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A Comment on the Draft:
"Labour Believes in Britain"

LABOUR'S SECOND TERM

Written for the FABIAN SOCIETY by
its Chairman, G. D. H. COLE, and
offered for discussion to the Labour
Movement • • SIXPENCE

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"LABOUR BELIEVES IN BRITAIN"

Written for the **FABIAN SOCIETY** by its Chairman, **G. D. H. COLE**, and offered for discussion to the Labour and Socialist Movement, and particularly to the Delegates attending the Labour Party Conference.

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Introduction

The Labour Party Executive, in issuing its draft of the party's new programme for consideration at the forthcoming Annual Conference, says that it will welcome the widest discussion of its proposals "not only by the Labour Movement but by all the men and women of Britain who at the next General Election will have the great responsibility of deciding upon the policy they wish the country to follow". This presumably means that the Executive has no desire to force the programme through the Conference unless it is really what the Movement wants, and also that it is prepared to be influenced, in revising it, by reasoned comment from any source. In the following pages I am taking up this invitation to adopt the *rôle* of friendly critic, in the hope that the Conference will be inclined to fill up certain very notable gaps in the draft now presented for discussion.

The Limiting Factors

Let me make clear at the outset that I am in full agreement with the Executive about certain unpalatable truths which evidently underlie the draft. It is in no wise possible to produce for 1950 a programme embodying the same direct and simple appeal that was the strength of *Let Us Face the Future*. In four years of office, the Labour Government has already done so much and has, in home affairs, so thoroughly fulfilled its promises, as far as they can be fulfilled by legislation, that, by the very magnitude of its achievement, it has rendered impossible for the present any second programme of the same kind. The measures it has placed on the statute book will take so long to put fully into execution, and will involve in so many cases rising costs as they come more completely into effect, that it is out of the question to launch large new measures of the same order at the present stage. This is partly—indeed in the last resort mainly—a matter of the limits of redistributive taxation in an economy still predominantly capitalist and still suffering from low productivity as a result of war; but it is also to some extent a matter of allowing time for what has been instituted already to settle down to smoother working and to become clearly understood both by the officials who have to administer it and by the mass of the people, who are its beneficiaries.

Of course, the financial limits apply mainly to the social services, the cost of which will rise sharply during the next five years even if no new developments are set on foot. But the other limitation applies strongly to the socialisation programme; for I think nobody will pretend that the problems of the successful, democratic conduct of industries under public ownership have yet been solved, or are even within sight of solution. It would be foolish to shut our eyes to the fact that there is serious discontent in the nationalised industries and services, and little sign as yet that the new incentives

on which the success of Socialism must finally depend are being brought into play. This being the state of affairs, it would be unwise, even in the absence of other difficulties, to come forward with an ambitious programme of further socialisation on the same lines as that of 1945. I do not mean that the Government has gone too far with socialisation already—far from it. I am sure that every transfer to public ownership so far made or put forward has been wise and right. But I am also sure that the Labour Party had better think more, and get nearer to solving the pressing problems of the industries for which the State is already responsible, before it sets out on any further ambitious projects involving millions of workers.

The Case for Consolidation

It is, indeed, plain common sense, in the fields both of nationalisation and of the social services, to devote the next five years mainly to consolidating what has been already, and on the whole so well, begun. This does not preclude the taking over, for sound reasons, of some further industries and services or of particular big concerns, such as those which the Executive has mentioned in its draft programme; for these, as far as I can see, are all highly desirable extensions and need give rise to no new problems which offer serious administrative difficulties. I think too that at least one addition could usefully be made to the list—I mean the joint stock banks, which it may be of the utmost importance to have command of in the event of a threatened international recession of trade, both because of their importance as the suppliers of credit and because, directly or through their subsidiaries, they are important as providers of long-term capital and can greatly affect the national programme of investment over a wide field of industry. Nor do the limiting factors preclude pressing on as fast as possible with the carrying through of the rest of the social service programme—especially with housing and with education. There is no reason why, in these fields, the actual achievement of the next five years should not go a long way ahead of what has been accomplished since 1945: indeed it must, as a means of implementing what has been already set on foot. But great as are the prospects of successful achievement in the social field during a second lease of power, these prospects, because they arise out of pledges given already, cannot bulk large in the election programme of next year.

Incomes and Production

Sir Stafford Cripps was right, in his budget speech, to stress the point that, when accruing commitments are taken into account, the limits of income re-distribution within the existing system have been almost reached. Even if *all* the surplus incomes which rich people now have to spend were taken away and given to the poor,

they would not suffice to meet the prospective *increases* in the cost of the existing social services. The poor can be made less poor, broadly speaking, and the real level of working-class incomes generally can be raised, only as a result of higher production, which, as there is no spare man-power to be set to work, must mean higher productivity. Nor can the whole of such a rise in productivity go to swell the real incomes of the working classes and the recipients of social services; for some of it is needed to free Great Britain from dependence on American aid and to help peoples who are a great deal worse off than we are—for example, in the Colonies and in some parts of Europe. We can fairly hope that in helping these peoples to improve their conditions we shall also be helping ourselves; for we cannot expect prosperity in a world of want. But these gains will take time to harvest; and in the meantime we have, for our own sake as well as the world's, to devote to overseas investment a part of the increased production which it would be immediately more pleasant, but also grossly improvident, to keep for our own consumption.

Continued austerity is forced upon us as a condition of future prosperity. Given wise government, not afraid to do what is right and to tell the people the truth, we can reasonably hope, if peace is preserved and no major slump spreads out from the United States to engulf the western world, to emerge within a few years from our international economic difficulties, and to be in a position to improve considerably our general standard of living. But it would be foolish and dishonest to hold out the hope that we can do this, now or later, except by producing more, or to trust to mechanisation and scientific advance alone to give us the requisite increase in output. Machines, and scientists, can help; but the real key to the creation of wealth is in the hearts of the people. We in Great Britain have deliberately chosen the democratic way of life; and it is an essential outcome of democracy that men and women cannot any longer be driven to toil hard by the spur of fear, but must in the main be persuaded to give voluntarily of their best. Great Britain will not get the high production it needs, or the standard of living its people demand, until the people are minded to give freely in the spirit of democratic service. We have to find out how to organise both our politics and our industries in such ways as will elicit this spirit of willing co-operation in a common task; and, till that is done, Labour Chancellors of the Exchequer will have, in honesty, to continue making speeches about the need for austerity and for limiting even highly desirable reforms that cost scarce resources to carry them out.

The Danger of World Depression

I have said that we can reasonably hope for a substantial improvement in our national economic position during the next few years; but we can by no means afford to take this improvement

as assured. If the United States were to plunge a second time into a deep depression like that of 1931, and were to drag the greater part of the world down with it—as it well might—the repercussions on our own economy would inevitably be serious, and might reach the dimensions of disaster. The effects would depend largely on the one hand on what happened to food prices and on the other on the reaction on our ability to sell our exports—two closely interconnected things. Even if the Government stood ready with all the appropriate measures of public works development, deficit financing, and bulk buying and selling arrangements with the Dominions and Colonies and with our European neighbours, it might become desperately difficult to buy enough imports to maintain our standards of life. I am not saying that this would necessarily be the position, even in the event of a serious American slump. But it might be; and everything possible needs doing to strengthen the Government's hands for facing such a crisis. That is the main reason why I wish to see public ownership of the joint stock banks included in the new programme, as well as a more definite reference to the need to retain full powers for the control of foreign trade and for any necessary reorganisation of the export industries and of their methods of marketing. As long as the United States keeps its capitalist economy and its speculative spirit, this danger of world depression will remain serious. No British Government can promise to immunise this country from its effects, should it unhappily occur; but much can be done to lessen them, provided that the Government is in full control of the credit mechanism and of foreign trade, as well as of budgetary policy.

Anticipations and Realities

No reasonable man, I think, can quarrel with the Labour Party Executive for giving full weight to these factors in shaping the new programme. But, of course, the great majority of us are reasonable only to a very limited extent; and it is natural for Socialists in particular to feel a keen disappointment at the smallness of the further advance towards Socialism that is to be looked for, on the basis of the draft programme, from a second five years of Labour Government. When *Let Us Face the Future* was drawn up, we accepted it as a good, moderate programme, embodying as much in the way both of socialisation and of social reform as an energetic Government could be expected to carry through in five years, in face of all the special complexities of the post-war settlement. But I think, as far as we looked forward beyond the first five years, most of us anticipated that the second five years of Labour Government would be marked by a much more rapid advance towards a Socialist society. The first five years, we thought, would have cleared the ground and got the foundations well and truly laid; and in the second term the Government would be able to go full speed ahead with the construction of the edifice of Socialism.

At all events, that is what I said, and heard others saying, five years ago; and, as a Socialist, I find it no easy matter to accommodate my hopes to the difference between the expectation and the prospect that is now set before me in the new draft programme.

Democracy and Socialism

Yet I accept, as fully as the Executive, the need for a pause in the work of building up the Socialist economic system. I realise that my hopes of 1945 were too high, and that, even apart from the difficulties of which I have spoken already, there is yet another reason why the Labour Party cannot promise to move fast in the direction of Socialism during the next five years. That reason is that the Labour Party stands committed to democracy, not only as an objective to be sought through the establishment of a classless society, but also as a method to be practised here and now. It is setting out honestly to persuade the majority of the electorate to want Socialism, and it does not regard itself as justified in introducing any more Socialism than a majority of the electors can be persuaded to vote for, without any concealment of what a Labour Government would actually do. This political honesty and this interpretation of the democratic creed have necessarily great influence in settling the shape of the new programme. For it is an indubitable fact that, whereas in 1945 a large part of the electorate had been stirred up by the unsettlement of war to consider changes in the very foundation of the social system, to-day most people's thoughts are mainly on such immediate things as food, housing, the prices of necessary goods and conventional necessities, such as beer and tobacco, the irksomeness of continued austerity and 'controls', and in general on hopes that have been disappointed in a distracted world rather than on the very real gains that have come their way through full employment and greater social security. In effect, the main body of the electorate is feeling, not excited or enthusiastic, but tired of trying to understand the confused prospects of a world given over to unreason and already in danger of a war worse than the last. The Government has done well in making the utmost effort to tell the people, in simple language, the plain facts of the economic situation of Great Britain; but no amount of explanation could avail to turn the sheer idiocy of current international politics into intelligible sense.

The Socialist Dilemma

With the people in such a mood, and the world situation what it is, no swift march towards Socialism is now possible by democratic methods, or indeed possible at all for the time being. But there results a dilemma, which is by no means easy for the Labour Party to resolve. For, in order to get out of this impasse, Great Britain must complete its economic recovery, regain its

freedom of action *vis-à-vis* the United States, and change the mood of the people to one of more hopeful and far-seeing activity and effort. But the worst possible way of generating the enthusiasm that is needed is to mark time. The Budget, in disappointing hopes that were mainly irrational and incapable of being fulfilled as things are, has given a cold douche to working-class feeling, which has been deeply affected by the coincident limitation of the food subsidies, the continued failure to impose any statutory limitations on dividends, or to tax excessive profits, and the granting of fresh concessions to capitalist enterprise by tax remissions for capital re-equipment. The rise in living costs may be but small; but, taken in conjunction with the continuance of the 'wages stop' and with the re-appearance in the shops of many goods at prices much too high for the bulk of the consumers to afford, it is galling, and is given a symbolical significance. It is engendering a mood very different from that to which the Chancellor devotes his reasoned exhortations: it is making men not more but less ready to believe that prosperity depends on their own efforts and can come to them in no other way than as the reward of more production and co-operative labour.

Is there no path of escape from this depressing prospect, with which the Labour Party Executive appears to intend to go into next year's General Election? I should not be writing these pages unless I believed the Party could do better in entire consistency with its honest principle of never holding out hopes that it cannot expect to fulfil. Let us face frankly and fully the fact that the most that can be done at present in improving the distribution of real incomes is to carry through to completion the great development of the social services that has already been promised and largely set on foot under legislation passed since 1945. Let us face the fact that there is no possibility of a general improvement in real wages except as a return for higher output. Let us accept the necessity of going relatively slow with fresh measures of nationalisation until we have made a good job of those already in being, or on the way. Does this mean that we can offer nothing for the next five years except a programme of bits and pieces which, however excellent in themselves, do not add up to a total capable of inspiring enthusiasm among the Labour stalwarts on whose activity depends the chance of getting the less convinced Labour supporters to the poll, of talking over the waverers and of giving the Government, when the election is over, the backing it needs for seeing its programme through?

Things Set Aside in 1945

We were told in 1945 that so many urgent economic tasks were calling for the Government's immediate attention that there was no time to spare for anything else. On this account, we were asked to acquiesce in setting aside a number of eminently desirable

reforms that are admittedly indispensable for the establishment of Socialism. We acquiesced in allowing the House of Lords to remain in existence, the procedure of Parliament to be but slightly modified, the reform of Local Government and the democratisation of the armed forces and the diplomatic service to be postponed. Even in the economic sphere, we accepted, however reluctantly, the postponement of any drastic restriction on inheritance of wealth and the decision not to press forward with a drastic levy on large accumulations of capital. These things, we were told—and we agreed—were all less urgent than the nationalisation of the coal mines and of certain other key services, than the immediate establishment of a comprehensive 'Beveridge' plan and National Health Service, than housing, and than the measures indispensable as a foundation for international economic stability.

Laying the Political and Social Foundations

But now these arguments are no longer valid. There can be no better period for tackling the problems that had to be set aside for lack of time five years ago than one at which, for a variety of reasons, the pace of new social and industrial legislation has to be slowed down. Now, surely, is the time for constructing the political and social framework for the further economic advance that is to come as soon as the opportunity returns, and also for striking hard at the roots of class-distinction in ways that are not ruled out by the need, for the present, to encourage rather than restrict the investment of capital in new equipment for higher production. As the Budget White Paper has clearly shown, new capital for industry comes to-day, not from private sources, but from public surpluses and from the reserved profits of joint stock concerns. Personal capital and inheritance can be taxed without any adverse effects on industry: indeed, they must be, now that so large a part of the responsibility for investment falls upon the State itself. That little more can be achieved by re-distributing incomes does not mean that economic inequality needs to be left where it is. The next step is to strike hard at the gross inequality of *ownership*.

'Bastard' Socialism

A programme including such measures as these would serve as an assurance that the Labour Party, in accepting the necessity for a period of consolidation in respect of the social services and of public conduct of industry, is not laying aside its Socialism in favour of a permanent 'mixed economy', with loosely controlled capitalism still in possession of the greater part of the economic field. There is a kind of Keynesian Liberalism, sometimes masquerading as Socialism, which does in fact see the solution of the social problem in these terms—a limited sphere of public enterprise, full employment policies to guard against slumps, low rates of

interest, budget surpluses and deficits as means of keeping the economy on an even keel, and therewith a retention of the profit motive as the main driving force in industry, and a continued reliance on the old incentives, despite their weakening by full employment and social security, to drive the labourer to do his job. There are suggestions in the new Labour programme that some at any rate of those who drafted it are thinking, consciously or half-consciously, in these terms, and are minded to put off any further advance towards Socialism to a dateless future when the electorate will somehow mysteriously have become ready for it. I am not accusing the Labour Party Executive as a whole of such an intention; but I cannot help feeling that, whether they know it or not, that is the way they are going. Were it not, surely they would seize the opportunity presented by an enforced pause in their advance in some directions to make all the more rapid advances elsewhere?

Abolish the House of Lords

On the question of the House of Lords, which seems to me crucial, it may be argued that the Government, having so recently clipped the wings of the "Upper Chamber", cannot at once resume the offensive. I disagree. The only conceivable reasons for not abolishing the House of Lords in the present Parliament were, first, that there was not enough time to spare, and secondly that forcing the issue would have involved a premature General Election. There is no case at all for the House of Lords, even when it has been reinforced by a few elderly Trade Union and Cooperative leaders—no case, I mean, that any Socialist can accept. The House of Lords is an utterly undemocratic institution, and needs sweeping as soon as possible right out of the way. The only sort of Second Chamber for which there is any democratic case is a small, expert revising body, with the right to suggest amendments in legislation to the Commons, but no power to resist the Commons' will. As long as the House of Lords exists, even with its restricted veto and its power to amend, it will be potentially a dangerous delaying force, capable of obstructing the advance of Socialism. Are we to mark time now for five years, and then mark time again while we deal with the Lords' resistance to Socialism's resumed onward sweep? Surely, the right course is to make an end of the Lords now, when there will be time to spare.

Besides, the House of Lords is a pestilence-ground of snobbery and class-distinction. It stinks in the nostrils of every decent democrat. Its overthrow, final and complete, would be a grand step forward towards ending the entire system of class-stratification which is entrenched in countless institutions of snobbery, from public school to every sort of 'charitable' society, and serves to uphold every kind of *bourgeois* and *petit-bourgeois* superiority.

Democratise the State Machine

Then there is the question of improving and democratising the machinery of Parliament and administration. The Government has managed, during the past few years, to get a surprising amount out of the obsolescent parliamentary machine; but this has been done only at the cost of a very great strain on back-benchers as well as Ministers, and it is too little realised that it would have been a sheer impossibility unless there had been an overwhelming Labour majority. A stronger Opposition, more evenly matching the Government's following, would have been able to slow down the pace of legislative achievement at least by half; and Labour, instead of being, after four years, well on the way to do all it promised, would now have been floundering in a vast accumulation of unfinished and unfinishable business. A majority such as Labour achieved in 1945 is a political rarity: we cannot expect it to be repeated again and again. But we need a democratic parliamentary instrument that will enable us, with even a small majority, to put Socialism into practice, at a pace at any rate equal to that of the past four years, at soon as the 'pause' ends. It is not past the wit of man to save a great deal of parliamentary time without in any way stifling the freedom of discussion, partly by getting Bills discussed more fully by those chiefly interested before they are debated in Parliament, and partly by cutting out waste of time due to obsolete rules of procedure and endless repetition of the same discussions.

We need too a less hierarchical Civil Service, more open to talent from below and from outside, and a greatly improved structure of Local and Regional Government, to act as a safeguard against undue centralisation and as a means of democratic expression and training in self-government for the little man in the big world. We need to cleanse the Augean stables of the diplomatic service, with its inveterate habit of hob-nobbing with the 'best' people and therefore leaving the Government quite uninformed about democratic opinion abroad; and we need, perhaps most of all, a real democratisation of the armed forces, so that military service, instead of being used to break the recruit in to discipline for its own sake, shall be converted at last into a decent democratic profession which a man can follow without sacrifice of his self-respect.

More Democracy in the Forces

By 'democratising' the armed forces I mean, above all else, assimilating the conditions of service as far as possible to those of ordinary civilian employment. I feel sure that, in peacetime, a soldier or a sailor or an airman ought to be as free to leave his job, after giving reasonable notice, as a workman should be to leave a factory. Service in the armed forces should be as much a matter of free contract as any other kind of work. Of course, this

freedom cannot be given to conscripts; but that is only a reason the more for getting rid of an unpopular measure which, judged by its results, is not worth the trouble it causes. The right way to build up the armed forces is to make service in them compatible with decent, democratic freedom. This involves, beside the right to resign, the entire abandonment of the idea that the first thing to be done with a recruit is to 'break him in', by subjecting him to disciplinary methods that are aimed at his self-respect. It means no more 'spit and polish' for spit and polish's sake; no cult of rudeness among non-commissioned officers; no barracks like prisons, but good living quarters with proper provision for a man to be alone when he feels like it, and not always in a crowd; no enforced wearing of uniforms except on duty; no ignominious punishments, and a drastic reform of the 'glass-house' system; no saluting except on duty, and no barriers in the way of friendly intercourse between officers and 'other ranks'. It means also, positively, 'joint consultation', fully as much in the armed services as in pit or workshop, full enjoyment of civil and political rights, and, last but not least, the filling of the higher positions both in the Services and in the departments responsible for them with men who believe in comradeship and democracy and will be prepared to treat the soldier, sailor, or airman as a social equal, and not as a natural inferior who needs keeping firmly in his place.

More Democracy in Nationalised Industry

Finally, and perhaps most of all, we need a really serious reconsideration of our methods of administering industries under public ownership. If Public Boards are to be retained at all, they will have to be reconstructed on much more democratic lines, and so as to give a real say to the workers concerned, as well as to the consumers. What is the use of telling the Trade Unions, as the draft programme does, that they "have a great responsibility to educate their members in production problems", when there is not the smallest suggestion that these members are to be given any power—anything, I mean, over and above that 'joint consultation' which they are promised equally in industries under capitalist control? Industrial democracy means much more than mere 'joint consultation', which is at most only a useful first step. If the workers are expected to labour harder, more co-operatively, and more intelligently in the service of society, and if they are to acquire the habit of thinking of the management as 'us' and not as 'them', power, real power, and responsibility will have to be given over into their hands, both through some sort of central representation on the authorities responsible for public supervision of the nationalised services and at every other level—regional, local, establishment, and actual working group. Only in this way, aided by the fullest practice of joint consultation and 'reporting back', so as to reach every individual in every productive concern, can we

hope to elicit the new democratic incentives that are needed to replace, and to surpass, the now weakened incentives of capitalist discipline and the lure of piecework payments.

Beyond 'Joint Consultation'

I am quite aware that all this is much easier said than done. It is largely true that only a small fraction of the workers wants power and that even of those who think they want it many are unprepared to accept the responsibility which power involves. The old, bad traditions of antagonism to 'management' are bound to take a long time a-dying, even where 'management' has ceased to represent an employing class and has come to be the servant of the public. Managers who have been used to the old ways cannot easily accustom themselves to new ones, based on a quite different relation to the workers; nor can workers easily lay aside the belief that there must be a catch somewhere in anything that 'management' proposes to them. Indeed, the best of the workers, in whom the Trade Union loyalty is strongest, are apt to be the most suspicious of any suggestion that they should change their attitude of continued vigilance and resistance for one of collaboration in making nationalised industries run smoothly and efficiently in the consumers' service. These attitudes are easily intelligible; but they constitute, not a reason for doing nothing, but a challenge which has to be met if Socialism is to succeed. The sort of power which the composers' chapel in a well-organised printing-house has long in fact enjoyed is a foretaste of what can and must be made the regular practice in other industries. The Joint Production Committee should be used to seek out deliberately functions of workshop control that can be transferred to the workers themselves—such functions as allocation of jobs within the working group, the appointment of charge-hands from below instead of by nomination from above, some degree of control over promotions, dismissals, and disciplinary measures, and, in suitable cases, group methods of payment which will leave the group itself to distribute the available balances among its members.

This brief pamphlet gives me no space for fuller development of this theme. I have written upon it already elsewhere,¹ and I shall have more to say about it on a future occasion. The gist of the matter is that Socialism will work only if it thoroughly applies the principle of democratic control to every aspect of social structure—to industry as much as to politics, and to each industry in particular as well as to industry as a whole. The Labour Party has shown itself most solicitous to give the farmers a sense of managing their own affairs, and has insisted that this is the only way of getting from them the needed response in higher and better output. Does

¹ See *The National Coal Board: its Tasks, its Organisation, and its Prospects*. Fabian Society 2/-.

it trust the worker less than it trusts the farmer? If not, cannot its leaders see that the same conditions apply to getting the response they want from the miner, the transport worker, the builder, and the machine operator in the factory? What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander: it is bad psychology to expect men and women to respond to the call of service unless they are given power and responsibility as well as sermons on duty.

The Programme and the Voters

Please observe, I am not quarrelling with what is in the draft programme—only with its lack of cohesion and appeal, and with what it leaves out. I shall no doubt be answered with the contention that neither the abolition of the House of Lords nor the improvement of the machinery of Parliament and administration, nor the democratisation of the control of public industries will do anything to attract the wavering voters to the Labour side. I agree to that. I do not expect any of these proposals to give rise to a wave of *petit-bourgeois* enthusiasm for the Labour cause. But no more do I expect any particular proposal, included in the draft or not, to have this effect. The marginal voters are not in a mood to have their enthusiasm aroused by any practicable proposal. What they want is the assurance of peace and, next to that, no more rationing or scarcity, more and cheaper houses, lower prices (and higher incomes through reduced taxation)—in fact, just the things that no British party can promise them without telling a tissue of lies. I know of only one way to get the types of wavering voters who voted for Labour in 1945 to do so again next year. That is, quite simply, to make them feel that the Labour Party has behind it the enthusiastic backing of the working classes, and that they had better climb on the band-wagon while they can, rather than risk putting into office a Tory Government that will wreck the country in a head-on conflict with the organised working class.

The Attack on Monopoly

Of course, I do not undervalue the promises in the draft programme that the next Labour Government will launch a direct attack on monopoly and trading waste in an attempt to bring down the cost of living. On the contrary, I am strongly in favour of that part of the programme, and agree that it can be used to good effect with middle-class as well as with working-class audiences. I shall, however, be greatly surprised if it has, by itself, much effect in swinging over the doubtful voters. They will mentally discount its effectiveness in practice, and will say they have heard that sort of talk before. They may be wrong in this, but that is how most of them will react unless they are convinced on other grounds that the Labour Party really means to tackle the job. All this section of the draft programme is a credit item for electoral purposes; but

it is not a winner. Similarly, the determination to maintain bulk purchase and control of food distribution in the consumers' interests, as well as the plans for colonial development in the common interests of the Colonial and the British peoples, are excellent things; but their electoral appeal is much smaller than it would be if they were less easy for opponents to misrepresent.

The Danger of Working-Class Apathy

The main chance of winning the next General Election with a sound working majority rests much less on proposals designed to please the doubtful voters than on giving the stalwart Labour supporters something that will induce them to go all out to win. The greatest danger is not the hostility of the lower middle classes, but the apathy of the active workers. The worst thing about the draft programme is that, although it contains many excellent things, it is impossible to believe that it can have caused any Socialist, as he read it, to feel his heart uplifted or his determination reinvigorated and repaired after the blow dealt to him by the Budget only a few days before. In preparing it, the Labour Party Executive seems to have forgotten the spiritual needs of the Socialist salt of the earth, which raised them to power and can dash them to earth again, not by opposing them, but merely by losing a part of its enthusiasm for the party's success.

This criticism applies particularly to the complacent tone of the paragraphs dealing with the nationalised industries; for nothing is more calculated to make the key workers for the party apathetic than a feeling that their leaders are out of sympathy with the human grievances of the producers.

What I, as a Socialist, and I feel certain many of my fellow-Socialists, want to feel sure of is that the economic pause we are asked to accept is not a sign of a decreasing will to achieve Socialism. We will have none of attempts to reinterpret Socialism as merely Liberalism *plus* Planning, with extended Social Security and more redistributive taxation, but without the abolition of class-distinctions or the institution of democracy as an all-pervading principle of social structure. Socialism, as we understand it, is not Liberalism +, but a radically different gospel, incorporating indeed what is good in the liberal tradition of toleration and care for personal liberty, but insisting, as Liberalism never did, on economic equality and the abolition of class-differences, as well as on the need for a co-operative, instead of a profit-making, system as the basis of economic activity.

The Socialist Objective Defined

What is Socialism? At bottom, it is much less an economic policy than a way of life. The economic changes which Socialists stand for are put forward, in the last resort, not as ends in

themselves but as means to a better kind of living. Nationalisation, State control, economic planning are proposed, not for their own sake, but as means to advancing the well-being and happiness of the people. The aim of Socialism is a society in which there can be no exploitation of class by class, but instead a fair chance for every man, woman and child both to give of their best in the common service and to receive, as far as the common resources allow, everything that is needed for decent, healthy and enjoyable living.

Socialism, because this is its object, involves the disappearance of class distinctions, whether founded on inherited wealth or on personal achievement. Men being by nature, as well as by nurture, unequal in strength, mental capacity and the will to work hard, Socialism will not make them equal in these respects; nor can it endow them all with equal influence or prestige. In a Socialist society, as in any other, there will be leaders, and some will be set in authority over others; but no one will be a leader merely because he is rich, or claims a prescriptive right to be considered above others, and all authority will be responsible and accountable to those over whom it is set. The people will choose, and will be free to dismiss, their leaders; and no one who possesses the capacity to lead or to undertake superior work will be debarred by poverty from developing his faculties or from rising to any position for which he is qualified. Socialism means going the whole way it is possible to go towards giving every child, and thereafter every man and woman, an equal chance.

An equal chance of what? Not of using his or her faculties to exploit the common people for gain, or to satisfy the lust for power, but of being happy and useful—happy in being able to live his life in his own chosen way and to choose, as far as possible, a congenial job; and useful in finding scope for the most skilled and socially productive work of which he is capable, and in receiving a due reward for such service. Under a Socialist system the children, the aged, and the infirm of mind or body will be well cared for at the expense of the whole society; but no one who is capable of work will be able to live in idleness on the product of other men's labour. Leisure, as well as work, will be shared out fairly to all; and every man and woman will be given, not merely the opportunity, but the encouragement to play an active part in the control of the common heritage.

For democracy is an integral part of Socialism—and not merely that almost passive democracy which finds expression in the right to vote, but very much more than that. A Socialist democracy will be a society in which every individual counts and the happiness of every individual is a matter of supreme concern. Such a society cannot exist unless it is permeated in all its parts by the democratic spirit, so that in every one of its countless social activities many men and women are taking an active part, as the chosen leaders of the group concerned. This applies not only to Parliament and to

Local Government, but also to every kind of industry and occupation, to every branch of social service, public or voluntary, and to all the varieties of clubs and associations in which people come together on a basis of neighbourhood, or of common interest, in order to enrich the arts and amenities of living together. The more the State has to do, and the greater the scale on which many things have to be organised under modern conditions, the more imperative is the need for little democracies everywhere to match and to humanise the large-scale organisations through which the great central democracy is compelled to work.

What Socialism is Not

We want to feel sure that the Labour Party leadership is not falling into the error of confusing Planning with Socialism, and of erecting a new aristocracy of experts and professionals with recognised claims to live at a higher standard than working people and to give orders which ordinary people are expected to obey. We do not deny the need, at present, to offer special inducements and rewards for specially skilled or productive service; but we insist, as democrats, that differences of income must be kept down to the least that are necessary to elicit the required responses, and we view with the utmost suspicion any tendency to pay public servants extravagant salaries based on capitalist examples, or to bribe professional men into compliance with public needs by the offer of rewards that set them further than ever apart from the general run of men. Similarly we are distrustful of unchecked authority wherever it appears—no less when it wears the habit of technocracy or scientific expertness or administrative capacity than when it bases its claims on aristocracy or the possession of property in the means of production. We cannot understand a policy which puts a stop on wage advances but at the same time raises the salaries of high-ranking Civil Servants, medical consultants, and officials of nationalised concerns. We are afraid of such actions leading, willy, nilly, not to Socialism but to the technocratic revolution of which the reverse side is what Hilaire Belloc has called the 'Servile State'. That is why many of us, though we recognised the dilemma in which Sir Stafford Cripps was placed, could not stomach a Budget which simultaneously made concessions to capitalism and reduced even by a little the working-class standard of life.

An Appeal to the Conference

That is why I, speaking I am sure not only for myself but for a considerable body of working-class and Socialist opinion, entreat the Labour Party Executive to think again and the Party Conference not to take the draft they have put forward for discussion as the last word. I am not asking for anything inconsistent with what they have proposed, or for anything that will put a further strain on

the balance of payments or in any way impede short-term recovery, as far as it is possible within the framework of a still mainly capitalist economy. I am accepting the entire case for continued austerity and economic restraint, and the necessity of doing what can be done to make capitalism work efficiently until we are in a position to supersede it over the entire field. I am not questioning the need to go slow with further measures of socialisation until we can see better how to organise the new forms of control. I am, however, saying that these obstacles do not block all forms of advance, and in particular that they afford a positive opportunity for laying sound political and social foundations for the resumption before many years have passed of the rapid tempo of Socialist development that has marked the past four years as a turning-point in the history of democracy and of Socialism.

The International Aspect

Finally, a word must be said about foreign affairs. These provided the weakest and vaguest pronouncements of *Let Us Face the Future*; but, despite the vagueness, Labour owed its victory in 1945 not a little to the belief that a Labour Government could be relied on, more than any other, to work hard for world peace. That its efforts in this respect have been utterly unsuccessful, and that international relations have been going steadily from bad to worse, is certainly not the Government's fault; for though it has made bad mistakes in foreign policy, these have not been the main cause of the deterioration of world political relations. The blame for what has gone wrong rests mainly on Communist dogmatism and suspicion; and it can fairly be said that, if Great Britain is now entangled in an American-dominated Western bloc arrayed against the Communist East, that is much more the Soviet Union's doing than ours. Nevertheless, it is fatal to forget that the British people's deepest desire is for peace and that nothing is doing more to hamper both economic recovery and the advance towards Socialism than the necessity we are under of diverting much-needed man-power and economic resources to costly rearmament, or that the effect of this need on man's minds is to shake their faith in the future and to undermine their will to serve in the cause of Socialist construction.

So damping is this rearmament to our hopes and so calculated to make men shrug their shoulders and decide to live only for the day that we cannot, without disaster, allow it to become an accepted burden. Somehow, we must break the evil spell, and convince the leaders of the Soviet Union that we are no more plotting their overthrow than prepared to adopt their formula for the achievement of Socialism as appropriate to our very different circumstances and traditions of political behaviour. To this need the draft programme pays verbal tribute, but in halting phrases. Easy as this is to understand—for who of us knows how to break the vicious circle of fear

and hate?—it is not enough to blame the Soviet Union for “ blocking the road ” to world peace and friendly collaboration. Difficult though it be in face of the present attitude of the Soviet Union, we must keep on trying to reach out across the iron curtain for means of re-establishing Socialist comradeship, and often we must suppress the angry retorts that rise to our lips when we find ourselves denounced as “ imperialist plotters ” and enemies of the cause of peace simply because we are determined to set about getting Socialism in a decent, democratic way and are not prepared to wade to it through seas of cruelty and dictatorship that would make a mockery of it, even if something miscalled Socialism could be established by such means.

Forward to Socialism

Great Britain is not yet a democracy, in any full sense; nonetheless, our institutions and traditions embody already many elements of democracy that we have won by hard struggle but, on the whole, by decent human means that have left our social relations unsoured. These fruits of past victories we are on no account prepared to throw away. We wish to go on as we have begun, consolidating every advance by the sanction of popular consent, and hurting no man unnecessarily, nor hating any man who opposes us fairly and is prepared to accept the people's verdict against his claims. But it is a condition of this attitude that it shall involve no sacrifice of ideals or of the attempt to turn them into realities. We expect our Government to be moderate, kindly to its opponents, just in all its dealings, and ready to vary its pace of advance according to the conditions of the time. But this does not mean that we are prepared to accept a halfway-house on the road to Socialism as a permanent abiding place. That, indeed, we cannot do; for we are convinced that nothing short of Socialism will set free the genius of the people, or put the new incentives needed for prosperity into effective action. For that reason, we ask for a programme which, even if it can promise no great immediate further advance in Socialist construction, shall at least complete the process of laying the foundations which the past five years have seen so excellently begun.

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