

British Labour and the Colonies

By George Padmore

WHILE the coloured peoples of the Empire welcome the defeat of British Toryism, Labour's recent victory at the general election has aroused very little enthusiasm among them. Indian nationalist leaders have not forgotten that during the tenure of the Labour Governments of Ramsay Macdonald, the Congress Party was as badly persecuted as under any Tory administration. In Africa, Labour pursued traditional British imperial methods, despite its professed socialistic principles. Thanks to this legacy of distrust, the Attlee Government has much leeway to make up if it wants to inspire among the dark-skinned peoples of the Empire the same degree of hope and confidence which it has aroused among the common people of Great Britain and the European Continent.

In an open letter addressed to the Prime Minister, the Pan-African Federation, voicing the sentiments of Africans and peoples of African descent, calls upon the Labour Government to prove its sincerity to the peoples of Asia, Africa, the West Indies, and other Colonial lands, by breaking the centuries-old fetters of British imperialistic domination. "It is the challenge of our time that you, Comrade Attlee, and your Government, should give the Socialist answer to the Tory Imperialism of Mr. Churchill's 'What we have we hold.' What will your answer be?"

After enumerating a number of Colonial problems which cry out for immediate solution, the historic document from the Pan-African Federation suggests that "the Colonial Office should call a conference of representative African and other Colonial leaders elected by the people of the various Colonies, and discuss with them the problems of the common people of their lands and the proper solution of these problems."

"That," asserts the manifesto, "would indeed be heralding in the period of co-operation, of partnership, as against domination. It would be a giant stride towards the Century of the Common Man."

This is the Black Man's challenge to the White Man's doctrine of trusteeship. What will Labour's answer be? Will Major Attlee have the statesmanship to consolidate the victory of the common man in Britain in terms of the common man in Asia and Africa?

"To consolidate this great victory, however, courage is needed. The courage to face squarely the fact that Imperialism is one of the major causes of war. The

British workers live as much by the spoils of Empire as the Tories, and Labour's recent victory in the British general election spells no new day for British colonials. In this article a well-known colonial expert explains why

courage to admit that any high sounding blue-prints that beg the question of man's territorial and political domination by other men, whether their skins are white, yellow or black, is only staving off the day when the evils of war, with their ghastly new atomic weapons, will be unleashed against humanity." Only the liquidation of the present Colonial systems can guarantee peace and security—the common aspiration of all men of goodwill. But unfortunately, the Labour Party, despite its differences with British Toryism on domestic issues, has no foreign or imperial policies distinct from those of the British capitalist classes; and consequently, is unable to meet the challenge put forward

in the document of the Pan-African Federation.

Everything that has happened since the formation of the Attlee Government merely serves to emphasize our contention. Mr. Bevin's review of foreign affairs in the House of Commons was that of a Socialist tom cat in a Tory boot. This was so much the case that he was warmly congratulated by his predecessor, Mr. Anthony Eden, for upholding British imperial prestige abroad. The *Overseas Daily Mail* for September 1, 1945, bears out the general impression which the Tory Opposition received from Mr. Bevin's utterances. "Our Labour administrators," this paper writes, "have hard problems to solve, but they have begun well, They have been speaking more with the voice of Empire than

the voice of world socialism, and that is a good thing. Let us give them all credit for it. . . . Foreign Secretary Bevin has spoken in a way which has called forth the warmest admiration. No dyed-in-the-wool Imperialist of the Conservative school could have done it better." This is certainly high praise from Britain's foremost reactionary newspaper cir-



White workers in Europe seldom identify their interests with those of their colonial brothers, say with these miners in Nigeria. Here African workers, carrying their empty headpans, return to the paddock, name for surface tin mines in Nigeria.

British Combine

culating abroad.

Will Retain Empire

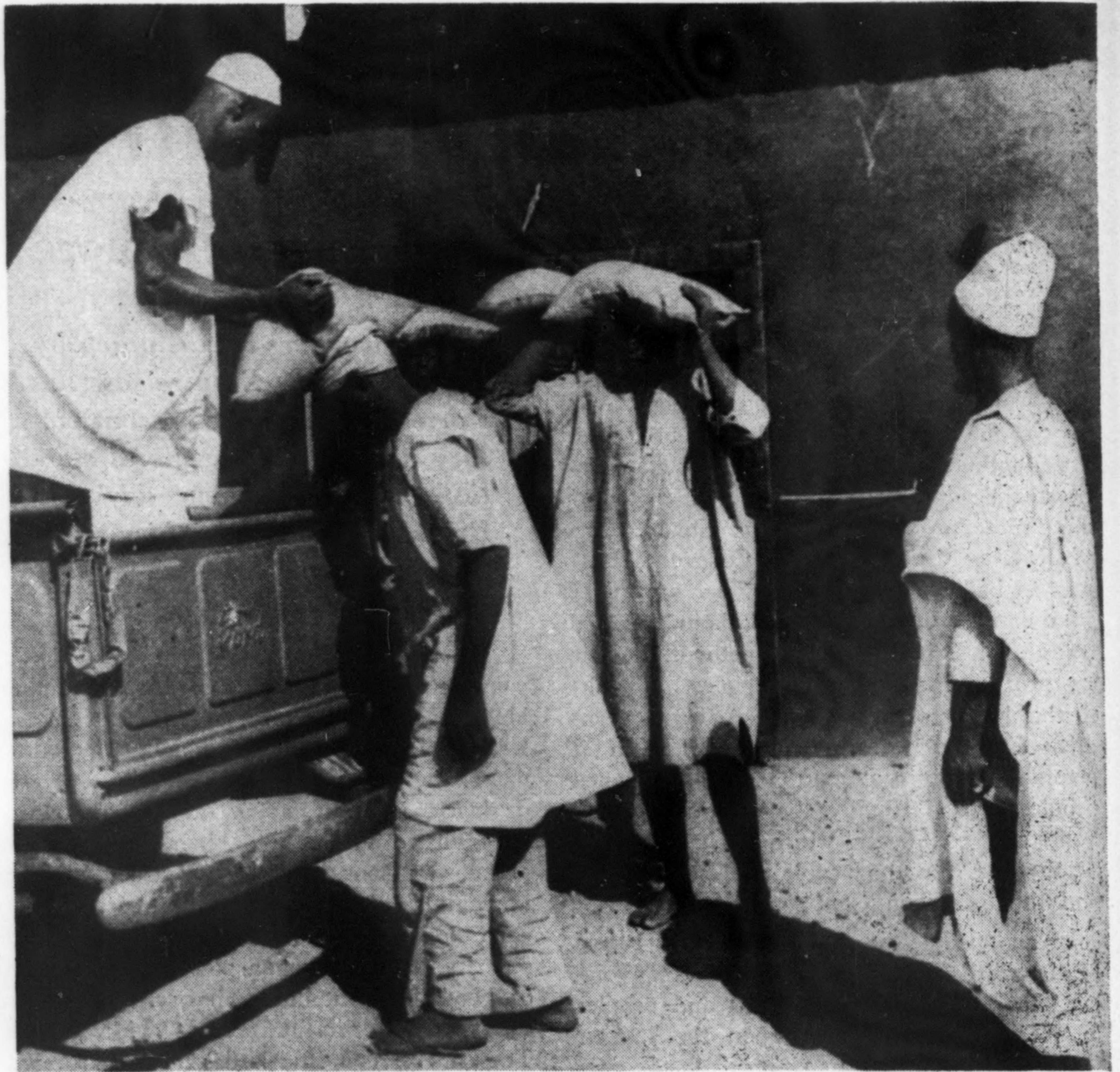
Upholding the Churchillian thesis, "What we have we hold, what we lost we intend to regain," Mr. Bevin told the Commons that the Union Jack again flies over Hong Kong and other Far Eastern Colonies of the British Crown.

As for India, the Labour Government has not yet made a single gesture by way of conceding any of the legitimate demands of the nationalists. For example, before the general election, Mr. Bevin, speaking for the party executive, promised to abolish the India Office should Labour win. But no sooner was Labour in power than Mr. Amery was turned out and replaced as Secretary of State for India and Burma by Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, a seventy-five year old barrister. Since his appointment, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence has been made a baron and elevated to a seat in the House of Lords.

At his first press conference, Lord Pethick-Lawrence was fulsome in his praise of oriental life and philosophy, but refused to commit himself concerning the future political status of India and Burma. "It has been my good fortune to be personally acquainted with and to count among my friends many of the leading men and women of India." Expanding the new British imperial doctrine of Partnership, the Secretary for India assured the newspaper representatives that: "The ideal which I set before myself as the goal to be reached can in my opinion be very simply stated. It is none other than *equal partnership* between Britain and both India and Burma." Then, to remove any doubts of Labour's sincerity, he added: "This is passionately desired, I am confident, not only by myself and His Majesty's Government, but by the vast majority of all our people." Lord Pethick-Lawrence observed that the British and the oppressed nations—the Indians and Burmese—"have much in common and where we are different we have much to give to and much to learn from one another." What irony! Even Mr. Amery never reached such depths of hypocrisy. Having assured the Indians and Burmese of his love for them, Lord Pethick-Lawrence has invited Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, to London for consultation on the political and economic crisis facing India.

Up to the time of writing, the Government has made no official pronouncement on its Colonial Policy, but this is well known. Mr. George Henry Hall, an ex-coal miner, has succeeded Colonel Oliver Stanley, the aristocratic heir of Lord Denby, as Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Mr. Hall worked in the Welsh coal mines at the age of 13 and later became a trade union official. He entered Parliament in 1922 as a representative of the South Wales Miners' Federation. When Churchill formed his Coalition Government, the Trade Union caucus in the Labour Party nominated Mr. Hall for the job of Under-Secretary of State



British Combine
Columbite, a complex ore of Niobium and Tantalum, is here loaded by Nigerian workers for shipment to Britain.

for Colonies. From then his ministerial career has been rapid. A mediocrity, with little or no knowledge of colonial affairs, Mr. Hall served as a convenient Charlie McCarthy to Lord Cranborne, who assigned him the job of replying to all embarrassing questions in the House of Commons on colonial misrule. When Oliver Stanley succeeded Lord Cranborne, Mr. Hall was shifted to the Treasury and later appointed Under-Secretary to the Foreign Office. He owes his present high office to seniority rather than ability, and to the backing of the influential miners' union, one of the most powerful supporters of the Labour Party.

Mr. Hall's assistant is Arthur Creech Jones, one of the leading colonial experts of the Labour Party. Mr. Jones is also an ex-trade union official and enjoys the backing of the General Workers & Transport Union, of which he was once national secretary. This union was organized by Ernest Bevin, who appointed Mr. Jones his Parliamentary Private Secretary when he (Bevin) joined the Churchill Coalition Government. However, in spite of the patronage of Labour's Foreign Secretary, one of the most influential leaders in the governing party, Hall beat Jones for the highly-prized \$25,000 a year job as "dictator" over 60,000,000 dark-skinned natives in Africa and the Colonial Empire.

Future Policy

The policy of the new Colonial Secretary will no doubt be based upon the official programme of the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions, which affirms that

- (1) "In all Colonial territories the primary object of the administration must be the well-being, education and development of the native inhabitants and their training in every possible way so that they may be able in the shortest possible time to govern themselves. In other words, the interests of those inhabitants are and must remain paramount, and of those interests Parliament is the trustee.
- (2) "The negation of this policy for which the Party stands is the policy of the Colour-Bar, the object and effect of which are to ensure by law, administration, and every other available means, that the native inhabitant is given a different and subordinate status, civil and social, from that of the European. It is in Africa that the Colour Bar as a 'native policy' can be seen in its most undisguised form, but it does less evilly but more insidiously, affect British Colonial policy in other continents. The Labour Party is ab-

solutely opposed to the Colour Bar in every shape and form. It maintains, therefore, that in territories for which Parliament is responsible the laws and administrative practices upon which the Colour Bar rests should be abolished and Colonial administrations should see that every kind of legal or administrative discrimination (whether by disabilities or privileges) on the ground of race, colour or religion, should cease.

"It follows that in all Colonial territories in which white settlers are in a minority, Parliament must remain trustee of the native interests, and the Labour Party cannot therefore agree to any conferment of responsible government upon any territory or union of territories which would involve the delegation of its duties to a local legislative body in which the native races were in a minority. It is not prepared to see any further alienation of their lands to white settlers, to agree to any restriction upon the rights of natives to acquire lands, or to consent to any legislation which, directly or indirectly, forces natives to work for white settlers. It is opposed to compulsory labour in those territories and holds that the international convention on forced labour should be strictly adhered to. It is opposed further to the exploitation of mineral or similar resources by white settlers or companies; in its judgment they should be operated as government concerns in trusteeship for the native community.

"The Labour Party welcomes the establishment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund¹ and looks forward to a great extension of its scope."

This Fund was instituted by the Chamberlain Government in 1940, at the time when Malcolm Macdonald, son of the former Prime Minister, was Colonial Secretary. Since then every succeeding Tory Colonial Secretary has endorsed the principle of the Fund. Now Labour links the present with the past and guarantees continuity of Colonial policy. Commenting upon the future scope of the Colonial Development & Welfare scheme, the official policy document observes that "expenditure should be directed to the promotion of the education and health of the native inhabitants and of their economic prosperity by improving communications and developing native industries and agriculture. It notes with satisfaction the establishment of the post of Labour Adviser in the Colonial Service, but holds that the creation of an energetic Labour Department, both in the Colonial Of-

fice and in every colony, together with an adequate inspectorate, lies at the root of all reform. It asks for the active development of institutions calculated to widen and deepen the opportunity of self-government, and that every occasion should be taken to associate educated natives with every aspect of government work, central and local. While the Labour Party maintains that for a long time to come the effective control of these territories must remain under Parliament, in the hands of the Colonial Office, it must demand that the whole process of government be geared to the supreme purpose of fitting the native races to determine their own destiny.

The Labour Party statement of aims and objects represents no fundamental departure from the official declaration of policy laid down by the preceding Tory Government of Churchill and enunciated from time to time by Colonel Stanley in the House of Commons. It merely serves to emphasize our contention that on matters of Imperial questions very little divides so-called British Socialism from British Tory democracy.

Shinwell's Speech

In this connection it is well to recall a speech made by Mr. Emanuel Shinwell, the \$25,000 a year Labour Minister of Fuel and Power, in which he assured Churchill that should Labour come to power it would defend the Empire as ardently as the Tories. "I have occasionally found myself in disagreement with my right Hon. friend the Prime Minister," declared the ex-tailor Shinwell, "but I am in hearty accord with the view he (Churchill) expressed some time ago on the suggested liquidation of the Empire. Sir, we (Socialists) have no intention, any one of us, of throwing the British Commonwealth of Nations overboard to satisfy a section of the American Press, or indeed anyone else."

This assurance that the Labour Party, notwithstanding its high sounding declarations of "native self-government," was as deeply wedded to the maintenance of the British imperial system as the supporters of Churchill brought forth thunderous cheers from the Tory parliamentary benches.

Even such men as Creech Jones who, until his appointment to high office, was one of the chief critics of British Colonial misrule, feel that "this country has an Empire" it cannot shed, although he assumes that "it is our responsibility." As Labour's leading authority on the Colonies, Mr. Jones, writing on "British Imperialism and the Colonial Empire," in *Left News* (April, 1944), enquires whether the colonial territories are moving to political and economic freedom." He tells us that there are vested interests which must be removed, then demands: "But how is it to be done?" That, of course, is the question which all Colonials, anxious to liberate their countries from the stranglehold of 'the city' [Britain's Wall Street], always postulate. How is it to be done? How are British vested interests to be removed from Africa and the Colonies? Nowhere does Labour suggest a solution. Wedded to the maintenance

of Empire, Mr. Jones and his chief, Mr. Hall, can envisage only one future for the coloured races—extension of social reforms within the existing imperialistic set-up by way of amelioration of some of the terrible economic and social conditions now prevailing in the Colonies. What is the basis of this identity of interests between Labourites and Tories when it comes to imperial questions affecting the right of self-determination for the dark-skinned inhabitants of the British Empire?

The answer is to be found in the historical development of British trade unionism in relation to the rise and expansion of British Imperialism in Asia and Africa during the latter part of the 19th century. Only in this socio-political context can the tie-up between the British workers and their capitalist class on the basis of the Colonial Empire be understood. It was that greatest of Empire-builders, Cecil Rhodes, who once advised the British oligarchy that "if you do not want civil war, you must become imperialists." The Empire, Rhodes declared, "is a question of the stomach." Acting on this premise, he carved out an empire for himself in Southern Africa, which today stands as a monument to his enterprise—Northern and Southern Rhodesia.

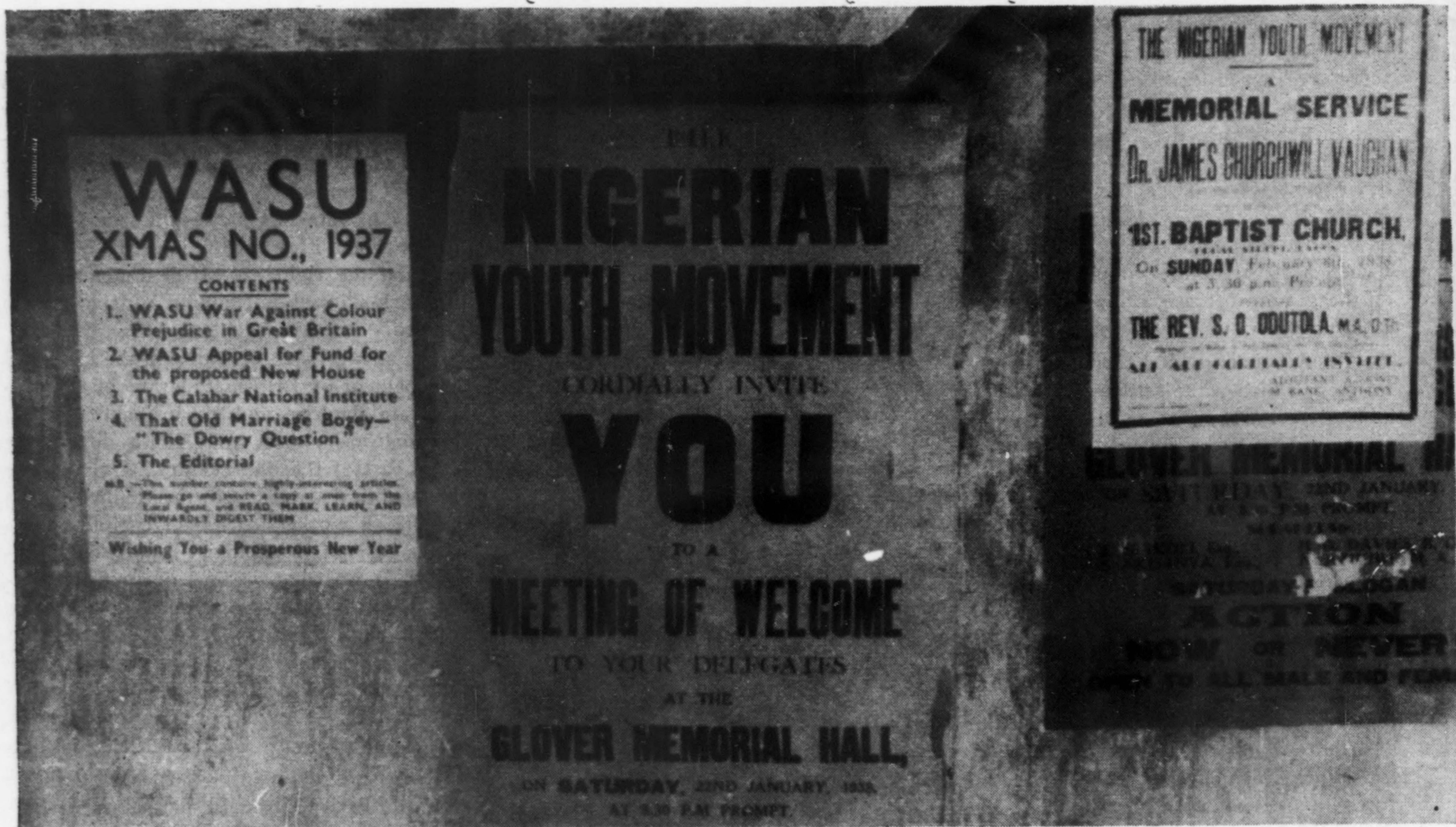
As Colonial Imperialism developed, the ideology of the White Man's Burden, made popular by writers like Kipling, permeated the British Labour movement which, unlike the European workers' movements, was never Marxist. And as the spoils of empire began to pour into England, ever larger sections of the trade union movement shared the benefits in the form of social reforms. The most influential top-flight leaders became so closely tied up with monopoly-capitalism that as time went on it became relatively easy for the ruling class to corrupt the entire movement by throwing the workers a few pennies from the tremendous profits derived from the ruthless exploitation of the Africans, Asiatics and other coloured slaves of the Empire. This economic-cum-ideological united front between white workers and white capitalists at the expense of coloured labour constitutes the historic basis of Reformism in the British Labour Party, which is dominated not by the intellectuals like Laski and Cripps, but by the trade union bosses, like Bevin and Citrine.

The influences which brought about the transformation from 19th century Chartist militancy to 20th Century Labour reformism are the result of the "inevitability of gradualness." It would be wrong to think that Labour's "sell-out" is a sudden affair. The process has been a gradual one; the logical corollary of the historical development of the British Labour movement in its imperialistic environment.

Ideology of British Workers

As early as 1882, Engels, the co-worker of Karl Marx, and himself a manufacturer in Manchester—the home of the Industrial Revolution—commented on the demoralising in-

¹ The Parliamentary Act which governs the Fund provides the sum of \$600,000,000 to be spent on improving education, public health, and other forms of social services for 60,000,000 natives. It works out at an average of about \$1 per head of the Colonial population!



Today Africans are alert to the problems and issues which confront them. Posters posted on a wall announcing meetings and services. Notice the WASU and Youth Movement posters. Three Lions

fluence of imperialist ideology on the British trade union movement. In a letter to the great German sociologist, Karl Kautsky, Engels wrote: "You ask me what the English workers think of Colonial policy? Exactly the same as they think about politics in general, the same as what the bourgeoisie think. There is no working class party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers merrily devour with them the fruits of the British colonial monopoly and of the British monopoly of the world market." While to Marx he wrote even earlier (1858): "The British working-class is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie. Of course, this is to a certain extent justifiable for a nation which is exploiting the whole world."

This prophecy of Engels has been fulfilled to the letter. For although the workers have broken away from the Liberal-Radicals and have created their own political organisation—the Labour Party—it has failed to emancipate them from the fetters of capitalism. And thanks to the narrow "bread and butter" outlook of the trade unionists, who finance and dominate the party, it reflects the outlook of a bourgeois proletariat and middle-class careerists with ambitions to sit in Parliament. This bourgeois approach to politics is manifested in matters of foreign policy and imperial colonial problems, especially India. In these spheres of government the trade union

leaders and caucus bosses have no definite programme of their own to set against that of the Tories and they hopelessly pursue a "continuity of Tory policy," in face of all Professor Laski's bleatings.

It is true that there are thousands of genuine Marxist Socialists, especially the younger men and women, within the Labour Party, who look upon it as an instrument for bringing about a Social Revolution, but the trade union leaders certainly have no such illusions. They have never been really converted to the Socialist objective as expounded by Marx. At best they are Fabian New Dealers.

Their aim has been to wring concessions from the capitalist class, and they have progressively come to the point of view that if the owning classes are to be in a position to accede to their economic demands, then the

capitalist system must be maintained, and where necessary, certain industries taken over by the State and reorganised after compensating their owners.

The British Colonial and Indian Empires are regarded as a world-wide trading concern owned by the imperialists and operated primarily in the interests of the capitalist class. But since the reforms—regular employment at high wages, good housing, social amenities, and other schemes outlined in Sir William Beveridge's report—desired by the white workers derive from the spoils of Empire, the trade union leaders have—whatever their original contentions might have been—been forced into the role of junior partners in the Imperial concern of John Bull Unlimited! They conclude, and rightly so, that a capitalist Britain without an Empire will be unable to provide the high standard of life which the workers now enjoy. The only alternative is for them to challenge openly the fundamental basis of the present capitalist-imperialistic system. This they are not prepared to do. Therefore, to expect the Labour Party to grant self-determination to India and the Colonies is to court disappointment.

Colonial peoples who have experienced the rule of two Labour Governments certainly have no illusions. While they expect more sympathy from a Labour Government than from a Tory administration, especially in the light of Labour's Colonial programme, they know that, whatever political and economic concessions they may receive at the hands of the Colonial Secretary, these will be the results of their own struggles.

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