Minutes of a conversation between I. V. Stalin and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, H. Pollitt, translated and minuted by V. Pavlov[[1]](#footnote-1), 5 January 1951

Secret

MINUTES OF CONVERSATION between Comrade I.V. STALIN and HARRY POLLITT

5 January 1951

Present: comrade V.M. Molotov and Pavlov (translator).

Comrade Stalin says that, the document (the draft programme of the Communist Party of Britain) turned out well.

Pollitt replies that this latest draft was drawn up in accordance with comrade Stalin’s letter from September[[2]](#footnote-2).

Comrade Stalin declares that, he has a number of amendments to the draft, and would like to know Pollitt’s opinion on these amendments. Comrade Stalin pointed out that the draft refers to the equality of nations in the Commonwealth of Nations. It is permissible to talk about the equality of nations in print or in public speeches, however, it is not accurate. It is more accurate to speak of equal rights rather than equality of nations. One nation cannot be the equal of another, just as it is not possible for one person to be the equal of another. For example, no matter what benefits the nation of Malaysia will receive from the future British government, Malaysia will not immediately become an equal of Great Britain, since the cultural level of Great Britain is higher than that of Malaysia. In addition, Great Britain has a much more significant number of trained personnel than Malaysia does. Accordingly, this is not a matter of equality between nations, but the equality of rights that one nation can take better advantage of than another. Comrade Stalin would like to know whether Comrade Pollitt agrees with this.

Pollitt replies that, he fully agrees with this amendment.

Comrade Stalin says, it is unclear from the programme whether there is any mention of nationalisation of land. Judging by what was mentioned on this matter, it can be understood that there will be nationalisation of all private land. We, says Comrade Stalin, believe that the private land of tenant farmers in rural areas should not be nationalised. If Comrade Pollitt wants to build a coalition among the working class, knowledge workers, the lower and middle strata in the cities and tenant farmers in the villages, then it will require abandoning nationalisation of tenant farmers’ property. And there is nothing risky about this. In countries with people's democracies, for example, tenant farm land was not nationalised.

Comrade Stalin says that, he would now like to propose an amendment on the issue of compensation to landowners whose properties are to be nationalised. The draft programme does not provide for any compensation except for owners who find themselves in difficult financial situations. Comrade Stalin thinks that, there should be a provision for partial compensation to owners who are loyal to the national government, while landowners of nationalised property who resist the people's government are to be refused compensation.

Comrade Stalin jokingly remarked that, as Comrade Pollitt sees it, Comrade Stalin is criticising the draft program from rightist positions.

Pollitt laughs and says that, Comrade Stalin’s criticism of the draft is quite justified, because in some places within the draft leftist elements really have crept in.

[....]

Comrade Stalin says that, the programme would have to warn the British people that, the capitalists will not voluntarily give up their large properties and their large profits for the benefit of the British nation. It would be correct to assume that, they will actively oppose the decisions of the national government and will fight to preserve their privileges by all means, including the use of force. Therefore, the British nation and the people's government, with the aim of self-defence, must be ready to give a fitting rebuff to such attempts. This should be stated in the programme.

Pollitt says that, he agrees with this.

[...]

Comrade Stalin said that, at the end of the draft, where it refers to the establishment of a free and happy socialist Britain, he removed the words "and in the liberation of humanity" and suggested to end the sentence with, "the establishment of a free and happy, strong and powerful socialist Britain." As the draft only mentions Britain, it may create the impression that the British Communist Party is excluding the Dominions and other British Overseas Territories.

Pollitt says that, since the UK includes only England, Wales and Scotland, it would be better to talk about the creation of a free and happy, strong and powerful socialist Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations. As for, "liberation of humanity", the words are rhetorical, and, indeed, should be left out.

Comrade Stalin declares that, he agrees with the phrase "Great Britain" being replaced with "Great Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations."

Comrade Stalin points to the draft section, "National independence of the British people and all peoples of the British Empire", where in a paragraph it states that, "All ties between the peoples of the modern empire based on political, economic and military domination should be discontinued, and replaced by a new relationship based on full nationalisation, independence and equality. This requires the withdrawal of all armed forces and administrative staff from British territory in the colonial and dependent countries, the transfer of sovereignty to governments freely elected by the people and the return of wealth and natural resources to the people of those countries that were captured by the industrial, commercial and banking monopolies." This clause raises a very complex question. A complete solution to this problem is hardly possible, if only because it is impossible, for example, to return to the peoples of colonial and dependent countries resources that have already been consumed by the metropole. Of course, if Comrade Pollitt’s pockets are full of money, then he will be able to compensate countries ravaged by British imperialism. But Comrade Stalin doubts this.

Pollitt replies that, Comrade Stalin is absolutely right. Of course, the national government will not have sufficient resources to fulfil the tasks set out in the draft programme. Pollitt considers Stalin's suggestion, to omit the aforementioned statement from the draft programme, to be correct. Pollitt would like to know Comrade Stalin’s opinion as whether to also omit from the aforementioned paragraph the statement on recalling all British administrative staff from the colonial territories and dependent countries. The fact is, that the governments which will be given sovereignty over these territories, will ask the national government for assistance from British specialists.

Comrade Stalin says that, he had doubts about whether or not to include a recall of the British administrative staff. After all, what could happen is, the Americans, taking advantage of the British government’s recall of its own administrative personnel, enter the territories in question and install their own administrative staff. Therefore, Comrade Stalin, thought that it might be better to talk about the withdrawal of the British bureaucratic apparatus. However, he agrees with Comrade Pollitt, that there should be no mention of the British administrative personnel’s withdrawal, and agrees that the words “and British administrative personnel” be left out.

Pollitt asks, how Comrade Stalin rates the draft programme as a whole.

Comrade Stalin replies that, the draft has been put together well, and said that the emergence of the Communist Party of Britain’s programme will mark a turning point in the history of the Labour Movement in Anglo-Saxon countries. This program is basically a suitable document for the Communist Parties in the United States, Canada, Australia and other English-speaking countries. The Communist Party USA is now in a difficult situation, as there is a lot of confusion there. Nevertheless, it must be admitted, says Comrade Stalin, that no matter how proud Americans are of their democracy, there is more freedom in monarchical Britain than in the United States.

Pollitt says that, he fully agrees with this.

Comrade Stalin asks, when to expect the programme to be adopted and published.

Pollitt says that, the programme will be discussed and adopted at the designated 13 January plenum of the Executive Committee. As such, the programme will be published at the end of January[[3]](#footnote-3).

Comrade Stalin said that the programme should be printed in the greatest possible number of copies and sent to the United States, Canada, Australia and other Anglo-Saxon countries. Should assistance be necessary in the publication of the program, then we will render it, said Comrade Stalin.

Pollitt said that, he took it upon himself to send the draft programme to Timothy Buck [[4]](#footnote-4) in Canada.

Comrade Stalin says that, he has outlined the main amendments to the draft for Pollitt. There are other less significant changes. All of them have been inserted into the draft text, and will be translated into English and handed over to Pollitt tomorrow morning.

Pollitt thanks Comrade Stalin for the assistance.

Comrade Stalin replied: "It is our duty."

Written down by Pavlov.

[RSASPH, f. 558, inv. 11, fold. 289, pp. 1- 7]

Keywords: International communist movement, Post-war USSR

1. Pavlov, Vladimir Nikolaevich (1915–1993) – Soviet diplomat and translator. First Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy in Berlin (1939–1940), Stalin's personal translator. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This was the reply to a letter from H. Pollitt on the draft programme of the Communist Party of Great Britain; the reply was sent on 28 September 1950 and signed “Your interlocutor”. The basic stance of the letter was summarised at the end in the form of several points (L.86-87): ‘It should be noted that the draft programme, judging by its structure and the manner of its presentation, reminds one more of an election manifesto that the Communist Party of Britain usually put forward for parliamentary elections, and less like the programme of the Communist Party of Britain that is intended for the long run and which gives the masses of the British people direction and an ideal.

With the aim of escaping these deficiencies, it would be correct to insert into the programme – after the general introductory part – the following sections:

I. Party tasks in the struggle for a lasting peace and against the threat of a new war.

II. British Communists – authentic fighters for the national independence of Britain and the strengthening of the British Empire on a democratic basis.

III. Britain is travelling towards Socialism along its own path, not through Soviet power, but through people’s democracy.

IV We do not need a capitalist, but a socialist nationalisation […].

V The task of the Communist Party that is nearest of all: increasing workers’ wages.’ (RGASPI, f. 558. inv. 11. file. 289. pp. 84-87). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The final version of the programme of the British Communist Party *The British Road to Socialism* was sent by H. Pollitt in galley proofs at the end of January 1951. Publication in Great Britain was set for 1 February 1951. According to the report of the head of the Foreign Politics Commission of the Central Committee V. Grigorian addressed to I. Stalin on 30.01.1951, checking the text against the last version discussed in Moscow showed that ‘all comments and additions made during the discussion of the programme in Moscow have been considered.’ - RSASPH., f. 558. fold.11. file 289. p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Timothy Buck (1891-1973) – General Secretary of the Communist Party of Canada (1929-1962). Between 1943 and 1959 the Party was officially called the Labour Progressive Party of Canada.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)