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# Land & Liberty

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## EDITORIAL

### Wooring and Cooing at Brighton

THE two major British political parties held their annual conferences at Brighton last month—the Labour party from September 30 to October 4, and the Conservatives from October 10 to 12. Each had a tonic effect on delegates. Socialists left flushed with the certainty of victory at the next General Election which, they firmly believed, was all over bar the voting. Tories were elated that at last the Government appeared resolved to halt inflation. The prospect of either party providing the next government is extremely sobering to the uncommitted voter. For him the choice (where there is no middle-of-the-road Liberal candidate lightly tarred with both brushes) is between two “evils.” His decision is likely to be influenced very largely by whether he would be one of those who would foot the colossal additional tax bill which the Labour Party’s policies involve, or whether he would receive one or more of the glittering “gifts” they temptingly dangle before his eyes. Those who have learned the simple, self-evident lesson that the whole of economic activity takes place on land and involves the adapting of natural resources to satisfy human desires, and is intimately and directly affected by the system of land tenure, ask themselves yet once more why the political parties persistently ignore the land question. It has been too long in the political arena for them to plead ignorance. Are they then afraid of those who each year receive hundreds of millions of pounds land rent which belongs of right to the whole community? Or are they their friends? One hesitates to impute motives but what other conclusion can one reach?

The Labour Party’s major policy decisions related to housing, economic affairs, superannuation, nationalisation, foreign affairs, and colonial policy.

An emergency resolution of the Rent Act, tabled by the national executive and moved by Miss Alice Bacon, was adopted unanimously. She made it clear that this would not mean that rents would be reduced (as many delegates had thought and hoped) to what they were before the

act was passed. Tribunals would be established which would be guided by a definition of “fair and reasonable rent which will be incorporated in the act and which will take account of the conditions prevailing at the time.” Security of tenure would be restored to the houses which have been freed from control. Under the Labour proposal there would be no more evictions and no more decontrol. But all this was an interim measure which would be introduced immediately by the next Labour government. The plan to “municipalise” six million dwellings set out in *Homes for the Future* (reviewed L&L August-September, 1956) would be implemented as soon as possible. The housing problem could not be solved under private landlordism; the only permanent policy was to treat housing as a social service. Mr. Greenwood, in replying to the debate for the executive, unashamedly boasted that the Labour Party believed in sectional privilege—the party was announcing to the country that it was on the side of the tenants.

#### FAIR SHARES OF AUSTERITY

Not surprisingly there was unanimous agreement among Labour delegates in condemning the Government’s economic and financial policy. There could be no effective solution of economic problems while the present Government remained in office. Conference placed on record its “profound conviction” that that was so. Our troubles sprang from the abandonment of domestic planning and controls and military adventures abroad. Mr. Harold Wilson, Labour’s “Shadow” Chancellor, spoke happily to a motion on those lines. Labour’s alternative to “these lurchings of financial policy, first full speed ahead, then full stop” was a purposive, Socialist policy, with less essential production and investment held back so that the essential could “roar ahead.” That meant selective, discriminatory controls. Mr. Wilson did not find it necessary to add the obvious, namely that his policy would give

great happiness to a hoard of professional economists and the bureaucrats, and would result in a shortage of consumer goods at high prices. In effect he invited the country to turn back the clock to the grey days of "fair shares" of austerity.

#### PENSIONS PLAN—A VOTE WINNER?

The "something for nothing" pensions proposal (see L&L, September, 1957) were accepted by a large majority. There were a number of criticisms and suggestions as to how the scheme might be "improved" but delegates were convinced that the plan was a handsome vote winner. Two amendments were defeated. Moving one for Thirsk and Malton which called for a scheme financed wholly by taxation, Miss Joan Maynard said that under the present proposal the man who had earned £20 or £30 a week and who had had greater opportunities to save for old age, would receive a larger pension than the man who had been paid only £7, and who had not been able to save at all. Another speaker, moving the Carshalton amendment which called for some form of additional contributions by the higher income groups, pointed out that in effect under the scheme as it stood the lower-paid workers would be subsidising the higher paid.

#### STEALTH—OR RICH RED BLOOD?

"Nationalisation by the back door" (see L&L, September 1957) was accepted by 5,309,000 votes to 1,276,000 after a long and sometimes acrimonious debate. A motion inviting conference to reject the policy document, *Industry and Society*, because it deviated from the principles of socialism, and asking for a list of the industries which the next Labour Government would nationalise, was defeated by 5,383,000 votes to 1,442,000. Mr. Harold Wilson, opening the debate on behalf of the executive, assured delegates that firms which "failed the nation," for any reason (among those he mentioned was "abuse" of monopoly power) would be nationalised. Answering the charge that the document was vague, he said that the reason was not electoral. It was impossible to be more precise at this stage. The policy would take the party further along the road it had started upon between 1945 and 1950. It opened up new paths, and strengthened and widened the Socialist sector of the economy.

The motion to oppose the executive's plan was moved by Mr. J. Campbell, general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, and seconded by Mr. M. Edelman, M.P. for Coventry North. Mr. Campbell regarded the policy as being designed to consolidate capitalism. He wanted the "rich, red blood of Socialist objective" injected into the document. Mr. Edelman wanted the Labour Party to "invest in socialism," not to "invest in capitalism."

Mr. Herbert Morrison and Mr. E. Shinwell, both Cabinet Ministers during the post-war Labour government, spoke sharply and bitterly against the proposal. Among other opponents were Mr. P. Hopwood (Peterborough) who thought the document would give socialism a permanent

vested interest in the continuity of capitalism, and Mr. G. Fear (Crosby) who claimed that the policy would transform the Labour party from a socialist party into a merely reformist party.

#### A RESENTFUL TACTICIAN

Mr. Gaitskell asked conference to support the proposal. People would not vote for nationalisation if they were told they should do so "because that is socialism." They must be given specific reasons. The other policies which conference had adopted would keep the next Labour Government busy for at least two or three years. It would not be practicable to adopt a firm nationalisation programme and, what was more, such a programme would frighten off the all-important marginal voter. He resented suggestions made during the debate that the executive was abandoning socialist principles. They were not.

Mrs. Castle, for the executive, gave a specific pledge that the next Labour Chancellor would allocate one per cent of the national income—something like £100 million—for Colonial development.

The Government's plans for so-called reform of local government finance were condemned in a motion moved by Mr. John Horner (Fire Brigades Union) who repeated what he had said at the T.U.C. conference the previous month. An emergency motion from Montgomerie was remitted to the executive. It urged that the next Labour Government should inquire into local government finance and consider especially a local income tax. The Conference appears to have given no thought for the rating of land values as the proper means of paying for municipal government.

## A Brighton Fable

### Foolish Sheep and Wild Dogs

INTERRUPTING their endless struggle with the well-covered Merinoes, the marginal mountain sheep assembled in a fold by the foreshore to discuss tactics. The young ram who had recently assumed their leadership unfolded a brilliantly clever plan. "Let us," he baa-ed, "reduce our sorties on the wicked Merinoes. Let us buy our way into their pen, imitating their ways, cross-breeding with them, and nibbling at their good rich grass."

"Braaaa-vo," bleated the more statesmanlike among them. But some of the older sheep cried out, "we are betraaaa-yed." "Not so," said their leader, solemnly reaffirming his own belief—which all present echoed—that their flock would remain on the bare mountain side until the Merinoes had been utterly liquidated. "By this plan we shall win the support of those of our kin who have hitherto not engaged the hated enemy." Five out of every six sheep present having agreed, they wandered back to their bare mountain top, baa-ing the "Red Fleece" as they went. They spared neither a sideways glance nor a thought for the wild dogs they passed, romping in a fat, sweet meadow. And the dogs, descendants of those who long ago had driven the sheep up the mountain, returned the compliment. Only the Merinoes trembled.

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