

from the London End

## New Lamps for Old !

IN preparation for its annual conference this year the Labour Party has been issuing a series of policy statements outlining labour's "new" views on a number of old problems. Pertinent among these policy pronouncements are the statements on 'Personal Freedom', 'Equality' and what is called 'Plural Societies in the Colonies'. The first two by the very nature of the questions touched raise some fundamental aspects of Labour's philosophy and the last (on the colonies) puts to test the party's integrity and sincerity. Some commentators have hailed these statements, particularly the one on equality, as "testaments" of the new Labour leadership. Further "testaments" are to be issued on questions of public ownership and education.

The statement on personal freedom is neither fundamental nor new in ideas. It attempts to examine the best ways in which civil liberties may be preserved in an increasingly collectivist environment. It does so without suggesting that the broader, more basic freedom to live and to live well was in the eyes of the fathers of British socialism, a junction of the extent to which public ownership of the means of production was achieved. Instead it believes in the sufficiency of the "mixed economy": full employment and the welfare State has widened personal freedom. And that is all. In this sense the statement typifies the outlook of the Right trend in the Labour movement the trend that goes under the name of Socialist Union and whose views are said to be shared by Mr Hugh Gaitskill.

The largely pedestrian examination of the question of personal freedom looks very much like having been inspired by some contemporary textbook on public administration or government. It relates what it calls the "dilemma" of advancing majority rights without infringing minority rights and goes on to show the extent to which infringements of Civil liberties have taken place from administrative tribunals, delegated legislation and the growth of a state bureaucracy. The "dilemma" is however a peculiar and almost unexpected one for Labour; for in another of the statements (viz 'On Equality') it is shown that the minority in British society constitute that "one

per cent of the population who own something like half the nation's wealth". And it is here that the indubitable impression is obtained that Labour's present conceptions of freedom have strong bourgeois characteristics and may be this is not without explicit design. After all the "twentieth century socialism" group believe very firmly that the "mixed economy" should be the limit of public ownership and thus of their socialism; hence their now new cry "liberty, equality, mixed economy".

### On Equality

This outlook of Labour is possibly more clearly brought out in the statement 'On Equality'. Here the impression is given that the State must be the instrument, not for effecting a social transformation, but for containing the trend towards economic and social inequality. Unlike the fathers of British Socialist thought, who believed that inequality was an inherent feature of capitalism and that equality in all its aspects was only a practical feasibility after the social transformation, the contemporary belief envisages "full employment" and the "welfare state" as having what it termed "the corrective influence" on Capitalism's consequences. The statement observes that "left by itself the Capitalist system distributes incomes in a manner that, is manifestly unjust a capitalist income structure stretches from well below the poverty line at the bottom to the high and excessive rewards on top". But, says the statement, the correct influences brought about by State action via progressive taxation and the social services have to all intents and purposes been sufficient. Thus in the event of Labour's return to power, these same corrective influences will be employed to stem the inevitable inequalities of Capitalism. And having said that, the statement goes on to lay an undue amount of stress on the social inequalities that emerge from the present education system a system, which it says promotes the gravest degree of inequality in British society. Actual proposals on the reform of the education system is apparently being worked out in another statement to be issued. The inequalities that arise from capital gains and inherited income are to be largely contained by the proposal for an expenditure tax.

An interesting rationale for this estimation of the problem of equality is given by the Labourite C A R Crosland in the current issue of Encounter. He distinguishes between "economic politics" and "social politics". The former describes a situation in which a Marxist analysis would be plausible growing pauperisation and mass unemployment. The latter covers the situation of prosperity and rising incomes when attention is diverted from economic to social issues. Mr Crosland explains that in circumstances of prosperity the income hierarchy gets out of alignment with the class or social hierarchy. The latter are based on socially recognized evaluations that have deep roots. The existence of a social hierarchy which fails to admit into its ranks those newcomers who have entered the income hierarchy is a principal cause of class tensions in periods like the present. Hence there is a profound need for reform of those institutions which give vent to social differences. The most important of such 'restitutions' at the present time is the system of education.

This type of reasoning breathes wholly of opportunism. Does it mean that when the slump comes back (as the U N World Economic Survey thinks is likely) the Labour Party will revert to Marxism? Or does it mean that the Labour Party is in that eminently pleasurable situation of possessing a flexible philosophy determined completely by the exigencies of each situation? Thus the Labour Party raises more questions than it answers by these statements.

### Double Subjection of the African

Personal freedom and equality are, at least in the circumstances of present-day democracy in Britain, relatively less urgent issues. Wide areas of the globe, where the British flag flies, with a population many times greater than in Britain, the matter of freedom and equality are urgent and most important. The Labour Party has issued now the first of a series of policy statements on Colonial problems. This statement outlines policies for those colonies in which many races reside—the plural societies in the Empire. It is a most welcome contribution from so important a Party on so important a question. The vast

areas of East and Central Africa where conflicts of considerable dimension have or are emerging possess features in many respects different from that of Britain's other colonies. In these plural society territories reside a sizeable group of white settlers who, as a group, occupy positions of class homogeneity very much similar to the capitalist classes found in the industrialized countries. As a group or class the white settlers have obtained a wide area of self rule in these territories and the time is approaching when in Central Africa the pattern of South African race relationship is to be fully duplicated. Conceptually, therefore, the African in these areas is subject to two stages or processes of Imperialist rule: that of the Colonial Office in London and secondly, of the class of white settlers. The statement correctly observes that "an essential difference between the history of

Britain and that of the colonies is that in the colonies the colour identifies the class". The African is under a double subjection: as a national group and as a class.

#### Unholy Compromise

And yet when it comes to applying the consequences of this fundamental recognition the Labour Party reflects an alarming insincerity tantamount to an abdication of responsibility and of policy. In East and Central Africa the fundamental rights of citizenship, of land ownership and of economic and educational opportunities are denied to the African people. It is here that the question of freedom and equality are most urgent. The statement sees here the need for laying the "foundation of democracy" (and that remarkable term "foundations" so often used in these contexts, is not defined). But it says the "main pro-

blem" is to work out a "reasonable balance in political representation" but this will make the white minority very "determined to fight this prospect". And so in the concrete case of East and Central Africa the Labour Party resigns itself to the Inevitable the adoption of the South African pattern. The Party accepts the aim of "parity of franchise" and then as an after thought of "parity of representation", thus loading and confirming the franchise and established privileges of the white minorities. It is these modification and qualifications which make the prospect of democracy in Africa, even with a Labour Government in Britain, difficult to see. The "transition" to democracy in plural societies occupy so fundamental a place in Labour's policy that the actual prospect of free democracy is dimmed into virtual darkness.