacDonald was called upon to form a Government and in this, the first Labour Government, Attlee received the appointment of Under Secretary of State for War! We hear no more of unilateral disarmament from him either during the lifetime of that Labour Government or subsequently.

MacDonald described the first Labour Government as an 'insane miracle.' What there was either insane or miraculous about it no one has since attempted to explain. To anyone other than MacDonald it appeared to be the natural sequel to the political awakening of the working class, the process of detaching it from the Liberal Party, and its organisation under independent Labour leadership. This process had not gone far enough to give the Labour Party a majority in Parliament. In the 1922 election it put the Liberal Party in eclipse and in 1923 it won 191 seats, having contested 427. Although the Tory Party had won 258 seats it had not a majority over the Liberals and Labour combined. When the King's speech was read in Parliament, therefore, the Labour Party promptly moved a vote of no confidence, and with Liberal Party support defeated the Tories by 328 votes to 256. The Baldwin Government resigned and passed the buck to the Labour Party, knowing full well that at any moment it could repeat the process in reverse. The new Labour Government, in fact, could only be a 'caretaker government,' holding office by kind permission of the coalition of the opposition. On no account would it be permitted to promote any fundamental measure from its own programme, and the shadow of defeat was to hang over it from the moment of its formation to its inglorious end nine months later.

Disappointment and disillusionment dogged it from the first weeks of its existence. The Labour Movement had great expectations. It thought that its own government would be something very different from previous governments, and found it difficult to appreciate that it had not the power to implement its socialist programme. It proceeded to function more or less as a Liberal Government, yet lacking any agreement with the Liberal Party. Its first action was to sign the Dawes Report, which had been prepared by the Tory Government. This report was the Allied bankers' insurance policy against revolution in Germany, providing loans to her to restore her private economy and pay reparations. To the surprise of every socialist, there was no immediate recognition of Soviet Russia, and when negotiations began between the two governments MacDonald advanced the same demands as the Baldwin Government had done. Only after months of delay and a considerable outcry from the Labour Movement were *chargés d'Affaires* appointed by the two Powers. Arthur Henderson was rebuked by Ramsay MacDonald for being so tactless as to remember that the Labour Party election programme had declared that the 'British Government should call an International Conference (including Germany on equal terms) to deal with the revision of the Versailles Treaty, especially with regard to reparations and debts.'

In domestic affairs it made some concessions to the unemployed workers and improved relief conditions. Its most popular measure was the Wheatley Housing Act, which facilitated on a large scale the building of working-class houses that private enterprise could not supply at rents which working people could pay. But its most unfortunate experience was its relation to the trade unions. A strike of locomotive men was on when the Government was formed. During the nine months of its existence there were two dock strikes, a shipyard lock-out, an unofficial underground-railway workers' strike in London, a strike of tramwaymen and bus workers, and a threat of a miners' strike. Prices had begun to rise again and the workers were determined to recover some of their recent losses. The worst situation of all was that created during the dockers' strike of February 1924, when the Government appointed Josiah Wedgwood as chief civil commissioner under the Emergency Powers Act—an Act which every member of the Government had denounced in unmeasured terms. When

Labour leaders began to talk to Labour leaders about bloodshed and civil war, things had got to a pretty pass. After the strike had been defeated Ernest Bevin exclaimed: 'I wish it had been a Tory Government in office. We would not have been frightened by their threats. We were bound to listen to the appeal of our own people.'

In August 1924 the 'caretaker Government' failed to take care, and the Attorney General mishandled the prosecution of J. R. Campbell, the editor of *The Workers' Weekly*, a Communist newspaper, for calling upon the soldiers not to fire on strikers. The prosecution was started and then stopped, as if somebody had thought better of it. This brought the Tories and Liberals together in the House of Commons, and down came the Government, its fall timed nicely to prevent the signing of a trade agreement with Soviet Russia.

Had the Labour Government had a clear working-class policy its life might have been shorter, but the workers and the people at large would have known what it was attempting to do and it would not have shocked its supporters. But its attempt to 'run with the hare and hunt with the hounds' proved to be a most unhappy venture. It certainly gave Clement Attlee and others a short experience of administrative responsibility, but that can hardly be regarded as a justification for its existence. It also angered Bevin, who made it clear at the Labour Party Conference following its fall that he was opposed to repeating the experiment. He moved a resolution on behalf of his union that: 'This Conference is of the opinion that in view of the experience of the recent Labour Government, it is inadvisable that the Labour Party should again accept office whilst having a minority of Members in the House of Commons.'

Ernest had no qualms of conscience about theoretical deviations. He was a 'practical' man judging by 'practical' experience. He began by saying that he thought all of them would have voted for the Labour Party taking office if the question had been submitted to a conference. But now that they had had the experience of office under exceptional circumstances and his union thought it was inadvisable for the Party to take office when the condition for getting any legislation passed was a continuous compromise with other people.

> 'I want to suggest,' he said, 'with a fairly good knowledge of trade unionists, that what they wanted was as straight a line in

politics as they were compelled to take in industrial affairs, and if the great mass of working men in the country knew that if they wanted legislation as laid down by the Conference they must give the Party a majority, it would be a very clear position, and if they did not give the Party a majority they would know they could not have the legislation which was promoted by the Conference.'

Turning now to his personal experience, he continued:

'I do not know whether you question my position as trade unionists, but I do know the standard that is set for me as a negotiator: and why you should set up a different standard for me as a negotiator for wages from that which you set for the politician who has greater power in the House of Commons, I can't imagine. You have had your experience in Government by a minority, and you know that when the great issue arose on Russia and the other parties did not like it, then the Labour Party was turned out bag and baggage. That was not good enough, and if I were in Parliament and called upon to take office and represent a great movement like ours, I would not accept it unless, when I spoke to the representatives of other nations or to our own people in the House of Commons, I was able to speak with the power which rested on the knowledge that I had a majority behind me both inside and outside in the nation. Anything less than that, at this stage of our development, I believe will be fatal to our strength and fatal to our ultimate victory.'

There was tremendous excitement in the Conference of nearly a thousand delegates. Such downright speech-making was rare in any conference. Up jumped J. H. Thomas to reply with all the wiles of an experienced negotiator and politician. He propounded a hypothetical situation which might occur. He supposed that the Labour Party in Opposition in the House supported the miners in an industrial dispute, forced a crisis, and the Government resigned. In the appeal to the country the Labour Party was returned in greater numbers, but had not a majority and was again invited to take office, should the Labour Party refuse? The people had said by their vote that they favoured Labour's industrial policy, but if they voted for Mr. Bevin's resolution they would have to say, 'Notwithstanding that fact, the other people must go on with their mischief. A more absurd and ridiculous situation could not arise.'

But John Bromley of the locomotive men strongly supported

Bevin and so did the veteran Ben Tillett. Finally MacDonald rolled into the debate with a seemingly unending diatribe. 'Did the Labour Government do nothing that was going to remain permanently to the credit of the Party?' he asked. He wished somebody else would talk about that, but—

> 'All I would say is that we have had many governments since Walpole started as the first Prime Minister. We have had many governments that were good, many bad, and many indifferent, but when you and I are dead, and when our children are dead, and when a more remote succession of generations read of the old twentieth century, I do not think it is flattering the Labour Government or flattering the Party if I say they would then be loud in their praise when they read that, in the year 1924, the men from the pits, the men from the factories, and the men from the fields, coming into office with a minority and as a minority, and for the first time breaking the record in that respect, accomplished as Labour Ministers a work that would be enshrined in the records of the British people. Is that finished? I am not going to say "Yes" and I am not going to say "No," but I ask you to reject the resolution, because if you tie our candidates and our Party with a resolution like that you will be putting them in a very silly position. When we have a by-election, for instance, all the Tories will have to do in order to put them in a false position with the electors will be to point to this resolution and say: "What is the use of electing those people?" Still worse, when a general election comes. They will simply show how far the Party must go before we can get half the Members, and they will say, "It is impossible for them to get their half, so do not waste your vote upon people who will take no responsibility except the responsibility of criticism."'

And on he went with words and more words about 'team spirit,' and the grindstone of reality.'

When Bevin got up to reply to the debate he could not help showing his utter contempt for MacDonald. The latter had swept the Conference with his oratory and emotions were deeply stirred, but Bevin was not to be deterred by that. His uncompromising directness roused an outcry at once.

> 'If ever we have had an example of the politician's clever art we have had it in the speech which has just been delivered.'

A big section of the Conference shouted its disapproval. But

instead of that causing him to be cautious it made him more determined in his course. He waited a moment and then said:

'I do not want to be interrupted. I did not interrupt Mr. MacDonald and I am fighting with as much intensity for the well-being of the Labour Party as Mr. MacDonald; and with as much intensity as I fought the Communists yesterday, I am going to fight the dictatorial attitude of Mr. MacDonald to-day. We have been told that if we declared our position to be that we must have a majority, then it will be useless to go into an election. If that were true, there never would have been a Labour Member on the floor of the House of Commons. A declaration of that character is enough to make Keir Hardie turn in his grave. Are we not as young men at the street corners—and although I am a Labour leader I have not forgotten the doctrines I taught on the soap-box twenty years ago—are we not as young men, always preaching about the independence of the Labour Party? The speech we have listened to this afternoon is typical of Mr. MacDonald. It is the old Leicester arrangement over again.'

This irritated a large section of the Conference; many yelled 'No!' and there was much interruption. But Bevin's voice boomed across the conference hall. 'Yes,' he shouted,' I have never forgotten the tactics with Gordon Hewart and the Liberals before the war.'

That brought disorder. The chairman intervened and told him he should not deal with matters which had occurred before the war. Delegates said he shouldn't be 'personal.' After several minutes' excited challenge and counter-challenge between Bevin and the members of the audience the chairman told him to 'Go right on.'

Bevin answered, 'I am going on,' and there was no doubt about that. On he went, careless of offending the MacDonald hero-worshippers whoever they might be.

'I want to quote Mr. MacDonald's words used during a big industrial dispute, which were to the effect that unless the Labour Government was going to get more consideration from the trade unions promoting their industrial policy than it was getting at the moment, it would be thrown out neck and crop. My executive has had to consider that, and in favouring this resolution we believe we are interpreting the feeling of the mass

Photo : *Picture Post*

Social Worker 1912

Photo : *Central Press*

Member of the War Cabinet 1940

Photo : *Picture Post*

Prime Minister 1946

Clement Attlee

of the men who occupied positions in the last Labour Government. I have heard ex-Cabinet Ministers say their position was one of compromise, that they were always having to negotiate, and I have heard them declare that if they were asked to hold office again under such conditions they would refuse. Now, if they said that to me in private, why did they not get up and say it in public on the platform?

'. . . Mr. MacDonald has said he would rather have a minority Government under certain conditions than a majority Government under other conditions. That is a difficult thing to work out.'

It was too much for Bevin to work out too, and he left it for the wiser politicians to ponder over. After trying to make sense of other points of MacDonald's speech he asked that: 'It should be laid down as a clear policy that we are an independent Labour Party representing the great working class of the country, which is opposing capital and forcing us to stand in a solid phalanx until the battle is fought out and won on both the industrial and political fields.'

Bevin had forgotten that the Labour Party had abandoned such a policy as far back as 1918, when it had declared itself not a 'class party' but a 'people's party,' a party of all classes carrying on the traditional policy of Liberalism in their party relationships without giving theoretical consideration to anything other then the immediate situation.

Bevin's resolution was defeated by 2,587,000 votes to 512,000. So, similarly was the party in the election of 1924, when the Tories scared the electors with the forged 'Zinoviev letter.' Ramsay MacDonald's antics in handling the situation created by this obvious piece of fabrication were amazing. Yet so strong was his personal influence upon the Labour Party that he was never taken to task. Instead of promptly denouncing the document as an obvious forgery, obvious from its content and its signatures, he allowed the Tories a free run with their campaign in the most decisive days of the election. The 'Zinoviev Letter' had three signatures—'Zinoviev, MacManus and Inkpin.' MacManus and Inkpin were in this country. They were British citizens. If they had signed the letter they should have been prosecuted and tried, at least for sedition if not for treason. For the letter was instructing Communists to prepare armed revolt. MacManus was the

chairman of the Communist Party and Albert Inkpin its general secretary. It would have been perfectly easy to test the validity of the signatures. Instead MacDonald ignored the existence of MacManus and Inkpin because they were British Communists and adopted an equivocal attitude to Zinoviev because he was the chairman of the Communist International. No more disgraceful episode than this marks the history of British Labour's relations with Soviet Russia. Although the party contested 67 more seats in the 1924 elections than in 1923, it lost 40 seats net and the Tories were returned to power. The Labour Party had increased its vote by more than million, but the Tories had increased theirs by more than two millions.

Clement Attlee again won the Limehouse division of Stepney. In opposition he again worked in close association with Ramsay MacDonald. This brought him its reward in due course. In 1927, on the recommendation of MacDonald, he and Vernon Hartshorn were appointed members of the Indian Statutory Commision under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon. This Commission, which became famous as the Simon Commission, was appointed under the Government of India Act of 1919 to make a full report on the political and social life of India and whether and to what extent it was desirable to establish the principle of self-government, etc.

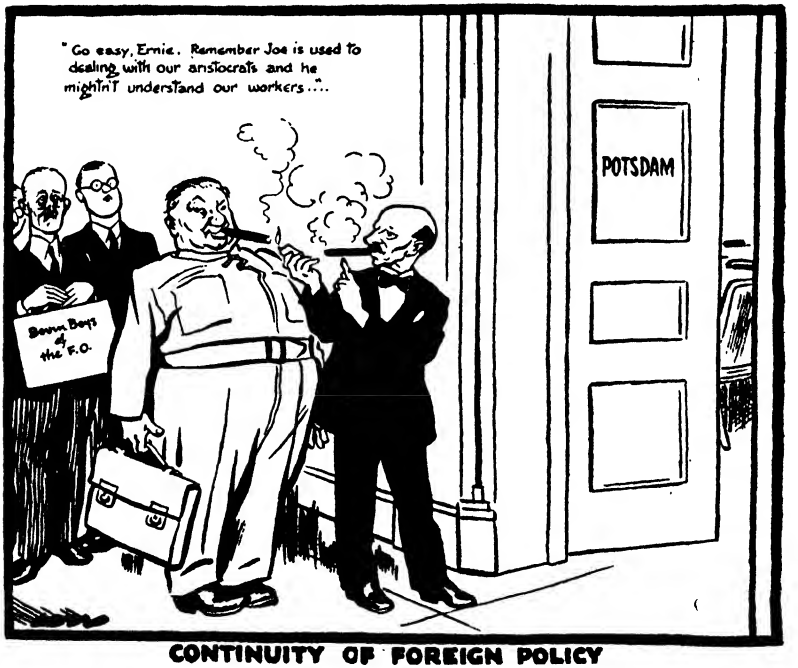
It is doubtful, indeed, whether Attlee ever dreamed he would become Prime Minister of a Labour Government with power to declare that India should have complete independence the moment her people produced a constitution of their own! He knew that the Labour Party was committed to such a course, but he knew little of India and her problems. Whatever else may be said of his participation in the Simon Commission, it certainly presented him with a unique opportunity to study the country and her people at first hand.

For two years he travelled with the other Commission members from one end of the vast country to the other, interviewed representatives of every political group and organisation, investigated the social conditions, studied the economic problems, and finally, at the end of four years' work, produced a report which has been universally recognised as one of the most comprehensive of its kind.

His wife went with him, and together they saw the splendour

and the misery of the East, its riches and unparalleled degradation, its capital and its great monuments, its industrial areas round Bombay and the primitive huts of the natives in the Nilgiri Hills. They crossed India into Burma and came down to Mandalay, then went back into India, to the cities of Calcutta and Madras, Peshawar and Mandura.

Wherever they went they collected their facts, discussed the opinions of innumerable people of all kinds and of every social strata. Clement approached his task as a research worker rather than a political advocate. He was simply one of the Commission, and neither he nor Hartshorn, his Labour colleague, offered any independent opinions in the Commission report. Consequently when the Commission returned to England this report was unanimous. Nevertheless it was a valuable experience.



CONTINUITY OF FOREIGN POLICY

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Ernest Bevin on the 'General Staff'

BEVIN WAS forty-four years of age when at the Scarborough Congress of the Trades Unions in 1925 he was for the first time elected to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. He was in the prime of life and now recognised as one of the most powerful personalities of the Trades Union Movement. Physically strong, with a full, broad face, eloquent and often passionate in speech, he could impress himself on any audience. Now the recognised head of his own union stepped into the executive of Labour's industrial parliament ready to extend his influence and power over the whole working class. There were other powerful leaders on this 'General Staff,' such as J. H. Thomas and J. R. Clynes, but Bevin was soon to eclipse them and make his position as unchallengeable as that of Samuel Gompers in the American Federation of Labour.

The Congress which elected him to the headquarters of British trade unionism marked the beginning of the end of a whole historical period in the British working-class movement. It was the Congress before the General Strike of 1926, which precipitated it into the shadows of defeat and reaction far outstripping the dark years following 'Black Friday' of 1921. And once again the mining industry was the 'Little Belgium' of the industrial conflict.

The working class had recovered quickly from its defeats in 1921 and 1922, as was clearly evident in the General Elections of 1923 and 1924. In 1918 the Labour Party polled 2,244,945 votes. In 1923 it polled 4,348,379 and in 1924 5,487,620. The advent of the Labour Government took away from the leadership of the trades unions several of what were euphemistically called 'the more cautious trade union officials,' namely Thomas, Clynes, Margaret Bondfield, and the leadership of the General Council of the Trade Union Congress passed into the hands of Purcell of the Furnishing Trades Union, Cook of the Miners Federation, and Swales of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. These were

identified with the 'class struggle' elements of the working-class movement, and their politics were most clearly focused by the Communist Party although they were not members of it.

The Minority Movement which pursued the communist policy within the trade unions made a practice of convening national conferences of trade unionists early each year to review the position of the industrial working class and submitted considered resolutions of policy, which they took back to the trade union branches with a view to having them placed on the agenda of the Trades Union Congress, and to getting delegates elected to support them.

The 1924 Trades Union Congress held in Hull under the chairmanship of Albert Purcell, was the first to receive a trade union delegation from Soviet Russia. Whatever else the Labour Government may have done, by its recognition of the Soviet Government and the establishing of almost normal relations between the two, it cleared the way for a new relationship between the British and Soviet trade unions. The Trades Union Congress in return sent a delegation to Soviet Russia, and this came back with a remarkable report which exercised a great influence on the trade unions especially. And this meant an increase in class consciousness among the workers and a strengthening of class-struggle politics. However the members of the Labour Government might view their position, the working class thought of it as their government and the coming of the Soviet trade union delegation as a growth of international working-class solidarity.

Ever since the formation of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress in 1921 there had been a widespread agitation, focused in the main by the Minority Movement, for the investment of greater powers in the General Council to make it really into a 'General Staff' of the industrial movement. In 1924 the General Council itself brought forward proposals with this end in view, and Bevin can be credited with considerable responsibility for the shaping of the new powers now vested in the General Council. One of the greatest stumbling-blocks to the centralisation of power in this Council, or any other council of the unions, has been that of 'union autonomy.' No union wishes to surrender its power to decide the terms of the settlement of any dispute, even when other unions have been called into sympathetic action. It was this which to some extent led to the collapse of the Triple Alliance

and caused much of the trouble which befell the General Strike of 1926.

The miners in 1921 would not surrender their 'sovereignty' to the Triple Alliance because they believed that the other union leaders would trick them into accepting wage reductions. The outcome justified them in this belief, for the grievance of Bevin and Thomas was the refusal of the Miners' Executive to confirm what they considered an offer by Hodges to negotiate wage reductions. Had that particular offer been accepted, neither Bevin nor the other leaders would have complained about the organisational defects of the Triple Alliance.

The new powers of the Council sought to overcome the difficulties arising from this 'union autonomy' by implication rather than direct methods. It now became a rule for all unions to keep the Council informed of all disputes which involved large numbers of workers. The Council would not intervene if there was a prospect of amicable settlement by the parties concerned. Should there be a deadlock 'of a character as to directly or indirectly involve other bodies of workpeople affiliated to the Trades Union Congress in a stoppage of work and/or to imperil standard wages or hours and conditions of employment,' the Council might offer advice and if necessary report to Congress. Then comes the clause which contains the assumption that with the acceptance of the Council's advice the Council remains in charge of the proceedings to effect a settlement. For if the advice of the Council is accepted by the union concerned and still 'the policy of the employer enforces a stoppage of work by strikes or lock-out, the Council shall forthwith take steps to organise on behalf of the union or unions concerned all such moral and material support as the circumstances of the dispute may appear to justify.'

Nowhere does the clause explicitly state that once the union has accepted the Council's advice the settlement and the conduct of the dispute, if the terms are not approved by the union or unions directly concerned, must remain in the hands of the Council. And that was the snag in the structure of the Triple Alliance. Bevin held the view that once the miners or any other partner of the Alliance asked the Alliance for help and that help was given them, the Alliance as a whole should decide the settlement. The refusal of the miners to accept wage reductions when the Alliance was prepared to accept wage reductions for them broke the

Alliance. The refusal of the miners to accept wage reductions when the General Council was prepared to accept wage reductions for them led to the collapse of the General Strike which the General Council organised for them.

The new powers of the General Council were quickly put to the test in 1925. The mine owners demanded wage reductions and district settlements. The miners appealed to the Trades Union Congress and the latter backed the miners in their resistance to these demands. The General Council called together the executives of the unions, who alone had power to call strikes. This brought Ernest Bevin into the foreground before he became a member of the General Council. In January of that year the Minority Movement called a national conference, attended by six hundred delegates representing some six hundred thousand workers. The conference launched a campaign with the slogan 'All in behind the miners.' The engineers took the initiative in an effort to form a quadruple Alliance to replace the Triple Alliance. This was to include the engineers as well as the miners, transport workers, and railwaymen. But this broke on the rock of union sovereignty, and nothing came of it. After a special Trades Union Congress held on June 29th, a month before the wage reductions were due to take effect, the General Council convened a conference of trade union executives. It was intended to deal only with the unemployment position, but most of the time was occupied with the miners' question. On July 20th, two days before the cuts were to be applied, the Conference of Trade Union Executives met and the leaders, Bevin, Thomas, and Cramp of the railwaymen, dominated the situation. Bevin and Cramp for the executive prepared a scheme for the application of a complete embargo on the transport of coal in the event of the mine owners not withdrawing their notices of wage reductions.

Amidst great excitement the Conference sent Stephen Walsh, a miners' M.P., as leader of a deputation to the Parliamentary Labour Party to ask it to obstruct all business in the House of Commons until the demands of the miners were met. At the last moment Mr. Baldwin called a nine months' truce on the basis of a subsidy of £20,000,000 to the mine owners to maintain the existing wage levels. So there was no embargo and no strike. The day was Friday, and was promptly designated 'Red Friday.' The 'General Staff' had functioned. A victory had been won. Working-

class solidarity was triumphant and a new fervour of enthusiasm swept through the ranks of Labour.

Bevin's reputation rose, but his pet aversion in the Labour Party, Ramsay MacDonald, was thoroughly annoyed. He declared that: 'The Government have handed over the appearance at any rate of victory to the very forces that sane, well considered, thoroughly examined socialism feels to be probably its greatest enemy. If the Government had fought their policy out we would have respected it. It just suddenly doubled up.'

He had really no need to be so petulant. The Government had not finished with the situation. It had conducted a strategic retreat only in order to fight better. A truce is a truce and not the end of matters. A date had been fixed for a show-down nine months later.

The Scarborough Trades Union Congress, meeting a few weeks after Red Friday, was flushed with a sense of triumph and full of enthusiasm: but despite the fact that everybody knew there was a time-limit to the terms of the victory, neither Ernest Bevin nor anyone else in the Congress raised the question of what should be done at the end of the nine months. There was a general decision to resist wage reductions and that was all.

But the Congress was outstanding in other respects. Just prior to the Congress the Minority Movement had organised another demonstration conference greater than the one held the previous January, and many of its representative leaders were present as delegates at Scarborough. As a result of the influence of its members in the trade unions it had succeeded also during the intervening months in getting its resolutions on to the agenda of the Congress. These resolutions were all based upon the class-struggle policy of the revolutionaries and included proposals for 'increasing the power of the General Council,' 'international trade union unity,' 'resistance to wage cuts,' 'denunciation of British Imperialism,' and so on. The General Council was still in the hands of the 'left' and again a Soviet trade union delegation was present, strengthening the 'leftward' trend. Harry Pollitt led the 'left' on the floor of the Congress and with slight modification the 'class-struggle' resolutions swept through the gathering.

But the defeat of the Labour Government had released Thomas, Clynes, and Margaret Bondfield from governmental obligations, and the Congress elections brought them back on to the General

Council. This was the occasion, too, when Bevin was elected to the General Council. It was the last Congress for Fred Bramley, who died shortly afterwards and was succeeded as General Secretary by Walter Citrine. Here, therefore, was a team antipathetic to the resolutions passed by the Congress and definitely antagonistic to the Minority Movement which had engineered them. The tide of working-class solidarity had carried its resolutions through the Congress, but it had not flooded the unions sufficiently to bring about a corresponding change in the leadership. For class-struggle politics did not characterise the outlook of these leaders.

They certainly implemented the decision of the Congress to set up an Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Unity Committee, and it functioned until it went down with the defeat of the miners in the aftermath of the General Strike. But neither the Congress nor the General Council made the slightest preparation to meet the situation when the 'truce' should end. Instead Bevin and his colleagues appeared to be entirely pre-occupied with the significance of the growth of the Minority Movement in the trade unions and the failure of the Labour Party to rid itself of Communist influence.

A considerable proportion of the delegates to the Trades Union Congress, including most of the leaders, went straight from Scarborough to the Annual Conference of the Labour Party at Liverpool. St. George's Hall presented a remarkable scene as the Conference opened. It was full to capacity. The accommodation not taken by delegates was filled by visitors. On the platform were the leaders of the Party: MacDonald, Henderson, Clynes, Cramp, Lansbury, Williams and Morrison. In the body of the hall, among the delegates, were Bevin, Thomas, and many another well known trades union leader.

Everybody sensed that this was to be a decisive Conference in the conflict with the Communist Party. What the latter had done through the Minority Movement for the Trades Union Congress it had done through its members inside the local Labour parties and the trade unions for the Labour Party Conference. It had succeeded in placing on the agenda resolutions on every aspect of policy, and here were some of its best known leaders to support the resolutions in the Conference itself. Pollitt, Gallacher, and others were present in force, for although the Communist Party had been refused affiliation, there was still no bar against the

unions electing Communists to the Conference or against Communists as individual members of the Labour Party. But the leaders of the Party were determined that what had happened at Scarborough should not happen at Liverpool.

And it did not. Not one resolution sponsored by the Communists received the support of the Conference. They were again refused the affiliation of their party, and this time resolutions were passed banning Communists from individual membership, while the unions were advised not to elect them as delegates to the Local Labour Parties or to the National Conference.

But if in its preoccupation with the Communists the Conference omitted to consider the coming end of the 'truce,' the Government was not so neglectful. It began at once to prepare for 'a national emergency.' At the end of September it announced the formation of an Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies. Taking the Labour Party decisions on the isolation of the Communists as a signal, it also attacked the Communist Party, initiated a prosecution of twelve of its leaders, and sought a decision in the courts to make the Communist Party illegal. It failed in the latter, but six of the Communist leaders were sentenced to six months' imprisonment and six to twelve months on the sedition charge.

The working-class movement of this country was faced by the most astounding situation of its history. The Government was openly pursuing a class-war policy. It had taken a political decision to devalue the currency, conscious that such a devaluation meant a wholesale attack upon the wage standards of the working class. Declaring that 'the wages of all the workers must come down' it prepared for civil war. It did not do this surreptitiously but openly. Baldwin, the Prime Minister, said, when the trade union threatened the embargo on the transport of coal, that 'in the event of the trade union threat being put into operation he would muster all the forces of the State to crush them.'

The Trades Union Congress of Scarborough had pledged its support of the miners against wage reductions knowing full well that if the miners accepted these every other body of workers would have to do likewise. This was an obvious class-struggle decision, meaning, if it had any serious meaning at all, that the Trades Union Congress was pledged at least to repeat the defence arrangements which had produced 'Red Friday.' But it referred neither to the means whereby they would affirm their solidarity

with the miners nor the implications of any measures such as those which had produced 'Red Friday' should the Government not be ready to extend the subsidy or go back upon its political decision on the restoration of the gold standard. At Liverpool, the repudiation of class-struggle politics which involved direct mass action was confirmed, and the previous reticence about action to follow the truce was continued.

Although Morrison did not speak here on the banning of Communist membership, he was a member of the Executive which decided on this course and wholly agreed with it. Attlee did not speak either, but also agreed with the measure. Bevin did speak, as usual attacking the Communists not because of their 'left' politics but as 'union splitters.'

These three rising leaders joined therefore with the old leaders, Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson, and the rest, in rejecting not only the affiliation of the Communist Party but in a purge of Communists from the Labour Party, and emphatically rejected all the direct-actionist resolutions of the Conference, steering the Labour Party sharply towards its complete adoption of Parliamentarianism. This decision was made on ideological grounds without the slightest reference to the impending direct-action crisis that lay only six months ahead.

Those intervening months were occupied by a tremendous campaign by the Miners Federation, whose Secretary, Arthur Cook, along with all 'left' groups, Communist Party, Minority Movement, Labour's 'left-wing' *Workers' Weekly*, *Lansbury's Weekly*, etc., shouted: 'Not a Penny off the Pay. Not a Minute on the Day.' But neither the General Council of the Trades Union Congress nor the Labour headquarters made a move until the Samuel Commission's Report on the Mining Industry was published in March and the dead-line was fixed for May 1st, 1926. Then Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party, 'saw the stars in their course were moving in our favour.' The miners saw their wages coming down.

The miners, the Trades Union Congress, and the Labour Party had collaborated in presenting the Labour case to the Commission. In February, prior to the publication of the report, all three bodies had agreed that there should be no reduction in wages, no increase in hours, and no district agreements. When the report was issued the Industrial Committee of the Party and the Congress

made no observations, apparently waiting for the considered views of the miners. When the miners asked them to re-affirm the previous attitude they declined, on the grounds that circumstances had changed. Evidently the astrological approach of Ramsay MacDonald to the report coincided with that of the General Council and really meant that the demands of the miners constituted the 'distant point' of their ambitions and they were prepared to accept something less, including wage reductions.

This difference of attitude between the miners and the leaders of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, revealed only after the publication of the Commission's Report, marked the beginning of the end of the struggle which precipitated the working-class movement into the grim days of defeat.

By policy determined in Conference after Conference, and especially that of 1923, the Labour Movement was committed against preparing for a general strike, to limiting mass action to collective bargaining, and preventing any dispute from reaching the stage of a direct fight for political power by mass conflict. The Communists, on the other hand, wanted no compromise on the demands of the miners, preparation for a general strike, and preparedness to follow the logic of the class struggle and develop the contest for power if the Government and the mine owners continued to refuse the miners' demands.

Hence it was that the Industrial Committee of the Congress moved into action with a declaration that the Labour Movement would 'render the miners the fullest possible support in resisting a degradation of the standard of life and to obtain an equitable settlement of their case with regard to wages, hours, and national agreements.' The Miners' Conference had said, however, 'That no assent be given to any proposal for increasing the length of the working day, that the principle of a national wage agreement with a national minimum percentage be firmly adhered to, that inasmuch as wages are already too low we cannot assent to any proposal for reduced wages.'

Here was a striking difference between the miners and the Trades Union Congress; yet after the Industrial Committee's statement was issued the miners interpreted it as supporting their own decision.

Lock-out notices were posted by the mine owners, to expire on April 30th 1926, and the Industrial Committee of the Congress

reported to the General Council and arranged for a Conference of Trades Union Executives. This endorsed the policy of the Industrial Committee as distinct from that of the miners. Negotiations with the Government were begun and the whole working-class movement was in a state of excitement. Here the question of 'union sovereignity' began to enter the situation. The General Council had taken the dispute in hand in consultation with the miners, but who should be the final arbiter on the terms to be accepted—the General Council or the miners?

Negotiations broke down and were resumed with not a little confusion between the two. The Conference of Executives was in session on Sunday, May 2nd, and had been in session since April 29th waiting for success to attend the efforts at a compromise decision. The Conference was held in the Memorial Hall, London, a drab place at the best of times and hardly a fit setting for the spectacle of men and women alight with the prospect of a struggle upon which the fate of all society would depend. The trade union secretaries and executives who filled the hall were quiet, cautious, fairly sure something would emerge out of the negotiations as Ernest Bevin and his colleagues strove with might and main to negotiate a compromise which the miners would accept and avoid a sympathetic strike which would be of such dimensions as to warrant it being designated a 'general strike.'

Twenty years later Bevin told the House of Commons what had precipitated the General Strike.

> 'On Sunday, May 2nd,' he said 'we were within five minutes of a settlement. Documents, which are still in my possession, were drafted. We were to submit them to the miners and others at No. 11, Downing Street. Suddenly, a message came into us that the negotiations were off. We had not time to hand in our documents. We do not know what happened. Then we enquired and were told, 'It is the *Daily Mail* incident.' I have a copy of that night's paper in my pocket now. The document I have was objected to—on what grounds? Not on the grounds of the General Strike, but because the proprietor of that paper wanted to use the type heading 'For King and Country' in order to bring the King into an industrial dispute. I ask the country to use its own judgement as to what base usages these people will descend.'

The printers, without instructions from anybody, had refused to continue printing the paper. Ernest pursued his story.

> 'What happened? I am sorry that the right honourable member for Woodford [Winston Churchill] is not in his place. He dashed up to Downing Street, ordered a meeting of the Cabinet, rushed Baldwin off his feet—if he was awake—and in a few minutes the ultimatum was given to us and the country was thrown into this terrible turmoil, when within the same few minutes it might have been saved.'

Bevin and the rest of the deputation arrived back at the Memorial Hall just before midnight on May 2nd. The Government chose to regard the unofficial strike of the printers as an 'overt act' beginning the General Strike, and the ultimatum was that the Government would require from the Trade Union Committee both a repudiation of the actions of the printers and an unconditional withdrawal of the instructions for the General Strike. There was no escape. The Government had planned for this 'emergency.' Had they been anxious to avoid it they had had the opportunity, for nothing stands out so clearly as the facts (1) that the Labour Movement had a policy based upon the rejection of the General Strike and all its implications. (2) the trade union leaders, and none more so than Bevin, had striven to negotiate a compromise decision, and (3) they had taken no measures to prepare the working-class movement for anything beyond exercising pressure to secure such a compromise.

The scene in the Memorial Hall when Thomas and Bevin faced the conference of Executives with their failure to pull off the compromise, and with the challenge of the Government, was transformed. Thomas reported on the negotiating efforts and Bevin outlined what must be done. Here again Ernest showed that even though he and his colleagues had been forced into actions they did not want to take, they would frustrate, as far as they could, the transformation of the strike into a conscious fight for power. Addressing the Conference on the Saturday morning, he outlined the limits of the call-out, specifying which groups of workers should come out and which stay at work. The Conference cheered and cheered, and instead of singing 'Lead, kindly Light' all lustily joined in singing 'The Red Flag,' and the strike was on.

On Monday, May 3rd, amid tremendous enthusiasm, millions of workers packed their tools, and on May 4th the wheels of

industry slowed down and whole sections came to a complete standstill. The newspapers and the railways stopped. Coal production ceased and large sections of road transport suspended working.

But the Government was ready. The country had been divided into nine divisions, having a central controller in each division with a semi-military apparatus. Military forces were at their disposal and soldiers were confined to barracks. The principal parks of the metropolis were commandeered and Hyde Park became a military camp. The police were mobilised and special constables called up. The Home Secretary made an appeal for volunteers whose purpose was strike-breaking. Winston Churchill was put in charge of a Government newspaper. The headquarters of the Communist Party were raided and their printing press stripped of vital parts. The Government had its apparatus ready for civil war and all of it was moved into position.

The workers responded to the strike call with a unanimity which amazed everybody. At the trade union headquarters everything to cope with the new situation had to be improvised, and it is universally recognised that in this crisis Bevin was the most powerful and energetic organiser of the union forces. His energy seemed inexhaustible, but he would hold these forces in leash whatever anyone might say about the political implications of the stoppage. For him it was an 'industrial dispute' and it would remain so, come what may. The Government said 'constitutional Government was being attacked.' The General Council countered the Government's paper by issuing *The British Worker* prepared by the *Daily Herald* staff.

The Communists, the Minority Movement, and all the 'left' forces of the Labour Movement flung themselves into the struggle with elation, urging the extension of the strike and the need to force the Government to resign, and challenging all efforts to seek a compromise decision. Then a sequel to the formation of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee appeared. The General Council of the Soviet Trade Unions offered a large sum of money to the strike fund of the British trades unions. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress declined the aid because of its political implications.

And so the days passed. The strike held and leaders were 'seeing people.' Bevin and Purcell were in charge of strike

organisation. Pugh was in charge of the negotiating committee of seven. Out of 'seeing people,' mainly Sir Herbert Samuel, came the final 'incident' that ended the strike. On the ninth day of it the General Council appeared to have won assurances from Samuel that if they called off the General Strike the Government would act on the basis of the Samuel Memorandum, which had been modified at the instigation of the miners but which the latter refused to accept.

The Council met the miners' leaders. And now the issue of 'union autonomy' came right into the forefront of the dispute. When the miners put their case into the hands of the General Council, did that mean they had handed to the Council the power of decision over the settlement? The miners said no. The Council said yes. There was a first-class row between the two. Tempers were frayed. Finally a vote of the Council was taken on the basis of a 'gentlemen's understanding' that if the strike was called off, the revised Samuel memorandum would be operated by the Government. The voting of the Council was unanimously in favour. The miners were against it.

Pugh, Bevin, and Thomas sombrely trundled along to 10, Downing Street and announced that the General Strike was off. So the spectre of revolution which had haunted them for days vanished from the scene. The corpse of the General Strike was wrapped in the mantle of an 'unofficial gentlemen's agreement' and 'honourably' laid to rest. The Government announced an 'unconditional surrender.' The miners were left to carry on their struggle as best they could, and for seven months they continued until beaten to their knees.

The employers jumped into action at once, and forced new agreements upon the unions that had participated in the strike, such as in other circumstances they could never have secured. Unions pledged themselves never to repeat their antics of May 4th. Bevin signed a document on behalf of the dockers pledging his union 'Not in future to instruct their numbers to strike either nationally, sectionally, or locally for any reason without exhausting the conciliation machinery of the National Agreement.' Other unions had to make similar agreements.

But this was not the end. The resentment felt by the workers against the decision of the General Council was so great that thousands of workers left the unions, and the leaders each began

to explain his position. The Communist Party, the Minority Movement, and all the 'left' of the Labour Movement denounced what they described as the 'betrayal of the working class.' But the revolutionaries were too weak to create an alternative leadership or to redevelop the General Strike in support of the miners. The Soviet Trade Unions denounced the 'betrayal of the General Strike' and down went the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Unity Committee.

Bevin is emphatic to this day that the General Strike was nothing more than 'a sympathetic strike, not a strike against the State.' That it was a sympathetic strike on behalf of the miners no one will deny, but that it was political in its origin is clear: that origin being a State decision to return to the gold standard, as Bevin admitted in his twenty-years-delayed speech in the House of Commons on February 13th, 1946. He said:

> 'Directly the right honourable gentleman [Baldwin] got into office they [the Government] started to contemplate our return to the gold standard. No sooner had the right honourable gentleman the member for Woodford [Churchill] agreed to that course, than Sir Otto Niemeyer left the Treasury to go to the Bank of England. That was very significant. We were brought back to pre-war parity to gold. No single trade union or industrialist in this country, outside the immediate bank directors, was ever told. There was no notice in the Press that it had ever been discussed and like a bolt from the blue we were suddenly met with the complete upset of the wage structure in this country. . . .'

Strange! The Labour Party report of its Annual Conference held in the last week of *September* 1925 contains, in its account of the work of the Parliamentary Party, the following paragraph:

> 'When producing the Budget [*i.e.* April 1925] the Chancellor of the Exchequer intimated the intention of the Government to return immediately to the gold standard, and a Bill for this purpose was introduced. The Party felt that a sudden return to the gold standard would be harmful and moved the following amendment:
>
> "That this House cannot at present assent to the Second Reading of a Bill, which, by providing a return to the gold standard with undue precipitancy, may aggravate the existing grave condition of unemployment and trade depression."

'Having made its position clear, the Party did not further oppose the measure, but developments since show that the Party's doubt as to the wisdom of the Government's policy was fully justified.'

Bevin participated in that Conference and spoke frequently, but neither he nor any other delegate from left, right, or centre, referred to the gold standard, although there were discussions on national finance, unemployment, and banking. Bevin was at the Scarborough Congress of the Trade Unions in September 1925, just before the Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party. He spoke on anthrax, conditions abroad, *The Daily Herald*, duties of the General Council, payment of wages mid-weekly, regulation of the meat trade, and voluntary agreements, but not on the gold standard, the return to which had been publicly announced and debated in Parliament in the preceding April. Nor was it referred to by anyone else participating in the Congress.

The fact of the matter is that Ernest Bevin should have delivered the first part of his House of Commons speech of February 13th, 1946, just twenty-one years earlier to the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference, and explained, if he saw it then, the significance of the return to the gold standard. He might, for instance, have said something like this: 'I believe that the decision of the Government, made in April of this year, to return to the gold standard is the most important and, shall I say, calamitous decision of recent years. It means that every trade union in this country is now faced with an attack upon its wages. Baldwin has declared that the "wages of all the workers must come down." He says that because of this decision. We will fight this decision in the House of Commons with all the power at our command until it is reversed. We will fight the wage reductions with our unions and the Congress will help every union involved to the best of its ability.

'It would seem logical and practical for everyone to say "Let us all act together and if need be wage a general strike." I warn you that, however far we go, and we will go far, we are committed to a policy whereby we are prohibited from going as far as a general strike unless we are sure the Government is most likely to retreat before it and concede our demands. We have pledged ourselves to secure political power only by means of parliamentary elections and securing the majority of the seats in the House of

Commons by the will of the people expressed by their votes. A general strike which becomes more than a demonstration, that is, which finds itself faced with the determined resistance of the Government, will find against it all the forces of the State. At some point we should have to capitulate or face the logic of such a class struggle and proceed from the general strike into civil war and a fight for power. The working class of this country is an unarmed working class. I am sure that a working class that is not ready to vote itself into power, as we can do in this country, is not ready to fight for power with arms when it has neither got them nor is trained in their use. Therefore we cannot give you the lead in that direction, for we neither wish to create a situation in which we have to ignominiously capitulate nor lead you into situations for which the whole history of our movement has left us unprepared, physically and politically.

'Therefore, the alternative I suggest is stubborn resistance on the part of the unions to every demand for wage reductions, even though we may be compelled to retreat. We must conduct a persistent agitation by the Parliamentary Party in Parliament for the reversal of the gold standard decision, and maintain a continuous widespread agitation and propaganda by every section of the Labour Movement for the return of a Labour Government with power to change the whole character of the economic structure of this country.'

Bevin did not make such a speech. Nor did anyone else. But it would have saved him and the General Council from all the accusations of 'treachery to the working class' to which they laid themselves open, and would have been consistent with the declared policy of the Labour Movement.

Neither Morrison nor Attlee played any part in the General Strike. Nor did the Labour Party. Nevertheless the sequel affected them all, and produced the greatest changes in the Labour Movement since the formation of the party.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Bevin the 'Economic Man'

IT IS rarely possible to say a particular moment is *the* moment of abrupt change in the history of a social movement. But none stands out so clearly in the history of the British Labour Movement as that when, on May 13th, 1926, Bevin, Pugh, and Thomas went cap in hand to Baldwin and surrendered unconditionally.

Up to that moment of surrender the British working-class movement had been uncertain of its way forward. Should it secure political power by means of parliamentary action or by direct mass action which leads through the general strike to civil war? Time and again, despite its repeated commitments by conference resolutions and programme declarations, it had moved into positions of open class warfare—Leeds Convention in 1917, Councils of Action in 1920, Miners' Lock-Out of 1921, 'Red Friday' 1925, the General Strike of 1926. The surrender ended the period of uncertainty. Leaders echoed the raven's croak of 'Never more' in pained tones, as though the calamity had been anybody's fault but their own.

Meanwhile Bevin and his colleagues and the whole Labour Movement had to face the aftermath of the capitulation. During the continuing miners' strike they turned to help the miners by other means, mainly by financial aid. When the miners' strike ended the working-class movement stood almost helpless before the continued attacks of the Government and the employers. With prayers for 'peace in our time' the Baldwin Government struck relentlessly at home and abroad. For home consumption it passed the Trades Dispute Act, which declared the general strike to be illegal, limited sympathetic action of one union with another to action within an industry, forbade 'political strikes,' detached the Civil Service Unions from the Trades Union Congress, prohibited their association with the Labour Party, and struck at the funds of the Labour Party by changing the law in relation to trade union participation in politics. Henceforth, said the new

law, only those who 'contracted in' by signing a document affirming their willingness to pay a political levy approved by majority vote in any union not proscribed by law, could be affiliated to the Labour Party. Previously the law had permitted all to pay according to the ballot of the unions except those who 'contracted out' of the arrangement. The Trades Dispute Act thus split the Trade Union Movement, prescribed new limits to its actions, deprived the Labour Party and the unions of many thousands of pounds from their income, and imposed political restrictions upon hundreds of thousands of trade unionists.

The international attack was directed against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Trade Unions had angered the Government both by offering financial aid to the Trades Union Congress in the strike and by sending more than a million pounds to the Miners Federation to aid the miners. This kind of action had been recognised as a common practice of trade unionism everywhere, but never had it been done on so large a scale. The Government regarded such practices as gross interference in the affairs of this country. They also saw that the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Unity Committee was torn assunder by the General Strike and its collapse.

Here was the opportunity to strike further at the devotees of the 'class struggle.' The Home Secretary ordered a police raid on the Soviet trading institution in London, 'Arcos,' to link up the Soviet Government with the British Communist Party. Following the raid they broke off diplomatic and trade relations with Soviet Russia, so ending what the Labour Government of 1924 had done to inaugurate them.

The Labour Party protested. The Trades Union Congress of 1927 protested, and proceeded to ratify the rupture of the Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Unity Committee. The General Council was sorely offended and so was Bevin. Addressing the Congress in passionate language, he cried:

> '. . . Give us a consensus of opinion of this Congress. Are we not entitled to it? Is it fair after the silence of the General Council, after sitting down week after week, month after month, after circulars have been sent to our own branches that attempt to decry and belie us, we have kept silence in the interests of international unity? Is it right to throw the onus upon us, on the General Council, so that whatever decision we take we shall

be laid open to another twelve months of lying and abuse before we can come back to this Congress? We have appealed to Cæsar; for God's sake let Cæsar give his verdict in this Congress to-day. . . . I am convinced, with my experience of constant attendance in international work, that the carrying of this resolution this morning will give the General Council freedom to approach international unity from an entirely new standpoint, and I believe come back to Congress, having our hands unfettered by these resolutions, with a tremendous advance in real international unity before the Congress next meets.'

Thus died the Anglo-Russian Trades Union Unity Committee No. 1, and thus the Trades Union Congress severed its association with international resolutions which led them along the path of 'direct action and revolutionary mass struggle.'

Having purged itself of such international entanglements it proceeded with an inner purge of the trade unions which has its parallel only in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, although there was a fundamental difference in the purpose and method of the purges. The Russian Communists systematically purged the party of those who decline to wage the class struggle. The Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party purge those who attempted to organise a 'class struggle.' The 1925 Conference of the Labour Party had decided on this course, but the class struggle itself was too severe for the resolutions to become effective. But with the surrender of May 13th, 1926, the defeat of the miners, and the consequent reaction, the moment was opportune to effect the purge decided on in 1925. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress, now definitely dominated by Ernest Bevin, struck both at the Minority Movement and the Unemployed Workers Committee Movement. The Joint Committee of the General Council and the Unemployed Workers Committee suffered the same fate as the Anglo-Soviet Trades Union Unity Committee because of the Unemployed Workers' association with the Communists. The Minority Movement had made a big drive to win the support of the Trade Councils and had made great strides. The General Council issued an ultimatum to the Trades Councils to dissociate themselves from the Minority Movement. The Minority Movement and the Communist Party urged them to reject it, and the majority did until within almost the time limit of the ultimatum. At the last moment the revolu-

tionaries capitulated when called upon to do so by Harry Pollitt. So died the Minority Movement, much as the General Strike had died. Ernest Bevin and his colleagues had called off the General Strike to avoid open warfare with the Government; Harry Pollitt called off the Minority Movement to avoid open warfare with the Trades Union Congress and many executives of trades unions.

Just as the Communist Party had organised the Minority Movement in the trade unions, so it had organised a 'left wing' in the Labour Party, based upon the support of local Labour parties. It thus mustered considerable support. When the Labour Party Executive demanded the fulfilment of the Liverpool Conference decisions excluding Communists from individual membership of the Labour Party and Communist Delegates to local Labour parties, many refused to apply the decisions. By 1928 twenty local Labour parties had been disaffiliated for this refusal. They refused to expel the Communists, and after months of disaffiliation the Communist Party put the issue to them—join the Communist Party or go back to Labour! They went back to the Labour Party without the Communists. Thus the purge was completed.

It was in this period too that the Independent Labour Party was split from end to end. Ramsay MacDonald and his supporters had come to the conclusion that there was no further need for the continued existence of the Independent Labour Party and left it. Among these supporters was Morrison, who at this time admired MacDonald greatly. The Independent Labour Party that remained passed under the leadership of James Maxton and the Clyde M.Ps.

With the purging of the Labour Movement of all the organisations of the 'left,' the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress consolidated themselves and became more centralised and disciplined than at any time since their formation. And with the centralisation there grew up a more clearly formulated and uniform policy, destined to take the form of the State, the employers organisations and the trade unions forming a 'trinity' of institutions with clearly defined functions of 'public service' in society.

Two men were to shape the policy of the movement in accordance with these revised ideas of policy. They were Bevin and

Citrine. First in the field was Bevin, and the time was immediately after the General Strike as the purge of the 'left' took its course Bevin had never clearly formulated for himself or the Labour Movement any theory of social development. His approach to every question had been empirical, and the only clear principle in his trade union career was that of the 'fair deal' in collective bargaining both for the members of his own union and the working class in general.

He learned from a practice which had been rich and varied. But after more than twenty years' experience his ideas began to take on a distinct pattern, of which he became conscious and which began to guide him in his work in the trade unions. He wanted trade union unity, but there would be no more general strikes so far as he was concerned. He would push ahead with his ambitious plans for the amalgamation of the unions. That would mean more power, and he liked power. But this power would be in the main potential, and held in equilibrium with the State and the employers' organisations. The conquest of State power would be accomplished through the Labour Party, but slowly. Even when it was achieved it would not mean for long years to come the elimination of the employers' organisations. They would still be a part of the 'trinity' in equilibrium. Bevin's Socialism was far off. He conceived his job to be that of getting what he could out of capitalist industry by disciplined negotiation in arbitration courts, Joint Industrial Councils, conferences of employers and trade unions. Direct action? Well, skirmishes, but no big battles.

He did not set out his ideas in this way, but this is the pattern of them as revealed by his practice. And being a man of intense feeling he was determined to fight with an angry intensity all those who stood in his way, especially the Communists. It is also from the days of the General Strike and the fierce criticism levelled at the General Council of the Trade Union Congress by the Soviet trade union leaders that there dates his growing dislike of the Soviet Union and all associated with it.

It was at the same Congress at which he expressed his anger with the Soviet trade union leaders that he revealed his programme of action. His union had placed three resolutions on the agenda of the Congress; one calling for the General Council to prepare a memorandum setting forth the effects on trade of tariffs and 'dumping,' a second calling for information on trusts

and cartels and their effect on wages, standard of living, output, and prices; and a third which he himself moved. This resolution declared:

> 'That notwithstanding the political divisions of Europe, this Congress instructs the General Council to further, through the international organisations, a policy having for its object the creation of a European public opinion in favour of Europe becoming an economic entity.'

The theorists would classify this and his speech as 'economism' of the crudest kind and think that the word 'notwithstanding' dismissed too much. That didn't worry Bevin. He said, 'These three resolutions are largely in sequence, and we are asking that our international attitude should be considered, particularly so far as Europe is concerned, in terms of an economic entity.' Then, drawing from his experience as a trades union organiser of transport workers, he continued:

> 'Anyone who has had to follow the transport trades of the world realises that while you may satisfy political ambitions by the establishment of boundaries, the economic development of the world is often in total conflict with national aspirations. I recognise, and my union recognises, that national aspirations and political divisions are bound to be a great handicap to us for a long time to come, perhaps longer than we shall be on this earth. But we also believe that if we are to develop rationally we have got to show our people unionism in terms of raw material, in terms of harvests, cycles of trade, and exchange.'

Having taken his audience into the bargain basement of economics he told them how impressed he had been with his recent visit to the United States of America, where there were no tariff barriers between the States and none of the boundary handicaps that apply in Europe. If only the people of Europe would put first things first and organise Europe as an economic entity! He ignored the fact that other socialists had long talked about that, but were of the opinion that within the states of Europe there would first have to be political revolutions which would bring in socialist governments to change the economic foundations. We had another vision of organising economics in such a way that the political difficulties would be overcome with-

out such a drastic change. And the model would be the United States of America. And so he said, with the United States in mind:

'I found a frontier 3,000 miles long without a gun, with commerce passing to and fro pretty freely, and I came to the conclusion that if we are to deal with the problems of Europe we have got to try to teach the people of Europe that their economic interests, their economic development, have to transcend merely national boundaries. I am a little bit of a dreamer; I think it is necessary. We have debated all this week as if Britain had no industrial problem to solve, but Britain has got a problem, and it is no use attacking unemployment unless we try at least to make a contribution towards its solution, and one of the complications throughout Europe has been the creation of a greater number of national boundaries as a result of the Versailles Treaty, breaking up the proper organic economic distribution of commodities, dividing the great Danubian area into several divisions, distributing and handing the ownership of raw materials from one country to another. . . .

'. . . Cast your eye over Europe with its millions of underfed, with its millions of people with a wretchedly low standard of living. We can have mass production; we can have intensified production; and we must direct the consuming power in order to absorb that mass production to the millions of people in Europe, whose standard of living is not far removed from the animal, and whose standards are capable of being raised 1,000 per cent. by bringing together their productive capacity in return for the craftsmanship of our own Western Europe. I hope this resolution will be carried, and that when we meet our international friends we will be able to talk of real problems of Europe in terms of material, in terms of goods, in terms of productive capacity of the peasantry, in terms of exchange, and drive along the line of endeavouring to create a feeling of interdependence, between the production of the peasantry from the land and the craftsmanship of the workshop, and further its distribution throughout this great European Continent.'

Bevin met with considerable opposition to his theory of Americanising Europe with a policy of 'economism.' But he was not to be gainsaid. Replying to all critics, he ignored the existence of Soviet Russia as a European State and declared:

'We want an indivisible united nation spreading from the borders of Russia right to the borders of France, but due to

political divisions they have been cut up into national sections, and their economic unity absolutely destroyed in dealing with their own problems. . . . We have to be capable of studying all the industrial problems associated with our movement, *not with the idea of making preparations for the nationalisation of production*, distribution and exchange, but of trying to bring an improved mentality to show how Labour is to face and tackle that problem.'

He secured a good majority for his resolution, and so faded from the mind of our 'dreamer' the dream of a United Socialist States of Europe, and in its stead entered the dream of an Americanised United States of Europe outside Russia, a Europe of mass production and economic bargains.

And what should we do at home? Well, he would soon show them. Drawing from his rich experience as a trade union negotiator, he would now include as subjects of discussion and agreement with the employers' organisations questions other than wages, hours of labour, general labour conditions. He would discuss with them how to make capitalist industry profitable, so that out of the improvements and more abundant production there would arise the means to grant improved conditions for the workers. After all, we were all Britishers, not merely capitalists and landlords and workers and state functionaries, and we have got to get on together. Of course as a socialist he agreed that socialism would solve the problems. But he was a 'practical man' and we hadn't got socialism. The workers wanted work and wages and better conditions. As he had already remarked, 'it is no use attacking unemployment unless we try to make a contribution to its solution.' And he didn't mean a 'socialist solution.' He meant improving trade without changing the ownership. So he looked into the effect of tariff restrictions on trade, 'dumping,' the development of cartels, trusts, restriction of output, and rationalisation of industry. He would show how these things worked and how they could be improved.

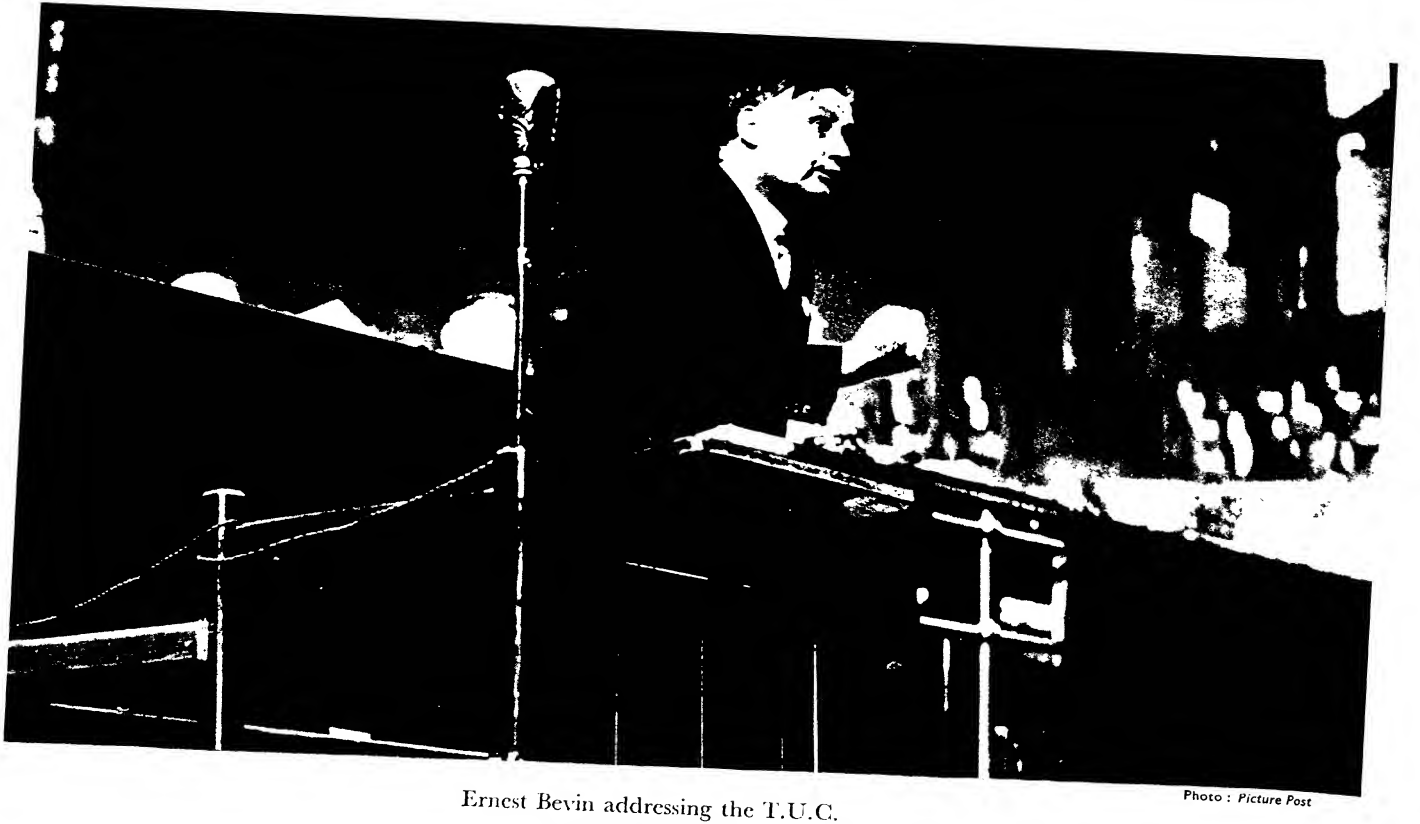
Opportunity was close at hand and the situation favourable. Lord Melchet and a group of employers were quite prepared to discuss these things. Ernest was one of the representatives of the General Council of the Trade Union Congress in the talks that became famous as the Mond-Turner discussions. Turner, a leader of the Textile Union, was the chairman of the General

Council when the discussions were agreed to. The Council got the Trades Union Congress to adopt the resolution of the Geneva World Economic Conference of 1927 endorsing the 'rationalisation of industry.' This included means for securing maximum efficiency of labour with the minimum of effort, mass production, avoiding waste of raw materials, simplified methods of distribution, and so on.

From Mond-Turner the General Council entered into co-operation with the National Federation of Employers and the Federation of British Industries. Together they produced a number of memoranda in which Ernest had great scope for the elaboration of his ideas. They covered the rationalisation of industry, which he favoured, the fiscal system, and finance. He no longer approved the traditional Labour support of free trade, which it had inherited from the Liberals. He would have both free trade and tariffs. He wanted the raising of wholesale prices and the stabilisation of prices. Britain also should go off the gold standard, and he wanted an expanding market for British goods. The whole scheme of restoration was crowned with a memorandum on economic groups and the world situation. He had on the Economic Committee of the General Council, which produced this document with the Federation of British Industries, John Beard, Arthur Cook, George Hicks, John Hill, E. L. Pouton, Arthur Pugh, W. Thorne, and Ben Tillett. But it was Ernest who laid the scheme before the Trades Union Congress.

It was a great occasion in 1930 when the Standing Orders of the Congress were suspended to give him free scope and unlimited time to expound his views. Gone for him were the days of five-minute speeches. He felt fine and ready for all comers. There was a grand programme before the Congress as it assembled in the Albert Hall at Nottingham. As is usual on these occasions, the mayor of the city welcomed the Congress. There was a mayoral lunch for the General Council, a lord mayor's reception and garden party. Before the Congress opened an organ recital put everybody in the best of moods. The platform was full of distinguished friends of the Labour Movement. The gallery was filled with interested visitors. The setting could not have been better.

They listened to Bevin, sure-footed as ever, hold forth on the proposition for the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations to function as an economic unit. After a few words of introduction



Ernest Bevin addressing the T.U.C.

Photo : *Picture Post*

to the subject, in which he assured the Congress that he was not influenced by the Rothermere and Beaverbrook campaigns, he proceeded, 'I am no imperialist, but an Empire exists in the world. Empires are not limited to the British Empire; the United States of America is as much an empire as the British Empire.'

Then he remembered Russia and how nasty the Russian Trade Union leaders had been towards him, and he couldn't avoid showing that he didn't regard it as a socialist country. He rapped out:

> 'So is Russia [*i.e.* an empire]. The Russians have different methods of extending their empire, but it is an empire nevertheless, and their attitude to subject races is very much the same. "Safety first" for those in possession is the rule of every empire. Let us begin on firm ground. It has been argued against me in one of our Liberal papers that three years ago I advocated a United States of Europe. I do not apologise for it. I think it is quite consistent with this report of the General Council. The *Manchester Guardian* is for ever looking back, and it is now putting me in the category of great men. It is not a question of what Gladstone said in 1868, but of what Bevin said in 1927. In any case from my own point of view I regard the last war, and possibly the next war, as struggles for spheres of influence and the domination of raw material. In the past, empires of all kinds have sought to get control of raw material by various means—military means, naval means, financial means—and if we are not hypocrites we must confess that sometimes even religion itself has been used. . . .'

He went on to show how certain groups had a monopoly of certain materials:

> 'Within this great Empire there is a tremendous fund of raw materials, and in fact, in certain commodities a monopoly. In rubber there is a majority control of the world's supply, and in tin there is a majority control. If all the oil in the mandated territories and in our Colonial possessions is developed I think you will find we should have a majority of the world's output. What we appear to do is to use other people's oil and many other essentials of the world's needs. On the other hand, the United States dominates cotton and other commodities. You cannot read of Mr. Hoover in South America without realising the motive that was behind that tour for pan-American development. . . .

'The main object of this report was . . . a proposal for a definite economic organisation within what is called the British Empire. . . . Therefore as a beginning we have outlined this economic organisation, and we trust that economic organisation will by arrangement with the rest of the country, control ultimately the raw materials within this great Empire. If we are to use Australian wool, Australia needs to understand our problem as much as we need to understand Australia's problem. If we are to use Canadian wheat it is impossible to pay for it with American motor-cars. . . . Let me assume that we have organised the whole Empire, because it is not a proposal merely for the Home Government only, but it is a proposal of a fairly representative body selected by these governments who are to be charged with responsibility. . . .

'If we are to succeed in this matter—and it is a long, weary road, I admit—what is required is a change from our old attitude. We must try and grapple by means of organisation with the problem of these supplies and their distribution and we must get a grip upon this problem by means of study, research, and understanding. Then when we go to a World Economic Conference and we find that one country has oil, another nation cotton, and another nation rubber, it is not a case of armies or navies settling the business; but we shall say to the others, here are these resources at our disposal, resources which will be open to you, there being no restriction of raw material for your needs, but in return there must be no restriction of supplies imposed upon us, so that we, too, may have the raw materials that we need without the fighting and financial struggle that has gone on hitherto. . . .'

Of the political implications of the Empire Block he had nothing to say. He was Ernest Bevin, the trade union leader, now standing before the world as the apostle of the 'economic man,' disclosing a grandiose scheme for the organisation of Britain with a happy accord between the organised employers and the organised workers, this accord existing in an equilibrium created by mutual concessions at the economic bargain counters of the Industrial Courts, Joint Industrial Councils, and a beneficent Ministry of Labour. For Europe he had a scheme of Americanisation, the growth of mass production, and economic unity outside the frontiers of the Soviet Union. For the British Empire he would let political developments go on as they might, but he would organise it as an economic unit. As for America and the Soviet Union, he

had no new schemes for them as yet. He recognised America as an empire and was perturbed by the competitive relations.

Pressed in the discussion about trade with Russia, he replied in his usual 'friendly' way that the General Council 'have gone to the Government over export credits and have worked jolly hard on export credits, but all you hear about Russian trade does not materialise in orders. We have discovered that. It is very often 10 per cent. orders and 90 per cent. propaganda. I am brutal enough to say that in this Congress.'

It rankled in his mind that Russia should be referred to, and he was very sensitive to the fact that the socialists in the Labour Movement would be deeply perturbed by his programme. He would take the offensive while the going was good. He'd had a grand time, and would finish with a smashing peroration that would take the Congress by storm.

> 'Friends, I believe in organising ourselves. I think Russia has set us a great example. She is exporting her timber and dumping it upon our quays without even a buyer. She is, at this moment, sending stuff into this country which is subsidised and stuff on which, on evidence given to me the other day, practically no wages have ever been paid for manufacture, merely the feeding of the people engaged on the work. If it is Britain that is doing this, then Britain is the devil, but you can never listen to anything about Russia. I know there are lots of people who believe that the British race—and I am beating no patriotic drum—is finished with, is down and out, and is done for. I do not believe it. I believe that we have a culture, we have an ability, we have a craftsmanship that can still render great service to the world in return for the food we eat and for the goods we make. Therefore I say, looking at the matter quite straightly, the proposal of the General Council is to enable us to have consideration of these economic problems, not in the backwoods of Government departments, but openly in the light of day, so that all people can get the facts and know what is going on.'

Amid a storm of applause he sat down. The report was carried by 1,878,000 votes to 1,401,000. The vote was received with cheering. The 'economic man' was triumphant, and socialism far, far away.

declared itself to be a 'people's party' as distinct from a working-class party, he had no illusions either about the 'class character' of the party or the 'class' nature of socialism. He recognised that when all allowances had been made for the broadening of the social basis of the party, it would still be composed largely of the working class, and that its power would always depend upon the workers.

No one knew better than he that socialism proposed to liquidate social classes by taking away from a minority of the population their private ownership of the means of production and distribution, leaving the community to become one working community. He knew that the principal opponents of socialism were the social groups whose power came from their private ownership of the means of production. But he was also convinced that the Fabian method of making the transition from one form of society to another was the right one.

Another feature of Fabianism which appealed to him strongly was its criticism of capitalism for its inefficiency and stupidities, its bad management and maladministration, and its insistence that socialism would not only change ownership but eliminate these evils. He had an orderly mind. He was convinced that he knew how to organise things and organise them well. In all his work he therefore insisted on being efficient himself and demanded efficiency of those who worked with him.

His youthful journalistic flare has stood him in good stead as a party leader. He enjoyed writing for the Labour papers. He also liked to be on the public platform, and was never happier than when engaged in a party discussion or in polemics with opponents of socialism. There was a freedom of expression and an ease of attitude towards his audience in his early years that tended to disappear as he passed into positions of responsibility and leadership, when 'tactical' considerations began to weigh upon him. At time he becomes somewhat pompous and authoritarian, but unlike his colleague Bevin he rarely makes a point of view his personal property. He can forget that he is 'a big noise,' laugh at himself, mix with the crowd, and enter into the fun of a social gathering with the zest of a schoolboy. This he can do to-day just as fervently as in his youth.

This combination of qualities enabled him to advance rapidly into the ranks of leadership. When he was elected Mayor of

Hackney he was London's youngest mayor. When he was elected to the National Executive of the Labour Party he was the youngest member of that august body. He won through to this position for the first time in 1920, when he was thirty-two years of age. The next year he was not elected. But he was back again in 1922, and has been re-elected every year since except on one occasion in recent years when he accepted nomination for the post of Treasurer of the Party and was defeated by Arthur Greenwood. But he returned the next year on to the Exective, and there he has remained.

The year 1929 was the most eventful for him. In that year he was elected to Parliament as the member for South Hackney, and became the Minister for Transport in the second Labour Government, Chairman of the Executive of the Labour Party and President of the Party Conference; he was also the Party's representative to the Co-operative Congress. At thirty-nine he had 'arrived' among the forefront of British Labour leaders, and no one would be so presumptious as to say he had reached the limits of his capacities.

He entered into the life of the House of Commons as one born to the debating chamber and administrative responsibility. It is generally admitted that Parliamentary oratory needs different qualities from the oratory associated with the public platform and the street corner. It demands knowledge of one's facts as well as dialectical skill, an urbanity of temper and a readiness and capacity to grasp the full meaning of the other fellow's case. Be as sincere as you may, if you have nothing to offer but perorations and slogans you will be quickly classified as a windbag. Sincerity must be combined with knowledge, the well-chosen word, the right balance of fact and argument, and be presented with the right mixture of wisdom, humour, clarity, and conviction, or your oratory will be dismissed as of little account.

Herbert quickly proved himself to be a first-class parliamentary speaker and an able administrator and when he stood before the Conference of the party as its President, ready to deliver his first presidential address, he had never felt more happy and confident.

The Conference was held in the Dome at Brighton. There was no difficulty about setting the tone of the meeting. It was in fine fettle. It followed on a great triumph at the polls. Labour had now

288 M.Ps. and had secured 8,364,883 votes in the general election. All the pent-up resentment of the workers against the Baldwin Government's onslaught from the time of the General Strike onwards had found expression in a sweeping increase of votes and a gain of 162 seats. Labour had now the largest party in Parliament, and despite its experience of 1924, when it formed a 'minority Government,' it ignored Ernest Bevin's warnings and criticism given at that time and again took office without having a majority over the combined opposition. Once more it was to function as a 'caretaker' Government for so long as the Opposition parties refrained from bringing it down. When the Conference met, Labour had been 'in office but not in power' just over four months, and the leaders of the Party felt happy.

When Morrison rose to deliver his Presidential address he was right on the crest of the wave of Labour's victory, and there had been insufficient time for any criticism to gather force. So he set out to present the Conference with a grand survey of the triumphant advance of the party of socialism. He began 'We meet to-day but a few months after a great electoral triumph.' He praised the office staff of the Party and paid tribute to Ramsay MacDonald, whose

> 'masterly expositions of policy set a high note for Labour's electoral campaign and beneficially influenced vast bodies of men and women of goodwill. He convinced the country that the Labour Party was a Party of the Nation and not the instrument of a section. To-day as Prime Minister, he is amply fulfilling the rôle as the political leader of the Nation. He will live in history not only as the first Labour Prime Minister, but as a statesman and servant of the people of the first order. . . .'

He went on to tell of the 'miracle of politics,' of the 'thirty wonderful years' in which 'Labour and socialism went forward as a result of its own strength, its own capacity, its own enthusiasm.' He paid tribute to the trade unions and the Co-operative Movement. Then came his review of 'Labour at the helm':

'The country has not had to wait long to see with what energy, determination and success the Government is implementing the policy which the Party submitted to the people in May.' He rejoiced in the triumph of Philip Snowden at the Hague, the signing of the Kellogg Pact renouncing war, the signing of the

Optional Clause of the Permanent Court of International Justice, the proposal at Geneva of a 'tariff truce' for two years. 'One of the most intractable of all British problems of foreign policy—our relations with Egypt—is on the way to a happy solution. . . . When Parliament meets, the Government will, we hope, be in a position to announce the re-establishment of relations with Russia on a friendly and stable basis. . . .'

Like all his predecessors he refrained from making any analysis of the international situation which would enable the Party and the Government to estimate the trends of world affairs, the forces with which they would have to contend, and the allies they would be likely to have in pursuing their policy. He simply turned to home affairs to show how Labour was 'advancing on the Home Front.'

> 'Although handicapped by its minority position—a handicap which must always be kept in mind—much can be done which the Opposition parties are not in a position publicly to oppose, whatever their real views may be. Practically the first industrial decision, the announcement that the Labour Government proposed to ratify the Washington Hours Convention, has had wide repercussions. [It was not ratified.] The consolidation and reconstruction of the Factory Acts is well in hand. [The measure was not passed.] The anti-Trade Union Act of 1927 is being dealt with. [It was not dealt with until 1946.] The working hours of miners are being dealt with.'

The election declaration had proclaimed that 'the disastrous Act by which the Tory Government added an hour to the working day must be at once repealed.' The Labour Government knocked off half an hour from the additional hour added by the Act. On he went:

> 'While the raising of the school-leaving age to 15, as from April 1st, 1931, will be an important contribution towards relieving the unemployment problem, as well as constituting a great educational reform. [The school-leaving age was to wait fifteen years before being raised.] The decision to cancel the 1924 Act subsidy reductions put an end to the Tory "economy" campaign and to the reduced housebuilding policy so ably carried out by Mr. Neville Chamberlain. By the virtual abolition of the Tory-appointed Guardians, a return is

made to democratic local government. The more outstanding anomalies of the Widows' Pensions Act will be dealt with in a Bill to be introduced in November. . . .'

After thus cataloguing things to be done, he referred to the number of committees appointed to aid in the rationalisation of industry, and to J. H. Thomas's efforts as a commercial traveller, and then rushed onwards towards his peroration.

'The Conference to-day meets in high spirits; the Party and the Labour Government are doing well. Success is not spoiling us. We refuse to water down our final objectives. Let it be understood by everybody that the purpose of the Labour Party is as much as ever to secure the conquest of our country for the people of our country, the conquest of the world for the workers of the world. We go forward to make material wealth the servant of mankind and not the master of mankind. We aim at a new society—the Socialist Commonwealth—and we aim at this society not merely that we may secure material betterment in the lot of the people: indeed, we seek this material improvement not as an end in itself but as a stepping-stone to the mental and spiritual regeneration of mankind. . . .'

He hadn't said anything about Bevin's dream of Europe as an economic entity on the American pattern, nor of the British Empire as an economic unit, nor of the 'economic blizzard' that was gathering ready to blast itself across the world and sweep the Labour Government away. But neither did any one else in the Conference appear to be conscious of the oncoming storm. There was deep concern about the slowness of 'recovery.' Bevin challenged Thomas about the recent raising of the Bank Rate and the working of the gold standard. But he showed no sign of recognising any of the portents. After Philip Snowden had given a most lucid exposition of the working of the gold standard and proposed an Inquiry into the working of the Bank Rate and the movements of gold, Bevin had nothing to add.

No one saw in the colossal boom in the United States the prelude to a 'bust.' There was just some anxiety in the ranks about the extent of unemployment, anxiety which Thomas sought to remove by his confident assurance that 'when February comes the unemployment figures will be far different and better than the figures during the late Government.' Henderson was very

hopeful of the outcome of the Disarmament Conference. Morrison was hopeful of the outcome of MacDonald's visit to America. Beyond this, nothing. Everybody felt the Labour Government had made a good start. Bevin paid tribute to the way in which Morrison had conducted the Conference and Morrison thanked Bevin and the Conference Arrangements Committee and all who had contributed to make the gathering a success. After singing the 'Red Flag' and 'Auld Lang Syne' the Conference dispersed—oblivious of the oncoming storm that would make a hash of most promises and all the estimates. For all the promises were based upon the assumption of a general recovery of capitalist economy and a steady development of a world at peace—and this assumption in turn was based on faith and faith alone.

Morrison's speech was no exception in this respect. Nor was the attitude of the Conference exceptional, but characteristic of every conference and every Trades Union Congress of the epoch. No leader up to this time and no Conference or Congress had ever attempted to make an analysis of British economy in relation to world economy or of the overall relation of the social and political forces of their own country. The scientific method of approach to political and social problems had not yet been acquired by the leaders of Labour, although it was making headway. Experience had forced them to make special investigations of particular problems, and the continuous crisis in the mining industry had led repeated investigations of the most comprehensive kind. The same could be said of other specialised questions. But Labour had yet to apply like methods of analysis to the situation as a whole, and effectively to relate the particular to the general economic and social struggle it was waging. It tackled its problems by the costly method of trial and error, rather than by foresight derived from insight. The Labour Movement was making history under the pressure of circumstance rather than consciously planning its way on the basis of understanding history as a social process.

Up to this time also the Labour Party and the trades unions had demanded the nationalisation of an industry and its 'democratic control' and had accumulated masses of information about the various industries, but had approached all questions mainly from the standpoint of seeking some immediate material improvement and of estimating what they could get out of it in terms of better conditions rather than viewing them as means of production

and considering the possibility of Labour being responsible for the productive processes.

After the General Strike there was a striking change toward a more scientific approach. Strangely enough, this was due, not to the sudden emergence of an enthusiasm for social science, or because Labour was near to the time when it would be responsible for production. It was born out of the defeat of the General Strike and the trade union negotiators' feeling that they could not, in their weak position, squeeze concessions out of declining industry. Hence they turned to the policy of conciliation with the employers and joint research in the realm of economics and the organisation of industry.

Whatever the impulse and motives in the minds of the trade union leaders who participated in producing the Mond-Turner memoranda and the documents of the Joint Committees of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and the Federation of British Industries, they do represent an attempt at a more fundamental approach to the problems facing the Trades Union and Labour Movement. They provided a wider basis for determining policy and attempted to see a main road ahead. The data may have been insufficient. The understanding of the interrelationship of facts may have been defective. The conclusions may have been wrong. But the method of examining Labour's problems in relation to the whole economic development at home and abroad was unquestionably a great step forward towards the acceptance of the scientific method of approach to problems as a means of determining whither the movement was going.

Morrison did not accept Bevin's views as outlined in the preceding chapter. He had differed from him on an earlier occasion, when Bevin was advocating a social insurance scheme in which each industry had to bear responsibility for its own social insurance. Morrison held the view that the unequal development of industry and the uneven incidence of unemployment would make the scheme unworkable and unjust. In his view social insurance should be a social responsibility of the community as a whole and organised by the State. He again found himself in opposition to Bevin's policy when he became Minister of Transport in 1929, and it was as a result of this ministerial responsibility and the handling of a Bill in Parliament for the creation of the London Passenger Transport Board that he eclipsed Bevin's

'economism' with a contribution which has proved to be a permanent development of socialist thought and policy of the British Labour Movement.

As Minister of Transport he inherited from the Tory Government the problem of co-ordinating London's passenger services. As leader of the Labour Opposition in the London County Council he had studied London transport very thoroughly. He had organised in the London Labour Party a team of research workers who under his direction had made a most exhaustive investigation into its history and problems. He had led the fight against the proposals of the Tories, and in 1929 the battle was unfinished when the Tory Government fell. He then took over the job of applying socialist principles to transport in the area. It was this experience which brought him up against the limitations of the Labour Party's programme and policy, in that it was limited to general demands for socialisation, the affirmation of the principle of compensation to the private owners, without any clear indication of how the job should be done. What form should socialisation take? Should an industry, when socialised, become another State Department? If not, what was the alternative? What was meant by Labour's demand for the 'democratic control of industry'? What should be the relation of the trade unions to the socialised industry? These questions had to be answered.

Morrison was not, like Bevin, a trade union negotiator, but a politician and a Fabian socialist. Although the Fabians, and especially the Webbs, had provided exhaustive studies of local government, the trade unions and the Co-operative Movement, and State institutions, they had not answered these questions. Indeed, it was not until after the rise of the Shop Stewards Movement in the course of the war of 1914–18 that they considered the possibility of the trade unions having any other function than the protection of workers' conditions. Then they came to the conclusion that the 'productive organisations may have a part to play in responsibility for production.'

Then there was a breakaway from the Fabians under the leadership of G. D. H. Cole and William Mellor who, influenced by the syndicalist movement in the trades unions, advocated the theory of guild socialism in which the unions were to be reorganised as industrial unions and to include all workers within an industry whether managerial or otherwise. These, as industrial

guilds, would be responsible to a parliament of consumers for the administration of industry. The industries would not be, as conceived by the syndicalists, the owners of industry. Ownership would be vested in the community and the guilds would be self-governing bodies, responsible to Parliament.

The syndicalists and the guild socialists had exercised a great influence in the trade unions and the socialist parties. So great was this influence, indeed, that most of the resolutions of the Labour and Trades Union Congresses dealing with nationalisation had also demanded the 'democratic control of industry' by the workers. But, as yet, the precise meaning of this 'democratic control' had not been worked out.

Morrison, leading the London Labour Party in the struggle against the Tories on the question of the re-organisation of London transport, had to find an answer. Bevin, leading the Transport and General Workers Union, was up against it too, and likewise had to give an answer. They had clashed in their views when Bevin supported the London Traffic Act of 1924, which gave the combine almost a statutory monopoly of London traffic. Morrison and the London M.Ps. had opposed it: they wanted London transport to be socialised. Now came the question of how this was to be done. And it was Morrison who worked out the theory of forming public corporations responsible to Parliament for the running of socialised industry.

This opened up a discussion throughout the Labour Movement which spread over several years. The Trades Unions Congress research committees produced detailed memoranda which became the basis of discussion in the Congresses. The Labour Party also worked on the problem. The various socialist organisations embarked on detailed discussion.

The struggle between those holding rival views came to a head in the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress discussions of 1932 and 1933, and lo! the leaders of the conflict were Herbert Morrison and Ernest Bevin. The dialectical battle was the greatest since the formation of these great assemblies of the British Labour Movement, and revealed how greatly the Movement had grown in political stature. All the leaders of the great trade unions were brought into the debate; and the socialist organisations and educational bodies such as the Labour Colleges and Workers' Educational Association now saw the results of

years of patient work reflected in what proved to be the most outstanding contribution to Labour's socialist theory and programme since the formation of the Labour Party.

Just as it had taken more than twenty years to establish the theory and policy of the Labour Movement on achieving political power through parliamentarism and subordinating 'direct action' to the sphere of trade union struggles for collective bargains—only after the defeat of the General Strike could it be said that this was established—so it was the experience of the two Labour Governments when brought up against the problem of socialising London transport which thrust the problem of socialisation into the foreground. It compelled the Labour Movement to think out the relationship of a socialised industry to the State, and the relationship of the trade unions to the management and control of socialised industry.

Up to this time socialists in Britain had held the view that when an industry was nationalised it would become a department of State much on the lines of the Post Office. It had also been commonly held that the development of centralisation and monopoly in capitalist industry simplified the problem of nationalisation. In the course of recent years there had appeared on the scene several semi-State monopolies, such as the B.B.C., the Electricity Board, and the Port of London Authority. It was the study of these public bodies which showed to Herbert Morrison how a Socialist Government should handle the nationalised industry!

He was in fine fettle when he faced the Leicester Conference of the Labour Party in 1932, charged with the job of moving two resolutions demanding the nationalisation of transport and electricity. He spoke with precision and power. There were no perorations this time. He was more concerned about clarity and a full understanding of his proposals than about emotion and cheers. His mind was made up. He was ready for all comers. He knew too, that Bevin and a number of other trade union leaders were ready for him. He said:

> 'The resolution urges the public ownership of a unified transport system. We believe in the unification of ownership, and once having settled that, then for socialists there can be no question but that the ownership must be the ownership of the community through some form of public concern. The Report proposes that the undertakings—all the undertakings we can

possibly lay hands on—shall be transferred to a public board, a public authority, the National Transport Board, and the only limitation on the undertakings that we accept, is the only limitation I was to accept under the London Passenger Transport Bill, namely, the limitation of practicability. Subject to that limitation, we will take and socialise every possible instrument of transport that exists in Great Britain.'

Nobody could misunderstand this statement. It appeared sound enough for everybody, and he would not meet with opposition from anyone in the conference either on the grounds of ambiguity or deviation from a socialist principle. But it would be asked 'What are the terms of acquisition?' He would be equally clear.

'The terms of acquisition—which is a complicated problem and upon which we do not wish to commit the movement entirely—is on the *basis of the reasonable net revenue of the undertaking*. You should ponder these words, because it does not mean we are going to perpetuate excessive profits, nor to pay for the wasteful, unproductive or watered capital that exists in many of these undertakings.'

Then came the real bone of contention:

'Now, the resolution lays down that the Board shall be appointed on appropriate grounds of ability, and I venture to say that Socialists above all must insist that persons of ability and competence must be in charge of our socialised industries. . . . Paragraph 1 also lays it down that the Board shall be responsible for securing efficiency in management, and I venture to say we must nail responsibility to the Board. . . .'

Next he set about his critics.

'There are two schools of criticism of this resolution and in my judgement they are both reactionary. There are the orthodox pre-war nationalisers; they are the Red orthodoxy; there is nobody more orthodox than the man who says socialism must be Red, but it is out of date for this undertaking. It is appropriate for other kinds of undertaking. . . . We believe for this type of undertaking your management must be rapid, on the spot, and not tied up with red tape. The public corporation form of management is the right form of management. . . .

'We must not be afraid of new ideas. This is a new one, and the curious thing is, nobody is more afraid of this new idea than those orthodox comrades who don't know the left from the right. . . .

'Now I come to the second criticism—workers' control—the point which is involved in a phrase which has been used in our Movement with regard to workers' control of industry. It was not invented by us; it was invented by the syndicalists. The Party must be clear in its mind as to whether it is syndicalist or socialist. I am a socialist. We are now getting to the stage when we should find out what we mean or do not mean by the phrase "workers' control of industry"'.

The Transport Workers Union, led by Ernest Bevin, had put forward an amendment insisting that 'certain of the members of the National Transport Board and/or of any directing and Managing Authority that may be established, shall be appointed by the Minister only after consultation with the trade unions having members employed in the industry.'

'Now,' said Morrison, 'suppose I concede that point and give the Transport Workers Union the substance of what they ask for, what happens? . . . You give away the case for the Board of capacity and ability. . . . A man should be there as a competent individual not as a representative of a trade union, but as one who holds a position of freedom and self-respect; that is the position he ought to be in. Moreover, there will be difficulties in selection. God help the Labour Minister of Transport in picking out his Labour men from between the various trade unions in the industry. Whoever he appoints, all the other trade unions will give him a hit over the head. . . .'

Harold Clay, a leader of the Transport Workers Union, with years of trade union experience behind him and as thorough a knowledge of socialist theory as Morrison, at once came forward to challenge him, not on the question of forming corporations but on how they should be formed and what part the workers and their unions should play in them. Clay is a slimly built man of about the same height and age as Morrison. He is not an orator of grand periods and triumphant cadences. But he is a lucid speaker, a well-read man who gives a great deal of attention to detail and is not afraid to hit straight. This he would quickly prove. He said:

'Mr. Morrison has stated that this report before you offers the socialist solution, and this report is based upon the same principles as appear in the London Passenger Transport Bill. In the debate in the House of Commons, Mr. Morrison would not make that claim for the London Passenger Transport Bill;

he handed out bouquets to some of the Tory Party because they had gone as far as, if not farther than, that particular measure proposed to go. I want to suggest that the proposals which Mr. Morrison puts forward stratifies industrial society. The workers are workers, and you doom them to remain hewers of wood and drawers of water under the perpetual control of their bosses. They have no real effective power under the proposals put forward in this report. This report provides for an efficient bureaucracy being placed in control with no effective check upon it. You have a public corporation in the B.B.C. What effective control have you there? . . . In this report and in the speech of Mr. Morrison, efficiency and super-brains are elevated beyond all other considerations.

'There is a fear, we are told, that if you open the door to Labour you open the door to other interests. We do not accept that point of view at all, because we do not, with all respect to Mr. Morrison, put Labour in the same category as the users of transport. We do not put them in the same category as the London County Council. . . . Labour is staking out a claim now, and for one very good reason. Mr. Morrison assumes, if his argument means anything, that we are living in a socialist society to-day, and we are not. This is a class society, whether we like to admit it or not; and whether we say that interests will be represented or not, interests will be there, every interest but that of the people who are actually doing the job. . . .'

Another rising young man, Emanuel Shinwell by name, now entered the fray. He was a leader of the Independent Labour Party and had made his reputation among the political 'left' of the Clyde. He prided himself on his dialectical skill and could score a point with the next. His voice carried well and he had had plenty of experience in debate both in the rough and tumble of the ports where he had been an organiser of seamen and in Parliament itself. He would let Herbert Morrison know that he couldn't get away with schemes without a fight. He said:

'May I ask your attention to the falacies underlying the arguments of Mr. Morrison? . . . He says to you, if you open the doors to these people, the trade unionists, you will open the door to every sectional interest in the country. But when he says that, is he not thinking in terms of one nationalised industry not related to the comprehensive planning for socialism that we have adumbrated this week, and to which the Conference has unanimously accorded its approval? . . .

'What is democratic control of industry? . . . When we speak of workers' control in industry, neither the amendment nor Mr. Morrison's views of the situation foot the bill at all. Workers' control means what it says. It means that the workers are so capable as to be able to control the industry as such without regard to financial or any kind of interests that may exist, even consumers' interests. Now that is all wrong. Democratic control means nothing other than that. I appeal to the Conference to suspend judgement upon this matter. . . .'

He went on to advocate that there be more discussion with the trade unions before they arrived at a decision. So the debate went on until Ernest Bevin rolled to the platform. He would withdraw the amendment in view of the willingness of the Executive to have further discussions on the whole question of the relation of the unions to the boards of the Public Corporations. But of course he could not do it graciously. He had a number of grievances and he expressed them. Then he said, 'My union is willing to let it go back with this observation, that we were forced to put down this amendment, because, in our view, Mr. Morrison was determined to force his point of view through, and I hope that I have some views on the construction and management of industry I obtained equally with him. . . .'

So the discussion went back to the Executive of the Labour Party. From there it went to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, then to the 1933 Congress itself. And in 1933 again it appeared in the Labour Party Conference, and the position was left in what Bevin called 'a fluid position.' The conference went over the ground once more and accepted that

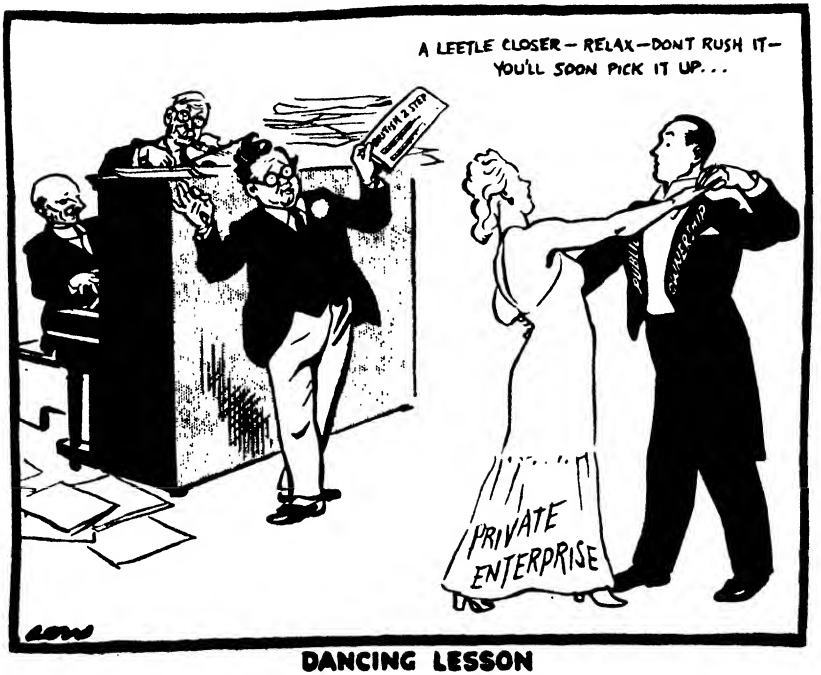
'. . . Organised labour claims for trade unions in the industry the right to nominate persons for appointment to such a Board. This claim of organised labour that it shall have its place in the control and direction of publicly owned industries is accepted.

'It is agreed that in order to give effect to this object there shall be consultation between the responsible Minister and the trade unions concerned.'

Herbert Morrison had triumphed with his theory of the corporation as a form of socialisation and Ernest Bevin had triumphed in forcing him to recognise that the organised industrial workers were determined to play a much more important part in the

'democratic control of industry' than he was at first inclined to concede. It had been a great battle in which both men had marshalled big support and able exponents of their respective points of view. The Labour Movement as a whole had emerged with clearer ideas on how to tackle the problems of transition from one kind of society to another. A big step forward had been made in the direction of planning the future by the method of scientifically analysing the materials and course of history.

The old leaders were passing and Herbert Morrison's and Ernest Bevin's generation were taking charge.



DANCING LESSON

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The New Leaders Succeed the Old

WHEN HERBERT MORRISON and every other leader of the Labour Party addressed the Annual Conference of 1929, full of hope and confidence in continuing progress and ever greater prosperity, knowingly or unknowingly they were echoing President Hoover of the U.S.A. He had declared in 1928, 'The outlook for the world to-day is for the greatest era of commercial expansion in history . . . . Unemployment in the sense of distress is finally disappearing; we in America to-day are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land.'

Of course, Morrison was conscious of the limitations of a 'Minority Government' set by the party Opposition in Parliament. But he and his colleagues were not conscious of the limitations which would be set by the economic crisis of capitalism as a whole. They had talked about the 'breakdown of capitalism,' but only in the same way as a man with a motor-car talks of a 'breakdown' when he encounters some mechanical defect which the engineers at the local garage will soon repair.

From their inception the Fabians had rejected Marxism, which was based upon a scientific analysis of the evolution and economics of society—rejected it, not because they had proved the Marxian analysis wrong, but because they scorned it as 'out of date.' The result was that, as Bernard Shaw put it, 'The abstract economics of the Fabian essays are, as regards value, the economics of Jevons. . . . This really exhausts the history of the Fabian Society as far as economic theory is concerned.'

Edward Pease, the historian of the Society, put it another way. He said that 'Fabian thought was conditioned by an acceptance of economic science as taught by the accredited British professors.' All the British professors taught what is known as the 'marginal utility theory of value,' which meant that the existing system would work effectively if only the law of supply and demand were free to work and regulate the production and distribution of

commodities. Hence the problem was to remove the hindrances to the free market; or, to put it another way, all economic problems are for the Fabians circulation problems which can be dealt with by the regulation of the fiscal and financial mechanism of society.

Armed with such a 'second-hand' understanding of the system they could anticipate neither 'economic blizzards' nor wars. They had scouted the idea of the Boer War and in 1915, according to Edward Pease, 'had made no pronouncement and adopted no policy' on the First World War. It can hardly be a matter of surprise, therefore, that neither Herbert Morrison nor his colleagues anticipated the 'economic blizzard' when they jubilantly took office without power in 1929.

The moral strictures of the Fabians with regard to capitalism and their examination of capitalist institutions brought them to the same conclusions as the Marxists, in that both aspired to socialism. It is a striking fact, which both the Webbs and Bernard Shaw have recognised, although most of their disciples are too full of prejudice to see it, that the nearer the Marxists of Soviet Russia came to the problems of socialist construction, the nearer they came to the Fabians.

Neither held the view that the transition from capitalist economy to a full socialist economy would be anything but a relatively slow process. The immediate problems of Soviet Russia and Britain would differ according to the level reached in the technological, industrial, and social history of the countries, but fundamentally the new economic construction and the institutional development would be the same. Had Herbert looked into the structure of the Soviet industrial trusts and combines he would have found them singularly like the public corporations he was foreshadowing for the socialisation of industry in Britain. Of course the Soviet corporations have not to carry an army of 'coupon clippers,' but that is our price for peaceful transition. In other aspects of construction—their separation from the Soviet Parliament yet responsibility to it; their structural relation to that of industry, and their forms of management—they are much in accord with the plan outlined by him.

Indeed, he did have a look at them when seeking to score off the advocates of 'workers' control of industry' and to reinforce his views on the question of the relation of the trade unions to the State and to industry. He thought it fine to be able to answer the

'left' by showing how the Bolsheviks had been compelled to reject the crudities of the syndicalists in their claim for 'workers' control of industry.' Some day he would discover that the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Fabians lay not so much in their respective views on socialist construction and the nature of the institutions which emerge in the process; but in their understanding of capitalism and how to get rid of it.

In 1929, when the Fabians were in control of the Labour Government and were the custodians of the ideology of the Labour Movement, Britain was a long way from being a classless society. We were on the crest of a capitalist 'boom' which was not recognised as a boom but regarded as a general recovery of capitalism which would continue. The Government had become caretakers of capitalist economy at one of the worst possible times, when they would not be able to pick up the crumbs from the rich man's table to justify their 'caretaking.' Indeed, their 'caretaking' would involve them in extracting concessions from the workers whose conditions they were pledged to improve.

The programme they had submitted to the people was contingent, of course, upon their receiving a majority and being invested with political power to implement their plans. They had not envisaged a 'minority Government' and had accordingly worked out no programme for it. Herbert's speech contained promises and proposals which assumed both that the Opposition would allow the Labour Government to implement them and that the economic situation would improve.

The story of the Second Labour Government is a sad story of disillusionment and hope deferred. Arthur Henderson's great-hearted efforts for international disarmament were to prove futile and to be superseded by an armament race. The Kellogg Pact outlawing war became a forgotten thing. When J. H. Thomas appeared before the conference of 1930 the army of unemployed had doubled. The ratification of the Washington Convention on the hours of labour was dropped. The Trades Disputes Act was never tackled. India was in mutiny and its gaols were filled to overflowing. Colonial women in Nigeria rose in revolt and dozens were shot. Instead of the wages of the workers rising, the Government found itself aiding the cotton and textile employers to secure reductions, and worse, to accommodate workers to a falling standard of life. Unemployment grew. The 'economic

blizzard' arrived. The bankers, the financiers, the industrialists, the whole army of Toryism faced the Government and the entire Labour Movement with a wholesale attack on the working population and the unemployed in order to balance the budget and keep the country on the gold standard. And the Labour Government crashed.

Here were class-war politics with a vengeance. The crash of the Labour Government drove the Labour Party back upon the trade unions. MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas, who for nearly thirty years had been the dominant leaders of the movement, with a handful of followers from the Parliamentary Labour Party, deserted the party and formed a 'National Government' with the Tories and a few Liberals who had split the Liberal Party. Neither Morrison, nor Attlee nor Bevin was among the deserters. These three had been steadily eclipsing the deserters before the break. Now they quickly took their places at the head of the Party, the trade unions, and the Parliamentary Labour Party.

There was a rush general election with the 'National Government' crying loudly that the 'savings of the people were in danger' if Labour was returned. Labour was heavily defeated. At the dissolution of Parliament the Labour Party had 264 M.Ps. After the election it had 46, supported by 6 of the Independent Labour Party. The Conservatives had 471 members, supported by 35 'National' Liberals and 13 'National' Labour. The Labour Party had polled 6,648,023 votes.

In this election Morrison was defeated. Attlee retained his seat with a small majority. Bevin was not a candidate. Indeed, at this period Ernest had decided to remain a trade union leader and leave politics to the politicians. It is actually probable that but for the Second World War he would have remained content with his position in the trade union movement. He is the only leader of the Labour Movement who has been drawn into a British Cabinet while still outside Parliament, and that was ten years after the fall of the second Labour Government. None but an astrologer would have dared to forecast such an event.

The misfortunes of Labour gave Attlee his chance. The Parliamentary Labour Party, deprived of so many of its older leaders, had to find a new one in Parliament. Lansbury became the leader and Attlee deputy leader. George was ageing. He belonged to the

'Old Guard' of Independent Labour Party propagandists and journalists. He was a great humanist and pacifist, who spoke more from his heart than his head. He needed a colleague to work with him who had executive ability and could quickly formulate and prepare the tasks of the party in its rôle as His Majesty's Opposition. Attlee had no renown as an orator, but no one would question that he had all the other requisite qualifications. Above all he was a loyal comrade, self-effacing and extremely diligent, and had by this time mastered the intricacies of parliamentary procedure and administration.

While Attlee became deputy leader in Parliament, Morrison became increasingly the leading man in the Executive of the Party. The dropping of Thomas from the General Council left Bevin as the outstanding trade union leader of the day, and he and Citrine now shaped the policy of the trade unions of the country. Walter Citrine, who had succeeded Fred Bramley in 1925 in the post of Secretary of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, had by this time, through sheer ability, established himself as one of the most influential leaders of labour. I first met him at a shop stewards' conference during the First World War, when he represented a branch of the Electrical Trades Union. Had he come up through one of the larger trade unions he would have outrivalled Ernest Bevin as a man of competence and power. He is one of the most orderly people I have known. His life and work are fully documented. He keeps a diary as systematically as he files every minute of the Congress and the countless committees on which he serves. Quiet in demeanour, free from arrogance and egotism, he speaks with the power and authority of one who has prepared his case well beforehand. With the passing of the leaders of the generation which had produced Smillie, Thomas, Henderson, and Clynes, Bevin and Citrine stepped into the foreground of British trade unionism.

The effect of the fall of the Labour Government and the new stage in the crisis of our time was as profound as the defeat of the General Strike of 1926. Then the trade unions had turned to collaboration with the employers to grope their way with Bevin toward solving the market problems of capitalism, in the hope of securing better bargains in the basement. Now the Labour Party, outraged and shocked by the turn of events, began a discussion which stretched over several years. Leader after leader

began to talk about the 'breakdown of capitalism,' the 'class struggle,' and the 'war danger.' The conferences passed many resolutions. They consisted of two kinds, those dealing with current affairs and those which would make up the programme of socialism 'when Labour comes to power.' The great debates led by Morrison and Bevin on the socialisation of industry belonged to the second category. There was no doubt about the fact that Labour did not want to repeat the experience of 1929–31, and there were many lessons to be learned from that experience. It was Clement Attlee who expressed this most clearly. In supporting a resolution moved by Charles Trevelyan that 'the next time Labour takes office with or without power it should stand or fall on definite socialist legislation,' he said:

> 'I think we all ought to understand quite clearly the position we have to face. The conditions have changed since 1929. . . . I think in the present condition of the world we are bound in duty to those whom we represent to tell them quite clearly that they cannot get Socialism without tears, that whenever we try to do anything we will be opposed by every vested interest, financial, political, and social, and I think we have got to face the fact that, even if we are returned with a majority, we shall have to fight all the way, that we shall have another crisis at once, and that we have got to have a thought-out plan to deal with that crisis; that we have got to put first things first, and that we have not got to wait until our mandate has been exhausted and fritted away . . . we have got to strike whilst the iron is hot. . . .'

Agreed, said the Conference. Henderson appealed for a little caution, but to no avail. The temper of the Conference wanted a Labour Government to deliver the goods, and promptly. So it went on to sketch the blue-print of socialism to guide the next Labour administration.

This ferment did not end with the 1932 conference. But when Attlee and Trevelyan expressed their revolt against what had become known as 'gradualism,' it was the beginning of a new grouping within the Labour Party, which became organised under the leadership of Sir Stafford Cripps into the Socialist League. He had been Attorney General in the second Labour Government and was recognised as one of the most brilliant lawyers of the day, a man of integrity and courage. He had all the executive qualities

of Attlee, with the added advantage that he was a legal orator of great power. He and Attlee were good friends and had a great deal in common. Both were ardent Christians. Both were university men. Both were trained in law and were socialists for the same reasons—essentially moral ones.

By the time the next conference was held the League was organised and had put a number of resolutions on the agenda. This time Attlee and Bevin clashed on the question of the use of Emergency Powers for dealing with the resistance of the House of Lords to socialist legislation.

Arthur Greenwood, one of the most popular, eloquent, and likable personalities in the Executive, a one-time member of the Independent Labour Party, had presented a report on 'Socialism and the Condition of the People.' He had said:

> 'Never in the history of the world has there been so large a volume of unemployed labour as there is at the present time. Never in the history of the world have the potentialities of prosperity been greater than they are to-day. What it means in effect is that the capitalist system is breaking down under its own weight, and that is not something merely that we believe, it is something that capitalists themselves know is happening under their eyes, and the question, therefore, is not one as to whether we are going to try merely to amend the old capitalist system; the real question, the real economic question which faces the world is whether you are going to have a socialist system of society or a form of economic dictatorship ruled by the leaders of capitalism to-day. . . . There is no difference of opinion in any section of our Movement as to what our objective is. We want the maximum of Socialism in the minimum of time. . . .'

Stafford Cripps followed him, asking that the Report be referred back for the Executive to specify the means of getting the 'maximum of Socialism in the minimum of time.' He specified certain means—the abolition of the House of Lords—an Emergency Powers Act—revision of procedure in the House of Commons—an economic plan for industry, finance, and foreign trade.

After Shinwell had once again anticipated Bevin's case and put it better, Bevin entered the fray with, as usual, a few personal grievances, and then began to tell the conference a few things about economics and tactics. He went on:

'If you are going to replan industry and deal with finance, these four headings are extremely limited. There is no mention of other constitutional requirements to deal with the foreign control of your country which now exists. You cannot replan the great engineering industry in this country unless you deal with the financiers of the United States. You cannot deal with the banks until you work out your procedure with regard to foreign holdings, which is a much wider thing than you have got within these four items. . . .

'We are not going to jump out of the frying-pan into the fire. We cannot forget the psychology and attitude of our own people. The British race is very peculiar; it will not go about threatening to 'thug' people, but it will defend itself when it is hit. . . . I believe we should put forward proposals which are intended to deal with unemployment, which are intended to deal with the social conditions of the people—because, after all, the people of this country might defend the House of Lords on a question of Home Rule, or some political question, but we can unite our people on bread and butter, we can unite them on their conditions providing we are clear as to what we are going to do. We should work out our programme, go forward with it, and if we find resistance, call for support to overcome the resistance, but not create the resistance as an excuse for not going forward with our own measures.'

Up jumped Attlee to tackle Bevin:

'Mr. Bevin has said, what is the good of putting four things like this through; it is not complete, for all these other things you have to do. My reply is that everything else you are putting through is useless if you cannot get them passed. Take the raising of the school age. When that was put forward the first thing that the House of Lords did was to throw it out. I have no belief whatever that the House of Lords is going to be kind and acquiescent to a Labour Government even if they have got a majority.'

Bevin interrupted him with a question, asking, 'Is it not a fact that the School Leaving-age Bill was killed by division in the Party itself?'

Not to be sidetracked, Attlee replied:

'To some extent that is true, but the fact remains, and I would challenge Mr. Bevin to show that there were any signs of the House of Lords accepting even a measure like that, which

was not drastic. I ask this conference to be realists as to what we are up against. We are going to be faced with the position of the House of Lords. You may go on for a little while if you do not tackle anything big, but I want our democracy to be effective. I do not think you can overcome the House of Lords unless you have a mandate. . . .

'We do not want to get in by a kind of confidence trick, saying: "We are very good boys, and we shall not do anything drastic unless you give us the power, and then we will do it." If we are to rally the whole of the people of the country we have to tell them that these things have to be faced. I am entirely with Mr. Bevin that we do not want to strike the first blow, but the blow is there, it has always been there. The Lords' attack has been against democracy the whole time. It is no good closing your eyes to that fact. We meet it at every turn, and if you talk with our opponents you will find they have no illusions at all about the House of Lords. . . . I believe entirely in democracy, but I want to see that democracy is effective, and democracy will only be defeated if people believe that democracy is futile and is not prepared to take the necessary steps to make the will of the people prevail.'

So the argument proceeded. Then the Socialist Leaguers swept the conference with a resolution pledging the Labour Party

'to take no part in war and to resist it with the whole force of the Labour Movement and to seek consultation with the Trades Union and Co-operative Movements with a view to deciding and announcing to the country what steps, including a general strike, are to be taken to organise the opposition of the organised working-class movement in the event of war or a threat of war, and urges the National Joint bodies to make immediate approaches to endeavour to secure international action by the workers on the same lines.'

Charles Trevelyan moved this, and after several speeches Hugh Dalton, tall, commanding, using his powerful voice to great effect, declared on behalf of the Executive: 'We rejoice to see the rising flame of the hatred of war. We welcome the speeches that have been made. . . . My only criticism of the drafting of the resolution would be that it does not carry us quite far enough and does not commit us to the economic and financial boycott of any war-mongering State—Hitler, or any other person who may disturb

the peace and murder the workers of the world. . . . I appeal to Conference to accept this resolution.' Carried unanimously. I think Bevin felt it would be useless at that stage to challenge the feelings of the Conference either as a 'practical trade union leader' or as a politician, despite the fact that it raised the issue of the general strike for political ends. But he was a tactician and could wait.

The discussion was essentially of war in the abstract, and no one remembered that the Labour Movement had abandoned the general strike as a weapon or gave any consideration to the implications of the resolution. No one discussed the kind of war that was already being prepared and becoming apparent in the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany. The whole discussion was nothing more than an emotional reaction to the idea of another war similar to the last.

The Socialist League had thus nothing new to contribute beyond acting as an accelerator of this or that in the Party's programme. Its approach to the problems of the Labour Movement was no different from that of the rest. It would flourish for a time, until it began to challenge the Labour Party on its relations with the Independent Labour Party and the Communist Party.

The rump of the Independent Labour Party which had broken away from the Labour Party turned itself, at least by declaration, into a Marxist party, but not sufficiently so for it to fuse with the Communist Party. It determined to fight both the Labour Party and the Communists. The Communist Party had become more isolated from the Labour Party than ever. The defeat of the latter in the General Election of 1931 convinced it that the party was in ruins and that the day of the mass Communist Party had arrived. The Communists had foreseen that an economic crash would follow the boom in the U.S.A., and had drawn the conclusion that we were heading for a revolutionary crisis and that their own strength would grow with the disintegration of the Labour Party. They put up more than twenty candidates in the election, most of whom forfeited their deposits. (I was one of them.) Their total poll was about 55,000 votes. The Labour Party polled six and three-quarter million votes. The Labour Party was in ruins, while the Communists were the triumphant party!

Now the Communist Party desired a united front with the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist League, and

affiliation to the Labour Party, as a means of securing a united working class against the danger of war and Fascism. The Socialist League lent itself to this campaign until the Labour Party faced it with the choice of liquidation or leaving the Labour Party. It was liquidated, and once more the Labour Party emphasised the Marxist principle of one party for one class despite its ideological differences with Marxism. Attlee ceased to be active in the Socialist League when he saw it moving into association with the Communist Party; but he did not object to being regarded as a 'left' socialist.

Morrison in this period had become the custodian of the ideology of the party in its battle against the dissidents and the Communists. He was an extraordinarily busy man. Having been defeated in the general election he was devoting himself with unremitting energy to the London Labour Party, and was on the verge of leading it to the conquest of the London County Council. At the same time he was a dominating figure in the National Executive of the party, and at the Conference of 1933 he not only completed his fight for the public corporation as a form of socialisation but was the spokesman of the Executive on the issue of 'Democracy *versus* Dictatorship.' He expounded Fabian philosophy in relation to politics, the philosophy whereby Labour action turns not upon the relation of the action to the economic, social, and political struggle of classes within capitalist society, but to abstract moral principles.

The circumstances of the time were extraordinary. The capitalists of the world had reacted to the crisis of the system far more quickly than had the working-class movement of the world. In Britain they had put the Trade Union Movement in legal fetters, depriving the Labour Party of thousands of pounds per annum, imposed political embargoes upon large sections of the population, shattered the Labour Government, and imposed new burdens on the working class. Hitler had come to power in Germany, destroyed political democracy in its entirety, smashed the working-class movement, and flung Social Democrats and Communists alike into internment camps. Unemployment was greater than at any time in the world's history. The League of Nations was disintegrating. The Japanese had conquered Manchuria.

Nevertheless Morrison would make it clear that Labour's policy

must be determined by its moral judgement of 'Dictatorship *versus* Political Democracy' unrelated to these political events.

A manifesto entitled 'Dictatorship *versus* Democracy' had been issued by the Joint Council of the Executive of the Labour Party and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. So Morrison and Bevin were at one on this at least. Citrine had piloted the manifesto through the Congress. Now came Morrison's turn. The reference back had been moved. Herbert stepped forward, and with that assurance and precision which every Labour Party Conference now expected of him said:

> 'The Executive cannot accept the reference back. I would recall to your minds the reasons for the issue of the manifesto on "Democracy *versus* Dictatorship" by the National Joint Council. We had received an invitation from the Communist Party to co-operate with them in a united front for the purpose of combating Fascism and war. We could not accept that because we found in the past that co-operation with the Communist Party was an impossible thing, and indeed it was really asking for trouble. Moreover, we should have been in difficulty in fighting Fascist dictatorship by associating with the Communists, because they themselves believe in dictatorship, and a united front under such a platform would have presented certain difficulties. We were also invited by the Independent Labour Party to join with them as well. To some extent the same difficulty arose there, because the Independent Labour Party does not know in this matter whether it agrees with the Communist or the Labour Party, so that further confusion would have arisen. The real point about the manifesto is that we condemn dictatorship as such, whether that dictatorship is a dictatorship of the "left" or of the "right," and the Conference must face up to that issue.'

The Conference did not face up to it. Nor did Morrison. He neither defined what he meant nor what anybody else meant by 'dictatorship,' whether he was talking of dictatorship by a party, a class, or an individual. He was not analysing real life. Just as the Conference had already disposed of a hypothetical war without analysing what kind of war, so it was about to dispose of dictatorship of an undefined character, even if labelled 'left' or 'right.' He went on:

'We cannot hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. If we are opposed to dictatorship we must be open about it and say so. If we ourselves flirt with a dictatorship of the "left" or with a dictatorship of our own, and if some people use the word "dictatorship" in a sense they ought not to, then what are we doing? We are preparing a political psychology which, if we justify one form of dictatorship, gives an equally moral justification in another direction. Therefore in the interests of our people we are bound in making our decision clear about dictatorship and democracy to be frank, firm, and clear about it, and the National Joint Council gives the movement what it is always asking for, namely, a clear, emphatic and firm lead.'

Then he became really eloquent in the style of Ramsay MacDonald:

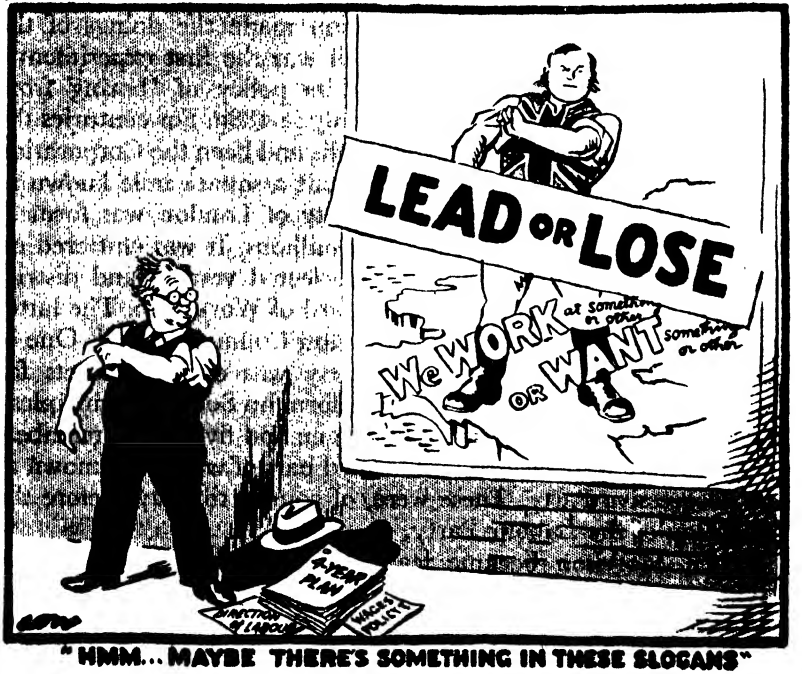
'Democratic institutions which are purely abstract and mechanical do not conform to the real requirements of democracy. Democracy must be a living thing. Democracy and democratic institutions must have behind them a people who understand, a people that is informed and can exercise these democratic institutions so that they be filled with living human blood and living human thought, and it is up to our Movement, as is indeed done in local Government institutions in case after case, as is indeed done in the Parliamentary institution itself, to make of democracy not a mere machine, not a mere mechanism, but a thing of life, a thing of beauty, a thing which places in the hands of the people great constructive political forces which can deliver the people from bondage.'

It sounded good and went across in fine style, and nobody asked him what he meant by this thing which people 'must be behind,' 'filled with human blood' and 'thought' and 'beauty' and at the same time puts 'political forces into our hands!' But suddenly he became a politician conscious of the real world around him, for he made some remarkable reservations:

'I make no promises as to what my position would be if, in fact, we were faced by the Conservative Party or any other party with a real threat of Fascist dictatorship, faced with a situation in which the enemy upholds and exercises the right to destroy democracy. Then so far as I am concerned, and, I hope, so far as the party is concerned, we reserve the right in those

circumstances to utilise any method of combating that threat of a Fascist dictatorship. In such circumstances I would not worry about democratic abstractions or democratic formulæ. I would reserve the right, faced with the use of dictatorial and Fascist methods by the other side, to utilise any method which was expedient or likely to be successful for the purpose of destroying such an attempt upon our constitutional liberty.'

With such a resounding reservation he swept the Conference, and the reference back was lost. The moral approach to history had won, and the new leaders of the Labour Movement continued as the old had begun. They were pushed by circumstance into doing things they would not, and were guided by faith and not by sight. Had Herbert Morrison and his colleagues applied the same method of analysis to the dominant political questions of the day as he had applied to his study of the socialisation of industry, he and they would most probably have arrived at different conclusions. At least they would have seen the actual situation with greater clarity. But it was not to be.



"HMM... MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING IN THESE SLOGANS"

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Attlee wins the Race

AFTER HIS defeat in the General Election of 1931 Morrison devoted most of his time to the London County Council. In 1934 he led the London Labour Party to victory in the Council elections and became leader of the L.C.C. with a working majority behind him. This was a triumph in which he rejoiced to the full. He was a London patriot of the first order. He knew its history, was conscious of its bigness, its beauty and its filth, its richness and its poverty, and of its rôle as the greatest city in the world. And he had studied its problems as well as its heritage.

He brought to his new tasks all his enthusiasm and keenness for efficiency in administration, and soon made the doings of the L.C.C. into 'hot news.' The Council was the first experimental ground of the Fabian Society for its policy of 'boring from within.' It had come into existence only in 1889. For centuries the only central authority in the Metropolis had been the Corporation of the City of London, governing about a square mile known as 'the City.' Then, in 1855, the County of London was formed, with a population of two and a half millions. It was cluttered up with a variety of organisations, the elected vestries and district board of works, the Metropolitan Board of Works, etc. The latter was really the forerunner of the London County Council. One of the first tracts of the Fabian Society was entitled 'Facts for Londoners with suggestions for its Reform on Socialist Principles.' Its author was Sidney Webb. In 1892 he and five other members of the Society were elected and formed part of what was known as the Progressive Party. These were, of course, the days before the formation of the Labour Party.

When Morrison became leader of its Labour majority the L.C.C. was the greatest local government body in the kingdom with an annual revenue of more than £30,000,000, and it is now agreed on all sides that in the first three years the Labour council accomplished more than the three previous councils put together.

Under Morrison's leadership the work has been revolutionised and extended until the L.C.C.'s reputation for efficiency and enterprise is second to none in local government spheres. Morrison has himself written a book about *How Greater London is Governed* which reveals not only the tremendous developments of recent years and the programme it has set before Londoners but, unintentionally perhaps, his own capacity as an administrator and leader within the limits set by the law and the multitude of private interests which beset constructive government within the existing system.

But it was in this period of constructive local government work that he and all political leaders were compelled to give more and more attention to international affairs. Indeed, it is true to say that from the time of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the rise of Hitler to power in Germany all domestic questions became subordinated to world affairs.

Just as the 'economic blizzard' had taken the Labour Movement by surprise, so the triumph of Nazism in Germany had taken it by surprise. Naturally it was shocked by the destruction of the German Labour Movement and the terror which Hitler waged against the working class. He had also swept away the institutions of political democracy. The Nazis had not subscribed to the pendulum theory of politics. Having come to power through political democracy they were determined there should be no more 'pendulum swinging.'

The Nazis certainly made the Fabian theory of peaceful transition from capitalism to socialism look very sick and demonstrated that it was not universally applicable. But the reaction of the Labour Movement to the rise of Nazism to power was instinctively a class reaction, socialist in its character but mixed with a great deal of moral indignation. It condemned Fascism outright, its methods, its ideology, its aims. But there was no certainty that it was inherent in capitalist development, nor was its relation to the crisis within the capitalist system clearly seen. Nazism would have to spread into socialist experience before it could be fully realised and affect Labour's policy.

The rise of Nazism to power signalled the most decisive change in world affairs since the end of the First World War. But neither the capitalist governments nor the Labour Movement recognised the fact. The capitalist governments could not believe it had any special significance for them, and they rather approved of Hitler's

handling of the labour movement. His anti-Bolshevism pleased them immensely. Even Lloyd George wrote to *The Times* advising the Baldwin-MacDonald Government to be cautious because he regarded the rule of the Nazis as the only alternative to the Bolshevisation of Germany.

But neither they nor Lloyd George nor any other statesmen outside Soviet Russia saw that a new world-shaking factor had to be faced. To all of them the Hitler government was just another German government, perhaps a little extreme in some things and extravagant in its raucous propaganda, not entirely a gentleman's government. But that was all.

True, such was not the reaction of the Labour Movement and its leaders anywhere. They denounced the régime and its rulers, and for a few months, when Fascism threatened to do the same thing in Austria as it had done in Germany, it almost appeared as if Ernest Bevin, Herbert Morrison, Clement Attlee, and Walter Citrine had become Marxists. For there emerged one of the most striking examples of socialist solidarity since Labour's solidarity with Soviet Russia in the days of the intervention war. These four certainly ignored once more their theory of class collaboration and peaceful transition and boldly ignored even the frontiers of nations. Herbert Morrison came down from the realm of abstractions about 'dictatorship and democracy' to reservations on what he would do in the unanticipated situation of the destruction of political democracy. The scene of action, however, was Austria, not England.

Citrine had been to Vienna to a meeting of the International Federation of Trade Unions to decide what should be done to combat Fascism in Austria. He had addressed the conference thus:

> 'Comrades, our International is formed on the principle that everyone of its units has complete autonomy. There is no dictatorship here. Yours must be the responsibility to take decisions as to how you should combat Fascism in your country, but I would remind you that you have not only a domestic obligation, but you have an international one. . . The Austrian Government, I repeat, is to-day and was at that stage a dictatorship without authority, electoral or any other kind, from the people of Austria, and when your constitutional right is taken away from you, when you have been proceeding along the path of democratic procedure and the Government blocks the

way to you, then you would be less than men if you did not take what remedies were open to you.'[1]

He came back to Britain to raise £10,000. He raised it and with it bought arms to assist the fight of the Austrian socialist workers against the same thing happening to their organisations as had happened in Germany.

Here was international working-class solidarity in words and deeds. Here was support for an armed uprising which was completely outside the political equipment of the British Labour Movement. Here was interference in the internal affairs of another country. Once again the living class conflict had made the theory of class collaboration and moral persuasion wholly inadequate to the situation.

But it was only a rearguard action in the liquidation of the labour movement of Central Europe. As against the Fabian theory of political democracy evolving slowly into socialism, history had thrust into the world's arena civil war for the preservation of political democracy. Fabianism was not only theoretically unprepared for its coming, but had totally inadequate arms at hand to cope with it when it came. The real world of social forces in conflict had proved quite different from the ideal abstract world which Morrison had dwelt upon so eloquently.

It would be untrue to say the Fabians had no policy. They had. But it was an idealistic policy based upon moral principles of a high order too remote from the world in which they had to lead a struggle for socialism.

How clearly this stands out in the proceedings of the Conference which cheered the support of the Austrian workers! This very Conference, which included Morrison, Attlee, and Bevin, passed the famous resolution calling upon the Labour Movement to prepare for a general strike, an international general strike, against war or the threat of war! It was passed with acclamation.

Against which war was this tremendous weapon to be used? No one could say. Against what kind of war? A capitalist war against Socialist Russia? An allies' war against Nazism? No; it was war in the abstract. Was an international general strike possible on the outbreak of war? Which sections of the labour movement could be prepared, and in which countries? Nobody asked about and nobody referred to its practicability.

[1] Report to 1934 T.U.C.

In the same period, on November 10th, 1933, Attlee, speaking for the Labour Party in the House of Commons, made a brilliant exposure of the equivocation of the Government in relation to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, to disarmament, to the Kellogg Pact, to the League of Nations. Of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria he said:

> 'I hold that the Manchurian question is the acid test of the League of Nations as a guarantee against attack. Everybody who has followed the discussions of the last ten years on disarmament and every international question, knows the problem of security is always uppermost. Those who support the League of Nations claim that it is only through the League that security can be attained. Therefore, when a question arises in which two member States of the League are engaged, the question as to whether the League has afforded that security is a vital one. . . . I believe that the Manchurian question is a vital one, and that unless it is settled satisfactorily through the League of Nations we shall find that the League will lose its moral authority and that we shall slip back to the old system of individual armaments and sectional alliances. . . .'

He went on to show how the legal and moral principles of the League, the Washington Nine-Power Treaty, the Kellogg Pact, etc., had been violated. All this was true. His criticism of the Government was unanswerable. And the corollary of the argument is equally true. Suppose the League, which included the British Government, had pursued the course which Labour had advocated—pressure on Japan, to be followed by sanctions and sanctions by a League war to enforce League law? How would this have squared with the proposition for a general strike against war which Attlee and all his colleagues had supported only one month before this speech?

Such confusion was the natural sequel to the idealistic and empirical approach to the history of society, and the cause of crisis after crisis in the party as it was forced to adjust its policy to changing circumstance. Within a year the party abandoned the theory of waging a general strike against war. By 1935 it was in the throes of another crisis in which it had to deal with pacifism and the possibility of war.

Although the full significance of the rise of Fascism in Europe and the Far East was not fully realised, it was becoming ever more

clear to all socialists that capitalism could no longer live within the legal, political, and moral framework established after the war of 1914–18. The Nine-Power Treaty and the Kellogg Pact were already dead. The Versailles Treaty was in the process of being torn up page by page. The League of Nations was in a condition of disintegration. The armament race had begun. Hitler's Germany and Japan had gone out of the League. Soviet Russia had come in. Then Mussolini invaded Abyssinia, and once again a League member had attacked another.

The new crisis hit the Labour Party with a bang. In 1935 for the first time in party history the Executive came before the Party Conference with 'A Report on the International Situation.' Again one may agree or disagree with its contents, but it was an analysis of the real world in which we live to help the party in the shaping of its policy. In it the fight for peace and the principles of the party was shifted from contemplation of war in the abstract to consideration of war in the concrete. When the Movement had discussed it in the abstract there had been complete unity. Now that it was to discuss it in the concrete it was another matter.

Cripps had led the Socialist League in opposition to the use of sanctions by the League of Nations until the British Government was replaced by a socialist government. They would not support a war led by a capitalist government. Lansbury, Salter, and other well-known pacifists would have no truck with war of any kind.

The Conference met once more in the Dome at Brighton. Every seat was taken either by a delegate or a visitor. There was great excitement, for everyone realised there was to be a 'show-down' and that, as someone afterwards remarked, Bevin had come there with the intention of 'setting a light to the martyr's fire' for Lansbury and to put Cripps 'on the mat.' Dalton was to open the debate on what should be done about the Italian-Abyssinian war and Morrison was to wind up. Bevin would speak as the leader of the trade unions and Attlee as Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party. George Lansbury was the Leader of the Party, and if the Conference endorsed the policy outlined in its report George could no longer be Leader. The resolution before the Conference was definitely in favour of the use of League sanctions against Italy even though it might mean a League war against Italy.

Dalton spoke with great power. He said:

'Shall we or shall we not throw the full weight of this great Movement of ours into the scales, to maintain peace unbroken if we can, and, if peace is broken not through our action, then to break the aggressor and to re-establish peace with a minimum of human suffering and delay?'

There was the issue. Cripps stepped forward. He argued eloquently:

'No League system is a reality within Imperialism. We have learned, many of us, by the experience gained through the post-war period, that the ideal conception of the League of Nations is something quite different from that which now exists in fact. . . . I am glad that we challenged the capitalists to live up to their profession in the Sino-Japanese dispute, because it demonstrated as nothing else could have demonstrated so effectively, the hollowness of their present pretentions. Unless we believe that they are now acting under the compulsion of the working-class movement of this country—which I cannot think to be a view which anyone accepts—what a phantasy! Mr. Baldwin as the agent, not of the imperialists and the financiers, but of the Trades Union Movement! Are these risks, obvious, great, imminent risks, ones that we must encounter? Are we entitled to call on the workers to take them? . . . Are we even certain that putting this weapon of sanctions in the hands of a capitalist government—or perhaps I should say encouraging its use by our imperialist government—will help the Italian or Abyssinian workers? . . . It is vain to imagine such a thing. . . .'

Every Socialist League speaker supported this argument. Attlee joined in, his support of unilateral disarmament and the pacifists forgotten. He now spoke with four years' experience as the advocate of the Party's policy in the House of Commons:

'I have put forward constantly our view of the League, the real view of the League, as supporting the rule of law and an attempt to build up an effective international society. . . . The League must be an effective body to enforce the rule of law. Non-resistance is not a political attitude, it is a personal attitude. I do not believe it is a possible policy for people with responsibility.'

Tackling Cripps, he continued:

'I can never understand why the League was quite good enough for us to support with Germany and Japan in it, and now it is so imperialist because Japan has gone out and Soviet Russia has come in.'

Lansbury rose to make his swan-song as leader of the Party. He spoke to the theme 'Those who take the sword shall perish by the sword.'

'If mine,' he said, speaking with great emotion, 'were the only voice in this Conference, I would say in the name of the faith I hold, the belief I have that God intended us to live peaceably and quietly one with another, that if some people do not allow us to do so, I am ready to stand as the early Christians did, and say, "This is our faith, this is where we stand, and, if necessary, this is where we will die."'

The great audience was profoundly stirred. George was the best-loved man of the movement. But the great majority of the Conference could not accept his religious faith as a political policy. They would have voted for the Executive's policy overwhelmingly, his position as Leader would have been untenable, and he would have retired with all the warm affection for him expressing itself in considered appreciation of his unquestionably great services to the party and to socialism. But it was not to be. The hour for Bevin's *démarche* had struck.

As Lansbury sat down Bevin strode to the speaker's desk. Full of pent-up anger, he was soon to express himself with shattering power. There would be no calm, academic argument from him. It would be a battle with the gloves off, a battle of persons, savage in its intensity. He would be ruthless as few men are ruthless. Watching from the visitors' gallery, I saw him stir that Conference as it has rarely been stirred. After a few introductory words he got into his stride.

'Let me remind the delegates that, when George Lansbury says what he says to-day in the Conference, it is rather late to say it, and I hope this Conference will not be influenced by either sentiment or personal attachment. I hope you will carry no resolution of an emergency character telling a man with a conscience like Lansbury's what he ought to do. If he finds that he ought to take a certain course, then his conscience should

direct him as to the course he should take. It is placing the Executive and the Movement in an absolutely wrong position to be taking your conscience[1] round from body to body asking to be told what you ought to do with it. There is one quotation from the scriptures which George Lansbury has quoted to-day which I think he ought to apply to himself—"Do unto others." I have had to sit in Conference with the leader and come to decisions, and I am a democrat and I feel we have been betrayed.'

There were protests from all parts of the Conference. But he was not to be stayed. We had to listen, not to an argument for and against the resolution, showing that pacifism was wrong and the policy of the Executive was right, but to a long digression into Lansbury's sins of commision and omission in relation to meetings of the Executive, the Joint Council, a disconcerting article in the press, the history of the document before the Conference and how 'I' acted and how 'I' felt, as if the Conference were discussing his autobiography instead of the issue of Labour's policy in relation to the League of Nations and the Italian-Abyssinian war.

After a time he ranged over the American continent, the transformation of the British Empire, the history of the League, and the invitation to Russia to join the League. Emphasising his argument with emphatic gestures, he went on: 'People have been on this platform to-day talking about the destruction of capitalism. The middle classes are not doing too badly as a whole under capitalism and Fascism. Lawyers and members of other professions have not done too badly.'

That was a hefty jibe at the intellectuals of the Party, preparing the ground for the direct attack on Cripps. It would, he hoped, rouse the proletarian trade unions against them. But that was not enough. He must rouse them thoroughly.

'The thing that is being wiped out is the Trade Union Movement. It is the only defence the workers have got. Our Internationals have been broken; our Austrian brothers tried to defend themselves. We did all that we could. It is we who are being wiped out and who will be wiped out if Fascism comes here—the last vestige of defence that it has taken over a hundred years to build up. All the speeches that have been made

[1] This is the official report. To me listening, it seemed unquestionable that he said '*hawking* your conscience.'

here against this resolution ought to have been here last year at Southport, and the people who oppose this resolution ought to have had the courage of their convictions and tabled a resolution at this Conference to the effect that we should withdraw from the League of Nations. You cannot be in and out at the same time, not if you are honest, and that is the only thing that makes me question the honesty of some of them.'

So off he went again, this time to question the 'honesty' of the opposition. Then he plunged into the attack on Stafford Cripps. Again he washed the dirty linen of committee meetings and accused Cripps of having attempted to split the movement. With no sense of humour whatever he exclaimed: 'And who am I to let my personality protrude as compared to this great movement?" Nobody had ever accused him of that. But no one had ever accused him of hiding his light under a bushel, either.

Feeling at last that he must bring his speech to an end, he said:

'They say that he who takes the sword shall perish by the sword. The man who has taken the sword is Mussolini, and because Mussolini has taken the sword we stand by the scriptural doctrine and say that he shall perish by economic sanctions. I honestly believe in this movement. I have shown you its history from the beginning, how its policy has been built up, how we have accepted responsibility, and pledged ourselves to the League, and I ask you to give an almost unanimous vote, leaving it to those who cannot accept the policy of this great Conference to take their own course.'

Lansbury pathetically attempted to explain that Bevin was wrong on certain points of fact in his attack on him. But the deed was done. The day's Conference ended. And the delegates dispersed into groups, discussing his speech with mixed feelings of disgust at his savagery and admiration for his power.

Although there was another full day's debate on the same issue not one speaker referred to Bevin's speech. Few there were in the Conference who had not expressed outside the conference hall their dislike of his personal justifications and insulting accusations, but nobody in the Conference was big enough to challenge him. Of course the Executive resolution went through with an overwhelming majority.

Morrison, sensitive to all that had happened in the course of the debate, wound up in his most persuasive manner. Instead of

the angry dismissal of the pacifists and followers of Stafford Cripps to 'take their own course,' he appealed for the spirit of tolerance.

> 'Let us all, whether majority or minority, be tolerant towards each other and try to radiate the friendly spirit of socialism towards each other. But if tolerance must be given by the majority to the minority, there must also be tolerance given by the minority to the majority. . . . I have perhaps "steam-rollered" more minorities in this Conference for the Executive than anyone else. But if the Executive asked me to "steam-roller" this minority I would not do it. This minority must be considered, but it must play the game by the Party, and it must express its dissent in a way that causes the least embarrassment to the Party and to our candidates in the constituencies.'

By the end of the Conference Bevin was in a different mood. He now revealed another side of his make-up—a capacity to ingratiate himself with his fellow men, to appear of humble and contrite heart and a brother without personal ambitions. He was as sincere in this mood as when he was angry. Seconding the vote of thanks to the chairman and all who had made the Conference a success, he went on in quiet sympathetic tones:

> 'The Chairman has had a task of very considerable difficulty, especially in regard to the subject upon which almost everyone wanted to speak; but if there was one debate in which I would have liked not to have spoken, it was the one in which I did speak. I go away from Conference, after thirty-five years' labouring work, with a sad heart. I have lived through three splits in the Movement in a responsible position and I do not want any more. . . . As one who is probably regarded as a leader on the trade union side, I have worked with all those who have been mentioned in the resolution. On the Labour Party side I am only a labourer. . . .'

Then he went into reminiscences of labour struggles which struck responsive chords among the delegates, and feeling now that all was well he said: 'I do not know what is in the lap of the gods. We must go on to do our best. My only appeal is this. I pay less regard to tactics than I do to principles, less regard to monetary advantage than I do in striving for the ultimate goal. . . .' He spoke quietly, intimately. The battle was over and won. The big boss had come down from the office to have a talk with 'his fellow workers.'

Thus another stage had been reached in the evolution of Labour's policy. There would be no more talk about a general strike against war, and pacifism was finally defeated. But the new policy was by no means soundly based upon a realistic analysis of the world-wide social struggle and the Party's own fight for socialism. It was still calling for international disarmament when the armament race had already begun and the line-up for the next war become clearly discernible. And this war would not be merely one of rival capitalist powers, but a war for the preservation of political democracy and socialism *versus* Fascism. Labour still viewed the League of Nations as the 'embryo of the new international society' when it had already become, at best, the basis for rallying the forces of democracy and socialism against Fascism. Being a party of the Opposition in Parliament, Labour was limited to putting pressure upon the Government, and assumed too readily that the latter meant business when it appeared to support drastic action by the League against Italy.

It was this last point that caused the party to be caught on one foot, as it were, in the general election of 1935. It appeared to the general public that there was exceedingly little, if any, difference between the Government's policy and that of the Labour Party. Both appeared to support collective security through the League. Both were denouncing Italy. Both appeared to be in favour of League sanctions against Italy.

Of course, if the people had read Attlee's speeches in Parliament they would have held a different view. But they had not read them. The Baldwin Government won the elections, as the Tories have won most of their triumphs—on a lie. In 1924 they won on the Zinoviev letter. In 1931 they won on 'Your Savings are in Danger.' In 1935 they won on their professed support of the League and sanctions against Italy. That the latter was not Baldwin's real policy he subsequently explained to the House of Commons when he openly declared that had he put his real policy before the people he was confident that he would have been defeated.

Nevertheless the Labour Party polled almost as many votes—8,326,131—as it had done in the triumphant year of 1929. But the distribution of the votes was not so good. Only 154 members were returned to Parliament. The Tories secured 10,498,000 votes and 387 seats.

It was in this year that the Communists everywhere made a drastic change in their policy. They had thought again about the disintegration of the Labour Party. With the growth of Fascism in Europe they had been calling for a united working-class front against this enemy of the working class. In 1935 the Communist Parties of the world met in Moscow. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Government had promptly reacted to the new situation created by the triumph of Hitler in Germany and swung their foreign policy into line with the call for Collective Security through the League of Nations and by means of non-aggression pacts brought within the framework of the League. It was in the carrying-through of this policy that Litvinov coined the phrase 'peace is indivisible.' The Congress of the Communist International, designating the Fascist Powers as the aggressor powers, dropped its castigation of social democracy and declared that the issue before the world was not socialism *versus* capitalism but the preservation of what was left of political democracy and of Socialist Russia *versus* Fascism. They therefore extended the range of the campaign for collective security with a world-wide campaign for a 'People's Front' and the unity of all peace-loving democrats against Fascist aggression. But they conditioned the formation of the 'People's Front' by insisting that it must be preceded by a 'United Working Class Front.' This latter meant that should the Liberals, for example, be prepared to enter a 'People's Front' on a specifically limited programme of demands for action, these could not be realised until the Labour Party and the Communist Party had arrived at such an agreement.

As evidence of good faith the Communist Party in this country put up only two candidates in the election of 1935, Gallacher and Pollitt. Gallacher was elected and Pollitt was defeated. But the Labour Party Executive would have none of it. Confident of their electoral strength and driven into bitterness by the previous campaigns of the Communist Party, they refused all advances.

Two other important results emerged from the election and the retirement of Lansbury from the leadership of the party. Morrison returned to Parliament. Attlee became the Leader after Lansbury. When, as is usual on the election of a new Parliament, the Parliamentary Labour Party elected its Leader, Attlee defeated both Morrison and Greenwood. It has often been argued that he

was a stop-gap Leader, much as Lansbury had been. Such an argument overlooks the qualities whereby Attlee had established himself as the Deputy Leader in the previous Parliament. He had a parliamentary experience of longer duration than Morrison's. He had proved himself to be a good team-worker. His integrity was unquestioned, and his executive ability was outstanding. He had created no animosities by partisanship in new ideas. Morrison had executive abilities of high order, but he had been a strong partisan of the individual membership section of the Party and had trodden on the corns of some of the trade unionists in the process. On more than one occasion he had challenged the trade unionists on the question of social insurance by industry and the rôle of the unions in socialised industries. He was under suspicion of being an intellectual politician. The trade unionists generally have the same prejudices with regard to the intellectuals and the 'politicians' as Bevin had so frequently evinced. These were the reasons why Morrison, with his greater oratorical and platform qualifications, could not at this stage beat Attlee in the race for leadership. Had the leadership depended upon the mass vote of a Labour Party Conference the result would in all probability have been different. It would then have been a struggle between Morrison and Greenwood on the basis of their greater platform qualifications and personal acquaintance with the mass membership of the party. But in the more restricted circle of the 154 M.Ps. Attlee's longer experience in Parliament and the able way in which he had functioned as Deputy Leader in a difficult period carried him to the top.

No sooner was the election of 1935 over than the Government made it perfectly clear that it would pull its punches with regard to Italy. By the middle of June it announced its intentions of advocating the lifting of the very restricted embargo which the League powers had applied as sanctions against Italy. Conforming to its declared policy as laid down in the 1935 conference, the Labour Party, in Parliament and out, kept up a constant criticism of the Government. In the same month that the latter recognised the conquest of Abyssinia by Italy and advocated the dropping of any form of sanctions by the League, civil war broke out in Spain. The issue was political democracy *versus* Fascism. A general election had produced a liberal government which appointed its representative to the League of Nations as the duly

acknowledged spokesman of Spain. General Franco led the Fascist armed revolt against the new government. He had long prepared for 'the day,' and had been fully assisted in his preparations by Hitler and Mussolini. No sooner had the civil war been launched by the Fascists than Hitler and Mussolini began to send in arms and men to aid Franco.

In France there was a government led by the Socialists, and Blum was Prime Minister. This government initiated the policy of 'Non-Intervention.' On August 26th there was a special conference of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, and the National Executive of the Labour Party. This meeting, in which our three leaders of to-day, Attlee, Morrison, and Bevin, participated, issued a remarkable statement—remarkable in the light of the policy which the Labour Movement had pursued in relation to Austria and Abyssinia. It stated:

> 'The military rebellion in Spain which has raged with increasing fury for the last six weeks emphasises once more the grave dangers arising from the growth of Fascism. . . .
>
> 'The struggle has been brought about by Spanish officers who have broken an oath of loyalty to the Republican Government which they had recently renewed, have seduced Spanish soldiers from their duty, and have organised an invasion of their country by foreign mercenary troops. . . . It was clearly the right of the Spanish Government by rules of international law to obtain arms for its defence, but by the supply of arms to the rebels, in clear breach of international law, in circumstances which showed foreknowledge of their plans, Fascist Italy created a new and immediate danger of war. This danger was simultaneously aggravated by the adoption of a similar policy by Nazi Germany, which had already established a vast system of espionage, corruption, and intrigue in Spain. Fascist Portugal has aided and abetted the rebellion, and its territory has been used as a base.
>
> 'The Conference expresses regret that it should have been thought expedient, on the ground of the dangers of war inherent in this situation, to conclude agreements among the European powers laying an embargo upon the supply of arms to Spain, by which the rebel forces and the democratically elected and recognised Government of Spain are placed on the same footing. . . . The Conference instructs the National Council of Labour

to maintain its close watch upon events . . . recall this conference when the situation requires it . . . support the International Solidarity Fund for Spain, which has been created to provide humanitarian assistance to the Spanish people.'

There could not be any doubt even from this statement that the issue in Spain was the same as that in Austria—Fascism *versus* democracy; that the Spanish Government was the legal representative democratic government of Spain: that Germany, Italy, and Portugal had assisted and were assisting Franco; that an entirely new relation of forces in the international situation had definitely crystallised; and that henceforth the relation of the Labour Movement to the Government would turn upon the Government's policy in relation to the Fascist powers.

It is equally clear from the statement that the leaders, dominated by the fear of war—a fear which they had denounced in the earlier stages of the crisis when dealing with Austria and Italy—thought war could be avoided by a policy of appeasement, which was also the policy of the British Government. They paid tribute to the 'steadfast courage of the Spanish workers' in their struggle. We would send them ambulances and sympathy. True, we had been prepared to risk war by applying sanctions to Italy. True also that we had risked war when we intervened in Austria and sent arms as well as humanitarian aid. Yes, yes, the Spanish workers had all morality on their side. They were right in terms of international law. They were members of the League of Nations, the embryo of the 'World Commonwealth of Nations.' But wisdom demanded of us not to 'intervene' lest the war spread. Of course if governments did not legally adhere to 'non-intervention' we should reconsider the situation; but even then there would have to be provided legal, documentary, lawfully testified evidence or, really, it would be difficult.

Such was the policy with which the Labour leaders came before the Conference in Edinburgh on October 5th, 1936. It may only be a coincidence, but it was in Edinburgh that the Trades Union Congress had met in 1927 when, after the defeat of the General Strike, Ernest Bevin, Walter Citrine, and George Hicks had led the Trade Union Movement into the path of quiescent accommodation to the difficulties of the employers and the mutual study of how to make industry profitable without changing its ownership. Now the Party was to be asked to accommodate itself to the

Government's foreign policy, the League, and the manipulations of the law, lest there be war.

Arthur Greenwood opened the debate on the above policy with an apologetic speech. He did not question the issue in Spain—Fascism *versus* democracy. He denounced the embargo on arms and then proceeded to moralise about 'Non-Intervention' being made to work. He expounded the legal position of the Government and raised the spectre of war in Europe if there were 'free trade in arms.' He acknowledged the responsibility of the French Socialist Premier Blum for the policy of 'Non-Intervention' and made this an additional reason for the British Labour Movement's support of the policy. 'Why was it,' he asked, 'we are reluctantly driven to the policy of non-intervention? Because the fear which is gnawing at our hearts is the fear of general war.'

David Grenfell followed and developed the theme. He cried loudly:

> 'Suppose intervention starts to-morrow, and suppose Germany and Italy and whoever else takes sides with them, say: "The hour has struck. This is the hour of conflict between Fascism and Democracy in Europe." Are you quite sure that is what we want? If you are, say so, but do not ask for intervention meaning not to fight . . . . If you are for intervention in those circumstances you must be for war, and you must take the responsibility.'

Charles Trevelyan said: 'You are beggared of a policy at this moment, with nothing to offer but bandages and cigarettes.' That fetched Bevin to the platform in fighting form. After a contemptuous dismissal of Trevelyan and a few autobiographical introductory observations he proceeded to lay down the law in his usual infallible way:

'We have never departed one inch or one tithe from our claim that international law should be observed.' To prove that, he read the resolution. Then he proceeded: 'We are faced with the arrival of Fascist governments who will not respect either treaties or international law. International law, as ordinarily understood . . . is dead. And unless the democratic countries, in conjunction with Russia and, I pray and hope, with the United States of America, will come together and assert international law, then the price for its re-establishment is going to be a bitter one indeed.'

He then went on to explain why they had to accept regretfully 'Non-Intervention' policy. It appeared that the assertion of an international right for the government of Spain left it open for the Nazis to recognise the Franco government, and they would have been square with international law. Then he couldn't take a line which might upset the Blum government of France. 'I said to myself: "In the light of these facts, am I the man, for the sake of any kudos I might get, or for any reason at all, to take a line to break down the Blum government?"

He did not explain how the refusal to be parties to the 'Non-Intervention' policy would bring down the Blum government. He wound up with this: 'The National Council of Labour has tried to follow, with the most intimate connection, everything that has been going on. We shall continue to do it, and the best decision that you can come to to-day is not to give a vote as if this Report confirms 'Non-Intervention,' but confirms the active work that the National Council is trying to do, and to back its effort to assist Spain to the best of its ability.' How the Conference with one vote could do the latter without confirming the policy of 'Non-Intervention' he did not explain.

Christopher Addison argued against this course. William Dobbie had just returned from Spain and he said: 'Mr. Greenwood has said that lifting the embargo will give the rebels an opportunity of having fifty to one in planes, in big guns, and in munitions. They have got that now.' Charles Dukes came up for the Executive again, and he argued, despite the personal evidence of Dobbie: 'We have analysed the statements made by the Spanish Government, we have checked up the press statements made by comrades who have taken this rostrum, we have checked up dates of despatch, dates of delivery, dates of the signing of the Pact [of Non-Intervention] and we cannot discover a single instance of munitions being despatched subsequent to the signing of that agreement.'

Then came the first dramatic incident of the proceedings. Aneurin Bevan came to the platform. Aneurin belongs to the generation of leaders next to Bevin's generation. He is a miners' leader belonging to the Marxists of South Wales, an orator who can stir any crowd, quick in repartee, disposed to hit in measure with the size of his opponent. The Conference was disturbed. It didn't like the apologies for the resolution.

There was a stir in the Conference as Bevan took up his position. He started off:

'We have been told by Mr. Bevin and we were told by Mr. Greenwood that those of us who were critical of the official policy of the Party were being governed by our sentiments and not by our heads. I listened to Mr. Dukes with great care, and if Mr. Dukes is representative of the cool, cold, calculated, and well-informed manner in which the official policy of the Party is being decided, then I am all for sentiment and emotion. He told us there was no evidence before the National Council of Labour as to the supply of arms to the rebels in Spain. Every reputable visitor from Spain informs us that the Government of Spain is without arms from outside and the rebels are getting all they need to support them. Every newspaper office in London is full of information about arms pouring through Lisbon. Del Vayo has made a statement at Geneva and laid a document before the League to the effect that arms are pouring in to the rebels. . . . Everybody in the world knows about the rebels getting arms—except the National Council of Labour.

'Mr. Bevin told the Conference that the reason why the rebels were getting arms in Spain was because the Fascists were ignoring all the claims of international law.'

He stopped. He saw Bevin had risen from his seat in the body of the hall and was thoroughly annoyed. He waited with his head thrown back, looking down at Bevin and ready to hit back with telling effect.

'On a point of correction,' Ernest said. 'I did not utter the words, or anything akin to the words, that Mr. Aneurin Bevan is attributing to me. What I said was that the Fascist governments are now ignoring international law and I indicated that the only alternative to prevent them recognising the Burgos government was some form of action of this character by M. Blum.'

Before he could sit down Bevan struck:

'I do not know what Mr. Bevin means by that, because if the references in his speech to the Fascist governments ignoring international law did not relate to the issues before the Conference, then they were entirely irrelevant. What we are discussing is the fact that the rebels are receiving arms and the Government is not receiving arms because the Fascist nations ignore the obligations of international law.'

I have seen Bevin many a time hammer his way through a Conference successfully. Watching this scene from the press table, I have never seen him so disconcerted by an opponent as on this occasion. Frowning heavily, his big form sank back into his seat and he made no more interruptions.

Having punctured Bevin effectively Bevan set about Greenwood:

> 'Mr. Greenwood said this afternoon that he had met in Transport House, London—members of the Parliamentary Party, the National Executive, and the General Council—and that no alternative suggestion was made. Mr. Greenwood knows very well that there were many people at that Conference who opposed the policy, and that the alternative to the policy suggested by the National Council of Labour is obviously that the embargo should be raised, and the Spanish Government obtain arms. That is why we opposed it.
>
> 'We have the suggestion that for the sake of avoiding a European war we must maintain a neutral attitude. If the Popular Front Government of France is destroyed, then the Franco-Soviet Pact will soon be denounced, and democracy in Europe will soon be in ruins. That is the consequence of this policy. . . .'

It was left to Attlee as the Leader of the Party to stem the tide Bevan had set flowing. Morrison did not take part in this discussion although he was the first man of any section of the working-class movement in this country to advocate intervention. 'To stand aside is treason' he had declared on the morrow of Franco's invasion. Now, afraid of splitting the Party, he held himself bound by the Executive's resolution to 'acquiesce' to the 'Non-Intervention' policy. Attlee spoke like a lawyer with an unsatisfactory brief: but he stuck to it. He said:

> 'We have here a very difficult decision to make. . . . We say the Spanish Government has every right to import arms. . . . We have protested against her not being allowed to do so. . . . The whole agreement on "Non-Intervention" is only binding provided it is loyally observed by all. . . .'

Ignoring the fact that the Republicans were almost without arms and refraining from any examination of the realities of the struggle, he proceeded to view the situation as a matter only for governmental investigation of the violation by the Fascists of the

'Non-intervention' Pact. This had been simplified by the document of Del Vayo submitted to the League. Were the accusations in this document true? 'You must,' he said, 'give the Government the right to see what the evidence is. . . . We demand that our Government and the other Governments who have put their hands to this International Agreement should see that it is being fully carried out.'

Hicks then told the Conference that the British Labour Movement had collected roughly £16,000. This money was being spent on sugar, chocolate, biscuits, and pullovers.

And the vote was taken and the 'Non-Intervention' policy won by 1,836,000 votes against 519,000. Appeasement under cover of legalism trading on fear of war had triumphed in the first round. It did not stop there. Two days later two Spanish delegates appeared before the Conference, Señora de Palencia and Señor de Asua. Had their speeches been delivered before the vote on the question of 'Non-Intervention' the Executive resolution would have been cast into the waste-paper basket. Something had to be done. It was. Attlee and Greenwood rushed off to London to discuss the situation with the acting Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. They went. They came back. 'Chamberlain assured us,' said Attlee, 'that the British representatives were fully conscious of the dangers which would be incurred if the situation were not cleared up without delay.' The Committee to investigate 'complaints regarding the alleged breach of the "Non-Intervention" agreement received from the Spanish Government' was meeting in London that day.

Attlee told the Conference that *if* the 'Non-Intervention' agreement has not been carried out 'it must be abrogated, and we are calling on our Government without delay to establish the facts, and if those facts are established, then to revert to the position before the "Non-Intervention" agreement and give the Spanish Government their full rights to support the cause of the legal government, constitutional government, a democratic government, against the rebels.' Noel Baker, Strabolgi, and John Jagger tried to persuade the Conference to secure an immediate change of policy. Once more Bevin jumped into the fray. He declared: 'From the moment we leave this Conference, our officers will be on the door-step, not in a week, but every day, putting pressure on to get results.'

So, having 'regretted' the acceptance of the 'Non-Intervention' policy by the Governments and spiritually aligned the movement with democracy in Spain, having humanely assisted with chocolates and cigarettes, and having rounded off the proceedings with the picturesque prospect of Bevin and 'our officers' daily sitting on the doorsteps of Downing Street waiting in the most agitated way for the legal confirmation of the violation of the 'Non-Intervention' Pact, the Conference suffered its resolution to remain.

It is doubtful whether the morale of the leaders of social democracy ever sank so low as in the opening stages of the civil war in Spain. Attlee searched for legality. Bevin bellowed for the right procedure. Morrison remained silent. And Eden and Chamberlain led them all through the labyrinth channels of enquiry and legality.

When Guernica was blasted by the German air force they demanded an enquiry into that. When the Spaniards begged for all anti-Fascists to unite in common assistance they kept clear of association with Communists. When the Communist-inspired International Brigades were formed they did ask for a distinction to be made between these real voluntary forces that went to Spain and the government armies of Italy and Germany, but did nothing to recruit members for the International Brigade.

By June 1937 Attlee led the party in the House of Commons to declare the uselessness of trying to ignore the 'deliberate intervention in Spain' and demanded that the League act under the Covenant. By July 1937 the tide turned and the party denounced the policy of 'Non-Intervention,' which it described as 'this policy foredoomed to failure.'

Meanwhile the humanitarian ambulance aid to the Spanish republicans had grown enormously. Thousands of Spanish children were brought to this country to be cared for by the British Labour Movement. A Spanish Medical Aid Committee organised medical and nursing contingents with ambulances to serve behind the Republican battle-lines. But while many Labour leaders, including Attlee, openly supported this Committee, the party did not endorse its activities and officially back it. One day in 1937 Attlee accepted an invitation from the Spanish Government to visit Spain. He went, and there came a day when he reviewed a section of the International Brigade named after

him. At last he, the Leader of the Labour Party, was standing where he should have been from the beginning—in the forefront of the army of liberation. He was deeply moved as the men from the fields, factories, and workshops of Britain marched past him and gave the soldiers' salute. He did not question their party affiliation. He did not cry 'Cross sections of all lands, unite!' but 'Workers of all lands, unite!'

Labour's 'acquiescence in the 'Non-Intervention' policy was dead.

TOUGH LAMB

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Right Turn

THE YEAR 1936 has often been referred to as the most depressing year in Labour history. The Edinburgh Conference had presented a spectacle of dismay, fear, and confusion among both the leaders and the led. The Fascist offensive throughout Europe had completely changed the international situation in a direction which neither Attlee, Morrison, nor Bevin had foreseen.

In the course of a few years all of them had performed some strange political gyrations. Now they came to the question of re-arming this country, a question they were first compelled to face in that same Edinburgh conference of 1936. Bevin found himself opposed by both Morrison and Attlee. Silent in the Conference of 1933, when the whole Conference had voted unanimously in favour of waging a general strike against war, he had now become convinced that war was on the way and that the Labour Party and everybody else must support a rearmament programme whatever government might be in power at Westminster. This led him into a first-class row with both Morrison and Attlee, who would support re-armament only if it were based upon collective League responsibility.

A resolution to this effect was before the Conference. Hugh Dalton, introducing it on behalf of the Executive, gave the impression that the resolution meant supporting the Government's proposals for re-armament. Morrison, following him, gave the impression that it meant nothing of the kind. He added that the Parliamentary Party should be left with a free hand to vote according to the change of circumstances and its own judgement on those changes.

This was too much for Bevin. He told the Conference:

> '. . . . After listening to Mr. Morrison, it seems to me that we are just "passing the buck" to the Parliamentary Party. I do not think it is a fair thing to do. It is not for me to defend

them, but if I were a back-bencher I should get up and ask them to play straight. . . .'

After a little personal history concerning his part in the shaping of the policy of the Labour Movement he went on:

'I admit it [the resolution] was drafted hurriedly and I am not complaining of that. It is the speeches that have been made and particularly by Mr. Morrison, which, in all kindness to him, I could not help feeling was one of the worst pieces of tight-rope walking I have ever seen in this Conference; and as a leader, in common with him, I consider that if ever there was a time when, whether it is popular or unpopular, we have got to tell the people the truth, it is now, and we must do it fearlessly, whatever the consequences may be. . . .

'We fear Fascism, and I will tell you why we fear it. We saw our movement go in Germany. You may criticise the German movement, and say they were guilty of this and guilty of that, and they were weak and did not realise it, but we have not got that excuse after they have gone. The lesson is there for us. Our men shed their blood in Austria—and nearly every one of them was a trade unionist. The British Trades Union Movement poured out its money and did all it could to try and save the Austrian workers. . . . I believe that if this great Movement says to Hitler, "If you are going to rely on force—while we will fight for justice for everybody in the world—if you are going to rely on force and the forcing of your system, either through espionage, either through Mosley, either through your finance, we will stand up foursquare to it," it is the best thing that can be done for peace. I thought this resolution intended to ask us to face up to that. . . .'

Attlee then came in to the support of Morrison. He summed up the meaning of the resolution in these words:

'We say we must fix our level of British armaments with regard to our position in a system of collective security, not with regard to a competition with other armed powers, and we announce perfectly clearly our position here; that we re-affirm our policy to maintain such defence forces as are consistent with our country's responsibilities. But we are not prepared to support a Government that has betrayed the League, that is not, I believe, in earnest, and that has not related its arms policy to any intelligible foreign policy. Their armaments

policy is entirely unintelligible and we shall therefore continue to oppose this Government on its foreign policy and its arms policy and endeavour to get rid of it at the earliest possible moment.'

The Executive got its resolution through by 1,738,000 votes to 657,000.

But there was no system of collective security to which British armaments could be related, and the Government was opposed to every step the Labour Party wanted to take in the direction of collective security. The policy was based on two assumptions: that the League of Nations was a working institution of collective security in which all the nations composing it pooled their forces for defence against aggression; and that it would be possible to stop the agression of Fascism without war, get them loyally to carry out the 'Non-Intervention' policy in Spain, and persuade them to accept non-aggression through the League of Nations and the moral code of international law.

Attlee in the same speech passionately affirmed: 'We recognise the dangers of our position owing to Fascist dictatorships, but I will never be a party to taking a fatalistic line and suggesting that it is inevitable there must be a line-up for a war.' How collective security through the League in its then existing composition could be anything other than a line-up against the Fascist powers it is difficult to see. Even if it had been effected in the name of preserving peace, the peace itself could only be a state of equilibrium until the Fascist powers deemed they were in a position to shatter the equilibrium. The assumption that war between Fascism and Democracy was not inevitable constituted a completely short-sighted view of the nature of Fascism, and was to land the party in an appeasement policy towards Fascism as fatal as that of Chamberlain.

Had the socialists studied the nature of Fascism and its relation to the rest of the world they would have seen that from the moment Hitler got into his stride in Germany all possibility of the League of Nations growing into a world commonwealth was ruled out; that not only political democracy and socialism everywhere were threatened, but the British Empire and Commonwealth also. From that time British Labour should have placed itself at the head of all anti-Fascist forces and challenged the Government on its appeasement of Fascism and its failure at

home and abroad to take the necessary measures to defend the country, the Empire, and political democracy, against the oncoming enemy.

But British Labour had no such estimate either of the nature of Fascism or of the tasks which patently lay before the Labour Movement as the real custodian of democracy and socialism. Inhibited by their inherent pacifism and idealism and their anti-Communist phobia, the socialists declined every proposal for united action by anti-Fascist organisations and drifted 'independently' behind the Chamberlain Government in the name of peaceful relations and collective League security through moral persuasion. And once again they made changes only under the pressure of circumstances and not through intelligent anticipation based upon a scientific understanding of the nature of the social struggle of our time.

In less than twelve months Bevin, Attlee, and the rest of the Party had had to abandon 'Non-Intervention' in relation to Spain. Within a few months Morrison and Attlee were challenging the Government not only on the futility of the 'Non-Intervention' policy but on questions of defence, and accusing it of giving away the strategic bases of the Empire all along the line. In 1937 the Parliamentary Labour Party decided not to vote against the final estimates for the military Services. The Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party of 1937 overwhelmingly endorsed re-armament. Now Bevin, Morrison, and Attlee were in agreement, declaring, 'The time has come for a positive and unmistakable lead for collective defence against aggression and to safeguard peace. . . . Whatever the risks involved. Great Britain must make its stand against aggression. There is now no room for doubt and hesitation.'

But although they were denouncing the policy of the Chamberlain Government with increasing vigour they were still refusing to co-operate with people and organisations who were in entire agreement with their changed policy. The Spanish Republican Government fell. They protested. Abyssinia fell, and the conquest by Italy was duly recognised. Again they protested vigorously. Eden resigned and they joined in the denunciation of the Government. Austria fell. On March 24th, 1939, the Prime Minister made a statement in the House of Commons that the relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia might, in the near future, threaten the peace of Europe and involve France, Great

Britain, and other countries in war. But there was not the slightest indication that the Government was likely to do as the Labour Movement had demanded and make 'a stand against aggression.'

Although ever since 1935 the Communist Party had dropped its propaganda for British soviets and had declared that the preservation of political democracy was the order of the day for them and the working class everywhere outside the Fascist countries, the Labour Party refused all association with Communism for a common campaign to force the resignation of the Chamberlain Government. The Labour Party forced the Socialist League to close down, expelled Stafford Cripps and Aneurin Bevan and others for taking part with the Communists in a campaign for a united working-class struggle against Fascism, and rejected all proposals for a People's Front.

When the Labour Party Conference met in the Garrick Theatre, Southport, on May 29th, 1939, Herbert Morrison was in charge of the report which told of the renewal of the Japanese war in China, of the fall of Czechoslovakia and of all the Party had done in the denunciation of the Government's policy, of the rearmament plans of the Government, the proposal for conscription, and the campaigns for a 'United Working Class Front' and the People's Front.

It fell to my lot to speak in support of a resolution proposing that the Executive of the party at once enter into negotiations with the executives of the Co-operative Party, the Liberal Party, the Communist Party, and any other organisations they might agree on, with a view to the formation of an alliance based upon a short-term international and home programme aimed at the fulfilment of Labour's foreign policy, the preservation of our democratic institutions, and the improvement of the economic and social position of the workers. In support of this proposition I argued that:

> 'The immediate choice before the people in this Party is not that of capitalism *versus* socialism. . . . It is to-day a choice between the continued existence of the pro-Fascist Chamberlain Government and the advance towards socialism through the preservation of democracy, of peace, and of our liberty. It is an amazing thing that on every question, apart from that of fighting the Chamberlain Government, the Party declares this to be the case. . . . Instead of seeking the maximum agreement

possible against a Chamberlain Government, it treats most of these people as enemies in the name of unsullied socialism. This is not the way to fight for power; this is the way to keep the Chamberlain Government in power. . . .'

Herbert Morrison replied:

'. . . Are Fascism and war in part, and in substantial part, the result of economic forces inherent in the capitalist system itself? I believe they are. I believe they have a relation to the economics of capitalism, and if that is so, it is a serious thing to abandon, even for the time being, our desire to transform the economic system, which alone in the long run will really remove the fundamental causes of Fascism.

'. . . It was proposed that part of the combination should be dissentient Conservatives such as Mr. Eden, Mr. Duff Cooper, Mr. Churchill and others. . . . It is very uncertain whether in fact they would pull Conservative votes or whether the Conservative voters, deserted by these men, would not more than ever determine to offset the combination against the Conservative Party itself. . . .'

He continued to speculate in like manner on the reactions of the Liberals and on the workability of a Popular Front Government removed entirely from the immediate perspective of the war that stared the world in the face. The People's Front resolution was defeated by 2,360,000 votes to 248,000.

Nevertheless the war rushed towards us. The Czechoslovak crisis was followed by the Polish crisis, the collapse of the negotiations for common military action by Soviet Russia, France, and Britain, and the signing of the German-Soviet Pact. War came, and the Chamberlain Government was still in power. The disaster that Morrison had completely ignored in his arguments against the supporters of the Popular Front was now upon us.

By May 1940, eight months after the Chamberlain Government had proved that it could neither fight for peace nor wage the war, Clement Attlee stood before the Labour Conference at Bournemouth asking for endorsement of the decision of the Party Executive that Labour should join a Coalition Government led by Churchill. There was no abstract arguing now about the 'serious danger of abandoning, even for the time being, of our desire to transform the system . . . and to remove the fundamental causes of war and Fascism'; no question now of whether it was

possible for Churchill and Eden or even Chamberlain to work in coalition. Hard facts forced the Labour Movement once again to change its policy in favour of precisely the policy which its leaders had denounced as unsound in practice and undesirable in principle.

The situation was urgent. Attlee spoke with vigour and eloquence. He said to the waiting conference:

> 'You have got to face the issue. Hitler will not care whether you are an imperialist or a pacifist or anything else, and he will not care whether your wives and children are pacifists or capitalists or imperialists or anything else. We have held in the Labour Movement during these difficult days that we have to preserve the hope of our Movement. Whatever may be the conditions in capitalist democracies, there is always that opportunity; but where Nazism reigns all hope has gone.
>
> '. . . We were invited to join the Government. We believed that the country wanted a new government, and we said so. Then we had to take the responsibility as to whether we would help to form that Government, and the National Executive had to come to a grave dicision. . . . That was done. We have been in discussion with the new Prime Minister with regard to the composition of the Government. Our view was this. As I said to him, if Labour representatives in the House of Commons are to come into the Government, they can only come if they have the support of our Movement. And we go in, as we say, as partners, and not as hostages. We can only act effectively in the Government if we have the effective support of our membership, if we have close contact with our membership on the political side of Labour and of the industrial side of Labour. . . .
>
> 'There must be included in the Government, perhaps, some people we do not like. Yes, but there are some of us they do not like. After all, that is the essence of the whole thing. . . .
>
> 'What I am appealing for to-day is for the Labour Movement to stand firmly together in this national effort. We must win this fight,'we must defeat Hitler, we must build a just peace, we must end war. You cannot end war by surrender to Hitler. You cannot get a just peace by surrendering to Nazism. We have got to win. . . .'

He got his mandate by an overwhelming majority. The oft-rejected principle of strategy, that in the existing world situation all anti-Fascists should unite to defeat Fascism, now became the

leading principle. No one accused Socialists of deserting socialism because they had formed a coalition with Liberals and Tories, under Churchill and including even Chamberlain.

The irony of the situation was that as Attlee, Morrison, and Bevin somersaulted into a Popular Front to wage a war against Fascism, the Communist Party, which since 1935 had been conducting a campaign for a 'United Working Class Front' and a 'Popular Front' on the ground that Fascism was the main enemy, now somersaulted from that position into isolation, on the ground that the war was an imperialist war and not a war against Fascism! Not until the Soviet Union was drawn into the vortex of the struggle did the pressure of events force the Communists out of this anomalous situation and complete the process of securing maximum political unity among the parties, not for socialism *versus* capitalism, but for political democracy *versus* Fascism. Yet, as Stalin subsequently agreed, 'the war was an anti-Fascist war from the beginning.'

'Oh what a beautiful mornin',
Oh what a beatiful day,
I gotta beautiful feelin',
Everythings going my way."
From "Oklahoma."

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Careers Converge

THE DAY upon which Attlee, Morrison, and Bevin joined the Coalition Cabinet led by Churchill came amidst the most amazing period of England's history. The country had been drifting almost to disaster. While Hitler's armies and air Forces were smashing through all the countries of Western Europe with startling rapidity, the 'phoney' conditions of warfare in our islands appeared to remain unruffled.

As so often happens in our history, the dominant politicians could not see the wood for the trees. They did not see in the Nazi-Soviet Pact the natural sequel to their own stupidity in three times refusing the offers which would have meant an alliance of Soviet Russia with France and Britain against Nazi Germany. They did not see in the Russo-Finnish war another hammer-blow in the strategical preparations for the coming war of the Soviets against Nazi Germany. All they could see was an act of aggression which shocked their moral conscience. And even now as the armies of Hitler swept onward to Paris and Britain's small army in France was about to be driven off the Continent altogether, the anti-Nazi forces of Britain only reluctantly came together.

This time there was no split in the ranks of Labour. Bevin did not treat us, as he had done in 1915, to a tirade on the anti-working-class character of the people with whom he and his Labour colleagues were about to form the most popular of 'Popular Fronts'. Nor was Morrison a conscientious objector. This time he was a most ardent advocate and fighter for military victory over the enemy. There was, indeed, singularly little of a conscientious objectors' 'movement' throughout the country, though a fairly high number of individual objectors. Never had the Labour Movement been more unanimous and determined in its unity to wage the war.

The only ironical anomaly in the situation was the attitude of the Communist Party. It based its policy, as usual, upon the

foreign policy of the Soviet Union, instead of making its own independent Marxist analysis; so once more it isolated itself completely from the Labour Movement, just when it had the greatest opportunity in its history to become integrated with it. It denounced the war as imperialist, and romantically chattered about appealing to the workers of Germany over the head of Hitler. It half-heartedly murmured something about 'turning the imperialist war into a civil war' and 'our enemy being at home.' Pollitt and Campbell accidentally tried on the 'collective security' record produced in 1935. But they were compelled to stop the gramophone, put on a 1914 record, and play it with a very worn needle. The reproduction was very bad. Nevertheless it was the best they had in the cupboard until the war got into its full stride and produced the new model of July 1941.

The situation was now extraordinary. Behind Attlee, Morrison, and Bevin was the united Labour Movement, now thoroughly roused as everyone became conscious of the overwhelming power of the enemy and the totally unprepared position of the country. The 'phoney war' was at an end. Our forces were being driven into the sea. The political basis for a united nation was established in a struggle for self-existence. Attlee, now Lord Privy Seal and functioning as deputy Prime Minister, declared to the House of Commons on May 22nd, 1940: 'The Government demands complete control over persons and property, not just some persons and some particular section of the community, but of all persons, rich and poor, employer and workman, men and women, and all property.'

Bevin was appointed Minister of Labour and National Service and Morrison became Minister of Supply. There would now be no more discussions on war in the abstract or 'League responsibility' or dissertations on the hypothetical unworkability of a Popular Front. The war had created a most desperately popular front. It had thrust the three Labour leaders into three of the most important positions of Government, and for the next five years they would be compelled, by the very nature of the situation and the jobs they had to tackle, to examine the real relation of social forces, the real economic and political situation, and to apply certain socialist principles that were forced by events into the forefront.

Every question would have to be faced from the standpoint of the interests of the nation as a whole, of the fight for its preserva-

tion along with its political democracy and social institutions. The 'interests of the nation as a whole' is the first principle of socialism. It governs the socialist conception of the ownership of property, the organisation of society, the existence of classes, the administration of things. But the relation of social forces within the nation, desperate as the position of the nation might be, imposed from the outset a limit to the application of the socialist principle. This was quite clear from the compromise made in the form of a 'gentleman's agreement' at the formation of the Coalition Government—that *for the duration of the war there should be no fundamental change in the ownership of the means of production.* Whatever was to be requisitioned because of national necessity should be a temporary requisition and not a permanent acquisition. National control and direction of anything and everything, but national ownership never, was the attitude of the Tories. But within the limits set by this compromise every feature of socialist planning and policy would be applicable to the desperate war situation. Never, therefore, had three men had thrust upon them greater opportunities to prove their calibre or greater tasks to accomplish.

Until victory should be signalled, the problems at home and abroad were to be greatly simplified by the singleness of purpose which would dominate the situation. In the first years of the war every question had to be determined by the exigencies of battle, the material at our disposal, and the capacity of the Government to mobilise the resources of every kind to the full, to produce to the maximum and to inspire to effort without limit.

Attlee's work as deputy leader to Churchill still lies hidden in the minutes of Cabinet meetings. While Churchill overshadowed him publicly, no one to-day questions the fact that as the war proceeded Attlee grew in political stature and common esteem. His leadership of Parliament during the frequent long absences of the Prime Minister at international conferences, while providing none of Churchill's great flights of oratory, did not weaken the nation's confidence either in the team-work of the Government or in his own competence to steer the nation's affairs in the absence of his colleague. He sought neither limelight nor applause. Calm, businesslike, precise, loyal, his reputation grew. It is now no secret that his handling of Cabinet meetings, free from Churchill's lengthy histrionic monologues, accomplished three or four times the amount of work achieved under the 'P.M's.' loquacious ægis.

The confidential character of Cabinet meetings sets the same limitation on public reference to the contributions of Bevin and Morrison in these important gatherings. But the departments in which they worked perform in the full light of day, and are so intimately related to the lives of Britain's millions that no amount of reserve on their part could hide their performance.

Bevin and Morrison were in commanding positions of responsibility from the moment they entered the Government until the end of the war. No better choice could possibly have been made for the post of Minister of Labour and National Service than that of Bevin. His vast experience as the outstanding trade union leader of his generation, his capacity as an organiser, and his great gift for expressing the human desires and social needs of working men and women fitted him better than any other for this department. Moreover, it was the department of his choice. He had long held the view that the State, the employers, and the trade unions should work on the lines of a threefold partnership. Now the extreme nature of the emergency placed the fulfilment of his dream right into his own hands.

Although Bevin was a stranger to Parliament he was no stranger to officialdom or to many of the people within Parliament, including a number of its leaders. Nor was he a stranger to many of the staffs of Government Departments, among whom there were quite a number of trade unionists. Parliament and its procedure would not worry him. Carrying into the Commons all the years of conference experience and of negotiations with all kinds of people, abundantly confident in his own powers of exposition, he impressed that assembly as he had impressed others.

When he walked into Montague House the morning after his appointment he had already given some thought to the job he was about to tackle. He has told the story in his own autobiographical way. Addressing a conference of trade union representatives on May 25th, 1940, he said:

> '. . . . I therefore immediately examined the problem on the first day. You will appreciate one had to move quickly. I went in at two-thirty on the afternoon of Tuesday; and on Wednesday morning at eleven o'clock I produced at least the basis of my scheme. Then at three o'clock the staff gathered round me and examined it in all details and by Friday night we circulated it te the rest of the departments. I could not move much faster

than that. But it was a big task. The first thing I had to do was to get the War Cabinet to agree to the principle of taking industry over and controlling it. You cannot in the middle of a war, with the enemy at your gates, be too nice about the methods you have to adopt, or sit down and work out with meticulous and mathematical precision exactly how you are going to do this or exactly how you are going to do that. But I felt it would be unfair and unwise and psychologically wrong to ask me to appeal to workmen to give a bigger output unless at the same time they immediately agreed to the policy that no other citizen could profit as a result of that increased output. . . .

'The second point was, that I felt there must be a Production Council, and that council must be in possession of the strategy of the war. You could not have departments like the Army and the Air Force ordering this and ordering that and ordering something else, and expect me to supply labour to the whim of every command and the idiosyncracy of every general, whether there were materials or whether there were not. And so the War Cabinet agreed that this Production Council should be established. . . .

'Then the next step I had to consider was as to what form of organisation I could create in the Ministry for which I was responsible. I came to the conclusion that I must establish a central pivot over which I shall preside myself. It will be called the Labour Supply Board. That Board will survey the use of labour. . . .

'The War Cabinet has, in addition, imposed upon me by the new Bill the duty of dealing with all labour, including mines, agriculture, and the Mercantile Marine. With regard to the mines, they gave me power to delegate my responsibility, and I have already met our old colleague, David Grenfell, and with him I am trying to work out a scheme in which I shall agree with him the total labour force required for the mines; we are going to try to bring men back by removing other restrictions arising out of previous Acts and various other things, and, if it is possible, by a system of temporary training of men who have been kept out of the mines a long time and are still living in the district, give them a chance to come back and lend me their skill to carry over this difficult period. . . .

'With regard to agriculture, I have told the Government that before I can make any Order a proper equilibrium must be established, not between town and country exactly, but in what I will call rural England. In other words, this difference

between public employees and those in factories and the people in rural England itself must be obliterated, and the old conception that agriculture is an industry of servitude must go, and go for all time. I hope not only to make a contribution to produce the necessary food, but I hope to remove a grievance which, as a country lad myself, has always burned in my bones. I am happy, as one who was born on a farm, to be given the opportunity to wipe that blot out of our industrial life. . . .'

So he went on to deal with the relaxation of the Factory Acts, the problem of welfare, the mobility of labour, the restoration of Trade Union regulations, fair wages, control of prices. All the time he showed an intimacy with the lives of the working people and a detailed knowledge of the effect of the changes that the war would bring upon them which few men could equal. Although he had acquired State powers to discipline by Order, he would leave that in the background. Just as the trade unions always had the strike weapon in their armoury, he aimed to get his way by consultation with the unions and the employers' organisations, by co-operation and voluntary agreement.

His job made him into the Minister of Man-Power, empowered by the Emergency Powers Defence Act to control and direct the labour of 33,100,000 people between the ages of fourteen and sixty-four. When he took on this Napoleonic job the country appeared to be on the brink of invasion and industry was in a chaotic condition. By the methods he had outlined, he brought order out of chaos, regulated the supply of man-power to the Forces, re-directed it throughout industry, established organised co-operation between the employers, the trade unions, and the State departments, introduced social reforms all along the line, and generally made the turnover from peacetime to wartime life with the minimum of friction.

The range of his activities was enormous and his energy seemed to be inexhaustible. There is hardly a phase of the industrial and economic life of this country upon which he has not stamped the hallmark of his work. The dockers got their guaranteed week. The agricultural workers were lifted from their low levels to a status comparable with that of other industrial workers. He invaded the catering industry with reforms, extended canteen and communal feeding, instituted wartime nurseries for the children of working mothers, regulated overtime, introduced an

industrial medical service, brought music to the factories, extended labour training centres throughout the country, organised 7,700,000 women for National Service, tackled such varied problems as the mobility of labour for dealing with unlooked-for emergencies, the quick turn-round of ships in port, the accommodation of the U.S. Army in the United Kingdom, the labour for preparing the Normandy landing on 'D' day, prepared the plans for demobilisation, and tackled the turnover of labour from war to peace again.

If this were all that could be placed to his account he would still stand out among the wartime leaders as a giant among organisers and a great social reformer who never lost touch with the lives of the working people from whom he had come. But he was also a member of the War Cabinet and of the Reconstruction Committee charged with the responsibility of translating social security from documents into reality. All and sundry pay tribute to his wartime service as 'wonderfully well done.'

If Bevin had the greatest organising job of the war thrust upon him, then Morrison was summoned to bat on the stickiest political wicket of any man in the War Cabinet. At first he was called upon to become Minister of Supply. The severest critic of the Supply Administration of the Chamberlain Government was thus bidden to direct the Ministry he had flayed. This was in the days of Dunkirk, when defence and supply were at their weakest. Here he brought to bear his famed organising ability combined with his capacity to inspire others to work with him and to work with tremendous drive. The effect of his efforts was soon felt, but he was not destined to carry his work to fruition.

The day-and-night bombing of London began on September 7th, 1940. The whole problem of the protection of the civilian population, thus brought into Front Line operations, now passed from the sphere of contemplation into that of actual experience. As the high explosives fell, all the existing means of protection proved entirely inadequate. Londoners began to call for Morrison to deal with the problem. Churchill turned to Morrison and told him, 'You'll have to take over this business.' That was a tremendous tribute to his work as the leader of the London County Council. In October he became Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security, replacing Sir John Anderson, who became Lord President of the Council.

Here was a Department with problems galore. Faced with a tremendous outcry about the lack of adequate shelter for the 'blitzed' population, with the panicky arrests of many thousands of refugees, with the completely decentralised fire services, with the administration of the police and prisons, and with any other job which could not be unloaded on to some specific Department, his qualities as a leader in a crisis were taxed to the utmost. The tube railways of London were invaded. They had to be fitted with bunks and made habitable. New types of shelters had to be improvised. After the familiar garden Anderson Shelter came the indoor Morrison Shelter, and along with it the reinforcement of basements, the organisation of Fire Guards, the establishment of a National Fire Service of 350,000 men and women, the improvement of the Civil Defence organisations, and the inauguration of new types of alert signals to meet the changing character of the bombing war. These measures he organised and brought into action with the speed and efficiency which the people had learned to expect from him.

In 1940 twenty-two thousand German, Austrian, and Italian civilians, most of them refugees from Fascism, had been interned. It was Morrison's job to sort out the genuine refugees from the Fifth Columnists. By October 1942 sixteen thousand five hundred internees had been released and turned to useful war work. But the more difficult problem was that of the native Fifth Column, the open and secret supporters of Fascism. Under what was known as Defence Regulation 18B, fourteen hundred of this type of suspect had been detained in June and July 1940. Under this regulation they could be held without trial for as long as they were deemed to be a danger to public safety. By 1943 Morrison had to make up his mind whether Mosley and Ramsay, two notorious Fascists, should be longer detained in custody. There was a tremendous outcry both on the occasion of Mosley's release and on that of Ramsay's. The Trades Union Congress denounced the decision. But Morrison stuck to his judgement, based upon the purpose of the regulations.

Like Bevin, he combined efficient administration with social reform, and carried through reforms of the Remand Homes for Children, the police services, Workmen's Compensation, and electoral procedure (to enable the Services to vote in the next elections), as well as leading the debates on the Beveridge Scheme

of Social Insurance and many other matters, and functioning as a member of the War Cabinet.

Thus through the darkest days of the war all classes were held together in a common struggle to survive. Right through to the turn of the tide the Popular Front remained popular and workable. No party lost its independence and socialism was not jeopardised. On the contrary, the whole experience proved how the Coalition was compelled to apply some socialist principles and agree to many socialist reforms in order to save the country from irreparable disaster. Time and time again, the interests of the community had to override the interests of individuals.

But as soon as the danger was past the class interests began to reassert themselves and point clearly to the time when the Popular Front would be no longer popular and the Coalition no longer coalesce, when the further advance to socialism would be possible only through a resumption of the struggle between the Socialist Party and the parties of private property.

Throughout the war we had a great many socialist forms of organisation and control without the socialist content, as a glance at the controls in industry clearly reveals. Whatever interference the Government was compelled to make with what privately owned enterprises might do or not do, and with the terms upon which they were to work, it did not interfere with the ownership except on a temporary basis. Requisitioning was done on a large scale, but always on the basis of a hiring of property and not on that of permanent acquisition by the State. Within the framework of all controls the pressure of private interests remained and the structure of State control took the form of social control by leaders of private interests.

State-controlled capitalism is not socialism, and it was State-controlled capitalism which the Coalition Government directed throughout the war. Until the substance of social ownership is given to State control there is not socialism. Churchill and his fellow Conservatives knew this as well as any Marxist. Hence the 'gentlemen's compromise' which made the Coalition Government possible. Hence also the incessant struggle of private and group and class interests within the framework of the controls and the inevitable outcry of capitalist interests for the abandonment of controls from the moment the danger of invasion and defeat began to disappear.

The transition from national unity to class struggle politics produced its own peculiar diagnoses of the situation and the perspectives which were opening out before us. In the heyday of unity between the Allies and within the nation came the Atlantic Charter proclaiming the broad aims of all the Allied nations in language sufficiently general to enable both capitalist and socialist states to subscribe to them. The quarrel would turn upon the interpretation and implementation of the Charter when the war was over.[1]

On this basis the respective Party leaders delivered many speeches in full accord. But by 1943 differences began to appear, although Bevin and Morrison continued to deliver addresses which gave rise to rumours that they were so enamoured with the Coalition that they meant to continue in the Churchill partnership. In March 1943 the latter had startled the country with a programmatic speech sketching a four-year programme for an extended Coalition. It appeared that if the parties forming the then existing Coalition could not agree on this 'All men of goodwill supporting the Churchill programme would form a coalition of

[1] The Atlantic Charter:

'. . . . 'Their countries seek no aggrandisement, territorial or other;

'Second, They desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;

'Third, They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;

'Fourth, They will endeavour, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity;

'Fifth, They desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labour standards, economic adjustment and social security;

'Sixth, After the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;

'Seventh, Such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance;

'Eighth, They believe that all the nations of the world for realistic as well as spiritual reasons, must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.'

their own.' Rumour then had it that Bevin was securing support for a new national newspaper and would support Churchill.

Of course both Bevin and Morrison flatly denied the rumours, but the idea of a possible coalition of the parties after the end of the war was not so flatly denied. In a speech delivered a few weeks after Churchill's oration, Morrison said to the annual meeting of the Yorkshire Regional Council of the Labour Party at Leeds:

> 'The Prime Minister in his broadcast gave us all something to think about in the post-war political field. It is good to think—but not good to jump to precipitate conclusions. Let us turn these matters over well. Let the hysterical and the hasty not seek to commit us one way or the other before we know where our country's need may point us. But one thing I will say, here and now, for all to hear. All my active public life has been spent in this Labour Party of ours. I have played a part in its development. Whether it is in alliance or whether it is alone, I am of it, for it, with it—and so will remain.'

No one could tell from that whether he was for a post-war alliance of the parties or not. The Party Conference of 1944 made it clear that it would fight the elections independently, but that he had such an alliance in mind as a possibility is clear from his campaign for the continuation of controls. He apparently had them in mind as a bargaining weapon if the Party should not secure a majority, and as a necessity for the full implementation of the Party programme should it secure one.

Events, however, settled the question by removing it from the agenda. Quickly after the defeat of Germany came the General Election. The Labour Party issued its famous election declaration, clearly defining its five-year programme of priorities in nationalisation and continuation of State control of capitalism as the first stages of the transition to socialism.

When the break-up of the Coalition Government came about and a 'caretaker' Government was appointed until the election was over, Attlee became the leader of H.M. Opposition once more. And so uncertain was Winston Churchill of the outcome of the election that he took Attlee with him to the Potsdam Conference. Here Attlee met for the first time both Stalin and Roosevelt. The election took place before the Conference had completed its labours, and it had to take a rest while Churchill and Attlee came home to wage a polemical battle in the electoral arena.

Morrison was in charge of the Labour Party's campaign, and as always when a policy has been decided, he organised it with masterly competence. Bevin was a candidate in the Wandsworth constituency, which had made him its representative when he joined the Coalition Government. But it was Attlee who surprised the whole of the Labour Movement by capturing the limelight and effectively consolidating his position as leader of the Party. Churchill opened the election campaign with a broadcast speech which utterly destroyed whatever prospects the Tories ever had of winning the election. He fell from the heights of statesmanship which had marked his wartime career to the level of a fourth-rate politician seeking to win the election with the bogeyman tactics the Tories had successfully applied in the elections of 1924 and 1931. Instead of the 'Zinoviev Letter' and 'Your Savings are in Danger' he conjured up from his fertile imagination the picture of his colleagues of the Coalition as leaders of a 'Goebbels Gestapo.' The Tory candidates had nothing better to offer than 'A vote for me is a vote for Churchill,' while the Tory Party worked the Grand Old Man theme to a standstill with a parody of Gladstone's Midlothian campaign.

It was Attlee's broadcast reply to Churchill's first speech which transformed the slide towards Labour, already under way, into an avalanche. Speaking with a natural dignity of utterance, he quietly swept the froth off Churchill's speech and in clear and simple words outlined the position of the country and the tasks before it. He regretted that a man so great as Churchill should fall so low. As he proceeded to explain his programme it appeared to the average man that one of themselves had suddenly risen and revealed a capacity to carry out what they thought should be done.

Churchill and his colleagues had completely failed to notice that 'the common man' had grown in political stature since last there had been an election. It was a commonly held view in all the social strata of the country that 'he was a great war leader, but not the man to lead the peace.' They would cheer him and pay tribute to the part he played in the unforgettable years of extreme danger, but they would vote Labour. Strange how reluctant even great men are to recognise the right moment to leave the stage and step into the wings! There was a moment in Churchill's career when he could have stood aside from

leadership in a blaze of glory, with the blunders of his career forgotten or referred to with tolerant affection even by his political foes. That moment arrived on V.E. Day, when the whole nation hailed the victory and cheered him to the echo. It marked the end of the great Coalition. He let it go, and at once tumbled from the heights in a futile effort to re-live his yesterdays as the leader of a politically bankrupt social class vainly struggling to restore a way of life that is historically dead.

Try as he did to recover from the effect of his first broadcast speech of the election campaign, he failed. Morrison had organised his team well. Churchill's painful efforts to emulate the 'Old Man' were followed by a series of Labour speeches that ably amplified the programme Attlee had announced. The eclipse was complete. Labour was returned to power. In a House of Commons of six hundred and fifty members it had won a majority of nearly two hundred.

So it happened that neither Morrison nor his colleagues had to answer the question, 'What should Labour do if not returned to power?' But the Communist Party answered it. It had gone into the election calling for a new period of Coalition Government, having assumed that Labour would not win. The Communists had not only wrongly diagnosed the character of the period which opened up with the Allied triumph, but also the extent of the political awakening which the war had engendered in the people of this country. Two Communists were returned to Parliament. The Communist Party had undergone great changes during the war. With the entrance of Soviet Russia into the conflict it became the most ardent supporter of the war and the Coalition. Under the influence of the victories of the Red Army, its membership grew to nearly fifty thousand. It abandoned the theory of the necessity of an armed struggle for power and accepted the parliamentarianism of the Labour Party. It had not yet admitted that it blundered badly in 1939, for Stalin had not yet announced that the war was 'an anti-Fascist war from the outset.' Now its leaders had again wrongly estimated the course of events, and must adjust themselves to a Labour Government in power.

Dramatic days followed Labour's triumph. Nobody now questioned who would be Prime Minister. Attlee had established himself completely as the leader of the Labour Movement in his

own right and not as a mere 'caretaker' holding the position until the issue had been settled between Morrison and Bevin. He had to form a Government. Morrison had won a seat in Lewisham. Bevin had won Wandsworth Central by a six thousand majority. What posts would they hold? That Morrison should be leader of the House appeared as natural as it formerly had that he should be leader of the London County Council. The surprise appointment was made when Attlee invited Bevin to become Britain's Foreign Secretary. Bevin had hoped to become Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was on the point of going with his wife for a short holiday on the assumption that he would return to that post when Attlee bade him pack his bag and go with him as Foreign Secretary to Potsdam.

With the appointment of Dalton as Chancellor, Cripps to the Board of Trade, Alexander to the Admiralty, Bevan as Minister of Health, and the filling of the many other posts which go to form the British Government, Labour took over the reins of power. Unthreatened by any coalition that the Opposition might make the socialists could at last make history according to plan.

Thus the British social revolution had at last been given its head. It had begun under the Liberal Party at the dawn of the twentieth century. Now it had shed the Liberal Party as an outworn thing, reared its own party to full stature, given it a programme, and invested it with the power to carry that programme through. And the three men who held the key positions were Attlee, Prime Minister, Morrison, Leader of the House, and Bevin, Foreign Secretary.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Labour's Foreign Secretary

ERNEST BEVIN was sixty-five years of age, well past the retiring age of his trade union, when he became Britain's Foreign Secretary. His short, ponderous figure bears all the marks of the years. His heavy face with its deep lines gives an added sobriety to his natural seriousness. His health warns him to be careful and that he would have been wise to retire, but his spirit burns fiercely within him and his ego challenges him to prove to all the world that he is *the* man for the new job as for the old.

He had, indeed, considered retiring on his pension from the Transport and General Workers Union. And had it not been for the war that is what he would have done. He had been 'under the weather' in 1938 and, to recuperate, had taken his wife on a tour to Australia. Whenever he went on long journeys his wife accompanied him if at all possible. That had been so through all their years of married life. Ernest was and is a home lover, and come what may, if home can be reached at the end of the day he will make for it, and his wife will be waiting for him.

The trip to Australia reinvigorated him, and when Winston Churchill called on him to become Minister of Labour and National Service and leave behind his trade union career, he was ready to bludgeon his way along as a full-time political leader just as he had done in the world of trade unionism. That he emerged from his experience as a wartime leader with increased prestige no one will deny. But his work at the Ministry was largely an extension of his work as a trade union negotiator. His new post as Foreign Secretary, on the other hand, would make entirely new demands upon him. It is, therefore, appropriate that we take stock of the man and his outlook as he entered the Foreign Office to guide the policy of the Labour Government in relation to the world at large.

He has had a tremendous career, and nobody knows that fact better than Ernest himself. Reminiscences form a considerable

portion of his conversation, and his speeches, as I have had occasion to show in these pages, are usually autobiographical in form. His colours are sombre and his mode of action is overwhelming. Much depends on his mood, for he is a man of moods, of fierce likes and dislikes, allergic to anyone who challenges his infallibility. He will 'Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne.' He detested MacDonald and Snowden and for many years was not on the best of terms with Morrison and Citrine. Bevan had the same effect on him as on Churchill.

But in some moods he can be very engaging and cordial and can indulge in good-natured banter. I recall how neatly he scored off Joe Scott, a Communist executive member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, at the Engineers' Jubilee dinner. It was in December 1945, and Ernest was the principal guest of the evening. Joe Scott presided. He cordially welcomed Labour's Foreign Secretary and of course made a few critical observations in passing.

While he was speaking Ernest appeared to be taking little notice. He was smoking a cigar and signing menu cards as fast as he could. But he was listening. His turn quickly came to address the eight hundred diners, who were naturally in the best of moods. He congratulated the engineers on having at last learned from the general labourers to organise such a fine social gathering as had assembled that evening. He appreciated the skilled workers very much and liked their precision work, and much could be said about the wonderful mass production which characterised so much of modern engineering.

'Perhaps,' he went on, 'you will be glad to learn that you save me a lot of work in my job as Foreign Secretary. Maybe it is the effect of the machine age and precision work, but I receive shoals of letters and resolutions from your branches all over the country. Fortunately for me it is only necessary to read one of them, for all the rest are like it. . . .'

That was a neat reference to the effectiveness of Communist activity within the Engineers' Union, and the gathering was not slow to appreciate the hit. They roared with laughter. It is on a par with Bevin's comment to his Cabinet colleagues on departing for some international conference: 'If I meet peace on the way I'll phone you.'

But these flashes are rare. Generally he marches sombrely. He

has many colleagues, who are either in high favour and can do no wrong or are left severely alone and can do little that is right; but he has few real personal friends. He likes power, but not in the hands of others. Yet no man has taken greater care to make sure that when he speaks he has behind him a collective decision of his union branch, executive, delegation, national council, party, etc., so that when democracy speaks it speaks with the voice of Bevin, and when he speaks it is the voice of democracy. He is little loved but greatly admired, and many are the tributes by the members of his union to the work he has put in on their behalf.

He remembers persons and events vividly, but has the knack of reading into the earlier event the opinions of the present. This was never more clearly manifest than in his speech in the House of Commons on the repeal of the Trades Disputes Act (1927). No one listening to that speech or reading it afterwards could be blamed for thinking not merely that the General Strike was called because of the return to the gold standard, but that Bevin had thought so at the time. But neither at the Trades Union Congress nor at the Labour Party Conference in the months preceding the General Strike had he or anyone related the gold standard to the General Strike or to the miners' dispute. He had waited twenty years to deliver a speech on the subject but it was not a twenty-year old speech.

His memory carried with it great loyalties. He never forgets that he belongs to the working class and to the people with whom he has worked. But he doesn't like criticism, and is much like Churchill in that respect. Although he can 'hand it out' in unmeasured terms, he can't 'take it.' He speaks with dogmatic authority, and when Ernest Bevin admits an error the heavens will crack wide open with the shock. He has a remarkable capacity for expressing the social needs of the working people and their thoughts in their own language. He is really a working-man become articulate, with a passionate desire to improve their lot. His sincerity has never been questioned by anyone.

These qualities, combined with a great and rich experience of working-class life and a strong, somewhat husky voice, have made him into a natural orator of considerable power. His gestures have not been acquired before the mirror nor his colourful passages learned by heart. They are the natural expression of the man, reflecting his feelings about the message he has to deliver.

All these characteristics and qualities of Bevin are not subtle. They are stamped upon his features, his bearing, his actions, growing through the years and mellowing little with age.

It would be a mistake to assert that he is a great trade union leader but new to politics. The truth is that his politics are derived from his trade union practice. He believes in socialism as a far better system of society than capitalism and can prove his case for the one against the other as well as any man. However that may be, he is not a socialist theoretician nor does he subscribe to socialist philosophy. Or if he does he has been silent about it. He has written no books, but he has made many speeches. I have read most of them, if not all, and heard many, but I do not know of one which shows more than a cursory acquaintance with socialist philosophy and literature. His economic theories of later years belong to the Liberal school of economists, such as Keynes.

Nevertheless he has built up out of his great trade union experience a positive pragmatic philosophy of action and understanding. From the moment he became a trade union organiser he gave himself wholly and completely to the job. The essence of trade unionism is collective bargaining to improve the conditions of the workers. Bevin accepted the logic of the fight for bargains. He studied the economics of bargain-making, the ups and downs of trade, the fluctuations of the market, the rise and fall of prices, the changing value of money, all of which helped in the bargaining warfare.

Early in his career, when he stood as a Labour candidate in Bristol in the election of 1916, he defined his political position thus:

> 'My attitude to politics is this. I look upon the Labour programme as capable of immediate realisation as a basis of reconstruction. The most important point of all I value is that a minimum standard of life must be assured. If that can be brought into existence you can begin to develop a very much higher standard of existence among the people and produce the necessary capacity to assimilate ideas leading them on the road to advancement.'

There is the key to Bevin's philosophy. Not that the *struggle for a minimum standard of life is a far-flung social struggle for socialism as the means to guarantee such a standard,* but that 'if the guaranteed minimum standard can be brought into existence you can begin,

etc.' From the guaranteed minimum to the higher standard of life and *then* onward to socialism. Socialism for him is the by-product of prosperous, democratically developing capitalism and not the prerequisite of social security and prosperity.

This principle runs like a red thread through his career from the first moment of his struggle to become a leader of the Trade Union Movement until to-day. His attitude to the First World War was not based upon an analysis of the social forces involved in the struggle but on national patriotism and loyalty to his union. His attack upon the Labour Party for joining the Coalition Government in 1915 did not arise from any political analysis of the relationship of Labour to the war, but from the anti-trade union record of the members of the Government. His quarrels with the Labour Governments of 1924 and 1929 were not based upon any criticism of their policy in relation to the struggle for socialism, but of their attacks upon the trade unions. He measured politicians by the standard set for trade union negotiators. They had to 'play straight,' with 'all the cards on the table,' make an open bargain, and stick to it.

The guiding principle of his union-building was centralisation of power with which to secure collective bargains with a minimum of social friction, and an equilibrium of the classes. Rising with the growth of modern road and water transport and the general labour which accompanied mass production, he accumulated great power in the Transport and General Workers' Union. It spread into many industries competing with the unions which are developing into industrial unions. He was not responsible for the growth of the general labour unions. They arose because the craft unions of the various industries conservatively refused to adapt themselves to the machine age until late in the day. But when Bevin amalgamated the transport unions and some of the general labour unions he did more than increase his power enormously, he helped to create for the Trade Union Movement as a whole the biggest headache of its history. Its major problem to-day is how to transform the unions into industrial unions, 'funeral benefits' notwithstanding, and the general labour unions block the road.

His attitude to the General Strike was a purely trade union attitude which stubbornly refused to acknowledge the political significance of the action. His collective-bargaining mind, obsessed with the economics of the minimum standard, led him

into ignoring and underestimating the politics arising from economic relations. His speeches on 'Europe as an economic entity' and the 'British Empire as an economic entity' are classic examples of this political myopia.

Recall the sweeping on one side of the political history of Europe with one grandiose gesture: 'My union recognises that national aspirations and political divisions are bound to be a great handicap to us for a long time to come, but . . .' the ignoring of Russia as a European State and of its relation to his scheme; the contemplation of the reorganisation of Europe on American lines 'not with the idea of making preparations for the nationalisation of production, distribution, and exchange.' What could 'economic unity' mean on such a basis other than industrial trustification, cartelisation, etc.?

But there is a consistency in the structure of his ideas and policy and he has built massively upon them. I doubt if there is another trade union leader with such a record of achievement in trade union agreements and social reforms that every socialist would applaud. That does not alter or dispose of the fact that in his achievements he has been guided by the principles of collective bargaining and that in his disasters he and the workers have had to pay the price set by the limits of such principles. The collective bargaining policy cannot encompass the General Strike. Black Friday was primarily Black Friday because the transport and railway unions let down the miners. But it was more than that. It was the first great public demonstration of the limitations of collective trade union bargaining. Faced with the proposition of transcending all economic bargains by a challenge to the State itself, Bevin and his colleagues retreated. A general strike of three major industries would shatter the equilibrium of class relations, and no State could face such a situation without dealing with it as a first-class political issue in which its own existence was at stake.

Bevin's leadership of the General Strike of 1926, with its ignominious capitulation, was governed by the same issue. This time the General Strike was called with a declared refusal to see the political implications. The State accepted the challenge on the basis of its political significance. From that moment the capitulation of the General Council was inevitable, for neither the General Council nor the Labour Movement as a whole was psychologically or physically prepared. Bevin will not acknow-

ledge this even to-day, for his whole thinking remains founded on collective bargaining instead of on an understanding of class relations and a will to change them. His guiding principle is that of seeking an equilibrium of the classes as a basis for collective bargaining for the social improvement of the working class. Even when he talks about 'class confronting class in solid phalanx' his attitude is fundamentally the same.

When the international situation changed so completely that reform at home was overshadowed by the conflict with Fascism, Bevin's 'economism' was thrust into the background, but his politics were still rooted in trade unionism. He leapt into the political arena for the fight against Fascism because it jeopardised the very existence of trade unionism and was in flat contradiction to his whole philosophy of life. After the first shock of the triumph of Nazism in Germany he was party to British trade union assistance to the Austrian workers in their civil war against Fascism. But after that he led the way back to legalism—to parliamentary pressure on the British Government in the case of the Italo-Abyssinian war, and to 'acquiescence' in the 'Non-Intervention' policy in regard to Spain.

His antipathy towards Soviet Russia springs from sources much deeper than his anger at the criticism by the Soviet trade union leaders and the Communists in his union: that merely made him personally allergic to anyone associated with the Soviet Union or the Communist Party. His antipathy has deep political roots: the principles upon which the Russian revolution was won; the principles upon which its socialism is being built; the outlook of the Soviet leaders on the making of history. Their struggles for reforms before the revolution were not based on the principle of establishing an equilibrium of the social classes but on changing the relation of the classes by bringing the working class to power. Their policy within the Soviet Union was based upon the principle that the economic foundation of their reforms should be built on socialist principles and the 'liquidation of classes.' The trade unions must have a structure conforming to the structure of industry and the equilibrium of institutions must be the equilibrium of socialist institutions and not of rival classes. They understand a socialist policy anywhere to be one which seeks to alter the relationship of the classes in favour of the working class.

Ernest Bevin does not agree with these principles, and what he

doesn't agree with he must fight. He wants social reforms, political democracy, the equilibrium of classes and socialist measures as a by-product of Labour's efforts to maintain the equilibrium. These principles run through his record as revealed in these pages and through all his speeches. The Labour Party itself was a by-product of the trade unions, as they do not forget to remind the party. The progress of the Labour Party in the constituencies was more of a growth resulting from the reformist acitvity of the unions and the Parliamentary Labour Party than a planned conquest. And it should not be forgotten that until after the 1945 election the Parliamentary Labour Party itself was pre-eminently trade unionist in social composition.

With these political principles guiding him it can hardly be a matter of surprise to find him antipathetic to the Soviet Union and in the camp of Empire builders and of British-American integration. Addressing the Labour Party Conference of 1939 he applied his principles to world affairs. He made a great speech within the national tradition, but there is not one sentence in it showing the slightest indication of a policy aimed at any fundamental change in the economic structure of any nation. Supporting collective security he said:

> 'I used a phrase the other day, which I think is worth repeating and expresses what is in my mind. It was that while we must see Collective Security as the principal weapon to resist aggression, we must always hitch our peace programme to a real economic star. . . . Is not monetary deflation one of the biggest contributors to the present world problem? It was the cause and the only reason for the Ottawa Agreement—an agreement which, in my opinion, was one of the causes which helped to produce economic difficulties in Japan, thwarted the efforts of the progressive parties there, and led Japan into a policy which resulted in the attack upon China. . . .
>
> 'One of the first suggestions I would submit for consideration is the desirability of calling a British Labour Commonwealth Conference: a conference which would be organised on sound lines, with a proper agenda, and which would provide an opportunity for considering not merely how best we can resist aggression, but what contribution can be made from the vast wealth, resources, and opportunities of the British Commonwealth in land, money, and raw materials, towards a general solution of the economic problems of the world. . . .

'Another reason why I urge this is because we desire to work more closely and in harmony with the United States of America. The quickest road to the United States is probably through Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Newfoundland, and Africa, and not through Europe. On the other hand, they have vital interests in the Pacific. . . .

'I suggest that possibly the quickest approach to understanding with the United States of America is for us to be willing to extend the great Commonwealth idea, in which the United States can be a partner, at least economically, even though it may involve a limitation of our sovereignty.'

Having resurrected Cecil Rhodes' dream of Empire Unity and the incorporation of the U.S.A. in slightly modified form, he proceeded to expand the brotherhood still further and to propose that Scandinavia, Holland, Belgium, France, and even Russia be invited 'to come within our preference system.' 'It would,' he said, 'bring the "Haves" together, and they would in fact, be controlling ninety per cent. of the essential raw materials of the world.'

Assuming this great pooling achieved, he continued:

'Having secured that, what should be our next step? Our appeal must be to the people of the aggressor countries. That appeal must be genuine, for many Germans have said to me: "All you have offered us up to now are military pacts." What have the democracies to offer out of their great abundance?

'Having pooled our arms, resources, and economic power, cannot we then say, and mean it, to the people of these countries, who, I believe, are as much against war as we are: "Put away your weapons of warfare, discard them as a means of bettering your conditions of life, and you can come in on the ground floor with the rest of us."'

This speech was delivered at the end of May 1939. Japan had begun her war of conquest of China in 1931. Italy had conquered Abyssinia. Spain had been conquered by the Fascists. Austria and Czechoslovakia had been swallowed by Nazi Germany. Danzig and Poland were on the agenda for conquest. The Labour Movement of Germany had been destroyed, the possibility of an internal revolution in Germany eliminated. The nature of Fascism had been revealed as inherently expansionist, aggressive, contemptuous of all agreements—indeed, all agreements

were integral with an expansionist strategy, to be kept or broken according to the exigencies of its expansionist requirements. Nevertheless, Ernest Bevin could visualise the fruition of his grandiose economic pooling plan within the framework of the British Empire's preference scheme, and its use as a bargain with the peoples of the aggressor countries! That assumed either an international bargain with Hitler Germany and the other Fascist States—or their overthrow by their peoples and a bargain with the new régimes to be established. Some diagnosis! Some dream! Four months later the Nazi armies were hurtling through Europe and we were at war.

Yet, there was a logic in the plan, and the policy outlined was consistent with the principles of economic collective bargaining, with Bevin's nationalism and the equilibrium of class relations which he has made the regular basis of his philosophy. Nor does the fact that the war blew his project sky high alter his approach to his present problems. His speeches during the war only ring the changes on one or other aspect of the same policy.

The Labour Movement had the shock of its existence when Bevin stood before the Party Conference in 1944 and boldly lined himself up with Churchill on the policy the Government had pursued in relation to Greece. Yet there was nothing in his policy in relation to Greece that was inconsistent with the policy he had always pursued since his emergence as a Labour leader. He wanted stability in Greece. So did Churchill. What stability? The stability of an equilibrium of classes, not the triumph of E.A.M. and the social forces they represented. So also Churchill. Bevin wanted a parliamentary democracy for Greece on the British pattern, complete with trade unions, employers' associations, etc., to maintain the equilibrium. So did Churchill.

That there was civil war in Greece was deplorable. Therefore the Government's job to stop the civil war by taking the arms away from the E.A.M., in which there were a great many Communists whom neither Churchill nor Bevin liked at any price. Besides, the E.A.M. wanted to change the class relations in favour of the working class. Their way was not the way to do it. They must do it the English way. They must start off with a new government in the hands of the traditional ruling class, a brand new parliament under its control, re-formed trade unions, and then in the course of time prove they could win in the only way

in which anybody could win, that is, Bevin's way. He has repeatedly declared, 'I am no imperialist'. In what this record of his dealings with Greece differs from that of an imperialist foreign secretary I have not been able to discern.

It is said that it was his speech to the 1945 Conference of the Labour Party that singled Bevin out as the coming Foreign Secretary. But there was nothing in that speech which was in any way contradictory to these leading ideas and the policy he had always pursued.

> 'The security for peace,' he said, 'must be the United States, Britain, and Soviet Russia. But we cannot remove the prejudices and economic differences, the effect of internal economies, easily. The United States is a free-enterprise country, the Soviet Union has a socialist internal economy, and Britain stands between the two. We will not weld these differing prejudices and conceptions into a power to prevent aggression by slogans, nor by saying that some people are all angels and others all devils. We have to show patience and toleration, and try to obtain understanding in order to come together for the common purpose of maintaining peace and developing a higher standard of life with a complete removal of fear.'

Then came his economic plan: maintenance of bulk purchase, wheat prices guaranteed, fight against any combines limiting production, immense flow of primary products in order to raise the standard of living, Empire preferences while tariffs were used against this country, a general lowering of tariffs if the Dominions were agreed, some balancing force for international exchange, but no going back to the gold standard, international control of a wide range of raw materials. He wound up:

> 'We are in favour of a peace conference. The problems of Europe cannot be settled by long-distance telegrams. Around the table we must get; but do not present us with *faits accomplis* when we arrive. In all the States of Europe, east or west, we are anxious to create a situation of settlement where there may be free and democratic elections, where they can choose their own government. We go further in order to give confidence. We pledge ourselves in our foreign policy never to use these small States to play off the big States, and so get advantage. If I may use a cockney phrase, there should be "cards on the table face upwards."'

He received a great ovation. No one seemed to observe that much would depend upon interpretation in practice. And nobody appeared to recognise that the war had set in motion over great stretches of Europe and the Far East a great social-political revolution involving momentous changes in the relations of classes. He had said nothing of this and therefore nothing of what would be his foreign policy in respect of it, although the Conference had had a clear demonstration of its meaning in his attitude to the revolutionary crisis in Greece. With the advent of the Labour Government all England expected the relations of this country with Soviet Russia would grow from a wartime alliance into the closest brotherly comradeship and warmest accord in foreign policy. After all, both governments were socialist governments.

The whole Labour Movement was startled a few months later when they observed Bevin being cheered to the echo by the Conservatives as the resurrected Palmerston of England, while the Parliamentary Labour Party looked worried and disturbed. They wondered what on earth had happened when Bevin roared that the Russians 'wanted to go right across the throat of the British Empire' and launched tub-thumping tirades against the Soviet delegates to the various conferences. They were still more amazed when, as the weeks went by, he found himself quarrelling with every new government in Eastern and Central Europe, fighting the Russians at every step.

It became clear that he wanted the restoration of pre-Nazi economy, a pre-Nazi social balance, British Parliamentary democracy, and socialism as a distant by-product of parliamentary evolution. As a consequence, it is the conflict of outlook based upon a fundamentally different approach to social evolution which puts Molotov and Bevin into opposing camps more than any idiosyncrasies of the two men. These idiosynacrasies only serve to make their wordy battles more acrimonious and to delay the compromise decisions which are finally arrived at.

That there is a fundamental clash of interests between socialism and capitalism is obvious. That the leaders of the Soviet Union do not need telling this simple fact is obvious too. They have had it hammered into them by fire, sword, and famine, by invading armies and the manifest hatred of every capitalist government of the world, from the first days of the Russian revolution. They have witnessed a modification of the attitude of other governments

only in measure with the change in power relations and the exigencies of war. They are *compelled* by the nature of the situation, the fact that the revolution took place in one country and was not universal, to build up a State power and to think and act in terms of power relations and national sovereignty exactly as other people in capitalist countries. Having had to fight incessantly for the very existence of the socialist state from the moment of its birth until now, their concern for its sovereignty, their interest in its strategic position, their preoccupation with developments in means of warfare in every capitalist state in the world, and their care in the disposition of their military forces, are intensified to a high degree and lead possibly to exaggerated fears and suspicions.

All this does not preclude a basis for compromise, but it makes the struggle to arrive at compromise decisions much more difficult and prolonged. This is the reason why Ernest Bevin finds it easier to arrive at compromises and points of agreement with Byrnes and Marshall than he does with Molotov. In dealing with the Americans he is in his normal bargain basement of accepted capitalist relations, where he can discuss tariffs, preferences, markets, state control, political democracy, etc., without concern for the social and political implications in the struggle of classes. When he meets Molotov, on the other hand, he not only meets the custodian of the interests of a socialist state, but one who by the nature of his position must view every problem in relation to the development of society towards socialism by changing the relations of classes.

Bevin was therefore in an exceedingly difficult position. On becoming Foreign Secretary he inherited a Tory apparatus and staff, all the problems of Imperial strategy and British state and capitalist interests abroad and took to them a political outlook antagonistic to any social revolution not patterned on the British model. Hence it can hardly be a matter of surprise that his difficulties in the negotiations with Egypt turned upon the strategical relations of Britain and Egypt in a possible war—against whom, he did not say. His troubles with Czechoslovakia turned upon his concern for British capital in that country. His quarrel with the governments of the Danube countries turned not upon the right of peoples to own their own river, but of the right of the private interests of Britain and America to have equal say in the control of the Danube and so to pursue their capital penetration into the Danubian countries. Thus it is that in all

questions relating to Europe's newly developing democracies, whether in the defeated or the allied countries, he finds himself supported only by the backwash of the old régimes in these countries and by his friendly colleagues of the U.S.A., those banner-bearers of capitalist enterprise *in excelsis*.

One day there was a debate in the House of Commons on Foreign Affairs in which Bevin made what has been called the greatest speech of his life. Anthony Eden had spoken on the significance of the atomic bomb and its effect on the foreign policies of all nations. Ernest had returned from a conference harassed and disturbed by the slowness of arriving at decisions. The House of Commons was full to capacity. Eden had raised the debate to a high level and had concluded his speech by saying:

> 'We have somehow to take the sting out of nationalism. We cannot hope to do this at once. But we ought to start working for it now, and that, I submit, should be the first duty of the United Nations. We should make up our minds where we want to go. I know in this respect where I want to go. I want to go to a world where the relations between nations can be transformed in a given period of time, as the relations between England, Scotland, and Wales have been transformed.'

Bevin rose. No one moved from his place during the whole of his speech and he spoke for nearly two hours.

It was evident from the beginning that he was deeply sensitive of the fact that the international situation was charged with fear and suspicion. So he made a plea for frankness—all cards on the table and so on. It was the conclusion of the speech which was new. He said:

> 'We are driven relentlessly to the necessity of a new study for the purpose of creating a world assembly, elected directly from the peoples to whom the governments that formed the United Nations are responsible, to make a world law which the people will accept, and be morally bound to carry out.
>
> 'You may invent all sorts of devices to decide who is the aggressor, but the only repository of faith I have ever been able to find to determine that is the common people. There has never been a war yet which, if the facts had been put before the common folk, could not have been prevented. . . .
>
> 'The common man is the great protection against war, and the supreme act of government is, after all, the horrible duty

of deciding matters which affect the life and death of the people. That rests on the House of Commons as far as this country is concerned.'

He waited a moment to give added effect to his coming sentence:

'I would merge that power into the greater power of a directly elected world assembly in order that the great repositories of destruction and science, on the one side, might be their property, to protect us against their use, and, on the other hand, it could easily determine whether a country was going to act as an aggressor or not.

'I am willing,' he went on, 'to sit with any body, any party, or any nation to try to devise a franchise or a constitution for a world assembly for a limited objective—the objective of peace. When we get to that stage we shall have taken a great progressive step. From the moment that is accepted, the words "International law," which presuppose conflict between nations, will be substituted by "world law," with moral force behind it, rather than case-made law. It will be a world law, with a world judiciary to interpret it, and world police to enforce it. It will be the decision of the people, with their own fate resting in their own hands, irrespective of race or creed. The great world sovereign-elected authority will hold in its care the destinies of the people of the world.'

Here he was paraphrasing Tennyson's dream of the 'Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World,' having still not learned that all political dreams can come true only to the extent that the social foundation for their fulfilment has first been laid.

Some months later, in June 1946, Bevin gave his report on Foreign Affairs to the Labour Party Conference. He had been under much criticism. He came to defend himself. He did. But his speech did not consist of an analysis of the international situation, its economic, political, and social trends and the policy he was pursuing. It was an account of his personal difficulties in seeking to make bargains about this and that. He said:

'One speaker said that members of the Party were bewildered. Well, I can understand that. So am I. So is anybody who has got to clear up the mess in this world after twenty years of appeasement and six years of war. . . . I agree that the problems of the moment are tremendously bewildering. . . . I cannot—neither could anybody occupying this office—be

expected to solve in the course of ten months every human problem which has been thrown up by this war. I know that you expect the birth of great things in nine but you cannot build a new world in ten. . . .'

Of course it did not matter that nobody had asked that of him. They were just a little worried about how he was tackling the job. Then he hit out against a resolution which accused him of following in the footsteps of his predecessor. Ernest wouldn't stand for that. 'It condemns me for following a Conservative policy in effect,' he said. Then he answered in his most emphatic way: 'I deny that. I repudiate that. The resolution urges a return to a socialist policy, which assumes I have departed from it. If that is not a vote of censure I have never heard one. . . .'

Then he told of his difficulties in dealing with the Jews and the Arabs, and how the problem of Spain had been muddled because everybody had not pursued a policy of non-intervention; what a bad time the Russians had given him despite his record as the leader of the Council of Action in 1920; how he had pulled British troops out of Persia as an example to others and striven for European unity. 'I have fought against European division and shall continue to fight against it. I was asked,' he declared, 'would I sign a separate peace treaty contrary to the decisions arrived at in the war? I do not know what steps we will take to get a peace treaty, but no one nation is going to keep me in a state of war for ever with other countries.' Keep *me* in a state of war! Well, well.

Having boxed the compass of his difficulties he finished with a resounding peroration which swept the great gathering off its feet:

'We seek a settlement that will give to France, will give to us, will give to Russia security, not dependent upon the poverty of the people, but dependent upon the mutual confidence of the great allies who won the war. That is my purpose. For that reason we urge a treaty with Austria and the clearance of troops from the whole Danube basin, Greece and everywhere else. Free the whole Danube. Let the people live again. Let the trade flow. Let it be free. Let the waterways of Europe bear traffic again. Let the goods flow from the manufacturer to the peasant, and food from the peasant to the manufacturing districts. Let Europe live again. To let it live again will be the quickest way of obliterating the memory of Hitler. Give us a chance to eradicate

the horrors of Nazism, and bring back that old cradle—which, after all, it was—the cradle of civilisation, that it may nurture into being a new and glorious civilisation.'

After that tremendous platitudinous effort nobody could ask whose trade was to flow and which manufacturers were to make the goods, what was preventing Europe from living again, or in what the new civilisation he wanted would differ from the old. He was winding up the debate, not beginning it.

Passing from that conference he continued to butt his head against the revolution in Europe, to do precisely what he had accused the Conservative coalition Government of 1920 (see p. 77). Had he recognised as one would expect a socialist to recognise that his job in Europe was to follow the military victory over the Nazis by taking all semblance of government out of their hands; to break up the economic apparatus upon which their power had been based in industry and agriculture; to redistribute the land of the great estates of the Prussian landlords; to re-organise and unite the working-class movement industrially and politically; to establish political democracy (not necessarily of the British pattern) on these new foundations—he would then have had difficulties to face, but he would not have put himself into the position of an enemy of the social revolution.

Failing to see these prerequisites of a 'United Europe' he could do no other than seek to re-create a prosperous capitalist Europe. Faced with the ruinous situation left by the war, the pressure of the forces of social revolution, the colossal capital demands of occupation and restoration, the pressure of the American Government which from the outset would have no truck with socialist proposals, he has been pushed from one position to another until there is little to distinguish Ernest Bevin's policy from that of any conservative Foreign Secretary of the U.S.A., except that the latter speaks with the voice of a creditor and Bevin speaks with the voice of a grateful debtor.

He has been doubly unfortunate. The great changes in the British Empire wherein India and Burma became independent did not fall within his province. The socialist glory attached to these changes fell on Attlee and not on him. This left him with all the 'sticky' problems of British relations with the countries of Europe and Asia and America. Having no socialist principles to

guide him in his relations with the countries in process of social revolution, and wholly subordinate to the U.S.A. in his relations with other countries, he has become bewildered and aggrieved, 'insulted,' 'stabbed in the back,' moody. He had to surrender on the Palestinian problem, upon the solution of which he once boldly declared he would stake his political reputation. He gripped the throat of the social revolution in Greece, established a fascist regime there and handed it to the U.S.A. as a military outpost against the European Revolution. Unable, as a result of the war, to maintain the economic, political and military leadership of British Imperialism in the Near East and the Mediterranean, he has lost out to America in every Near Eastern country where British power was hitherto supreme. Without a murmur of protest he permitted the American fleet to turn the Mediterranean into a Yankee Sea and a highway for a third World War.

So long as his powers were limited to tasks within his scope as a trade union leader and economic bargain maker he stood out big and powerful. From the moment he stepped into the world's political arena with a life history which left him hopelessly ill-equipped in understanding, in vision and purpose to handle the complex tasks of a government whose heritage is an outworn imperialism and whose commitment is to transform it to socialism, he has become increasingly a pathetic old man, a 'Palmerston' without teeth, floundering from conference to conference, driven where he should have led, hiding his incompetence in personal grievances, egotistical reminiscences and sickening adulation of dollar statesmanship which has transformed him into its 'Dominion Secretary.'

Had Ernest Bevin stepped off the stage and retired when he had done his job as Minister of Labour and National Service at the end of the war, he would have passed in glory and lingered long in the memory of the British Labour and Socialist Movement with his blunders forgotten and forgiven in the glow of things achieved. When the present sympathy for a man in a tough spot has passed and a grim realisation of the consequences of his complete inability to function as a *socialist* Foreign Secretary takes its place, his popularity will quickly fade and he will be lost down the corridors of Labour history even as his predecessors, MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Leader of Parliament

NOBODY QUESTIONED for a moment Attlee's appointment of Morrison to the leadership of the House as his second-in-command. Nor did Morrison think of any other post. It was a process of natural selection. So let us here, as he takes charge of the most momentous sessions in the history of the British Parliament, sum up the man and his development as a political leader.

In 1945 he was fifty-seven years of age, healthy and vigorous. His hair was turning grey, but he carried his years easily. He was at the height of his powers and moved along with the vigour and purpose of a man who knows where he is going. He was quick in the uptake and spoiling for political duels, especially with Churchill or any of the Opposition.

No one was more conscious of the triumph of Labour and its significance. He realised the power and strength of his new position and was thrilled with the idea of 'going to it.' This was the highest post he had yet achieved in a career which had registered a succession of triumphs and few setbacks. Attlee had beaten him in the race for the Premiership, but who knows what lies ahead? He is five years younger than Attlee, and Time may hold more unlikely possibilities in his lap than that of becoming Attlee's successor. Not that there is any open competition between them, for, contrary to the expectations of many, there has been more cordial unanimity in Attlee's Cabinet than probably any which have preceded it.

Morrison is a good team-worker. This fact marks his career. He is not afraid of having round him men and women of his own stature. His passion for efficiency has led him, confident in his ability to hold his position and not be superseded, at every stage of his advancement to seek the most able people to function on his committees. He is an excellent speaker, who can be by turns pugnacious, challenging, controversial, and tolerant, except with the Communists. He is a political organiser of the first order. I say

political organiser advisedly, because his whole life has been devoted to politics. But had he set out to be a trade union organiser or a business organiser, there is no doubt he would have proved equally successful. He has a good sense of publicity and knows how to publicise and propagate his views; but he has not the capacity of Ernest Bevin for thinking with the masses and expressing in their own language what they think and feel about their lives. Bevin has lived nearer to the struggles of the workers, been in them and of them. Morrison has lived amid the reflections of those struggles as expressed in electioneering battles and political campaigns. The difference is that between taking actual part in a strike of workers, sharing the hunger and strain, and of sympathetically lending a hand while not being directly affected.

There is nothing ostentatious about Morrison. He has made no attempt to escape from the class to which he belongs: he has simply grown up from the level of a clerical worker to that of a political bureaucrat, and to the intellectual level of the intelligentsia. He has never lost his boyhood passion for reading, he is still fond of music, the theatre, and the dance, enjoys the battle of ideas, has the capacity to speak in the third person, and can address himself to a subject without making it his personal possession. His speeches are not couched in the autobiographical form of his colleague Ernest Bevin. He can defend and expound the Labour Party's policy without giving the impression that you can criticise it only over his dead body. His speeches and his writings show a command of language and a capacity for analysis and constructive thinking.

At the same time he has succeeded more than any other Labour leader since MacDonald in creating doubts and fears as to whither he is going. There were never such doubts and fears about Bevin—until he became Foreign Secretary. Attlee has travelled along the path of Party decisions with such integrity that he has been taken for granted. Morrison, however, appears to combine with his other qualities the characteristics of the opportunist politician who trims his sails to the prevailing wind.

The roots of this opportunism can be found in his philosophy and his profession as a parliamentary politician, rather than in any weakness of character. He can stand firmly and battle as stubbornly and pugnaciously as any man when he has decided so to do. Witness his stand as a conscientious objector in 1914, when

he could easily, on the basis of physical defects, have avoided the ordeal.

He became a convinced socialist in his youth and was well acquainted with socialist theory of that time. This was the heyday of the Social Democratic Federation and its Marxism, of Blatchford's rationalism and humanistic socialism, and the fervent campaigns of Keir Hardie. Morrison assimilated much from these forces, and his opposition to the First World War, which he defined as an imperialist war, shows him deeply under the influence of Marxism as propagated in those days. This influence remains and frequently reveals itself in his speeches and writings. But when he became the Secretary of the London Labour Party, and had made up his mind to pursue a political career via local government and Parliament, his political outlook became increasingly influenced by the effect of any policy upon the voting in elections. Fabian socialism then provided him with the rationale of his work, for the Fabians eschew class-struggle politics and base their policy upon changing the minds of the 'public' and the evolution of public institutions and economy into socialism without abrupt changes.

The industrial conflicts passed him by: he played no part in any of them. His career begins in the Party struggle, and through Party struggle he ascends to leadership. His attitude to the rôle of the trade unions in the Labour Party is governed by his experience as an organiser of local Labour parties. For more than twenty years he fought for increased power to be vested in the local parties as against the block vote of the trade unions, and finally won for them the right to elect their own representatives directly on to the Executive Committee of the National Party. How much the question of votes in Parliamentary elections governs his thinking was never more clearly manifest than at the 1929 Labour Party Conference, when his review of Labour's triumph turned entirely upon the progressive increase of the Labour vote.

The state of mind of the 'public' and its relation to 'public' institutions is more important to him than the relation of the classes which make up the 'public.' It was this kind of thinking which led him even in 1929 to make statements that forced the Labour members to wonder whether they belonged to a Socialist Party or not. When he was Minister of Transport he said: 'I want every business man and every business manager to realise

that the Labour Government is not their enemy, but that every Minister in this Government wants to take him by the hand, treat him as a man and a brother, and help to make his commercial or industrial enterprise more successful than it has been in the past.'[1] It was this kind of utterance, so winsome and conciliatory toward those whom the trade unionists and socialists thought they were organising themselves to replace, along with his 'tight-rope walking speeches,' which led to his frequently being dubbed an 'opportunist.'

But, as in Bevin's case, there is a consistent theory behind his utterances. His disregard for the class struggle—a disregard so characteristic of the Fabians—also meant that he saw socialism coming as the political sequel to an educated 'public' voting socialist in a progressively developing and prosperous capitalism. Of course he was not exceptional among the leaders in thinking thus. The view was commonly held by MacDonald, Snowden, the Webbs, Shaw, and most of Morrison's colleagues of to-day. It accounts for the political somersaults the Party has performed in the course of the years, the repeated failure to see the course of history, and the repeated adjustments of policy under pressure from the class upon which Labour primarily rests for its power.

Herbert Morrison's struggle with Ernest Bevin and the trade unions concerning the rôle of the unions in socialised industry was rooted in Herbert's Fabian philosophy and the fact that he had lagged behind its founders. For the Webbs had abandoned in 1920 their old position in which they saw no place for the trade unions in the control of industry. Morrison's standing firmly for the 'public' irrespective of the class content of the situation, demanded that the boards of socialised industry should be composed of 'people,' 'voters,' 'citizens,' the 'public,' selected only by the criterion of ability without regard for the trade unions, the working-class organisations of producers. This was consistent with his theory of social development. But his theory did not and does not fit the facts of life. Hence it was that when Bevin, the head of the trade unions, came along at the head of a working-class army, Morrison had to give way and recognise that in a socialist society democracy has to be extended beyond political democracy to the administration of industry; that as ownership of industry

[1] *Daily Herald*, June 30th, 1929.

passes from private to social ownership the trades unions acquire new functions.

When Morrison worked out the theory of the 'public corporation as a form of socialisation' it was a distinctive contribution to British socialist thought. After the big controversy with the trades unions on their part in the socialised industries, he set forth his ideas in a book called *The Socialisation of Transport.* The title is a little misleading, for the book covers much more than transport. While dealing with transport in greater detail because of his experience as Minister of Transport, it really covers the problem of the socialisation of industry as a whole. In the concluding chapters he sums up his views on the problems of the transition from capitalism to socialism which he considers will lie before a Socialist Government. It reads like a paraphrasing of some parts of the speeches of Lenin in the period of the New Economic policy. Morrison assumes that political power is in the hands of a Socialist Government and proceeds:

> 'There is no socialist more in a hurry about the establishment of socialism than I am, but I want socialisation to be soundly conceived, well planned, and to achieve that success which will be a good advertisement and not a bad one for the socialist idea. Things that might check and muddle socialisation are the insufficient education of public opinion, the irrational exposition or defence of socialism, clumsiness, weakness, cowardice or sloppiness in dealing with the interests concerned in the socialisation proposals, and such insufficient attention to business detail that socialisation is not unreasonably judged by the public to be a failure rather than a success. The policy of putting fully competent, public-spirited people in charge and giving them their head, must be applied if we are to avoid that kind of failure which would bring socialism into disrepute for a long time. But sensible, business-like, and administratively clean-cut as a Socialist Government must be if it is to succeed, it must also have at the back of its mind the big thing at which it is aiming, which is the complete mastery by the nation of its economic resources and their management and disposal in the interests of all its citizens, together with the ethical idealism which becomes practical on that basis.'

When allowance is made for Morrison's concern for the 'voters,' it is very reminiscent of Lenin's 'learn from the capitalists,' 'learn how to manage industry,' 'less phrasemongering,'

'be efficient,' 'count the cost,' 'show that socialist industry is more efficient than capitalist industry,' and so forth. The Fabian and the Marxist are talking the same language with only variations in expression. But Herbert proceeds:

> 'For me, the bigger idea of socialism is not a mere vision of the future: it is a policy for to-day. I hope the electors will be so determined that it is the predominant duty of Governments to bring economic order out of chaos, that they will judge the Socialist Governments of the future, not on how much public money they have raised and disposed of in grants, allowances, and cash benefits for the purpose of palliating capitalism—though social reform must occupy part of our time—but on *how many industries they have successfully socialised.* We need not worry about getting every toffee-shop and boot-repairer's in the back street socialised; from the point of view of the real economic problem they are neither here nor there. But the all-healing powers of socialism cannot be applied until all the large industries and services are planned and organised for social ends and the people, through the appropriate political and economic organs of the nations, are made the masters and not the slaves of material wealth. In the end that doctrine must be applied to the world as a whole. Sooner or later world economic and political organs must in certain respects be supreme over national ones. . . .'

He sketches the development of the structure of the State implied by this process—the coming of a Minister of Public Economy, the setting up of an Economic Advisory Council, and the fashioning of the economic budget—and concludes:

> 'The economic budget would set out programmes of capital development for the various industries and the broad finances of the economic undertakings, each undertaking publishing its periodical report, including its audited and financial statements. Decisions would be made as to the allocation of capital to the various industries and the contribution of the industries to the national economic capital funds as a whole; for we shall not go on for ever floating loans upon the market and paying interest to rentiers—which, after all, must in any case be produced by the labour of hand and brain. Besides, the rentiers will steadily decrease. . . . Through the Economic Council and the Board of Trade or Ministry of Public Economy, the Socialist State will have achieved the scientific mastery of man over the

Photo : *Picture P*

Herbert Morrison dancing with his wife

resources which nature has given us and the scientific inventions which the mind of man has produced. The undignified competitive scramble for bread-and-butter will have ceased; the cheating of one's fellows in business will no longer be a recognised part of the game. . . .'

No socialist of any school, not even Lenin or Stalin, would quarrel with this exposition, and one may wonder why its author came into conflict with Bevin's trade unionists. I think the explanation will be found in the fact that all his life has been tied up with parliamentarism of one form or another. Like most of the Fabians (who were drawn from the middle-class intelligentsia and were occupied as bureaucrats, professional workers, etc.,) he moralised against the class struggle in society. He thought as a 'citizen' without regard for classes, and tried to transcend the class struggle and its implications. Hence he resented the claims of the organised working class, denouncing them as 'syndicalist' and incompatible with his ideological conceptions.

The same explanation accounts also for his persistent presentation of political democracy and the Party system without regard for its social content. He refers to Parties as if they were mere ideological associations with no social roots. He calls for 'a strong opposition' in Parliament, as if the progress of the Labour Party as the Party of socialism does not mean the passing away of the social foundations upon which the 'Opposition' thrives. The criticism which the Labour Party will need, as it succeeds, is not Tory criticism but socialist criticism—as he himself indicated when he expressed the hoped that the Socialist Governments of the future will be judged on 'how many industries they have successfully socialised,' and not upon the vigour of the opposition to their creed.

The nearer the Labour Party approached the responsibilities of power, the more it became imperative to plan ahead; and to plan the future of British economy and industry the leaders were forced to pass from the exposition of abstractions and moral precepts to the analysis of the economic and social foundations of society—to the methods, in fact, of scientific socialism.

This is what has been happening to Morrison; but he has been inhibited from extending his development to the whole of his political thought by his fight with the Communists. Fighting in the first period for the existence of the Labour Party, because the Communists certainly set before themselves the aim of liquidating

it, he became obsessed with the ideological battle, and was embittered by it. In the process, too, he grew blind to the relation between communism and socialism. He did not see the growth of the Communist movement as a social process undergoing changes like any other. He fought only as a doctrinaire. And so he continues to fight the Communists and they him.

Thus were Herbert Morrison and his outlook when he became leader of a parliament with a socialist majority ready to pilot a whole series of socialist measures and to begin the task of transforming this country from an arena of class struggle to a classless society wherein, 'The undignified competitive scramble for bread-and-butter will have ceased; the cheating of one's fellows in business will no longer be a recognised part of the game.' For that aim is not only his. It is increasingly the aim of the Movement through which he has risen to power.

Twelve months later he reported to the Labour Party Conference. Here he revealed, more fully than anyone else, how the responsibilities which come with power have forced the Party to adopt the methods of scientific socialism more completely. He outlined the historic background of the problems before the conference and told of the formation of an 'Economic General Staff.' Of this he said:

> 'In the first place, it is clearly impossible that individual and separate State departments, alone and in isolation, can engage in full economic planning. . . . Therefore the Government is rapidly building up an overall planning organisation with what amounts to an economic general staff, and its planning committees and working parties. I see this organisation working and developing. I compare it with the complete lack of economic planning organisation in the past. That was the case in the Labour Government of 1929–31, when I held the office of Minister of Transport. When we went into the economic and financial smash of 1931 we did not know we were going there. We ought to have known what was ahead, but we did not, because there was no proper machinery of State to tell us, and when we got there we did not know fully what to do about it.'

Herbert might have added that neither had the Party any proper machinery, and that it was a sad reflection on their economic theories and method of understanding the history of society. He continued:

'The real problem of statesmanship in the field of industry and economics is to see the trouble coming and to prevent ourselves getting into the smash . . . . We are determined that we are not going to be caught unawares by blind economic forces under this Administration. . . .'

There he made an analysis of the problems of reconversion from war industry to peace industry and the part to be played by the measures of socialisation now being initiated, and set before the Labour Movement its line of advance from capitalism to socialism. He finished thus:

'This is the testing time for socialists. It is not enough to have demanded socialisation, not enough to have preached the blessings of public ownership. Now it is our duty and our opportunity to practise it and prove it. It was, I believe, Friedrich Engels who said, "The government over persons will be transformed into the administration of things and the management of the process of production." It appears that there is some doubt as to the authorship of the passage; the Chairman thinks it was Proudhon. But whether Engels, as I say, or Proudhon, as the Chairman says, Lenin quoted it in due course and now I have done so. Whoever first said it was right. Economic planning is the firm basis for true liberty. This socialist vision is a great libertarian conception. The deliberate organisation of the material things is the only safeguard of our individual freedom; in fact, the more we advance towards socialism the more we shall need individual initiative, individual enterprise, and all the rich pattern of individual liberty. The British people will show the world the way to successful practical democracy—the people working for the people.'

Here it seemed that the Fabian and the Marxist in Morrison had arrived at a common understanding. He had diagnosed 'the real problem of statesmanship in the field of industry and economics.' He saw the vision of the transition from 'the government of persons to the administration of things. . . .' But he had not analysed the 'trouble' and did not see how near we were to another turning point in the crisis conditions of our time. He and his colleagues were again 'caught unawares.' The Labour Government had accepted the American loan at the outset of its career anticipating that it would last until 1949 and assuming that capitalism by that time would again be on the upgrade. The loan

ran out earlier in circumstances that could have been foreseen, and indeed were foreseen by others. The circumstances were made worse by a winter more severe than had been known for almost a century.

Hence once more the Government and Herbert Morrison in particular were put to the test of adjusting themselves to an unanticipated situation. It was at this juncture that Herbert became Deputy Prime Minister charged with the task of preparing the emergency measures to meet the crisis. And then came a blow. He became ill with phlebitis and for months had to relinquish all activities. Sir Stafford Cripps stepped into the breach, and with the fall of Dalton from his position of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Cripps became Chancellor and supreme economic director of the country.

The post of Chancellor of the Exchequer stands on the threshhold of the premiership, the post of Deputy Prime Minister notwithstanding. In the absence of Herbert Morrison the brilliance of Sir Stafford's handling of the economic crisis outsparkled 'Labour's big three.' But after several months' absence Herbert returned to the fray completely recovered, and quickly proved his outstanding qualities as a political leader of the Labour Movement and that he was still Deputy Prime Minister in fact as well as in name.

Unless his health fails him Herbert Morrison will in due course succeed Clement Attlee. Then once more he will prove the greatness of his qualities as an administrator. But he is inhibited from becoming politically great by his fight against the communists and excessive cautiousness. At one moment he gives the impression that he is firmly leading the Labour Movement and his country to socialism. At the next he gives the impression he can find a permanent place in society for the House of Lords and every piece of mumbo-jumbo of the centuries, that it is not really socialism he is working for but a mixed grill of feudalism, capitalism, socialism, liberalism or what you will.

Such vagaries are not due to misunderstanding. Herbert Morrison understands socialism as well as any man. They are due to his over-riding fear that at some stage he might find himself saying something with which the communists agree and scare middle class voters. His wisdom is that of the cautious parliamentarian who advances only after he has counted the votes and

he is sure the majority are his. Two voices are ever whispering in his ear, the Fabian and the Marxist, and he is never quite sure to which he should give heed. When he wrote *The Socialisation of Transport and Industry* he spoke with the voice of the latter. When he speaks on political democracy the voice is that of the Fabian ignoring the social basis of politics and the relation of political parties to social classes. This conflict of outlook, involving contradictory methods of approach to the understanding of the social struggle of our times, mars his judgement of the course of history, leaves him to be caught unawares by crises, inhibits him from the daring decision and disturbs his course with over cautiousness. Outstanding examples of these factors operating in his career are his silence on the question of 'Non-intervention' in the Spanish Civil War at the Edinburgh Conference of the Labour Party in 1936, and after, his 'tight-rope walking' on the question of re-armament, his uncertainty on the future of the Coalition in 1943.

His record reveals him as a great party organiser and public administrator. Were it possible for him to apply the same analytical methods to the shaping of his political judgements as he has on occasion shown in relation to industry and economics he would not only become Prime Minister of Britain, as is his due, but also the outstanding British socialist leader of his generation. I fear, however, that his inhibitions are too strong and his intellectual habits too firmly established. Hence it is most probable that the historians of to-morrow will write in their records of to-day that Herbert Morrison was a big man in British Labour and Socialist history of the first half of the twentieth century whose over-cautiousness and temporising prevented him from achieving greatness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Man at the Helm

'SOME THIRTY years ago, when I was a young barrister just down from Oxford, I engaged in various forms of social work in East London. The conditions of the people in that area as I saw them at close quarters led me to study their causes and to reconsider the assumptions of the social class to which I belonged. I became an enthusiastic convert to socialism. I joined the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party and became a member of my trade union, the National Union of Clerks. For many years I worked as a rank-and-file member of the movement, taking my share of the work of branch activities and propaganda meetings at the street-corners.'[1]

Thus Clement Attlee wrote in 1937 of how he 'bridged the gulf' between his class and the working class and began his climb to power and responsibility. In those early years he was a young Christian gentleman who considered his conversion to socialism as a corollary of his Christian ideals. In these later years he is a middle-aged Christian gentleman still fired with the reforming zeal of his youth.

He was sixty-two years of age when he became Prime Minister, head of the Labour Government, in the year 1945. He is still a slim figure, moving easily and quickly, without noise. He is a happy man too, because Labour's triumph at the polls has appeared to justify him in his way of life.

There had previously been nothing very dramatic or surprising in his life. He had had few disappointments. In fact, after his return from the war of 1914–18 things had run fairly smoothly for him. He had married happily, and lived the life of the lawyer-politician, regularly travelling between Westminster and his Stanmore suburban home. In his 'spare' time, which grew less and less with the years, he played a little tennis, tended the garden, enjoyed the company of his four children, liked motoring,

[1] *The Labour Party in Perspective*, by C. R. Attlee, p. 7.

read much, liked thrillers, the theatre, and the cinema. He will continue thus, when he has time, even now that his home has moved to 10 Downing St., and Chequers.

In the course of his career he has acquired no new characteristics. As a young man he was quiet, precise, serious, polite, legalistic, moral, with a sense of humour and capable of the quick, witty observation and the rapid decision. His speeches always read better than they sounded, although he has risen on more than one occasion to deliver a speech which has surprised friend and opponent alike by both its delivery and its content. But he is essentially an executive man. Put him in charge of a committee and an agenda, and he is the man to steer it through its work and to see the work is done well. This the Coalition Government observed when he deputised for Churchill while the latter was attending international conferences.

Although he early became a Fabian socialist, Attlee has not contributed anything to socialist thought. He is not a theoretician, but an idealist who is also a pragmatic lawyer, examining his brief carefully before taking action. Although he challenged the 'assumptions of the social class to which he belonged' he did not henceforth think in terms of 'social classes' but of Party programmes and doctrine. A political party is to him, as to all Fabians, an organisation of the adherents to a doctrine and not the expression of a social class. Hence the ideology of a party is more important to him and to them than its social content and the part it plays in the social struggle. Hence, also, any kind of society, capitalist or socialist, may have any number of parties. He recognises that there is a social struggle within capitalism, but his attitude towards it is a moral attitude. He regards it as deplorable, that it should be transcended, and all social changes be made by agreement between the contending forces. He thus meets Ernest Bevin on the 'bridge between the classes,' seeking an equilibrium in the class struggle, progress by means of agreements, and socialism as a by-product.

This attempt of the Fabians to transcend the social struggle instead of leading it to socialism accounts for the repeated failure of Attlee and his colleagues to understand the course of history and to anticipate events—for their being so often caught unawares and compelled to switch from one policy to another. The fact has been amply demonstrated in these pages.

Naturally they believed that Labour would come to power, and indeed they had formulated a plan of gradual transition, specifying a five-year programme of economic priorities. But they never foresaw the conditions under which they would come to power. They did not reckon that they would have to deal with capitalism in a more acute condition of crisis than ever before. They did not anticipate the war and prepare the Labour Movement for it. All their assumptions were based on the theory of progressing through good times to better.

They were, of course, always in a far better position than their rivals, who neither understood what was happening to them nor possessed any coherent alternative to the chaotic conditions of their own creation, so that their political bankruptcy encouraged the people to look toward the socialist alternative.

When Attlee formed his administration backed by nearly four hundred Labour members of Parliament, he was in a remarkable position. But the world war was not yet ended. Japan had yet to be 'liquidated.' The Labour Government would for some months have to hold its hand with its measures of social transformation. But the months passed quickly, and the atomic bomb suddenly brought the struggle to an end. And then came the aftermath.

At once the ties of war which had held the classes together, and which in the concluding months of the contest had been visibly loosening, fell asunder, and the social struggle between the classes was resumed without the restraints which the war had imposed.

From the moment the reins of Government came into his hands, Attlee proved that he was no 'back-room boy.' His genius for executive work showed itself immediately. The Cabinet he had formed did not meet to hear monologues. He delegated responsibility to the members, and held them responsible for the direction of policy in their charge. He did not regard it as his responsibility to lay down the law. It was for the individual members of his team to present to the Cabinet their detailed proposals for applying the Party's policy in their several departments. It was for him to check, to co-ordinate, and to function as the chairman of the collective organisation. There were powerful personalities in his entourage, almost any one of whom could have stepped into his shoes, but he knew how to hold them together.

The tasks he and his team had to face were extraordinary.

Instead of taking charge of a flourishing social system and gradually initiating one reform after another, the Government was faced with a greatly crippled foreign trade; outworn machinery in great areas of industry—the heritage of chaotic 'private enterprise'; ruined buildings and a tremendous housing shortage; the problems of re-conversion from war industry to peace industry; millions of men scattered across continents and anxious to be demobilised; and half the ships with which we had begun the war now at the bottom of the sea. The British Empire, too, was no longer as before. India was on the verge of a social eruption. Egypt demanded her freedom. The Jews, most tragic of all peoples, ruined by the million, wanted a home of their own. Social revolution, latterly hidden by the military conflict against the Fascists, now stood revealed over wide stretches of Europe and Asia. And the relation of the great victor Powers was now complicated, not only by the conflict of interests, but by their contrasting social systems. Never had there been so complex a situation in the history of human society.

Six months after Attlee became Prime Minister, Churchill, now leader of the Opposition that represented the resistance of the dying régime, seized upon the difficulties of the times and whatever discontent existed in society to challenge the Government with a vote of censure. On behalf of his party he moved:

> 'That this House regrets that His Majesty's Government are neglecting their first duty, namely, to concentrate with full energy upon the most urgent and essential tasks of the reconversion of our industries from wartime production to that of peace, the provision of houses, the speedy release of men and women from the Forces to industry, and the drastic curtailment of our swollen national expenditure, and deplores the preoccupation of His Majesty's Ministers, impelled by socialist theory, with the formulation of long-term schemes for nationalisation, creating uncertainty over the whole field of industrial and economic activity, in direct opposition to the best interests of the nation, which demands food, work, and homes.'

The old war horse was in fighting form, although he had not yet become accustomed to leading so spiritually bedraggled and weakened an army. The House of Commons was of course packed to capacity and there was great excitement. When Churchill had finished everybody was agog to see how Attlee would deal with

him. Would he accept the challenge and answer with the reply direct, or trim and equivocate and apologise? Once more Attlee proved himself to be more than a good staff officer—a match for Churchill in the realms of debate and statesmanship.

With a few words of introduction referring to Churchill's broadcast at the beginning of the General Election, he promptly delivered his first heavy broadside. He said:

> 'The burden of Mr. Churchill's speech is this "Why, when you were elected to carry out a socialist programme, did you not carry out a Conservative programme?" To Mr. Churchill everything that is conservative is normal, to him anything that sees the changing world and wishes to change it must be wrong. We are always asked to rally round, to be patriotic, and keep things as they are. *We were not returned for that purpose.*'

Having landed this resounding blow he proceeded to deal wittily with some of Winston's lieutenants. He accused Oliver Lyttleton of 'bowling a few wides' and being 'no-balled' by the Speaker, sarcastically referred to Beverley Baxter as a 'Member of light and leading,' to Lord Beaverbrook as not being 'exactly a still small voice' of the Conservative Party. Then he returned to Winston Churchill and handled him on the question of demobilisation, and left him greatly disconcerted. Next he challenged him on the question of the conversion to peacetime industry.

> 'Mr. Churchill says, in that breezy way of his, "Look at the United States of America, a mighty evolution taking place in a violent, convulsive, passionate manner, which causes great commotion and disturbance, but which has already led to an enormous increase in output of necessary things for the home market with an immense, ever-growing overspill for foreign exports."
>
> 'But has it? This is what a woman reporter of the *Sunday Times* says—and this is from New York:
>
> > "Purchasers are pushing notes across the counters for luxury items ranging from ruby-tipped hatpins costing £150 to Piper Cub aeroplanes. . . . Women run their hands lovingly over the sensuous smoothness of mink-lined mink coats—reversible fur—with the equally fanciful price-tag of £3,000. At nearly every salon a tiny perfume ampule, set with sapphires, was selling for £75. . . . Despite the 'get it at any price' psychology . . ."

'and despite Mr. Churchill's confidence, I might add:

> "of the first peacetime Christmas since 1940, real shortages exist in many fields. Would-be buyers of men's clothing, children's toys, and household appliances are met by harassed store-owners' vague talk of slowed reconversion and bare shelves."

'In every industry in this country catering for the ordinary simple people's wants there has been a steady increase of labour and of output. I freely admit we have done nothing about mink coats or sapphire ampules. . . .

'Let me turn for a moment to finance,' he went on, 'a subject on which I move with some delicacy—I am not even as much at ease, perhaps, as Mr. Churchill. He said that at least £800,000,000 could have been saved this year by sensible, vigorous administration of our finances.'

Churchill here interposed: 'This financial year, up to March 31st.'

Attlee resumed:

'Yes—by setting free at an early date millions of men and women now kept in employment. I should like to know whether there is a basis for that figure. Anyone can say £800,000,000, or even £1,600,000,000, but where does it come from? Was it given to him by the distinguished physicist who supplies him with economic information?'

After this caustic introduction he proceeded to analyse in detail the Government's handling of the financial situation, and Winston remained silent. But Attlee had not finished with him yet.

'I must now turn to Mr. Churchill's main indictment—"these gloomy vultures of nationalisation hovering over our basic industries." I have no doubt that Mr. Churchill knows all about vultures. The vultures never fed on him because he kept alive, fortunately for us all; vultures feed on rotten carrion. Is it his view that our basic industries are so rotten that they attract the vultures? Is that his view of private enterprise? He talks about growing uncertainty. There is no growing uncertainty whatever. Our Party has stood for nationalisation programmes for forty years or more, and even a Conservative M.P. might have realised that when we got a majority we should naturally

go in for nationalisation. At the same time we put it clearly in the King's Speech that we intended to nationalise certain industries.'

There was not much left of Churchill's case when Attlee finished his speech with the resounding affirmation:

'We shall go forward with our policy, the policy upon which we were returned to power by the votes of the electors. We intend to carry out both our short-term programme, dealing with immediate problems, and our long-term programme of reconstruction, and I believe in doing that we shall have the steady support of the vast majority of the people of this country, workers and employers alike.'

On June 11th, 1946, at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party held at Bournemouth, Clement Attlee met the representatives of the source of his power and reported on a year's work done. The Conference itself was more a demonstration than a place of discussion. Clement Attlee, Herbert Morrison, and Ernest Bevin figured as its highlights. Attlee was jubilant. Great work had been done. 'Seventy-three Bills have been introduced,' he said;

'fifty-five have already received the Royal Assent. There are a lot of fish in the basket, and they are not just minnows. There are pretty big salmon among them. Look at those three great measures of social reform: National Insurance, National Insurance Injuries, and the National Health Services. In previous Parliaments any one of these would have been thought to have provided a full meal for a whole year. . . . Here is another large one: the repeal of the Trades Disputes Act. At long last that unjust stigma on the Trade Union Movement, that injustice to Civil Servants has been removed. The late Prime Minister invited us to go to the country on this issue, to appeal to Cæsar. We appealed; Cæsar gave his verdict; and the Trades Disputes Act is no more.'

He told of other measures. He was excited with the changes inaugurated in the British Empire. He said:

'We have invited the people of India to decide their own destiny. If they will stay with us in the British Commonwealth we shall welcome them. If they desire to go outside, we shall stretch out the hand of friendship to them. . . . We were the first to proclaim our readiness to hand over our possessions from

the last war under a system of trusteeship. In the Colonial Empire also self-government marches on. No Government has given more complete proof of its desire to follow the path of democracy and freedom. We hear a few voices now and again mumbling the old shibboleths about Imperialism. I must say they seem to me rather second-hand. . . .

'After all, this is only the beginning. I stand here with this experience of Government to reaffirm my faith in democratic socialism. . . . We have, I believe, made a good beginning. We shall not falter. With faith in the justice of our cause and our ability to serve the nation we confidently face the future.'

How reminiscent was this striking declaration of the occasion in 1929 when, a few months after the formation of the second Labour Government, Herbert Morrison sounded a similar note of triumph, promised new measures and re-affirmed the faith. Of course there was a great difference in the two occasions in that the second Labour Government was vulnerable to attack from the Opposition and could be brought down at will and the third Labour Government was not liable to be so easily demolished. But how much alike were they in unawareness of approaching crisis conditions. On both occasions the speakers assumed that the worse days lay behind and they were going 'on and on and up and up.'

The unforeseen developments in the crisis of capitalism knocked the bottom out of the second Labour Government. The unforeseen crisis came and shook the third Labour Government from stem to stern. It almost removed Attlee from the helm. Had it not been for the personal loyalty of his colleagues that he had won in the course of the years and had he not functioned more as a chairman of the Cabinet than as its leader he would have been a casualty of the dollar crisis of 1947. He was badly shaken, but as the Cabinet grappled with the situation he resumed as before; and his prestige rose once more.

And yet again the reaction to the crisis took the form of slowing up the progress to socialism and drastic efforts to restore capitalism as the prerequisite of reforming it into socialism. The Fabians were still convinced that capitalism can be made prosperous and that socialism is an organic growth from capitalist society in a state of well-being. Hence instead of eradicating the crisis they subject it to extraordinary 'medical' treatment to 'ease the pain.'

They assume the easing of anguish to be a cure, only to be caught unawares again by new crisis conditions.

So Clement Attlee will continue his way earnestly and sincerely, a man of high ideals and definite principles, who seeks neither the limelight nor personal power. He stepped into the breach in the leadership of the Labour Movement when 'big' leaders were at a discount and surprised friend and foe by the manner in which he rose to the task and on his merits held the post in other circumstances when bigger men were available. His strength lies in his executive ability and in his self-effacing co-operation with others in achieving the ideals he holds by the means in which he believes.

He has been the titular head of the British Labour Movement in the most remarkable period of its history. Whatever mistakes he has made in the course of the years have been mistakes common to the movement. He will be remembered by it, not as the man who impressed himself upon it but as the man who expressed its mind with integrity as one who serves.

THE NEWEST LOOK

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LABOUR'S BIG THREE

by Murphy