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EAST OF SUEZ

We Must Be Told

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"The enormous growth of armaments in Europe, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them—it was these that made war inevitable—This, it seemed to me, is the truest reading of history, and the lesson that the present should be learning from the past in the interests of future peace, the warning to be handed on to those who come after us."

Lord George of Fallodon.

In 1950 that brilliant writer on international affairs (R. Palme Dutt) wrote on . . .

"Britain's Crisis of Empire"

In the course of his work he drew attention to the worsening economic position of England and mentioned her ultimate complete dependence on the U.S.A.

He quoted from speeches by leading statesmen in England and the U.S.A. He quoted from articles in the Conservative Journals of the U.K.

He drew attention to the new and emerging countries.

He mentioned the important part Asia would play in the Councils of the world.

He said Imperialism as we knew it was finished.

The people of Asia and Africa were not going to tolerate the domination of the Imperialist Powers.

He showed the extent of American trade penetration, in millions of dollars, in the countries of the British Empire between 1938 and 1947. In those years in Australia alone exports from the U.S.A. to Australia increased by 283 per cent.

He quoted from an article in 1940 by John McCormack in "America and World Mastery" which reads—

"THE NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE

"EVERY DAY MAKES IT MORE CERTAIN THAT THE UNITED STATES MUST NOT ONLY PUT HERSELF AT THE HEAD OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE TO WIN THIS WAR OF WHICH A FREE WORLD IS THE PRIZE BUT THAT, AFTER HAVING WON THE WORLD, THE UNITED STATES MUST BE PREPARED TO RUN IT. THEREFORE, TO THE EXTENT THAT ENGLAND GROWS WEAK, THE UNITED STATES MUST GROW STRONG. AS ENGLAND'S GRASP ON WORLD POWER SHRINKS, AMERICAN DOMINION MUST EXPAND. AND WHERE ENGLAND'S DOMINANCE ENDS, AMERICAN COERCION MUST BEGIN."

The number of important statements he has collected on this question shows the research that was necessary before the

book was published. Among the statements quoted was one by Mao-Tse-Tung who said—

"The American reactionery has a heavy burden. He must sustain the reactionaries of the entire world and if he cannot sustain them, the house will fall down. It is a house with one pillar."

My purpose in drawing attention to this brilliant work is because what he envisaged has come to pass both in regard to the dominance of the U.S.A. over Britain and the crisis of Empire.

It is the latter we have to be concerned about. The reason for our concern has to be based on the need for the people of Australia to be informed by their Government of the Secret Agreements that have been entered into with the U.S.A. and British Governments, not only in regard to Vietnam but as the British Government says—"East of Suez".

We cannot ignore the frequent visits to this country by Government leaders from the U.S.A. and U.K. and the innumerable visits overseas by our Minister for External Affairs and his failure to make any statement of importance on the reason for, or the result of, his mission to other countries. To deny that there is intense diplomatic activity and that Australia is receiving more attention from foreign Governments than at any stage in our history is to deny the obvious.

The purpose of this attention is what is causing me concern. I feel if the Australian Labor Movement gave more consideration to this matter than we are doing the time spent would be of the utmost value to the people we represent. My concern, nay my alarm, is heightened after the study I have made of the British Government's White Paper on Defence Estimates for 1966, and the statement made in this document in regard to Australia. It reads—

"Middle East and Far East—

But the load must be more equitably shared than in the past; and we shall aim to make significant economies by deploying our forces more realistically in accordance with the political circumstances in which they are likely to operate.

"South Arabia is due to become independent by 1968, and we do not think it appropriate that we should maintain defence facilities there after that happens. We therefore intend to withdraw our forces from the Aden base at that time, and we have informed the Federal Government.

Its effectiveness will turn largely on the arrangements we can make with our Commonwealth partners and other allies in the coming years.

"Against the day when it may no longer be possible for us to use these facilities freely, we have begun to discuss with the Government of Australia, the practical possibilities of our having military facilities in that country if necessary."

Since this White Paper was issued the British Minister for Defence and the Vice-President of the U.S.A. have visited Australia. That they were here at the same time may be a coincidence. I do not subscribe to that view.

Pointing out the problems of manpower that confront them where men in all three services have to work long hours in difficult conditions and serve for long periods abroad, often without their families the White Paper says—

"In these conditions, both recruitment and re-engagement have fallen short of the targets set; this in turn has increased the strain on our already over stretched services. It is estimated that in 1966-67 the armed forces will need about 40,700 male entrants."

We must note the similarity with Australia. That is why our Government has imposed military conscription on the youth of this country. That is why military conscription has to be resisted by all freedom loving Australians.

The White Paper goes on to say—

"... we set out not only to decide which political commitments we must give up or share with others, but also to limit the scale of military tasks which may be imposed by the commitments which remain."

We are entitled to ask to what extent we are involved in the sharing of those military commitments.

The Australian Labor Party must demand from the Government an answer to this question.

I intend to confine myself to giving what I regard as the most important quotations from the White Paper so far as Australia is concerned. These quotations will enable our members to understand my concern at the developments that are taking place and which are being withheld from us by our Government.

The people of England and Australia are being told they must curtail their demands for wage increases, social services, housing, etc. due to the crisis in the Balance of Payments. No wonder when we have figures showing the staggering amount of money that is being spent on Defence.

The White Paper says:—

"As we emphasised in the National Plan to continue spending over 7 per cent of the Gross National Product on

defence would be seriously damaging to Britain's economy, at a time when we need a rapid increase in production so that we can export more and import less; when industry must be re-equipped and modernised; and when we are running into a shortage of manpower.

"We plan, therefore, to bring our defence expenditure down to a stable level at about 6 per cent. of the Gross National Product by 1969-70, thereby improving our ability to compete successfully with other exporting countries."

"In other words, we intend that our programme three years from now should not cost more in real terms than that of two years ago.

"This means a reduction of £400m. or 16 per cent. on the expenditure which the previous Government contemplated for 1969-70."

OUTSIDE EUROPE.

"Nevertheless, to maintain all our current military tasks and capabilities outside Europe would impose an unacceptable strain on our overstretched forces, and bear too heavily both on our domestic economy and on our reserves of foreign exchange.

"Britain will not undertake major operations of war except in co-operation with allies. We will not accept an obligation to provide another country with military assistance unless it is prepared to provide us with the facilities we need to make such assistance effective in time. Finally, there will be no attempt to maintain defence facilities in an independent country against its wishes."

"We have a direct responsibility for Gibraltar and a defence agreement with Malta."

There are many other statements in this White Paper which indicate to me that the purpose of the discussions between the Australian Government, the Government of the U.K. and the U.S.A. is to make Australia a base to protect British and U.S. capital investments in areas east of Suez. This will add to our defence expenditure and can be regarded as an unfriendly act by the people of Asia.

This must be resisted at all costs and the Australian people must be told what will confront them if our Government agrees to turn Australia into a military base to suit the financiers and other monopoly groups in Europe.

BRITISH T.U.C.

The British T.U.C. also expressed concern at the mounting costs for defence and many delegates were outspoken in their demand for a halt to this expenditure.

The decision taken reads:—

“Congress declares that the present level of expenditure for our Armed Forces is incompatible with our aim to make increased resources available for social advance and economic development. It therefore welcomes the Government’s intention to review defence expenditure with a view to its reduction and draws particular attention to the heavy burden on the national income involved by the maintenance of outmoded military bases abroad. Congress asks the General Council to take such steps as seem appropriate to ensure that detailed advanced planning is undertaken in order to ensure continuity of employment and enable industry to convert to peaceful manufactures with a minimum of difficulty.”

The delegate who submitted the motion among other things said:—

“The present level of defence expenditure is incompatible with our aim to make increased resources available for social advance and economic development. In any case this colossal expenditure is in no way necessary for the preservation of our peace and security.

“The 1965 Budget provided for an estimated defence expenditure of £2,120,000,000—in monetary terms an increase of six per cent. over that for the previous year.

“The detailed estimates reveal that 5s. in every pound of income was to be allocated to military expenditure, whereas only threepence in every pound was allocated to housing and one penny in every pound to promoting local employment. We need more houses, schools and hospitals.”

“FOR THE COST OF ONE CHIEFTAIN BATTLE TANK WE COULD BUILD 50 COUNCIL HOUSES; FOR THE COST OF ONE V-BOMBER WE COULD BUILD SEVEN NEW SECONDARY SCHOOLS; FOR THE COST OF ONE HUNTER KILLER SUBMARINE WE COULD BUILD NINE NEW 500-BED HOSPITALS.

“The Minister of Labour rebuked us for living above our means. It certainly is not the thousands of unemployed or the millions of old age pensioners or the millions of women who have not yet got equal pay, or the millions of lower paid workers who earn less than the statistical average of £18/18/- a week.

“We are still spending a higher proportion of our national wealth on defence than any other country of our size in this world.”

“Since the end of the second World War, we have spent nearly £30,000 million on what was termed defence.

“The preservation of peace was due to the untiring efforts of millions of ordinary men and women throughout the world.”

“IF OUR POLITICAL ALLIANCES COMPEL US TO MAINTAIN A BURDEN WHICH RUINS OUR ECONOMY, THEN WE MUST TELL OUR ALLIES THAT WE CANNOT CONTINUE SUCH ALLIANCES.”

Another delegate said:—

“The problem of defence costs is a problem that affects the toilers of the world, because it is their labour and their industrial intelligence that creates this mountain of wealth which is going in the costs of defence.

“A lot of our defence expenditure is based on the past, based on the situation when we had a great empire, and the military men have built into the defence organisation a fundamental resistance to any reduction in expenditure.”

“In the new Parliament it is my privilege to chair a committee that deals with defence expenditure, and I am appalled at the way the people’s money is wasted on this aspect of Government expenditure.

“Twenty-six per cent. of all Government expenditure goes on defence; 7.2 per cent. of our national income every year goes on defence. We spend £320 million a year (without weapons) on overseas bases, excluding the Army of the Rhine. That is, one-sixteenth of all Government expenditure goes on overseas bases, without weapons, one-fourth of our defence expenditure.

“In the last ten years we have spent on the Army of the Rhine £700 million of the people’s money, and today the costs of the Army of the Rhine are running at the rate of £200 million every year.

“We employ in Germany 35,000 civilians, who do an economic job, it costs us £90 million a year in German currency. That represents one-eighth of our deficit in our trade with Europe.

“We spend in Singapore every year under normal conditions £100 million. It is suggested that our forces are there to defend British interests. If you accept that view, British capital investments in the whole of Malaysia are only £145 million so in 18 months we have spent in defending these vested interests more than the total capital investment of the whole of that area.”

“We spend in the Persian Gulf £150 million a year. In Aden in Bahrein in Kuwait, in the Trucial States we are supposed to be defending our oil interests in the Persian Gulf. The

Americans take much more oil out of the Persian Gulf than we do. The Japanese take 30 per cent. of their oil from the Persian Gulf, and the French take 20 per cent.

"The Americans, the Japanese and the French have no armies in the Persian Gulf, they do not need an army to defend their oil because the people want to sell their oil to whoever wants to buy it, and you do not need massive armies in order to defend products and raw materials which people want to sell.

"We are in the Persian Gulf, to defend the rulers and sheikhs and sultans against the demands of the people of democracy and the right to run their own governments on the basis of free elections.

"No labour government which believes in international socialist principles can maintain the discredited, outmoded foreign policy that they inherited from the Tories.

"There cannot be extensive social advance in this country until we are prepared to make massive cuts in unnecessary military expenditure."

I was impressed when I read the speeches of the delegates.

I am convinced the British Labour Government will have to reduce its expenditure on defence.

We must be sure we are not called upon to increase our expenditure which in 1965-66 amounted to £385,921,000 an increase of £81,430,000 or about 27 per cent. greater than the actual expenditure in 1964-65. Of the increase about £58,000,000 will be spent within Australia and £23,000,000 overseas."