Record of the meeting between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, I.V. Stalin, and members of the delegation of the Labour Party of Great Britain, 7 August 1946

TOP SECRET

RECORD OF COMRADE I.V. STALIN’S CONVERSATION

WITH THE DELEGATION OF THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY

7 August 1946

(from 21:00 till 23:20)

Laski says that he was Roosevelt’s and Churchill’s friend and that he is very happy to now meet the third great leader of the United Nations who had won the war.

Phillips says that he, on behalf of the Labour movement, expresses his delight with the fact that the delegation met with Comrade Stalin. The delegation arrived here in order to seek, as representatives of the Labour Party, the establishment of friendly relations with the Soviet Union and the Soviet people, this being done not only on commission of the party governing bodies, but the entire Labour movement.

British workers, united by the Labour movement, have been following the great Russian experiment with much interest and demonstrated their friendly disposition, expressing the hope that the experiment would be a success. During the war the friendship had been strengthened by the blood shed by both nations. Presently there are many causes to seek mutual understanding, and not least of which is the fact that both countries strive for building of a new world.

Lasting friendship will be the contribution from the British side, as well as fulfillment of the programme of the socialist economy, which is the result of the 1945 elections. Britain, as well as the USSR, has to restore the damage caused by the war; it also has to increase productivity, maintain the distribution system and carry out nationalisation of main industries; in other industries, to control, inter alia, capital investment, credits and prices for agricultural produce. Furthermore, Labour wants to carry out reforms in the field of housing construction, social welfare, and public health services, - these are steps that will lead to a change in the British society.

All of the above represents a huge challenge, especially in a country where there is a Parliament based on traditions, which means the Labour government has to fulfill certain constitutional requirements. Notwithstanding this, Labour are sure that they will fulfill, and already are fulfilling, their first programme, with support from the people. They are sure that during the next elections the people will support them and will adopt the second five-year plan of Labour.

Labour believe preservation of international peace to be a prerequisite for the implementation of their programme. This means development of mutual understanding between the countries, and within this mutual understanding there should be a special mutual understanding of the countries pursuing similar goals.

Phillips then expresses his thanks for the opportunity given to the delegation to visit the Soviet Union and the reception it has been shown; he also says that he would like to underline the fact that the delegation is a mission of good will, whose aim is to build, as a result of its visit and discussions with the Soviet people and the leaders of the Soviet Union, a strong foundation for close friendly relations between the two countries.

Bacon speaks of the satisfaction which she experiences from meeting Comrade Stalin. She says she is representing the new parliament elected the previous year. The new Parliament, according to her, is different from all the previous ones, in that its members are younger, more enthusiastic, and about 400 places out of over 600 are Labour. This fact makes her sure that the Labour programme will be fulfilled in record time. This Parliament also has more female MPs than the previous ones.

British women, says Bacon, were amazed by the tenacity and behavior of Russian women during the war. Over the last few weeks I have seen many ruined European cities. Women of Britain, as well as women of Russia, believe that this should never happen again. The work we are doing now must not be destroyed by the war again.

Bacon further says that during her stay in the USSR she learnt about the activities of Soviet women, the education system, the system of social welfare and public health in the USSR. Bacon says that it is her opinion that Britain and the USSR may learn from each other. Bacon says that it has especially impressed her that many women in the USSR, who started their life at the lower levels of society, could reach high managerial posts. Bacon says the same holds for Britain nowadays, and says she herself is an example for this: a miner’s daughter who became an MP.

Stalin says that it is truly pleasant that there are two large countries in Europe, the USSR and Great Britain, which advance towards socialism. Comrade Stalin further says that the Soviet Union advances towards socialism via its own, Russian way, which is the shorter one, while the British advance towards socialism by a longer, roundabout, way, both of these ways being appropriate. We are Marxist-Leninists, says Comrade Stalin, and we do not think that our way is the only one, we believe that socialism can be attained not only through Soviets; the difference is that our way is shorter, albeit more bloody; the way through Parliament is slower, but with less blood. You and we, Comrade Stalin says further, we all advance to the same goal, which is socialism. Therefore it would be surprising if our two countries were not friends.

The sympathy of the British people towards the Soviet Union is well known; the fact that the Russian people are compassionate with the British may not be so well known, but after the war it does not require further proof. About fifteen years ago during a strike[[1]](#footnote-1) Russian workers helped British workers with money, thus demonstrating their friendship.

Laski notes that the generosity of the Russians will never be forgotten in Britain.

Phillips says he was one of the workers on strike.

Stalin asks whether any actions are planned in the field of trade.

Phillips replies that the Labour government nationalised the Bank of England and the coal mines; there are plans for the nationalisation of transport, including civil aviation, gas-, electricity-, steel-, and iron-producing industries. There are plans for rationing and control over country supplies; a ministry has been set up which will control manufacturing of bricks and other construction materials and their distribution in the country; actions in the field of trade will be carried out in subsequent stages.

Stalin explains his question saying that he knows from the Russian experience that if the trade is in the hands of the state and the profits are retained by the state, more opportunities arise for maintaining and keeping the wages. We have been greatly helped by such system in terms of decreasing prices and raising real wages. Comrade Stalin further speaks about the importance of actions in the field of trade even in the period when the state has not yet taken over the trade: as soon as the state enterprises start selling cheaper products, this immediately affects the market, the prices go down, which is beneficial for the working class.

Stalin then asks a question whether there is a threat in Britain that the industrial capacity will grow, while the inner market turns out insolvent.

Phillips replies that the market demand is so high that a long time is needed to meet it; he offers an example with housing construction saying that Britain cannot produce itself all the construction materials and will be forced to import them; for example it would be desirable to import timber from Russia, which would open, in its turn, the opportunities for other industries to export to Russia in exchange for timber.

Furthermore Phillips says that Labour intend to raise the living standards for the working class not only in the metropolis but also in the colonies; they also hope that the countries, inspired by the spirit of socialism, would organise world production based on total employment. Phillips further discusses the actions of the Labour government as regards paying pensions to retired people, increasing the term of mandatory secondary education, decreasing the use of 16-18 years old teenagers’ labour in order to allow them to study without leaving employment. With all these examples Phillips aims to demonstrate that not only will there not be any excess workforce in Britain, but on the contrary, there will be a labour shortage.

Stalin speaks of the role of women in building of socialism, indicating that, as soon as women’s energy had been activated in the USSR, it immediately produced appropriate results; the same will be achieved in other countries, says Comrade Stalin. Comrade Stalin further refers to the words of the delegation members regarding the complete mutual understanding that must be maintained between the two countries on the issues of socialist construction, and says that he hopes that mutual understanding will be achieved in the field of external relations, too, understanding, which is nonexistent nowadays, but which he hopes will be in future.

Laski notes that all the influence of the Labour party, same as in the first days of the October Revolution, will be employed to improve the relations between the two countries.

Stalin says that it would be great if the Labour Party achieves this; as regards the Soviet Union, it is fully prepared for an amicable relationship.

Laski says that Labour now implement the economic and political ideas of the great pioneers of the 19th century, and to this end, friendship with the great socialist country is indispensable for the country’s external relations.

Stalin notes that it will be very good if this is achieved.

Laski replies that this must be achieved.

Clay says that he represents trade unions in the delegation and is usually concerned with the issues of wages. He further says that, while fulfilling their five-year plan, Labour in fact solve three problems simultaneously: production of means of production, production of means of consumption, and ensuring the distribution of means of consumption.

Clay also says that they would be eager to know how prices are decreased in socialised industry; he notes that all resources should be tapped to improve the living standards of the working class, which requires avoiding international complications. We believe, says Clay, that if international co-operation defers the start of the war, the people will be able to reap rewards from their labour, which will lead to an increase in actual wages.

We in Britain believe, continues Clay, that there are two types of wages: wages expressed in monetary terms, and socialist wages, set in legislation; Clay gives an example of benefit payouts to families with more than one child.

Phillips gives another example: there is a law in Britain according to which a person who becomes disabled following an accident at work not only receives a compensation for loss of ability to work, but is taught a new vocation.

Stalin approves of such a law and notes that if the Labour Government follows this route, Churchill will not be able to win the following elections.

The delegates say as one, that Churchill will not be able to win the next elections in any case, and Laski jokingly says that Churchill needs a long rest after his labours during the war, and Labour intend to provide him with such rest.

Phillips tells about the popularity of the Labour Government among the people: Labour candidates won all Parliamentary by-elections, the Labour party got 3000 places during the municipal elections, and the new member intake to the Labour party is so big that there are not enough Party membership cards.

Clay stipulates that he believes Churchill to be a great military leader, to whom the British people owe a lot; Churchill’s misfortune is however that he is not fit to be the country’s leader in the post-war period.

Stalin agrees with this.

Phillips says that there is a certain category of people who are only good in certain circumstances; when the need is gone, it is better for them to withdraw.

Stalin says that this issue must be treated with caution, and reminds of the words of Lady Astor[[2]](#footnote-2), who had said in a conversation with him a few years earlier that Churchill’s days were gone and he should not further appear on political arena. Stalin had replied to this at the time that whenever hard times come to Britain, Churchill would reappear[[3]](#footnote-3).

Clay says that it is the intention of both countries to eliminate the causes leading to the need for Churchill or his likes.

Stalin says that when you go to war, you should count for the worse.

Returning to the issue of lowering prices, Stalin says that the Russians have empirically established that if the main industries, banking system, and trade are nationalised, and if one part of the profits is used to improve the life of the workers, and the other part, to expand production, while profits from trade are used to decrease the prices, this method gives the opportunity to simultaneously decrease prices and expand production.

Stalin says further that there is another means to decrease the expenses, which is to cut the army; there is a threat to become the object of aggression, however, agreements on mutual help against aggression and agreements on mutual defence could be used. When such agreements are in place, they represent a considerable source of increasing the wellbeing of the people and growth of production.

Stalin further discusses the difficulties that Labour face and the difficulties that had taken place in Russia during the revolutionary years: the Russians had faced difficulties that were different from the British experience: low level of education among the people, a large proportion of the small peasantry who did not believe in socialism; the British difficulties are of a different scale: there is no such peasantry in Britain, the working class is largely predominant, at least in the metropolis, the educational level is higher than the one that had been in Russia in the first Soviet years; however, the main difficulty is that the British bourgeoisie are cleverer, richer, and more experienced than the Russian, and will be a very strong opponent.

Laski says that they know they are facing a difficult task, and notes that intelligentsia plays a significant role in changing the character of bourgeoisie; he refers to Diderot’s and Voltaire’s influence on the bourgeoisie of the French Revolution, mentioning also the Provisional Government in 1917, when even the members of the Government did not trust it, and says that big changes have been taking place in Britain, especially over the last ten years, which was mainly intelligentsia becoming more left-wing, leading to two outcomes: (1) the British literature started reflecting socialist spirit, and (2) academics join trade unions and the Labour party.

Stalin jokingly says that Diderot and Voltaire did not own coal mines; and what about owners of railways, banks and mines in Britain, how do they feel now?

Laski says once more that they are aware of the difficult task facing them, and that construction of socialism is like approaching war: you hope for the better, apply all resources to preserve peace, and are ready for the worse.

Clay notes that those who follow closely the Russian experience are mostly astonished by the quick rise of the educational level of the people.

Laski says that it is also necessary to mention the splendid resolution of the national problem which is, as is common knowledge, due to the Generalissimo.

Stalin says that the national problem was resolved according to a plan devised by Lenin.

Laski agrees, but points out that the important issue is that Lenin entrusted Stalin with implementation of the plan.

Stalin says that it was the Party’s assignment.

The members of the delegation thank Comrade Stalin for the honour and assure him that upon their return to Britain they will apply all their resources to achieve the goal for which they had come to the USSR; at the same time Bacon expresses hope that the members of the delegation will have the opportunity to once again visit the Soviet Union, and that upon their return to Britain, there will be a reciprocal visit by the Soviet delegation.

Stalin replies that if such desire would be expressed by the British government, the Soviet delegation will come.

Stalin then says that he had seen many of Europe’s socialists who promise a lot during elections, such as the radical-socialists in France, and forget about their promises when the elections are over; he can see that socialists in Britain are not like this.

Stalin says good-bye to the members of the delegation and wishes them success in reaching their goals.

Recorded [signature] (Pastoev)

[RSASPH, f. 558, inv. 11, file 286, pp. 5–10]

Keywords: post-war order, post-war USSR, inter-allied relations

1. This refers to the General Strike of 4–13 May 1926 in Great Britain during which the USSR provided aid to British Trade Unions on strike. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Astor, Nancy Witcher Langhorne (1879 – 1964) – American-born British MP (1919 – 1945), first female MP. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lady Astor’s conversation with Stalin took place on 29 July 1931 during her visit to the USSR in the company of George Bernard Shaw. Stalin’s words on that occasion about Churchill’s return to politics have been confirmed by British witnesses to the meeting, including a detail which Stalin preferred to gloss over in 1946: he spoke of Churchill’s return to power leading to a new intervention in the USSR, analogous to that of 1918-1919. See: Sykes C. NANCY: The Life of Lady Astor. London, 1972. p. 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)