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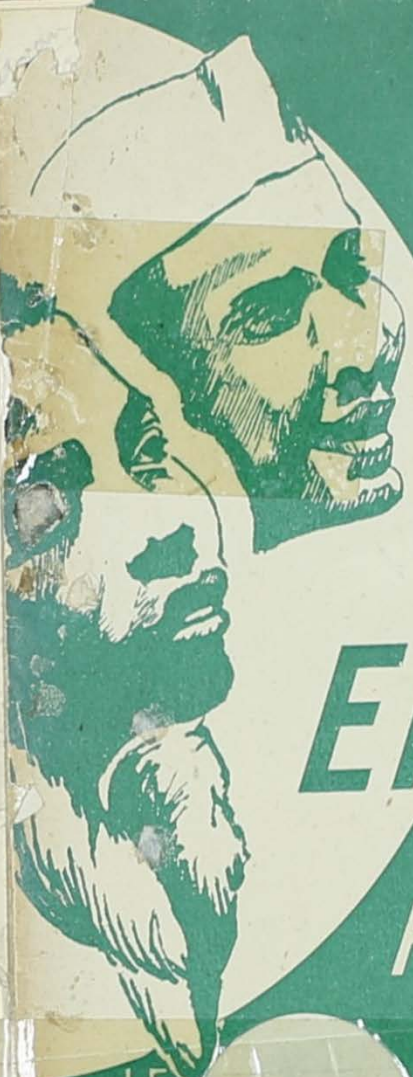
AND

THE

EMPIRE

by

RITA HINDEN



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A FABIAN COLONIAL BUREAU PAMPHLET

THE AUTHOR

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Sep. 1946.

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EMPIRE

Twenty years' work of the

FABIAN COLONIAL BUREAU

by

RITA HINDEN

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Preface

This is something more than a Report of the work of a Socialist Organisation. The excuse for writing this pamphlet is that the five years' life of the Bureau has happened to coincide with perhaps the most formative and interesting period in the history of British colonial policy. The story of our own problems and struggles reflects the problems and struggles in the whole field of colonial policy during these past years. Not only that—the Bureau is the main organisation within the Labour Party devoting itself at this time to the regular and detailed study of colonial affairs. Working within the tradition of the Party, and drawing on the inspiration of a long history of socialist thought on questions of imperialism, it has itself contributed powerfully in the formulation of the Party's attitude towards the problems of the new era opening up in colonial policy. With the Labour Government now in office, the policies worked out by the Bureau become of much more than parochial interest—they are, indeed, the policies to which we hope the Government's action will approximate.

This pamphlet is an attempt to put the work of the Bureau in its historical setting, to discuss with frankness the difficulties which this work has posed to us as Socialists, and to make clear the basic attitudes which determine our approach to the complex issues bound up in "the colonial problem" today.

NOTE *This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individuals who prepared it. The responsibility of the Fabian Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as embodying facts and opinions worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement. It is the aim of the Society to encourage among socialists a high standard of free and independent research.*

1 Background

THE CHALLENGE

A Labour Government, with a powerful majority, is in office. What does this mean for the Colonies? Here is a question which is everywhere being asked in the vast and scattered British Empire, and echoed by 'dependent' or 'oppressed' peoples of all colours and nationalities. The reply is awaited anxiously, expectantly, not only by the colonial peoples, but by the many European nations to whom Britain has always appeared as the archetype of imperialist aggressor.

The bogey of 'British Imperialism' has, for generations, clouded the friendship and admiration which other nations have felt for Britain—it is the stick with which Britain could always be chastised with the sure applause of the rest of the world. Unfailingly, it arouses Americans to vehement moral indignation, and stirs Russian tongues and pens to vitriolic abuse. Will the Labour Government exorcise the bogey at last? Or was it more than a bogey? If so, what is the Labour Government doing to destroy it? That is the challenge.

The challenge comes as Britain emerges from six years of devastating, exhausting war. Her wealth has been drained; her skilled men diverted to military purposes; all her resources and thought and energy concentrated on the battle for life. But the war has been a world-wide, totalitarian war, involving all the Colonies as well. It has produced drastic changes in a hundred ways and the world is a different world as a result. The Asiatic races will no longer accept a position of inferiority as against the white; and the Africans who, in their tens of thousands, have moved in a new environment, will never return happily to the deadening stagnation of primitive, rural life. New forces, and brave new ideals, are surging forward everywhere, and new political and economic opportunities will have to be created if enthusiasm is not to turn to frustration, and frustration to revolt. This is the stupendous task with which Labour Britain, her own economic foundations sapped and strained, must courageously grapple.

THE BRITISH SOCIALIST TRADITION

To appreciate how this grave challenge is likely to be met, one must delve a little into history, and unravel the threads of thought and tradition which have characterised British Labour's approach to imperial problems since the beginning of the century, when Socialist policy in this country took political and practical shape. The influence of J. A. Hobson's book on imperialism, published in 1902, was immense. His economic analysis of imperialism as being rooted in the evils of the capitalist system followed on the analysis and teaching of Marx. It inspired the anti-imperialist attitude not only of British Socialists, but of Lenin and, in particular, of the millions of European Socialists who learned their ABC of imperialism from Lenin's tract *Imperialism*—which based itself on Hobson's earlier, brilliant work.

A logical deduction from Hobson's and Lenin's analyses was that empires must be liquidated as part of the general liquidation of the capitalist system (though a careful reading of Hobson shows that his thought went very much further than this). This attitude has been one of the threads running through Socialist policy in Britain for close on half a century, and finding strong expression in the books and pamphlets of dozens of writers. Leonard Barnes became the most forceful exponent of this view during the nineteen thirties and commanded a large following.

But there have been other threads in Labour's colonial policy, commanding no less support. Even before Hobson was at work on his statistical and economic analysis of the forces of imperialism, Mary Kingsley and E. D. Morel (both of whom knew Africa, and whose imaginations had been fired by the problems and mysteries of the Dark Continent, as it then indeed was) began to write with affection and understanding of Africans, and to inveigh against the Governments of their day for their sluggish, ignorant and tactless handling of African affairs. They, and others, such as Roger Casement, were essentially liberals reacting against the Dilke-Chamberlain-Kipling school of thought which glorified imperial expansion in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They carried forward from the earlier days of the philanthropists that thread in our thought which calls for a study and understanding of the problems of peoples brought under the control of stronger powers, and for the carrying out of rational policies designed in the interests of the native populations.

This humanist school joined in the protests against the evils of imperial domination. The battle was carried forward by devoted Socialists like Lord Olivier,¹ Leonard Woolf and Roden Buxton. Dr Norman Leys and Macgregor Ross championed the Africans against the Europeans in Kenya; Sir John Harris, of the Anti-Slavery Society, combatted the forced labour system; Professor MacMillan, Frank Horrabin, and many others exposed the defects of colonial policy; and the struggle was pursued with gusto by a small group of Labour M.P.s in the nineteen thirties, who, in and out of Parliament, urged changes on the Government. Of this group Arthur Creech Jones became the most notable.

It is always difficult to demarcate the boundaries between different strands of thought. They interact on and fructify each other. The Marxist analysis was an essential stage in the shaping of Socialist views as to the nature of capitalist imperialism—it was indeed an inevitable development in the general Socialist critique of capitalism. At the same time, it was inevitable that as people became personally acquainted with the day-to-day problems of the Colonies their minds should turn to the practical questions of what should be done, and how the evil conditions they knew of could possibly be ameliorated. Almost all the Socialist writers and workers on imperial problems combined in their philosophy an intermixture of the Marxist and humanist attitudes.

EVOLUTION OF A CONSTRUCTIVE POLICY

The outlook of the British Labour Movement has thus always been basically anti-imperialist. But, as we have said, it has not followed a merely 'anti' line. There have always been thinkers in its ranks whose minds, besides challenging the assumptions on which imperialist governments have rested, have been engaged on the actual problems involved in securing the welfare and freedom of the colonial people. There have been shifts in emphasis as the understanding of colonial affairs grew over the years, and as world events unfolded. The emotional and negative anti-imperialism of the Boer War period² underwent much adaptation during and immediately following the war of 1914-18, when the first coherent attempts were made by the Labour Party to shape a Socialist colonial policy, and the idea of the Mandates system was developed and supported.

¹ Lord Olivier was Governor of Jamaica, 1907-1913.

² A particularly interesting historical incident was the stand taken by the Fabians during the Boer War. They refused to join in the pro-Boer agitation which was pursued with much emotion by most British liberals and progressives at that time. Their argument was that it was the interests of the Africans that mattered, and from this point of view there was little to choose between Boers and capitalist Britons. This view was politically unappreciated at the time, though it certainly would not be today. See *Fabianism and the Empire*, edited by Bernard Shaw, 1901.

In the years that followed there was a steady building-up of constructive criticism and knowledge. The Labour Party's Imperial Advisory Committee met and discussed; there were a few interested M P's, and a few groups here and there, who cared about and studied these problems. By the nineteen thirties the Party was putting forward fairly comprehensive policy statements outlining programmes for colonial health and education services, economic planning, constitutional steps towards self-government and so on. But most of the plans were of a very general nature, more idealistic than realistic. The movement had still to elaborate the practical ways and means of achieving the changes it thought essential. How exactly did one raise the standards of living? How exactly was the transition to self-government to be attained? The answers to these and a hundred other questions were still very elusive.

In the idealism and indecisiveness of that period, many impracticable ideas were mooted. We find, for example, in the socialist literature of the time, proposals for the internationalisation of Colonies, as an answer to the German and Italian claims for overseas expansion. Although this arose from the various threads woven into socialist philosophy, it was a view which revealed little understanding of the implications of such a programme or how it could be achieved in practice. Some Socialists went further, and proclaimed that the only answer to the Hitlers and Mussolinis of the world was that Colonies, as such, should cease to exist. They gave little consideration as to what would happen to these weak and isolated territories if they were suddenly to be declared 'independent' in the holocaust of war that was inevitably coming.

But perhaps there was nothing surprising in the fumbling which was sometimes obvious in Labour's case. There was the same fumbling in much of the discussion of home and foreign affairs at that time. The principles and the *ends* were secure; but the Movement was still insecure in its knowledge of the *means* by which these ends were to be achieved.

DISCONTENT AND THE NEED TO ACT

The serious thought and heart-searching on colonial questions which went on within the Labour Movement during these years, and the gradual formulation of a constructive policy, took place against a background of imperialist 'retreat' in Asia (which had begun before the first great war) and of smouldering discontent inside the British Empire itself.

It was a time of appeasement on all fronts. The stagnation that had weakened British home and foreign policy during those unhappy years was felt in the handling of colonial affairs as well. Throughout the inter-war period British colonial policy was feeble and purposeless. There were, of course, in some Colonies, exceptional men and developments, and there have always been in the public services many devoted administrators; crude brutality and suppression were rare. But what virtues there were did not compensate for an almost complete absence of drive and imagination in high places. '*Laissez faire*,' the 'line of least resistance' philosophy which so frequently dominated home affairs, tended to sap the springs of energy in the Colonies as well. It was not considered the function of the Imperial Government to spend money for colonial progress. Colonies were left to balance their meagre budgets, which ruled out any planned economic development. The old shibboleth of 'free trade' seemed ample excuse for the weakness of colonial economies and for the failure to secure a fair place for their products in the ruthless and shrinking world market. Perhaps worse than any of this were the bad relations between the administration and the growing educated and politically conscious classes in the Colonies. The

attitude of the British officials was too often a source of friction, irritation and resentment.

The economic crisis, bringing intensified social distress with it, led also to increasing discontent in the Colonies. There were no reserves of wealth to tap; no protection against the fluctuations in world prices. If this was not the only reason for discontent, it lay at the root of the disturbances which flared up in Colony after Colony. The nineteen thirties saw riots and bloodshed in almost all the West Indian islands; in Cyprus; in Mauritius; in Northern Rhodesia; a cocoa hold-up in West Africa. Consciences in Britain were uneasy. Naturally for the British, every trouble had its Commission of Enquiry. The Reports and Blue Books and White Papers mounted up, all revealing the squalor and misery and economic neglect existing almost everywhere. But what was to be done? Clearly, the Colonies could not be left to their fate—who seriously could suggest that in 1939?

This unhappy situation, intensified daily by the encroaching shadow of a terrible war, the stirring conscience of Britain, the constant discussions and criticisms, compelled some modification in the Government's colonial policy. The Labour Party, as the official opposition, which had for years voiced the discontent, and sought for the constructive approach, pressed with greater emphasis the urgency of a drastic overhaul of policy. The stage was set for the establishment of a group of British Socialists in some organised form, which would make the study of colonial problems its main concern, which would gather up the information and knowledge and experience on which the programme of the Party would be based, and which would fight for it in and out of office, war or no war. It was against this background that the Bureau was born in 1940.

2 Foundation of Bureau and Method of Work

TURN IN THE TIDE

The birth of the Bureau in 1940 coincided with that turn in Britain's colonial policy which the unrest of the thirties had rendered inevitable. The mounting discontent in the Colonies had been accompanied by a mounting uneasiness at home, and Parliament had become increasingly concerned with the need to do something to stem the disturbance manifesting itself everywhere.

The Royal Commission on the West Indies reported early in 1940. As a result, the Colonial Office published the famous White Paper on Colonial Welfare and Development, and Parliament accepted the passage of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act. Until that date, Britain had never adopted the principle that she might herself spend large sums on plans of colonial development. A Colonial Development and Welfare Fund had been established in 1929, but its resources were only £1 million a year, and its purpose was rather to help British exports than to promote colonial progress. But the Labour agitation coupled with the views of the Royal Commission which had seen the conditions of the West Indies after the serious riots there, had

made it clear that large sums of money would have to be spent to relieve the appalling conditions present in all parts of the colonial empire. The Royal Commission proposed that a West Indian Development Commission should be set up with authority to spend at least £1 million a year in constructive effort. Such action could no longer be deferred. Thus in 1940, when Britain's very existence was in peril, Parliament made available the sum of £50 millions for colonial development within the ensuing ten years.

At the time this might have seemed more an act of faith than a serious intention. £5 millions a year for the magnitude of the problem to be tackled was a pitifully small sum. But if the sum was small, the circumstance of war made the actual expenditure in the following years smaller still. With the best will in the world, there were just not the men, the materials, or the equipment to carry out development plans, at a time when Britain was battling for her life.

Nevertheless, this Act of 1940 closed a chapter in British colonial policy—it marked the concluding phase of the *laissez faire* period and inaugurated a new conception of responsibility. It was now stated categorically that Colonies could not hope to advance and undertake development works, if they were to rely only on their own revenues. If these countries were not to be a source of continual discontent, and invite the disapproving frown of the rest of the world, Britain would herself have to find money and provide the skilled advice for their development. There was more to it than this but, at least, it meant there was *need to plan*. With the recognition of this need, there followed the inevitable change in the character and purpose of colonial government.

It was bound to take some time for the implications of this new conception to be fully grasped, particularly as the tempo of all action for peaceful purposes was so badly slowed up by the war. The Development and Welfare Act evoked very little enthusiasm among the colonial peoples; in many territories they continued to be suspicious of every British act. In Britain itself, there was much criticism of the gap between the meagre promise of the Act and the yet more meagre performance.

But it was not only in regard to economic development that policy was beginning to alter. In labour matters, in social welfare services, in the study of nutrition, in constitutional reforms—advances were discernible. The time for change had come. British Socialists were called upon, as never before in colonial affairs, to question, to learn, and to construct.

FOUNDATION OF BUREAU

The Bureau thus began its work at a critical moment. The conditions imposed by war were anything but favourable. Tragedy was writing its mark on country after country. Public interest in Britain was distracted; the Parliamentary situation was difficult; the press was absorbed by military matters and the rigours of home affairs under war circumstances. Few people had the time or the head for problems which, however imperative of solution, seemed so remote as colonial policy. Against these odds, the Bureau made its way; it grew in strength and gathered up support by the validity and value of its work. By the end of the war it had succeeded in channelling much of the expressed frustration and discontent bound up with 'the colonial problem', to constructive purposes. It had become in colonial affairs not only the repository of knowledge and experience, the clearing house of information, the examining point of conditions and policy, but also the recognised spearhead of agitation and constructive thought within the labour movement. How was this done?

METHOD OF WORK

The method by which the Bureau worked has been described before.¹ The relevant passages, brought up to date, are worth quoting here :—

‘When the Fabian Society decided to establish a special department to deal with colonial affairs, its first action was to invite those colonial experts who were sympathetic with the Labour viewpoint to join a committee to advise on the work, and act as a link between the Bureau and outside opinion. Mr Creech Jones, who for some years had been one of the very few Members of Parliament to take a detailed and lively interest in colonial affairs, agreed to act as Chairman, and provide the liaison between the Bureau and Parliament. From the start the Bureau determined to work within the Fabian tradition, which has always commenced with research. There are too many organisations in all spheres of public life, clamouring for action, denouncing, appealing to public conscience, and too few who base their appeals and denunciations on solid knowledge and a painstaking collection of the facts. The Fabian Society is admirably, almost uniquely, placed for a combination of research and political action. It has not the resources of a university which might attempt to pursue research for research’s sake. Circumstances compel it, therefore, to concentrate chiefly on applied research, or—it might be called—*ad hoc* research. At the same time, as an affiliated society, with a long record of loyalty to the Labour Party, it has unique opportunities for meeting and working freely and amicably with Labour Members of Parliament and the Labour Movement in general. It is clear, therefore, that the Fabian Society can act as a direct channel for transmitting the results of its members’ research work to the key people of the Labour movement.

‘The Colonial Bureau started with the absolute minimum of staff. Far-reaching research was out of the question to begin with, but it was possible to go right ahead with the collection of regular information regarding current events in the Colonies, and the creation of direct contacts with progressive organisations inside the Colonies themselves. This alone was a heavy task—there are, after all, more than fifty British Colonies in the Empire. Colonial newspapers were ordered, read regularly, and, with the aid of volunteers, cut and filed. It very soon became clear what were the main problems agitating the people of the different Colonies at that particular moment. With the help of the Chairman and other interested Members of Parliament these problems could be raised in the House or brought to the direct attention of the Secretary of State in correspondence. It took longer to establish personal contacts with colonial peoples and to gain their confidence. There is a long heritage of suspicion to be worn down, and it would be rash to claim that, even after many years’ unremitting work, success in this direction is anything like complete. But, gradually, as it was shown that the Bureau, and the increasing number of Members of Parliament who collaborated in its work, were able to ventilate the grievances of colonial peoples, and sometimes to secure redress, confidence grew and correspondence from all parts of the Empire began to trickle in.

‘But the Bureau could not be content to act merely as a channel for information on individual grievances. Most of these grievances were merely symptoms of deep-lying injustices and imperfections. Certain subjects demanded more careful study, and groups composed of some

¹ Article ‘How a Political Society Functions’ in the *Fabian Quarterly*, April 1944. This article was reproduced in *Fabian Colonial Essays* (Allen and Unwin, 1945).

of the members of the Advisory Committee and some outside specialists, were set up to undertake detailed inquiries into special aspects of colonial administration

Some of this detailed research and the action taken on it is described later.

‘Simultaneously with the development of this more fundamental research, and the constructive thinking to which it has given rise, the Bureau has had to cope with the day-to-day problems which have been coming to its notice in increasing volume and urgency. A cable would suddenly arrive—for example, from Jamaica—saying “Five trade unionists detained. Two trade unions banned. Please help.” Or, say, from Gambia, “Mass protest meeting against new Press regulations. Please make representations Colonial Office.” Or, friends in Mauritius would wire, “May Day demonstrations prohibited.” Then would come letters pointing to the evils of forced labour in Kenya or Nigeria; telling of the infringement of civil liberties in Jamaica; asking for modifications to the new constitutional proposals in various of the West Indies; telling of rising costs of living without corresponding rises in wages; pointing to the failure to introduce rationing and the shortage of essential supplies; painting a picture of unrest among workers or of colour-bar incidents. . . .

‘All these letters and cables—and the trickle has now become a stream—demand action. Very often effective action can be taken and results obtained. The Colonial Office—indeed, any Government Department—cannot refuse to respond to informed representations. When the Jamaican trade unionists were detained and their unions banned, there were no less than five parliamentary questions on the Order Paper almost immediately. Barely a couple of weeks had passed before these oppressive orders had been rescinded. There is little doubt that forced labour was kept within its narrow limits during the war, because of the many protests which were made against it in Britain. (The Chairman of the Bureau moved the Adjournment of the House on the subject.) There are dozens of cases which may be cited where representations to the authorities have been satisfactorily met and the grievances allayed.

‘But in all this work the Bureau has been conscious that for real strength it must broaden its base. It was not good enough to have a handful of enthusiasts working in London without the backing and interest of a wider public. It decided to offer membership facilities to anyone interested. It was not easy to build up the first nucleus of support, but it can now be said that there has grown up a steady membership of more than a thousand, and double that number of subscribers to the Bureau’s journal—*Empire*. The journal became possible through the generosity of one of the members of the Advisory Committee. It is still a small affair, but it has already been invaluable as a contact between the Bureau, its membership, and the outside world, and month by month its circulation grows. Attempts have also been made to reach directly to the public by a series of conferences—weekend conferences in the provinces, and day meetings in London . . . though the Bureau has not the resources to do this on any large scale.

‘The Bureau has more than fulfilled the original purpose with which it set out—“to act as a clearing house for information, and to interest the Public, the Press and Parliament in colonial affairs.” From all over Britain there now come demands to the Bureau for speakers, for bibliographies, for information, for literature. From all over the Empire each week brings in a heavy post. The publications of the Bureau have all met with an eager demand. More and more do visitors (both European and Colonial) from the Colonies make a point of calling in on

the Bureau on their arrival in London to exchange news and views. In both Houses of Parliament, and in the more serious organs of the British Press, there is now always an opportunity for the knowledge and research collected by the Bureau to find a public platform. Finally, a direct and friendly relationship has been created with the Colonial Office itself.

'All this considerable success is due to a very few factors. The Bureau has worked within the democratic constitutional framework of this country, utilizing every avenue and opportunity which democracy offers. It has been able to command respect because of the stress it laid on the accuracy of its statements, its willingness to engage in painstaking research and its persevering collection of information. It has had a valuable point of view to put over and has not flagged in so doing. And finally, it has had the good fortune to find altruistic and loyal collaborators who were prepared to champion the work inside Parliament and out, to give unstintingly of their special knowledge and time, and to expect no return other than the spread of colonial liberty in its widest sense. Of course this is not the method for effecting revolutions. But it is a method—the method of "eternal vigilance"—whereby the rights and freedoms of colonial peoples may be safeguarded, and opportunities assured them for shaping their own future in the way that they themselves desire.'

In sum, the Bureau did not begin with any general declaration of policy. It did not set out to tackle 'imperialism' as a world force. Its work was, implicitly, to fight the abuses it knew of in the British Empire, to urge on economic change, and to hasten the day when self-government, or—if desired—indpendence, could be achieved. Its attitude matched the Fabian attitude in home affairs, which was to study and tackle the abuses of capitalism in Britain. It had no illusions that any of its aims could be secured by a wave of the wand. To be effective one had to arm oneself with facts, to plunge into statistics and reports, to know exactly what was happening everywhere, to build up contacts with the struggling democratic movements in the Colonies, to research into problems and to fight every issue as it arose.

It would be a long argument to discuss now whether this was the wisest approach for the Bureau to adopt. There are those, even among its leading supporters, who have wished for more of a revolutionary and less of a 'concrete' research attitude. It is certainly anything but easy to combine inspiration and fervour with the slow plodding task which the Bureau set itself. Yet was any other course really practical and possible? The whole nature of the Labour Party and Fabian tradition as well as the forces of history had probably made the choice inevitable. Experience does not, on the whole, lead us to regret it.

3 The Range of Activities

THE EMERGING QUESTIONS

Following this method of work, the Bureau has tackled almost every facet of the complicated 'colonial problem' in the five years of its life. Much of its early thought and research was concerned with the question of how to facilitate the growth of popular, democratic organisations among the colonial peoples. What was needed for the foundation and fostering of a trade union movement in every Colony? How could co-operative associations be formed to protect the colonial producer and consumer? Could local government authorities be created or adapted to deal with the daily affairs of every village and township? Was there any help to be offered to political

associations? How advance towards self-government? How was it to be achieved and in what form? What constitutional changes were therefore needed now? How did representative government merge into responsible government?

Such studies were not, of course, unconcerned with the most basic problem of all, from the point of view of Socialists—the ownership and distribution of wealth, on which all economic, and real political, advance depends. Who owns the wealth of the Colonies? Who profits from the mines and the export trades? Are the rich taxed? How is the land divided? Why are the standards of life so poor? What is wrong with the equipment, resources and methods employed in tropical countries?

In addition to these general questions many specific problems, it was clear, would emerge for decision at the end of the war—the future of many individual territories was at stake, and the conditions in each of them had to be understood for a fair judgment. Bound up with this was the question of regional collaboration between adjoining Colonies and between the different nations responsible for their administration; followed by the whole knotty problem of international trusteeship and the accountability of the colonial powers to the conscience of the world. The machine through which all these problems were to be tackled had also to be looked at. Did we have a satisfactory Colonial Office and Colonial Service? Were Parliamentary arrangements adequate to do justice to colonial affairs? Or was one trying to chisel out a new face in all these territories with a blunt, imperfect instrument?

TRADE UNIONISM

We turned early attention on the growth of wage employment in the Colonies and the protection of labour and gave thought to the whole question of colonial trade unionism. British Socialists had always proclaimed the right of colonial workers to organise, and had denounced victimisation or suppression of trade unionism. But there was need to give practical aid to the workers' struggle overseas. The TUC had created a Colonial Labour Advisory Committee and begun to interest themselves in the problem, though much of this work languished as the war proceeded. When the Colonial Development and Welfare Act came before Parliament, some of the Labour M.P.s used the occasion of the Bill to further for the colonial workers the rights of combination. They insisted on having inserted in this Bill a clause whereby no British money might be granted to any Colony where the trade union law fell below the British standard. Mr George Hall, the present Labour Secretary of State, was Under-Secretary in the Colonial Office and championed the demand. This provision did not attract much attention, yet it has probably been a material factor in protecting the small and youthful trade union movements in a number of Colonies. The colonial governments were obliged to introduce proper trade union laws; often opposing interests objected; the Governor had then to point out that if the law were not pursued, the territory would render itself ineligible for a development grant!

This was an invaluable provision, but not enough in itself. The Bureau put itself the question—what sort of laws governing Trade Unions and labour relations do in fact exist in the Colonies? Can colonial workers organise freely? It was decided to undertake a study of the position. A Labour Committee was set up which had the help of a number of prominent British trade unionists, and was fortified by information from the I.L.O. The Trade Union laws of every British Colony were scrutinised and in many respects found to be inadequate. This led on to a study of the arbitration and conciliation machinery in the different Colonies, of the work of the labour departments and labour officers; and of the application of the I.L.O. Conven-

tions and Recommendations. In many cases gaps in the law or its operation were revealed, with a consequent hampering effect on Trade Union development or labour relations.

Some of the papers on these subjects were published in a pamphlet *Labour in the Colonies* and the Colonial Office was asked to consider the deficiencies which had been uncovered. This it agreed to do, and it is a fact that the greater part of these inadequacies were dealt with in the following years. Today there is a good trade union law, modelled on the British law, in almost every Colony, a remarkable overhaul of the whole body of labour legislation has taken place, and striking advances have been made with the development of labour departments. A novel experiment was started, at the instance of Mr George Hall—the appointment to the Colonies of British trade unionists to act in conjunction with colonial trade unionists, and also to advise the new movements and help with labour legislation and the working of the new labour departments. As a result there has been an impressive growth of unionism in most Colonies, coinciding with the appointment of a Labour Adviser and Labour Advisory Committee in the Colonial Office, which Labour M P s had for a long time urged. In a White Paper entitled *Labour Supervision in the Colonial Empire*, published in 1943, the Colonial Office mentioned the help it had received from the Bureau in this particular branch of work.

Putting the law in order is of course only a first step in the growth of trade unionism and the protection of workers' rights. Vigilance is needed to prevent the law from being abused. Pleas for support have come from the young trade union movements in the Colonies, who have constantly to struggle against encroachments on their rights, and sometimes against open victimisation. There was the time, for example, which we have already mentioned, when a number of the leading trade unionists in Jamaica were detained. The Bureau immediately had the matter raised through friends in Parliament, who pursued the question with such energy that the detainees were released within a very few weeks. When in 1945 the Nigerian trade unionists organised their first big strike, appeals for intervention were sent to London, and it again fell to the Bureau to plead for a generous settlement with no victimisation, which was eventually granted. There have been many such cases, but the trade union movement in the Colonies is gradually getting on its feet. When, in 1945, the World Trade Union Congress was held in London, it was attended for the first time by colonial delegates from West Africa, the West Indies, Palestine and Cyprus.

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

If a free trade union movement is one of the pillars of democracy, the co-operative movement is another. In 1942 the Bureau decided to make a survey of the co-operative movement in the Colonies. Representatives of the British co-operative movement joined with administrators who had had co-operative experience in different Colonies to form a Co-operative Committee. Here, too, a survey was made of the existing laws, which were found to be quite inadequate in the majority of cases. There were found also to be too few Co-operative Departments in existence, and the necessity for trained staff was insufficiently recognised. There was no organisation in the Colonial Office to encourage co-operation and to lay down the principles on which the Co-operative Registrars should work. As a result, frequent mistakes were made, and no Colony learned from the experience of others.

The report of the Committee was published in book form—*Co-operation in the Colonies*—and a series of recommendations for action were proposed to the Colonial Office. The value of the co-operative movement in encouraging

mutual aid and raising standards of living and the need for a more active approach in the building up of co-operatives was admitted. With the arrival of Labour Ministers at the Colonial Office an energetic despatch on the wide range of co-operative practice has been sent to all colonial governments. It is too soon, yet, to register progress.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The study of local government has come later, and is not yet complete. But there has been much discussion and activity on Native administration and indirect rule, on the place of local responsibility in the territories advancing to self-government, on the place of municipalities as the basis for control of social services. It was decided to draw in the collaboration of friends in the Colonies for a larger study of the broad problem. They will provide the information about their own country from first-hand knowledge and we hope that the contributions would then be edited in London and studied, and recommendations deduced. This type of enquiry is a new experiment for the Bureau, and it remains to be seen how successful it will be.

CONSTITUTIONAL ADVANCE

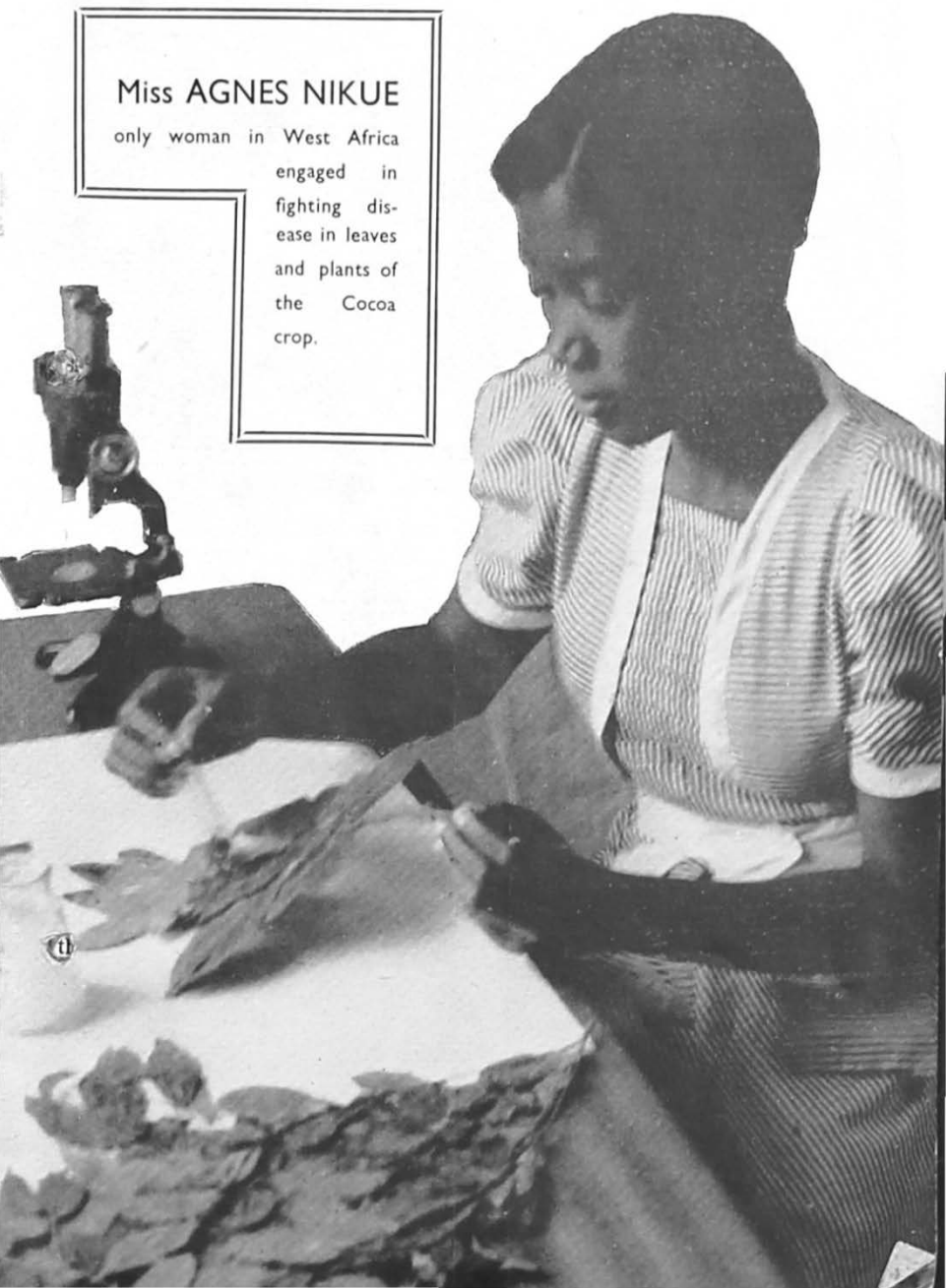
Vital as trade unions, co-operatives and local government are for democratic advance, they rarely raise as much emotion as the question of self-government. Constitutional changes have been in the air in most Colonies during these years—it is difficult now to think of a single territory where some change has not been made in the direction of greater self-government, or greater representation of the people.

But in few instances has a constitutional advance proposed by the Colonial Office satisfied the desires of all sections of the people in a Colony. It has been an important function of the Bureau to study the reactions of the colonial populations to constitutional reform, to give thought to the changes proposed, and to receive objections from colonial organisations. In every case reasoned amendments have been urged on the Government for more liberal advances than they have at first been inclined to make. Representations have been made on the constitutions of Jamaica, British Guiana, Trinidad, Barbados, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Kenya, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Ceylon, Malaya and Singapore.

One of the biggest struggles was the Jamaica constitution. Here a people's party with a socialist programme—the People's National Party—had been founded, and had commenced a well-organised, intelligent campaign for constitutional change. Proposals were put forward from London for a wholly representative legislature based on adult suffrage. But this did not meet local demands which were for *responsible* and not only representative government. The Bureau strongly supported these claims, and for years negotiations went backwards and forwards to secure the desired advance. The matter was constantly raised in the British Parliament; many representations were made to the Colonial Office; and every support given to the Jamaicans. The proposals were formulated and reformulated three times before they were accepted in Jamaica. Even then the Bureau was dissatisfied and felt that the constitution which had been agreed was not only inadequate but was far too complicated and unclear to work satisfactorily. We regret that these forebodings have been justified. The constitution was accepted, and at the first elections based on adult suffrage held in December, 1944, it was not the P N P which was voted into office, but a party without a programme or a valid membership led by Bustamante, and calling itself a 'Labour Party'.

Miss AGNES NIKUE

only woman in West Africa
engaged in
fighting dis-
ease in leaves
and plants of
the Cocoa
crop.





Effects of Soil Erosion in Onitsha Province, Nigeria.

African swamp reclaimed by run off channels which are stepped to prevent gullying.



A West African analysing soil at the Gold Coast Government Research Station.





Land saved from soil erosion by terracing in Basutoland.

*Checking erosion by constructing earthworks and terracing in Onitsha Province, Nigeria.





Huts alongside a corner of a sisal factory in Kenya

Cutting Copra in Fiji Island of Taveuni.



In an East African Sisal Factory



There has been much bitter controversy and conflict in Jamaica since. With a constitution that falls short of self-government, the resulting position is most unsatisfactory, and it is obvious that the Jamaica constitution will have to be revised before many years have passed.

The story of the Jamaica constitution is in a separate category—it was a bold experiment which has not quite come off. In other Colonies the proposals have been more cautious. If the Bureau saw any good in them at all, it was too often accused of accepting minor reforms, instead of insisting immediately on complete responsible government everywhere. A very careful study and appreciation of all the facts have been needed to steer a fair course between all these pitfalls. When the new Nigerian proposals were made, they seemed to contain such far-reaching innovations, that the Bureau felt it desirable to try them out for a few years, before asking that responsibility should be handed over. This is not to say that the Bureau was satisfied with the Nigerian proposals. In point of fact strong representations were made to increase the elected membership of the councils; to hand over the beginnings of executive power; and to extend the suffrage. Many of the suggestions were agreed to. But the improvements secured did not remove a feeling on the part of certain Nigerian politicians that the Bureau had been unsympathetic to their point of view.

In every instance, the problems of political advance have been beset with difficulties and misunderstandings—it is a subject on which thought is still befuddled, and emotion too often takes possession.

OWNERSHIP AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Work on the complexities of political advance went hand in hand with a study of the ownership and distribution of the wealth of the Colonies. This involved the questions of mineral rights and the operation of mines; the share of the primary producers in the price of their product; taxation and the ownership of land. On each of these issues a most inequitable position had existed. Minerals which were the most valuable assets in certain Colonies were, in some instances, owned and operated by private companies based on London, and the royalties from the mines and the profits were distributed to investors abroad. Even a large part of the taxes went to the British Treasury. In some Colonies, the European share of the wealth produced was increased still further by the inordinately high wages paid to European employees. All that remained for the colonial peoples were the meagre sums paid out in their own wages and their own share of the low taxation that was in force. In most Colonies no income tax had yet been introduced and the greater part of the revenue came either from taxes on the goods consumed by the native population, such as customs duties, which raised the prices of most imported articles, or from poll or hut taxes.

As regards primary producers, all through the nineteen thirties the prices they received had fluctuated—often sinking to a wretched level owing to the world depression. But not only that; the revenue and prosperity of the Colonies which were often almost entirely dependent on one export crop, would fluctuate, wildly and unpredictably, in consonance with the fluctuations in the world market. In the case of land ownership—another cause of injustice—the most blatant examples of inequality were in East and Central Africa, where the alienation of land to Europeans had involved the crowding of Africans into reserves or the upsetting of the balance of agriculture.

These abuses required remedy, and knowledge was essential if useful suggestions were to be made. A study was undertaken of the position regarding minerals, as a result of which detailed proposals were laid before the Colonial Office. These included the nationalisation of all mineral rights, the public

operation of new mines, and of existing ones wherever possible; the setting up of a Mining Department in the Colonial Office, the strengthening of the mining departments in the Colonies; and a revision of the taxation system. The proposals were studied with care inside the Colonial Office, and although we have not yet had the satisfaction of a declaration of a comprehensive mining policy on the lines suggested, there is reason to hope from official pronouncements and steps taken here and there, that our work has not been in vain. The Minerals Ordinance in Nigeria in 1945, for instance, accepts the principle that all mineral rights should be nationalised.

The unsatisfactory taxation position was also a subject of constant pressure. By the end of the war income tax had been introduced in almost every Colony, and E P T as well. It has now been generally admitted that the division of the taxes between the British and colonial treasuries was unjust to the Colonies, and this state of affairs will not continue long.

PRICES FOR PRIMARY PRODUCTS

The low prices paid for primary products called for special concern, as most of the colonial population are primary producers, and the standard of living is directly dependent upon the prices they receive. The position was complicated by the disturbance of all normal trade owing to the war. Government bulk purchasing schemes were introduced for many colonial producers, and this gave an opportunity to press for an increased price to be paid for the crop as a whole. Dozens of questions were asked in Parliament on primary produce prices and the arrangements for fair treatment for colonial producers. It was strongly felt that rational marketing schemes ought to be introduced to continue after war conditions had ended, and that colonial producers should have full representation on any marketing boards which might be set up, preferably through their own co-operative associations. When the Colonial Office produced a scheme for postwar marketing of cocoa which conformed with these suggestions the Bureau felt that an important principle and precedent had been gained.

LAND IN EAST AFRICA

On the East African land question, the Bureau adopted the straightforward attitude that racial discrimination in the ownership of land must cease, and that there was no place for a community based on privilege. It was never argued that the European settlers should be expelled or expropriated against their will, but that if they remained it should be as no more than equals with the rest of the population. When it became known that plans for further European settlement in Kenya were being prepared, with the possible intention of their subsidisation out of public funds, the Bureau put up an energetic fight in Parliamentary debates in the Commons and the Lords, in many Parliamentary questions, in newspaper articles, and in a pamphlet—*Kenya—White Man's Country?*—which aroused exceptional attention. This campaign evoked bitter opposition in Kenya, and the Bureau was pilloried as representing all that was worst in the Labour Movement's 'armchair' approach to colonial problems. The feud against the Bureau has not yet abated in East Africa.

TERRITORIAL PROBLEMS

While these broad general questions were being thought about and acted upon, the specific problems of separate territories were calling for urgent attention. It was not only that riots and agitations would suddenly focus interest on an area and demand action (there were the Bahamas riots,

the Mauritius riots, disturbances on the Northern Rhodesia copper belt, disturbances throughout the years in Cyprus, violence in Uganda, strikes in Nigeria, and constant difficulties in Jamaica), but in some Colonies the whole future political framework was at stake. In Cyprus, the demand for union with Greece is a burning issue; in Hong-Kong there is the thorny question of the relationship between the Colony and China; in Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland there is the demand of South Africa for their incorporation in the Union; in the Rhodesias there is the agitation for amalgamation of North and South; and in East Africa the advantages and disadvantages of closer union have long been heatedly canvassed. In Egypt the future of the Sudan is a crucial issue, and in Palestine there is the deadly conflict between Arabs and Jews. In Burma and Malaya the whole machinery of government was to be overhauled at the end of the war. In Newfoundland an end had to be made to commission government and the whole status of the island considered afresh.

On all these difficult problems the Bureau had to form a judgment and put forward a point of view. In a booklet—*Four Colonial Questions: How shall Britain Act?*—it suggested an approach to the questions of the South African Protections, Closer Union in East Africa, the Rhodesias, and the future of Malaya and Burma. A pamphlet *Strategic Colonies and their Future* dealt with Hong Kong, Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar. A study, *Sudan—the Road Ahead*, analysed the complexities of the situation in the Sudan; and a further pamphlet *Palestine Controversy*, provided a valuable symposium on the Palestine problem. *Newfoundland—The Forgotten Island* was a challenging description of the state of affairs under Commission Government and the choice for the future.

In a different category was the pamphlet *Hunger and Health in the Colonies* dealing with the question of malnutrition and how to combat it. And in yet another category was the battle waged by the Bureau on the introduction of forced labour for private enterprise in East and West Africa during the war.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Tied up with the study of individual territories was the question of regional collaboration, if necessary on an international basis. During the war a number of regional organisations had been set up—the Middle East Supply Council and the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission were on an international basis, and a regional arrangement had been made in the case of the British West African territories and also in the case of the British East African territories. When authoritative proposals were put forward at an international conference for the creation of a Pacific Council, the British Government expressed its approval of the principle of regional collaboration.

The Bureau felt some anxiety, however, that these arrangements might be superimposed on the peoples of the region without their co-operation, and might be seen by them as a bar between themselves and self-government. On the other hand, they might be used by some of the imperial powers as an alternative to international supervision by a world authority. With these fears in mind, a pamphlet *International Action and the Colonies* was published, welcoming the concept of regional collaboration, but insisting on safeguards if a valuable instrument were not to be perverted to dangerous uses.

But regional action, however soundly envisaged, was clearly only a small part of the international aspect of colonial affairs. The larger question of international supervision by the United Nations, and the recognition that all colonial powers should submit themselves to world opinion, involved something more than *ad hoc* regional arrangements. The International

Trusteeship principle was, in fact, embodied in the United Nations Charter, but the Bureau was dissatisfied with the limited application which the Charter proposed. The Labour Party has long supported the idea that the administration of *all* non-self-governing Colonies, as long as they are dependencies, should be subject to world opinion. The pronouncements on this question by the Party since 1917 were collected, and the history of international action in the Colonies was traced, together with a critical analysis of the Charter provisions. This study was published under the title of *Colonies and International Conscience*. The problem remains as to how to apply the idea of international accountability in respect of all non-self-governing territories. The imperial powers have yet to be convinced of the validity of the principle, and the international machinery and relationships devised to make accountability an effective proposition.

THE COLONIAL SERVICES

At an early stage of its work the Bureau was confronted with the limiting factor in all the plans for progress—the nature of the Colonial Service. The weaknesses in the structure both of the Colonial Office and the Service were well known from hearsay, but a careful study was needed if proposals were to be made for its reform. A Committee was appointed to undertake this. It analysed the structure of the Services, how their staffs were recruited and trained, the arrangements for promotion, and the interrelation between the technical and administrative services. It then discussed the arrangements at Westminster for the handling of Colonial affairs, and the proposal for a Standing Parliamentary Committee. A host of recommendations emerged from these studies and were published in a book *Downing Street and the Colonies*. The recommendations were sent to the Colonial Office. The question of the structure, recruitment, training and function of the services has now received, under the Labour Government, the attention it deserves.

4 Conflict and Causes of Conflict

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Looking at the Bureau's work in perspective, it can be seen as a struggle for the securing of social justice—of which freedom is of course an integral part—in the Colonies. As long as Britain remains responsible for colonial administration, British Socialists are lending themselves to an empire system which is, in its very essence, undemocratic. They must, in conjunction with the progressive forces in the Colonies, exercise increasing vigilance over that administration to secure that it is directed towards the advancement of the colonial peoples and not towards Britain's own greater glory and profit.

The Bureau's work was clearly to study, expose, and fight the abuses of imperialism; to strive for the growth of democratic organisations of all sorts; and so hasten the day when self-determination could be successfully achieved. There were no illusions that all this could be done by pressing a magic button. Generations of oppression, exploitation and abuse had left deep-seated scars on the life of these colonial communities, as well as in the minds of the people; and a painful process of rehabilitation might be needed before a healthy society could be created. British socialists, too, are conscious of their own long struggle for liberty and social justice at home, and the years—or scores of years—of suffering and sacrifice which any such struggle involves.

DIVERGENT APPROACHES

If imperialism has distorted the life of the Colonies, it has also, in a different way, scarred the life of Britain herself. Great changes in mind and heart are needed here if the correct relationship between us and the colonial peoples is ever to be developed. In the meantime, there are unhappy differences of approach on the part of even the most sympathetic British Socialists, and of the colonials themselves. They inevitably arise from differences in experience and tradition, and in fact all the Bureau's experience lends proof to this. The background and history of each are so widely divergent. To the African or West Indian or Sinhalese 'freedom' is the longed-for goal on which all effort and aspiration are concentrated. The great and obvious political lack under which they chafe, is that they are ruled by 'aliens'; and their disabilities, their poverty, their inadequate education, their bad health, are attributed to an unsympathetic, oppressive foreign rule. Political effort centres in an opposition to this rule. Freedom or independence comes first; all other aims a very bad second.

These feelings can be appreciated with sympathy in Britain. Nevertheless, the British approach is bound to be rather different. Britain has not known the struggle against alien rule for many centuries; the ideals of 'self-determination' or 'independence' cannot have the same strong emotional content for British people as they have for Yugoslavs or Greeks or Indians or Africans. The very word 'freedom' has a different significance to an Englishman from what it often has to, say, a Nigerian. The struggle of British radicals and socialists has centred rather in the ideal of social justice in which the liberty of the individual is of course an essential part. But even then freedom has been thought of as the freedom of *the individual* from police interference or from the oppression of a privileged class, rather than freedom from foreign domination. This makes it peculiarly difficult for British people really to enter into the feelings of colonials, and to forge any deep emotional bond.

With these divergent emphases, it was inevitable that the Bureau should approach colonial problems from an angle rather different from that of the colonial peoples themselves, and that it should soon find itself at variance with certain of the political elements in the Colonies. The Bureau's implicit insistence that freedom was not an absolute end in itself, but must go hand in hand with the day-to-day struggle against the injustices around one, was often interpreted by some of the more vocal colonial elements as an attempt to fob off the real demands, which sprang from the hearts of the colonial peoples, with trifling concessions in the way of cash, or trade union laws, or better hospitals, or else as an excuse to delay the day of freedom and retain the imperialist hold. The development schemes under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, for which the Bureau fought so hotly in the realisation that planned expenditure was essential to give the peoples the bare decencies of life, often evoked the comment on the part of politically-minded colonials, 'We don't want your charity; we want you to get out.' The marketing schemes which, to the Bureau, seemed essential if the colonial producers were to get a fair share of the price of their product, were suspected by others as a ruse to keep control in an 'alien' government's hands, and the Bureau's backing of such schemes was interpreted as a sign of support for the government and all its works.

The Bureau recognised strongly the need for the development of the people's own democratic institutions—trade unions, co-operatives, local government, political associations—if the advance to freedom was to be accompanied by social justice. We have described how it devoted much of its effort, in the way of study, publications, political action and propaganda, to the means

whereby these institutions could be encouraged—for was it not on the basis of a democratic local government that Britain's own successful parliamentary democracy had been built? And was it not from its trade unions and co-operatives, friendly societies, voluntary movements, and free political societies that the British socialist movement drew its own strength and found its own roots in the day-to-day needs and lives of the people? But again the efforts to encourage these institutions were seen as little more than red herrings across the path to immediate self-government. Trade union advisers and co-operative registrars were often the objects of scorn and suspicion on the part of the colonial leaders—they were seen as little other than an attempt to keep the people's organisations, as they developed, under constant government control.

TWO BASIC ISSUES

In practice the conflict crystallised around two main issues. There are some very vocal colonials who wish Britain to evacuate all the Colonies at once—nothing short of immediate and absolute independence will satisfy them. The Bureau, on the other hand, while favouring the grant of independence in certain Colonies at once, has regarded others as being unfit for it immediately, and has considered the immediate task to be to *prepare* all Colonies for independence at the earliest possible moment. The Bureau has therefore been very bitterly attacked by some of these people, who have misrepresented its position, even to the extent of suggesting that it is against independence altogether.

In the second place, the Bureau, being Socialist, believes that the government of a territory must perform certain economic functions, which in capitalist countries are left to 'free individuals.' It has therefore advocated some policies—such as the nationalisation of minerals and government marketing schemes—which involve new government controls. But the colonials dislike their governments, and on nationalist grounds are opposed to any strengthening of their powers and activities. The Bureau's Socialist schemes, which would be hailed as excellent and progressive in Britain, have therefore at times been criticised and resented in the Colonies.

The position is summed up pretty fairly in stating that in so far as the Bureau dealt with immediate abuses, and aired grievances, it received the enthusiastic support of colonial peoples. But in so far as it attempted to suggest social or economic policies, or even political policies which did not go the whole way towards immediate, one hundred per cent. self-government, it incurred suspicion and often hostility.

THE CONFLICT ON TRADE UNIONS AND CO-OPERATIVES

It is important to describe one or two of these conflicts in a little detail. The first arose on this very question of help to the colonial trade union and co-operative movements. From the start there was the suspicion that this was nothing but a sinister government device, and the Bureau was criticised for the part it had played in encouraging such wicked machinations. The mere fact that the trade unions and co-operatives were compelled to register, to submit their accounts to audit, and to be supervised by officials, was much resented. It was useless to point out that in Britain itself there was registration of the trade unions, a regular audit of the accounts of the unions and co-operatives, or that in Britain too all co-operatives had to register with the Government, and that in very many countries special departments existed in the governments to encourage the co-operative movement. It was still more useless to try to explain that, without control of some sort in these early stages, the workers' own organisations might fall into the hands of unscrupulous

leaders who might misuse their funds and abuse their true interests (as has, in fact, already happened in more than one instance).

In West Africa, in particular, an agitation arose against the co-operatives. They were dismissed by many leading spokesmen as mere government tools, and scornfully rejected as fit agents to represent the people's interests on such bodies as the proposed cocoa marketing organisation. The Bureau was submitted to many attacks for supporting these bodies, but it felt convinced that some sort of orderly control was essential in the formative period of the new associations.

Its conviction was strengthened by the course of events in Jamaica, where the greater part of the trade union movement had fallen under the control of one man. The more scrupulous trade unionists in Jamaica, who had built up the beginnings of a sound trade union movement, found themselves at a growing disadvantage. There was humour in the situation when, at a conference of the colonial trade unionists attending the World Trade Union Conference, which the Bureau held in London in February 1945, we were first approached by Africans who objected to any measure of government supervision and could see no value in it whatever; and were then tackled by West Indians with the plea that we should work for yet *greater* government supervision as the only means of curbing the irresponsible activities of colonial demagogues!

The story with the co-operatives is not dissimilar. The greatest objection to Government-encouraged co-operatives has also come from West Africa, but we learn now that there is the beginning of an appreciation of what is really intended by official encouragement, and how valuable a part the movement can play in raising the standard of living of the people. The aim is, of course, and the Bureau has always insisted on this, that these people's movements should reach independence at the earliest possible moment—as soon as the technique of running a trade union or a co-operative on accepted lines has been learnt, and the people can nominate their own officials to keep their funds and books. The audit of funds and registration are almost always essential, whether the country is a Colony or not.

DISAGREEMENT ON MINERALS AND COCOA PLANS

The conflict on problems of the ownership and distribution of wealth has been no less bitter. We have mentioned our own agreement with the purpose of the Nigerian Minerals Ordinance and the West African Cocoa Scheme. It was far from being shared by the Africans themselves. Both these matters, but particularly the cocoa scheme, became subjects of acute controversy in West Africa.

The Minerals Ordinance was opposed by many Africans who saw the nationalisation of their mineral resources and the vesting of mineral rights 'in the Crown' as an attempt by the Government to obtain control of their wealth, and to wrest it out of the hands of their own people. They insisted, instead, that the rights should be vested in their own Native Authorities. When it was argued that to place these rights in the hands of the Nigerian Government was a method of making the wealth available for the country as a whole, on the lines of the nationalisation of coal royalties in Britain, the Africans objected that the Nigerian Government was not their government, but an alien government which they did not trust. They remained unconvinced by arguments that it would be a retrograde step to put these rights in the hands of native administrations, which are, after all, the Nigerian version of British local authorities. This would mean that an area in which a mine happened to be situated might grow extremely wealthy, whereas an area a few miles away could be stricken with poverty. Also there was no guarantee that native authorities would dispose of their mineral rights with wisdom—

indeed the history of mineral concessions in the Gold Coast, where Chiefs and Native Authorities held the rights, pointed to exactly the opposite result. The Minerals Ordinance continued for some time to be the butt of bitter attack on the part of many Nigerians, even though to British socialists it appeared to be on a level with what they were struggling for in Britain itself.

But the opposition to this Minerals Ordinance was nothing as compared with the opposition to the cocoa plan. Here the African argument was that the plan aimed at a Government monopoly of their main product, which would inevitably mean a Government strangle-hold over the whole of their economic life. They were suspicious of the provisions for African representation on the proposed marketing board and declared that they would only be satisfied with a return to complete 'free trade'.

To the Bureau a return to free trade meant nothing less than a return to the chaotic marketing conditions of the pre-war years, and the strangle-hold of West African economic life, not by a Government Board over which popular control (both in Britain and in the Colony) could ultimately be exercised, but possibly by big trading firms—the unfortunate results of whose activities were already only too well known. It was also strongly suspected that the Africans opposing the scheme were mainly cocoa traders and brokers who would obviously suffer from a Government marketing arrangement, and not the actual cocoa producers. The Bureau therefore took up the cudgels in favour of the scheme, and found itself standing alone in its support of the Colonial Office, against a strange combination of vocal Africans, British trading firms, and American consumers.

5 Under the Labour Government

THE INITIAL DANGERS

When the Labour Government was voted into power in 1945 there was elation among all those who had shared in the Bureau's work, particularly when Arthur Creech Jones, who had been Chairman of the Bureau since its inception, was appointed as one of the Labour Ministers to the Colonial Office. At last, it was felt, the policies which had been pondered over and pressed during the preceding years of hard work would be carried into effect, and enthusiasm ran high.

This was, however, a dangerous period for the Bureau. The mere fact that it was suddenly so closely connected with the Colonial Office laid it open to the charge that it had become just a propaganda agency for the Ministry. The Bureau soon found that any agreement with the actions of the Colonial Office, or any refusal to indulge in headlong attacks on every facet of colonial policy, was immediately interpreted as a desire to shield former friends, and as a symbol of the deplorable fact that what had once been an honest and independent body of critics was now becoming a mere tool of the Government.

These charges are as unfair as they are baseless. It was natural that the Bureau should feel sympathy and understanding for the policy of the Labour Party now in power, as this was the very policy which it had helped to evolve and considered right. But there has not for one moment been a pause in the criticism on all colonial problems which has emanated from the Bureau since its birth. When the plans for land settlement in Kenya were published, it was the Bureau which led a deputation to the Colonial Office protesting against the failure to abolish racial discrimination in the ownership of land in the Kenya Highlands. When there were disturbances in Jamaica

the Bureau did not hesitate to express its anxiety about the handling of the position there. When legislation containing measures for racial discrimination was introduced into Southern Rhodesia, the Bureau led a strong deputation to the Dominions Secretary to press for the withdrawal or amendment of the offending law. In the controversy over the cession of Sarawak the Bureau voiced its apprehensions in letters to the Colonial Office and asked for a full explanation. It has approached the Minister on the state of discontent in Cyprus, on unrest in Malta, on the inadequacies of the constitutional proposals for Mauritius, and on a dozen other points where official policy seemed to fall short. The Parliamentary work has also gone on unabated, with the help of many back-bench Labour M Ps who are as willing to question points of colonial policy as ever their predecessors, now in office, were. All this is indicative of the determination of the Bureau to remain an independent—albeit friendly—critic of the Government's every shortcoming.

But there was another more serious danger when the Labour Government took office—the danger of over-optimism, of expecting too much and then being disappointed. It was not that the Party programme was unclear. The years of study had succeeded in putting plans into pretty concrete shape. The real snag was in the machine itself. Ministers can at best lay down the general lines of policy; the detailed execution has to be left to their officers—the officials in the Colonial Office, and the men 'on the spot', who may have been brought up in a very different school of thought. In many Colonies, too, there are legislative Councils (some with considerable powers) and here quite other interests may be at work than those which operate in the Secretary of State's room in Whitehall. In fact, the machine of colonial administration is an enormous, slow-moving, creaking affair. It is a job to get it moving at all, still more to secure that all the wheels within wheels move in harmony. There are no magic levers to be pulled, and a Minister of even the greatest energy and idealism has a hard task before he can begin to see results. Perhaps Labour's most important job is really to reform the machine, to oil the wheels and get the right men in the right place. But this is bound to take a very long time, particularly with all the serious staff shortages which have resulted from the war.

One could then, only too easily, fall into the error of over-optimism and be disappointed when solutions to problems which have long caused uneasiness seemed slow in forthcoming. The matter has not been helped by the rather weak publicity arrangements of the Colonial Office. It needs an 'expert' devoting the closest attention to these matters to know really what is being done, or to gain any inkling of the huge amount of thought and activity which the Ministers have brought to colonial affairs within the first year of their office.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN CONSTITUTIONAL ADVANCE

To outline the special achievements of Government departments under the Labour regime is a ticklish task because, inevitably in the nature of British politics today, many plans are handed over from one government to the next. There is always a certain continuity, and much of the action which has been taken by the Colonial Office in the last year was already 'on the stocks', in some form or other, before Labour took over. Labour has tackled the problem of constitutional advance in Colony after Colony, but it would be unfair to suggest that all the credit for this was due to the present Government. Owing to public pressure for years previously, constitutional reforms in many territories were well on the way beforehand. Labour had inherited plans for new constitutions in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Malta, Ceylon, Mauritius and Malaya. What Labour did do was to push through these

reforms with speed and energy, and with the introduction of liberalising clauses wherever possible. And where the opportunity offered, it went considerably further.

In the case of Malaya the defeat of the invading Japanese gave the opportunity for making a new start. Certain plans had, it is true, been prepared, but Labour decided to do much more than its predecessors had proposed. It has in fact introduced a revolution in constitutional arrangements there—diminishing the power of the Sultans, offering the possibility of equal citizenship to all races, and unifying a dozen splinter states under one administration. These plans have been sufficiently revolutionary to arouse strong opposition from the Conservatives here and from some interests in Malaya which found themselves threatened, or who could not grasp the purport of such far-reaching changes. The framework for an entirely new political existence has been offered the people of this country, with the opportunity of filling in the details of their political institutions themselves.

Malaya represents, so far, the most drastic political change introduced in the Colonies under Labour. For the rest, progress has been speeded up, though on the accepted lines. Apart from major constitutional reforms, the representation of Africans on the Legislative Councils of most of the East African Colonies has been very noticeably increased, and there is progress with the extension of the suffrage in Trinidad and British Guiana.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

On the economic side, there have been as yet no violent departures. The Development and Welfare Act had established a general line of action, and Britain's awkward financial position after the war made it impossible to secure more money for colonial development. But a new spirit of enterprise and energy was infused when all colonial governments were called upon to present a ten year economic plan for which they would qualify for assistance from British funds. The £120 million voted under the Act has been apportioned between the Colonies, who are asked to add their own funds, raised by loans and taxes, to the British grant, and to prepare large-scale plans on the basis of the total sum. This is the first time that so comprehensive an approach has been made to the difficult problem of economic planning in the Colonies, and it is still too early to judge of its success—though it is already obvious that the funds available under this Act, and from the Colonies' own resources, are far too small for a really effective impact to be made on colonial poverty. Other economic measures are clearly necessary, but these are not yet ready for application.

In one territory, Kenya, however, special proposals for land utilisation and settlement have been put forward, the use of the land there being recognised as the basic economic factor. These plans caused some disappointment in failing to put an unambiguous end to race discrimination in the ownership of land in the Highlands. Nevertheless they outlined, for the first time, a really far-sighted scheme for African settlement in as yet unused areas, and resettlement on more modern and effective lines in the existing Native areas. And the plans were unambiguous on one point—that money on a large scale would have to be devoted to projects for African assistance, whereas European settlement could no longer be subsidised out of public funds. The whole tone and spirit of the proposals marks a strong departure from what has gone before in Kenya.

Trade unions and, to a less extent, co-operative movements were already being given support under the previous Government; under Labour the policy of encouraging them is being pursued with new vigour. The Labour Departments in many Colonies are now being overhauled, extra staff is being

provided, and British trade unionists are being sent in increasing numbers to assist the colonial unions. The gaps or weaknesses in labour legislation are being tackled, and it will not be long before the legal framework is complete and responsibility for the growth of trade unionism will have devolved on to the shoulders of the colonial workers. A despatch on the encouragement of co-operatives has been sent to all colonial governments, advising the establishment of co-operative departments with skilled staff, laying down the general lines along which the movement could be most helpful to producers and consumers, and providing a model co-operative ordinance according to which legislation should be shaped. The objectionable use of forced labour by private enterprise, which had been introduced during the war, was put a term to by the Labour Government very shortly after coming into office.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Another aspect of colonial affairs in which the Labour Party has always been interested is the furthering of international and inter-territorial action for the improvement of colonial conditions. Certain steps in this direction had already been taken during the war when a number of regional arrangements had been made for greater efficiency under war conditions. Here again Labour has speeded up the tendencies already at work.

In West Africa a West African Council will strengthen the work of the earlier Governors' Conference. In the Caribbean the Anglo-American Commission has been extended to include the French and the Dutch. In East Africa a more revolutionary approach has been adopted. An inter-territorial organisation is to be set up to co-ordinate certain services common to Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. This organisation is to consist partly of a sort of federal council representative of the three territories, on which Europeans, Indians and Africans from each territory are to sit in exactly equal numbers. This is an extraordinary innovation for East Africa and has already evoked strong protest from parts of the European communities there. Some democratic critics, taking a superficial glance at this scheme, have jibbed at the *equal* representation on the grounds that Africans should have incomparably *greater* representation because of their immense superiority in numbers. But the Council is a federal body and not a democratic Parliament and it is the custom in federations for each constituent part to have more or less equal representation. One must have experienced the inequitable conditions of East Africa to appreciate what a drastic change has come about.

On the question of international supervision, the Labour Government strongly supported the creation of a Trusteeship Council under the United Nations, to take over mandates and ex-enemy Colonies, and Britain gave a lead to the other nations in offering to put her existing African mandates under trusteeship. The trusteeship agreements are now in preparation.

COLONIAL SERVICE REFORMS

But, as we have suggested, the reform of the machine is perhaps the most important step of all. Plans for this are now well under way. The Colonial Office has published its first set of proposals for reforms in the Colonial Service. These follow the imaginative line of setting aside £1 million for scholarships spread over the next ten years, to train colonials for the higher posts in the Service; and a further £1½ million for special training for all recruits—black and white—after their selection. This is designed to introduce colonial officials to a deeper and more sympathetic insight into the problems they will have to tackle, and to bring together men from all branches of the Service. But perhaps the most interesting point is the adoption of the principle, long pressed

for by Labour members, that a basic salary should be paid for every job in the colonial service, irrespective of race or domicile. If a higher salary is needed to attract skilled technicians to administrations from overseas they should be paid a special expatriate allowance—but the basic salary should not depend on the colour of the man who earns it. There will thus be every inducement for Colonies to employ more and more local people, as those with the right qualifications come forward in increasing numbers as a result of the new scholarship schemes. There are many other suggestions for reform, including the possibility of retiring officials whose continued service is no longer considered in the public interest. The value of these plans will again be apparent only in the course of years as the new men gradually take the place of the old, as colonials themselves step in to the higher posts, and a new spirit is infused into the very core of the Service.

NO SHORT CUTS

This is by no means a complete list of the Government's achievements—nor are they all to be accepted uncritically. But they do indicate the direction of policy. It was only to be expected that with such a policy the same variance as was seen before between the Bureau and certain of the colonial people⁴ would now be seen between the Labour Government and the Colonies. Many colonials had hoped for some spectacular declaration when the Labour Government took over. They had imagined that there might be immediate grants of self-government, or at least the naming of a date by which all Colonies would be 'free'. Instead they found a Government intent on securing a sound economic and social basis in each Colony, as the springboard for the advance to self-government. While the Government has busied itself in the pursuit of an increasing measure of social justice, the colonial peoples have continued to be intent on the achievement of freedom or independence and have been disappointed not to get it. Many of them are already saying that for the Colonies there is no difference between a Labour and a Conservative Government.

It is indeed a fact that there are no short cuts towards the achievement of the millenium, no détours by which the hard day-to-day work of building up economic and social standards can be circumvented. Nothing can eliminate the crying need for the honest policy of painstaking advance to which the Labour Government after so much thought has set its hand, however slow it might be to achieve spectacular results.

FACING THE FUTURE

Must we accept then, that the bogies—real and imagined—of British imperialism will still not be exorcised for a long time to come? As the disappointments of ambitious colonial people become more articulate, and as what appears to be a close continuity of policy with the Conservatives stirs increasing uneasiness among the Party's own supporters, a new phase of heart-searching begins. This pamphlet has shown how, under the pressure of political reality, Labour has shed its early attachment to the idea of a simple and immediate liquidation of the Empire. Instead it has evolved a reformist policy, bringing it perilously close to the policies which history and the force of public opinion have already impelled other parties to adopt. Now, the power in its hands, it finds this line cannot satisfy. A policy of reforms, however worthy, does not begin to answer the strident cries of colonial nationalism, and carries no conviction that the British Empire, even when run by socialists, is anything but the same old wolf flaunting a new lambskin. But what is the alternative? Philosophically an impasse has been reached.

This was why the recognition of India's right to independence, and the announcement that British troops would be withdrawn from Egypt, were received with so much enthusiasm in socialist circles. But India is an immense sub-continent with an old civilisation and an educated leadership to grasp the reins of government. Egypt is not a British Colony and Britain has no moral right there at all. In these cases a new approach was possible. But for the rest of the vast and scattered Empire—60 million people divided over 50 territories in all corners of the globe—the right course of action (if it is not to be a speeded up reformism which might be the work of any Party) is nothing like so self-evident.

In the years to come, two main tasks lie ahead of the Bureau. The day-to-day work must go on. Whatever government is in power, there is need for independent organisations to maintain vigilance, to submit every act to criticism, to reveal abuses, to be accessible to the problems and complaints which people cannot take directly to government departments, to educate and interest public opinion, to publish books and pamphlets and journals. But in addition there is the second task of finding the way out of the present blind-alley in which colonial policy has been caught. Until this way is found, the lack of understanding between Britain and the colonial peoples, and Britain and the outside world, remains a grave and dangerous problem. Nor is it only Labour Britain which is misunderstood. Perhaps British people themselves do not fully understand the feelings and deepest desires of the peoples of the Colonies, and in the years to come a new effort of understanding and patience must come from this side as well.

A FREE ASSOCIATION

What the new approach might be is suggested very tentatively by the thought that, in the final analysis, there are *two* answers to the evils of imperialism. The first is to liquidate empires; the second is to convert them into free associations—commonwealths, unions, call them what you will. Many anti-imperialists think only of the first answer, and many of the colonials think only of that answer too. But there are also many British socialists—and the Bureau, on the whole, has been among these—who see no benefit to anyone, and no stability in the concept of weak, isolated and scattered states rejoicing in a 'freedom' which, in the modern world, can be no more than a name and a façade. This is what would result from an immediate liquidation of the British Empire. But an association of free nations, maintaining certain ties because of the mutual help they can give each other in culture, in economics, in political support, in defence, seems a far more fitting concept in the conditions of this century (pending the realisation of an international society) and an ideal to which socialists can unhesitatingly devote themselves, provided the ties are *free* and *voluntary* ties and not chains. This means that those territories which genuinely desire complete independence rather than any tie at all with the Commonwealth must, as soon as practicable, have it—just as the choice lies before India now.

How can socialists carry out their policy of converting an out-of-date, discontented, abuse-ridden empire into a *voluntary* association of free, progressive, nations—working in co-operation with the colonial peoples, and with the recognition of a sincere purpose in the eyes of other nations? It is to evolve the answer to this question that our work is now directed.

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