

PEACE AND THE COLONIAL QUESTION.

POLLITT: The intention behind this document is as follows: Comrades know that in the pacifist movement particularly there is talk about giving the colonies away, various proposals in regard to the Mandate system, and comrades have no doubt also seen the announcement this week of a campaign to be conducted by Lansbury and Ponsonby under the auspices of the Peace Pledge Union which will concentrate on these two questions and the operation of the Van Zeeland Report. Comrades working in the Peace movements have reported to the Peace Commission established after the last Party Conference, that they were meeting with difficulties in explaining in a convincing manner what line should be adopted on these controversial questions. Therefore in the Peace Commission we have had preliminary discussions which led to the formulation of this document, which is to be introduced by Comrade Bradley and Dutt, and after discussion it will be referred to these two comrades for final editing.

We bring this forward now because the Labour Party are also considering a memorandum on this question; and the fact that we believe we should be able to influence considerably the Annual Conference of the National Peace Council to be held in Bristol at the end of May, and because on the basis of this experience we will also be able to influence perhaps in a bigger direction the Empire Peace Conference to be held in Glasgow during the course of the Glasgow Exhibition.

If in the course of their experience they have come across difficulties, the comrades should speak of them here, especially if they can formulate them in the shape of questions, because along with this resolution Campbell will be answering the questions which seem to crystallise these points in the Daily Worker.

There can be no doubt of the activity of the pacifists and our fight against the line of the pacifists undoubtedly has got to be strengthened.

B. BRADLEY: As has been pointed out, this is merely the draft of a resolution, which I feel falls short of dealing with many points which will have to be dealt with.

It is clear that it is not merely a question of the insistent demand of Hitler for the return of colonies which has made this question of tremendous importance. The Anglo-Italian Peace Pact has also brought the question of colonies much more to the forefront. Also the question of the proposed recognition of the conquest of Abyssinia by Mussolini. There is also another question which we must not fail to take into consideration in connection with peace and the colonies, and that is the growing appreciation among the colonial peoples and the importance of the recognition of the menace of Fascism, and their relation to the people in the capitalist countries in opposing this menace. And these questions as they are presented here of course clearly indicate that we must have our line quite clear.

As far as the volume of opinion in the peace movement is concerned, it has been taking into consideration the colonial question in relation to peace, and there is definitely a division - one section feeling that they are prepared to sacrifice anything, hand over colonial territories to the tender mercies of Hitler, in order to save world peace. And there is another section, quite a considerable section in this volume of opinion which is taking an interest in the colonial question, who recognise the need to remove the oppression from the colonial peoples. And what we have to do is to gather support for this section which sincerely wants to alleviate the burdens on the colonial peoples and help them towards a democratic system. We have to show this section that by handing over colonies to Hitler or bringing them under some international Mandate, it will not remove the menace of war, and it will actually worsen the conditions of the colonial peoples.

There have been a number of questions already presented, and it is on the basis of these questions that we have prepared this draft document. I would like to indicate some of the questions. For example we have to answer the question asked by these people in the peace movements as follows:

Is not the Mandate System of colonial rule an improvement on the old imperialist system? Will it not lead to self-government. Can we not transfer these Mandates to an international authority. In these questions there is the recognition of the Mandate System of colonial rule as not altogether satisfactory, and they have in mind some alternative or new international control. Another question is: Have not colonies only prestige value and are they not a burden on the imperialist country? Is it fair to the backward countries to give them self-government? How can we resist the claims of Hitler when we refuse to place our own colonies under international control. Hitler's demand is not for the open door or for the removal of tariff barriers etc. It is not for the bringing of colonies under the Mandate system. His demand is clearly for the return of those colonies previously under German rule and he wants these colonies not merely for prestige value but in order to exploit the people, and for the resources of the colonies. He also wants colonies for their strategic importance. With the drive of Fascism, the drive for world dominance, it is absolutely essential that they should have outposts throughout the world as in the Mediterranean, a base for fuelling submarines, for aeroplanes, etc. and these are absolutely essential to Fascism in Africa and in the other parts of the world. This is an important point behind Hitler's demand for colonies.

To answer the question on the present system of mandatory rule. It is imagined by people who do not know that the League of Nations has authority over the powers which have been given the Mandate and that the Permanent Commission established by the League of Nations can investigate the control and can interfere with it in its rule in relation to the colonies under Mandate. This is not so. In the present circumstances the imperial power has complete control over the Mandate, and the Permanent Mandates Commission has no authority at all to interfere with the rule in the colony. This is a point we must stress, and we must show the people in the Peace movement that the present Mandatory system of colonial rule is not any different to the old imperialist rule.

Then the question raised about some new form of international Mandate, bringing all the colonies under one international control. That is, that an international committee should have complete control removing it from the hands of individual imperialist powers, and this international committee should help the colonial peoples steadily towards self-government. Actually the position would be any such international control would place the colonial people at a greater disadvantage than at present. They would have no direct appeal to any country; would not be able to win popular support for their demands for progressive democracy, and this disadvantage would remove any possibility of moving towards self-government.

I think that the widespread sympathy in the Labour and Peace movements must be directed along some practical lines to improve the conditions of the colonial peoples. That is, we want to put forward demands to support the call for democracy, civil liberties, the removal of restrictive ordinances imposed upon the colonial peoples, and towards the winning of self-government. If we can remove these barriers then it is clear it would give a far greater opportunity for the colonial peoples to build up their own movement inside the colonies and so progress towards self-government. But this must be related to the peace movement and also to the Peace Alliance we have in mind. Any peace alliance that we visualise must have in its programme one other important point - that is recognition of the rights of the colonial peoples and their aspirations; recognition of the growing movement in the colonial countries and the importance so far as this country is concerned of the 400 million people in the British Empire.

And this is being more and more appreciated in this country. The fact that in the Peace Conference referred to already by Comrade Pellitt, more than 50 per cent of the time allocated for discussion is devoted to consideration of questions in relation to the colonies. The question of the Glasgow Empire Exhibition alongside which the Scottish Peace movement is organising a peace conference. There has been some difficulty over the title of this. It might easily be put as 'Peace and Empire' because this would cover the whole question bringing in the Dominions as well as the colonies. It is clear the important place the colonial question is occupying at the moment.

Then the question of the colonies themselves, particularly as far as India is concerned. The leaders of the Indian National Congress have clearly indicated both in resolution from the National Congress and in their speeches, that they are recognising more and more that their struggle for liberation and independence is bound up with the struggle against Fascism and War. There is a new approach to this question. It is not limited as it has been in the past to merely stating that their main enemy at the present moment is British Imperialism and all they have to do is to struggle for their liberation from British Imperialism, but a recognition that there is a greater menace of fascism and that there are points of common interest between the peace loving peoples in the capitalist countries and the people of the colonial countries. An endeavour is being made at the moment to find some common ground where the great peace movement representing the 300 million Indian people can be linked up with the peace movement in this country. But the basis for linking up can only be found if we are able to show them this understanding of the aspirations of the Indian people in their struggle towards democracy and freedom. Therefore the importance of this question is increase by the fact that we have to recognise inside the peace movement the importance of the struggle of the colonial peoples.

We cannot put forward the idea of breaking up the British Empire and complete independence for India as our slogans inside the peace movement. Those are ultimate slogans. But we can put forward the immediate slogans of democratic rights and civil liberties and win the broad masses of the peace movement for these demands. We can clear their minds in relation to the Mandate question, remove the illusion about the international mandate, and win these people to support our demands for the colonial peoples thereby drawing into the peace movement not merely the masses in this country, but alongside as allies the peoples in the colonial countries into a great broad movement against Fascism and War.

CONCLUSION: With regard to this document, I think our main need is to simplify it and bring it closer to the point of view of the peace movement, their work and their language. The position is clear. Fascism demand for colonies is the central factor of the present war situation. We know that imperialist war means war for a new division of the world, and that that expresses itself today in Fascism's demand for colonies. People like Londonderry represent a very small section, but on the left among the Liberal, Labour and Pacifist elements, there is quite a wide opinion that for idealist reasons gives certain support to these demands.. It is a question of justice that we, Britain, France, etc. represented as the peace powers, have an enormous lot of colonies and that the dissatisfied powers have not got colonies and therefore it is a matter of justice that the peace movement should support the handing of colonies to Fascism.

Next they say it is a policy for peace, namely that the cause of the present war danger is precisely because these Fascist powers have been deprived of colonies, and that if a redivision was made if certain colonies were given to the fascist powers, this would diminish the danger of war. Therefore it is a peace policy.

At the same time they are aware of the criticism that this is treating the colonial peoples as the spoils of war and therefore they try to meet that difficulty by putting forward the proposition, could we not internationalise the control of colonies, develop the Mandate System into an International Mandate System and on that basis bring in the fascist powers on equality with the other powers.

We have to recognise that we have got here an outlook widely held on the left, but which in point of fact is an element of extreme danger breaking the front against Fascism, letting the way in to Fascism. Therefore we have an extremely responsibility in this - Understanding the point of view of these people, to be able to clear up this question for them in such a way that we make firm the front against fascism.

For this there are two main positions we have to make clear. The first is that the peace movement should be against any handing over of colonial peoples to Fascism, and we have to be able to argue the reasons for that. To begin with, the peace movement cannot base itself on the domination of the colonial peoples by violence. Over Abyssinia the entire peace movement defended the right of the Abyssinian people to their independence against the attack of Fascism and felt that this was the close concern of the peacemovement. But every colonial people is in fact an Abyssinia at a different historical stage. It has been conquered by violence. Therefore as the starting point we do need to get clear that to uphold any colonial system is to uphold the rights of aggression and violence.

Come to the question of justice - that it should be just that the possessing powers, Britain, France, etc. should hand over some colonies. Our answer has to be to make quite plain that there is no basis of justice within imperialism, and there cannot be. There is only a basis of power. Nobody raised with any kind of emphasis the need of Germany for colonies so long as Germany was weak and republican and democratic. But only when Germany becomes a military power, threatening the world, then is raised the question of justice. The same with regard to the small countries which may also be highly industrialised and having a series of economic problems. Nobody discusses their right to colonies because there is no power behind them.

Therefore we have to get clear that in this question of colonies there is no justice and there is not a possibility of it. It is a question of power. The peace movement will go wrong if it is backing one set of robbers against another. That does not mean that we uphold British Imperialism. We are saying it is no solution to hand over colonies and the colonial peoples to fascism.

Then come to the argument of expediency - whether it would not
lead to peace and diminish the danger of war if certain demands
were satisfied. And here we simply have to give a clear and direct
answer. That is, that it would hasten the advance of war. The reasons
are clear as soon as you look at it. Because there is not such a thing
as any permanent division or satisfactory division. There is not
really such a thing as a satisfied power. Before 1914 Britain on the
basis of the British Empire was spoken of as a satisfied power. But
that did not prevent when the war of 1914-18 came, her being ready to
take another 2 million square miles of territory. Every imperialism
always wants more. It is never satisfied. You will never reach a
basis for peace on the basis of so-called 'satisfying' or 'just division'.
The effect of making concessions to Fascist powers, handing over
something, will be to increase their possibility for further
aggression. Handing over of certain colonies, having colonial
possessions does not remove their fight for world domination, but
increases their resources, their strategic bases, gives them the
possibility for conscripting and training native populations, as Italy
is already doing, and in this way is simple handing over additional
war resources to the fascist war-making powers. This is the point
we have got to get clear in regard to this question of giving colonies
to Fascism. That is the first point.

Then the next one is what policy the peace movement should adopt
with regard to the colonial peoples. When we say we are against
handing over the colonial peoples to fascism, does not that mean we
suggest the movement should take a negative attitude. We are against,
and nothing can be done. Against that we want to get the idea spread
in a very practical way of the colonial peoples as allies of the peace
movement. Abyssinia showed this clearly because everybody felt that
the Abyssinian people in fighting against Italian fascism were fighting
on behalf of all the peoples against fascism all over the world. Then
again, the Indian National Congress has just at its last session voted
for a resolution supporting the policy of collective security, desiring
that a free India should be able to come into co-operation. So that
we should be able to show in the practical world situation how the
colonial peoples are strong, positive allies for our peace front if
only the peace movement bases itself on the right policy in relation
to them.

Then we come to the policy put forward - the international mandate
system. Here again we need to take a very definite stand. Because
this is a reactionary proposal which is intended to defeat the
sympathy felt within the peace movement for the colonial peoples.
We have to show first with regard to the existing Mandate system that
it does not in practice make any difference and it cannot make a
difference to the actual exploitation of the colonial peoples. The
extraction of super profits, the driving of these people off the land
to draw them into the plantations or factories, the taxation of the
peasantry - all this is a normal colonial process. The Mandatory
system is only an attempt to sanctify this process, to give it the
appearance of something which is being done in the interests of the
people. And we must be able to show that conditions in mandatory
countries are not in any degree better than in non-mandatory countries,
but that there are the same conditions, the same kind of oppression
and exploitation. Therefore when the proposal is put forward that
it would be a step in advance to internationalist this mandatory system,
what it means in reality is that you are drawing still one stage further
away the control of this whole process. It really joins up with the
idea of ultra imperialism, which is not a reality, not practical, and
if it were, it would be reactionary. At present a given power has
got these colonies, You can have a combined movement of the people
in this country and those in the colonies in order to fight abuses
and improve conditions: but suppose you had an international mandate
system. The authority would be completely removed to some remote
international authority that nobody can reach because there is not
such a thing as an international Parliament, and therefore is a question
is then raised in the British Parliament the answer will come, we are
no longer responsible, we are only part of the international mandatory
authority in whose name all this is being done.

You will probably find such questions being ruled out of their discussions. So that we have to show that this is not a way of helping forward conditions in the colonies but a reactionary proposal to sidetrack the issue.

The real way to help is to help them in a practical way, to help them to stand on their own legs, to organise and improve their conditions; that is the idea underlying the Charter for the Colonial People. We do not ask the peace movement to adopt the Communist line on the colonies, but we do put forward reasonable demands of labour organisation, free speech, etc. which gives the opportunity for the colonial peoples to develop, and we say that this is the stand which the peace movement should take.

We further say that this is important in the interests of the peace movement and to strengthen the world peace front. Because we have to make our friends in the peace movement aware that there is a very dangerous situation at the present moment in relation to the colonial peoples and fascism. Dangerous in this sense: that many of the colonial peoples get the idea that all this collective peace front, peoples front, etc. is just a policy of the big imperialist countries which does not care about the colonial peoples and their historical policy of struggling for the independence against all imperialisms, that all this is a matter of indifference, that they should take advantage of the conflict between one set of imperialist powers and another in order to carry forward their struggle for independence. So you get the viewpoint which sees Fascism as entering into conflict with the British Empire. We are in conflict - Fascism must be our friend. That tendency is a very real danger.

We have seen how Bose was received a few years ago by Mussolini with great honours. In his book there is a very favourable viewpoint of Fascism. We are aware of the activity of Italian fascism in the Near East to get its hold on the Arab movement in Egypt, similarly the use made by the Fascists of the Moroccans on the side of Franco. Therefore we have to make the peace movement aware that there is a serious danger; that we need to win the colonial peoples to our side. We must see that the best elements, the most progressive, those who are seeing and understanding the situation within the colonial countries must also fight for this understanding.

Nehru has carried on a magnificent fight for this world understanding. The national movements should support the common world movement, a collective world order based on collective security. We have to meet them halfway in this and see that the peace movement will be taking such a stand so clearly. Because these arguments are not familiar we in the Communist Party have a special responsibility of explaining these questions in the easiest possible way to help to get this policy as the general policy of the peace movement.