15

LABOUR PARTY TALKING POINTS

29 June 1944

Price Twopence

GENEVA—SO FAR

Meeting in Berlin earlier this year the Foreign Ministers of Britain, Russia, America, and France decided to convene a conference at Geneva. This conference was to discuss Asian affairs. It opened on 26 April and is still going on. There are two big issues before it.

One is to try and bring the war in Indo-China to a stop. The other is to try and convert the Armistice in Korea into a durable peace, and to bring about the unification of Korea. On 23 June 1954, Mr. Eden gave an interim report on the Conference to the House of Commons. There was a day's debate on the matter, but very little controversy. There was general agreement from all quarters of the House with Mr. Eden's actions so far. There was an equally general hope that it would be possible to achieve some settlement in the Far East.

This Conference is important, but it is also very complex. Despite its difficulties we must look at it and see what is happening. On its outcome may depend peace or war for a large part of the world.

A South-East Asia Pact?

The Conference began at a time when the French military position in Indo-China was very unstable. Alarm was expressed in many quarters that should the Communists win a major military victory in Indo-China then the whole military position for South-East Asia would be endangered. Mr. Dulles, the United States Secretary of State, flew to Europe and had conversations with Mr. Eden. As a result of these conversa-

tions Mr. Eden announced in the House of Commons on 13 April 1954, that Britain was ready to take part with other countries:

> '. . . in an examination of the possibility of collective defence within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations to assure the peace, security, and freedom of South-East Asia and the Western Pacific.' House of Commons, 13 April 1954.

In reply Mr. Attlee pointed out that the independent Asian nations would be vitally concerned in this pact if it materialized. He said:

> **'The essential thing is that this should be free to all the peoples of Asia, and should not in any way be represented, as it may be misrepresented, as a defence of an obsolete colonialism.'** House of Commons, 13 April 1954.

There were various criticisms of this United States initiative, as it was feared that it might prejudice the Geneva Conference before it started. Mr. Eden made it quite clear that he was merely committed to the examination of possibilities, and that the future membership was a matter to be considered.

Mr. Eden outlined further developments on this matter in the debate on 23 June. He said:

> 'When, therefore, I learned that an initial gathering of a number of Powers was to be held in Washington on 20 April, it seemed to me that this fact must inevitably pre-judge the question of membership at the outset, and I thought it important not to do this. I said so, and the meeting was accordingly transformed into one of the Powers concerned with the Korean Conference.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

Mr. Eden summed up his attitude towards any such defence pact in South-East Asia by saying:

> 'It could be a future safeguard, but it is not a present panacea.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

An Asian Locarno

A new suggestion was thrown out by Mr. Eden during this debate. This was that we should have some type of 'Locarno' pact for the whole of South-East Asia. In Mr. Eden's words:

'We could have a reciprocal arrangement in which both sides take part.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

If such a pact came into existence it would mean that both sides would guarantee to take action against any aggressor in that area. An advantage might be that it would also enable the type of pact that was originally suggested to come into force. There would be a possibility of having a South-East Asia defensive alliance similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It should be pointed out that this is already matched on the other side by the Chinese-Soviet Treaty.

Armed Intervention

Also involved in the atmosphere surrounding the Conference was the battle raging around the fortress of Dien Bien Phu. In certain quarters the British Government had been attacked for not agreeing to armed intervention in Indo-China to save Dien Bien Phu. Mr. Eden gave the reasons why this was not done:

'First, we were advised that air action alone could not have been effective. Secondly, any such military intervention could have destroyed the chances of a settlement at Geneva. And thirdly, it might well have led to a general war in Asia.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

Labour supports this attitude. Such intervention, said Herbert Morrison:

'would have been not only undesirable but impracticable . . . it would not have been tolerated by British public opinion.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

Let us turn to the conference and examine the two subjects of Indo-China and Korea separately.

I — INDO-CHINA

First we must be clear about the terms we use. Indo-China is not a unit in the sense that it was one country before the French occupied it in the last century. In the North and along the coast line there is the country of Viet Nam, and inland the

two separate kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos. They are very different areas with very different problems.

There has been a civil war raging in Indo-China since 1946. The background to this conflict is long and complicated. Briefly, towards the end of the nineteenth century the French occupied the area we now know as Indo-China. The period of French rule saw considerable material advances.

During the period 1941 to 1945 the Japanese secured control of the whole area. At first they made no attempt to gain local nationalist support, but operated through the Vichy French administration. Early in 1945 they installed Bao Dai as Emperor of Viet Nam.

Meanwhile a local resistance movement had grown up under the leadership of an Indo-Chinese Communist Ho Chi Minh. By the time of the Japanese surrender, this resistance movement had quite large forces. The People's National Liberation Committee, as it was called, controlled considerable areas of the country. After the Japanese surrender Bao Dai abdicated as Emperor, but became political adviser to the National Liberation Committee.

British, French, and Chinese (Nationalist) troops entered Indo-China to disarm the Japanese after the Surrender. In 1946, British and Chinese troops withdrew, leaving the French in possession.

Agreements were reached between Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia on the one side, and France on the other regarding their position within the French Union. At the end of 1946 the agreement between France and Viet Nam broke down and fighting started.

Bao Dai came back as Emperor of Viet Nam in 1949. The three countries of Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia are now Associated States of the French Union, and have a wide measure of independence.

The original resistance movement was nationalist under Communist leadership. Since the break with the French the Communist leadership has become stronger and stronger, particularly after the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949.

The rebels in Indo-China are called Viet-minh. They receive considerable support from the Chinese Communists in the shape of arms, equipment, etc. At the moment they hold considerable areas in the North.

Therefore, we have, in the war, on one side the Chinese-helped Viet-minh, and on the other France and her three associated states of Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Down to Business

The section of the Geneva Conference dealing with Indo-China is attended by France, Britain, U.S.S.R., America, the three associated states, and the rebels, Viet-minh. Discussions on Indo-China started on 8 May.

The conference quickly got down to business, unlike many of the post-war international conferences. There was practically no wrangling over procedure, and it was soon agreed that Mr. Eden and Mr. Molotov should be alternate chairmen.

M. Bidault presented the French terms the first day the conference dealt with Indo-China (8 May 1954). Very briefly, these provided for the concentration of forces in agreed areas, and the freeing of prisoners. This would be supervised internationally. The agreement would be guaranteed by the nations at the conference. The Viet-minh forces would be withdrawn from Laos and Cambodia.

The next notable event was two days later on 10 May. This was the putting forward of the Viet-minh terms.

These proposals included a demand for the recognition of the 'governments' of the rebel movements in Laos and Cambodia, withdrawal of foreign troops and elections to be conducted by 'advisory conferences' of representatives of both sides.

Laos and Cambodia

The claim that the 'resistance movements' in Laos and Cambodia should be recognized was very thin. These so-called 'resistance movements' consist in the main of Viet-minh troops

sent into the country. Largely for religious and historical reasons Viet-minh and Communism have little appeal in Laos and Cambodia. In fact, of so little account are these 'resistance movements' that their Governments have not been recognized by any of the Communist countries. As a general rule Communist countries are very quick to recognize such movements. For example, Russia has recognized Viet-minh since 1950.

The terms of Viet-minh outlined above were generally considered to be unsatisfactory. They seem to ensure that Communist governments will be set up even where they have little support.

After attempts by Mr. Eden to obtain clarification of the proposals, the next progress was on the 14 May. Mr. Molotov made his usual speech but conceded one point. This was that the mixed French and Viet-minh Commissions should be supervised by a commission of neutral nations.

This was followed by a period of confused proposal and counter proposals turning to a large extent on the position of Laos and Cambodia.

Military Talks

Not until 20 May was any further significant step forward taken. Then agreement was reached on a British proposal. This proposal was: Representatives of the two commands should meet immediately in Geneva and contacts should be established on the spot; they should study the dispositions of forces to be made upon the cessation of hostilities, beginning with the question of regrouping areas in Viet Nam; they should report their findings and recommendations to the conference as soon as possible.

It will be noted that the proposal does not mention Laos and Cambodia, and their position was left to be settled later.

The net effect of Britain's proposal was that military discussions could begin and need not wait upon the end of the conference. This would facilitate the signing of an armistice if political agreement were reached.

Who Are The Neutrals?

Mr. Gromyko clarified Mr. Molotov's idea of a neutral Supervisory Commission on 31 May 1954. He proposed that it should consist of Polish, Czech, Indian, and Pakistani representatives.

Apparently, Mr. Gromyko wanted it to consist of two neutral states and two states that would inevitably side with Viet-minh! An important point here was that it was considered by the Russians that the Commission should arrive at decisions 'collectively.' In other words, one country would have the veto over the others at all times.

The composition of this proposed Commission was not acceptable and Mr. Dinh of Viet Nam proposed that the United Nations should be asked to form a Commission. There was argument too during this time on the powers of the neutral nations' commission. The Communist side insisted that it should have powers equal to the mixed French and Viet Nam Commission, while the Western side felt that the neutrals should have the final word.

The 'Colombo' Powers

Mr. Eden made a very important contribution on 8 June. He suggested that the five 'Colombo' powers should act as the neutral Commission. These are the independent Asian powers of Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Burma, and Indonesia. Many people felt that such a Commission would be really neutral and unaffected by either the Western or the Communist block of nations.

Unfortunately, Mr. Eden's proposals were not acceptable. The Chinese Prime Minister, Mr. Chou En-lai, rejected the scheme on 9 June 1954. He made it clear that Communist states should serve on the International Commission.

Deadlock

This then was the situation at Geneva. Apparently deadlock had been reached on three points. These points were:

1. That Laos and Cambodia should be considered separately due to the unrepresentative nature of the 'resistance movements' within their borders.

2. Whether the composition of the neutral Supervisory Commission should be of the neutral Colombo Powers or include Communist states.

3. That the neutral nations' Supervisory Commission should have power over the other mixed Commissions supervising the Armistice.

There was general pessimism at Geneva and throughout the world, and the talks were expected to peter out or be adjourned. The matter was complicated by the fact that on 13 June 1954 the French Government had been defeated in the Chamber of Deputies and had resigned.

New Proposals

This was the point of extreme deadlock. It seems to have been broken by the joint action of Mr. Eden and Mr. Chou En-lai, the Chinese Prime Minister. On the morning of 16 June 1954 Mr. Chou En-lai and Mr. Eden conferred. In the afternoon of the same day the Chinese put forward new proposals.

These new proposals were a radical change from their previous position. They proposed that all foreign troops should withdraw from Laos and Cambodia although those two countries should be permitted to import arms for their own defence. The term 'foreign troops' seems to include the Viet-minh rebel forces. Two days later, in discussions, the Chinese and Viet-minh admitted that there were Viet-minh 'volunteers' there.

This was a recognition of the fact that Laos and Cambodia are different from the rest of Indo-China. Having admitted this the Chinese can't go back. The West was right to maintain that these two countries should be treated separately from the remainder of Indo-China.

Mr. Molotov made further concessions when he suggested alterations in his own proposals for the powers and composition of the neutral Commissions. First of all he felt that the neutral Commissions could arrive at decisions by a majority vote except in certain cases. The cases he wished to except were those whereby an action would lead to a breach of the

cease-fire likely to lead to a resumption of the war. Obviously this could be very widely interpreted, but it was a welcome suggestion.

His second concession was on the composition of the neutral Commission. To his original proposal of India, Pakistan, Poland, and Czechoslovakia he was prepared to add Indonesia. Alternatively he was prepared to accept a three-member Commission of India, Poland, and Indonesia. Or, instead of Indonesia, any other of the 'Colombo' powers.

This was the situation on 23 June when Mr. Eden made his statement in the House of Commons. Progress had been made while, as Mr. Eden said, there are three sets of military discussions either proceeding or about to begin. One is for Viet Nam, which has been going on for about three weeks, and the other two are for Laos and Cambodia. All three have been asked to report to the Conference at the latest by 10 July. It will then be for the Conference to pronounce upon their work.

2 — KOREA

The other subject discussed at the Geneva Conference was the future of Korea. The first proposal came from the South Korean representative. On 27 April 1954 he put forward South Korea's views. These were that there was no need for new elections in South Korea but that free elections should be held in the North. The North Koreans replied with a set of proposals which ran counter to those of South Korea. There were to be elections throughout the whole of Korea for a new Assembly which would unite North and South. These elections would be supervised by a Commission appointed by the present Assemblies of North and South Korea. All foreign troops were to be withdrawn from Korea within six months.

The real point of difference was the supervision of those elections. The Western world wished them to be under the supervision of the United Nations. The Communists wished them to be under the supervision of a Commission selected from the present Korean Assemblies.

After various other discussions Mr. Eden put forward five proposals. This was on 13 May 1954. The proposals can be summarized as: (1) elections for an all-Korean Government; (2) the elections to take account of South Korea's much larger population; (3) elections to be universal, secret, and free; (4) supervision by United Nations members drawn from an agreed panel; (5) foreign troops to be withdrawn once security is restored.

Supervising the Elections

These proposals effectively narrowed down the discussion to a disagreement upon whether or not the elections would be supervised by the United Nations. The South Koreans, themselves, put forward slightly different proposals on 22 May. At the same time, the North Koreans stuck to their point of no United Nations supervision. A slight advance was made in that the North Koreans seemed to accept that the all-Korean National Assembly visualized should be proportionate to the population after the election.

However, they still took no account of the differing population in their proposals for the Commission to supervise the election. Mr. Molotov re-emphasized the Communist position on 5 June 1954. He did this by putting forward five principles, which really left out the fundamental issue of United Nations supervision.

Still no progress was made and finally, on 11 June, Mr. Eden summarized progress so far. He said that:

> 'No real progress had been made on the two issues clearly before the conference: the authority of the United Nations and free elections. "If no way can be found of resolving these two main differences," he said solemnly, "then we shall have to admit that this conference has not been able to complete its task".' *The Times*, 14 June 1954.

The conference took Mr. Eden at his word. On the 15 June the delegates noted the various proposals that had been laid before them and broke up with the current situation unresolved.

3 — LABOUR'S VIEWS

In general, Labour supports Mr. Eden's efforts at Geneva and his stand against a premature pact for South-East Asia.

Mr. Attlee pointed out what should be Britain's concern:

> **'Our interest is simply to get such conditions in Asia as will enable its various peoples to develop harmoniously as free nations, taking their full part in the world.'** House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

On Korea, Mr. Attlee joined the general regret that no progress had been made, but felt that both in Korea and Indo-China we must stand by our proposal for free elections under proper conditions. Mr. Attlee added:

> 'Indo-China, I would describe as part of the process of bringing to an end obsolete colonialism.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

Herbert Morrison pointed to the root causes of the Indo-China war and some future dangers when he said:

> 'I think that the French Parliament and Government should have realized, as did the Labour Government in this country between 1945 and 1950, that the old western imperialism had gone. That was why we left India, Pakistan, and Ceylon; . . . we left because we believed that it was morally and ethically right.
>
> 'Having said that the old Western colonialism is dying, or dead, I would add . . . that we of the Labour Party have no desire for the development of a new Eastern or Communist colonialism or imperialism, and there are possibilities of that.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

However, we must aim to end the war and our general objective must be to achieve a settlement in Asia. In many ways the clue to the problem lies, as Mr. Attlee said:

> 'In keeping in close touch with our Indian friends.' House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

Labour's wise and moral act in granting freedom to the peoples of India is now bearing fruit. Without the influence of the independent Asian nations peace might be much farther distant in Asia.

Top-level Talks

Since the debate, the Prime Minister and Mr. Eden have flown to Washington for discussions with President Eisenhower. It is good that these top-level discussions should take place. Such discussions help to clear up differences between us and our American allies and to prepare future policy.

Mr. Attlee hoped there would be talks with Mr. Malenkov as well as with President Eisenhower.

> **'I should like to see that take place here in London. After all, it is a very central situation. Why should we always have to go abroad? . . . It would be an enormous advantage if in this country, in the centre of the Commonwealth, fixed between those two great land masses, there should be a meeting of at least the three—perhaps a wider meeting, but at any rate of the three—leaders of their countries at the present time to deal with those vital questions . . . which lie at the back of so much of the fear which obsesses the world.'** House of Commons, 23 June 1954.

EDITORIAL NOTE

This issue of TALKING POINTS has been held up a few days to enable the important debate in the House of Commons on 23 June to be included.

TALKING POINTS

(Price Twopence)

Edited by the Labour Party Research Department. Annual Subscription (24 issues): 1 copy, 6s.; 10 copies, £1; 25 copies, £2 10s.; 100 copies, £8. All orders and communications should be addressed to the Labour Publications Department, Transport House, Smith Square, London, S.W.1.

PUBLISHED BY THE LABOUR PARTY, TRANSPORT HOUSE, SMITH SQUARE, S.W.1. PRINTED BY VICTORIA HOUSE PRINTING COMPANY (T.U. ALL DEPTS.), 185-188 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.1. VH8386