WESTERN MAIL

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The vital questions facing Labour

DESPITE Mr. Healey's weekend attempt to exhibit closed ranks, it is clear that the Labour Party is riven once again by a major internal split. Last week's vote by the party's national executive to nationalise 25 of Britain's largest manufacturing companies is bound to embarrass Mr. Wilson for a long time to come. In the first place it will serve as a constant reminder to the country of the yawning ideological chasm which separates the parliamentary leadership and its own left wing. Secondly, the Labour Party, in future, will be more vulnerable than ever to the charge of carelessly letting confusion and uncertainty infect industry; despite Mr. Wilson's sharp insistence that the proposal has no chance of becoming policy, some damage has already been done. But, most important of all, Mr. Wilson must realise that the nationalisation threat will gravely damage Labour's credibility.

Until last week things were looking up for Labour. Lambie, Pentland and the Lanarkse affair had been working together to the Tories' discomfiture and Labour's electoral benefit. But the hopeless — and widely — nature of the nationalisation proposals has already guaranteed the party a severe loss of electoral sympathy. There are several questions which allow no satisfactory answer. What is the economic sense of 'nationalising' companies which are clearly successful? What good will be in Britain's top 25 if they were less than efficient? And is there a glimmer of a reason for believing that the Treasury could run them more profitably as public enterprises?

It is our opening, however, that the national executive's proposals will have many benefits. According to one estimate public [illegible] loans to find £12 billion, to foot the taxpayer bill — a [illegible] inflationist brew for a completely reckless child. When this policy collapses under currency, the blunder will deepen to [illegible] proportions. Meanwhile, as Labour continues her internal squabbling, Mr. Thorpe must be delighted. More than ever the time of the Liberals seems ripe.

Action at last?

Environment Minister for Local Government Mr. Graham Page is expected to announce soon that the Government is to spend £1 million to try to determine the nature of chemicals — many of them believed [illegible] waste — deposited in at least 40 tips throughout Wales. [illegible] of the 100 tips in Glamorgan. This long overdue initiative is to be welcomed. The *Western Mail* has stressed consistently that a realistic Government intervention over what is fast becoming a national scandal is essential. It is understood that a Department of the Environment study of the 40 or so tips has shown that [illegible] or [illegible], near Pontypridd, with at least 24 different [illegible] — one of them toxic — is the worst. PCB, a chemical [illegible] can be accumulated through the animal [illegible] and, in large doses, is likely to be lethal [illegible]. In January 1970 PCB was found in the fish, fish oil and [illegible] in the shores of 21 pigs and body disorders in a further 15,000.

The Welsh Office, while stressing that it was not aware of the [illegible] has been slow to react. Despite the £50,000 Department of the Environment investigatory programme that has been going on for several months at Nantgarw, the Welsh Office says that there is no immediate danger from the Nantgarw tip, and to a lesser extent the nearby Seconistin tip, as no water supplies are affected. This is not necessarily correct as it is possible that there may have been [illegible] — and has farmer has already been told his cannot sell milk from cows grazed on affected land.

The main complaint for municipal laws regarding the dumping of poisonous waste — the Rivers Act 1951 is derived mainly from drainage — have been tightened. The 1972 Act allows for a maximum penalty of five years gaol and/or an unlimited fine for those who tip chemical material where it is likely to become a health hazard. This is reasonably satisfactory, although it has no bearing on the Abercwmboi saga as the Act was passed after dumping there had ended. A good start has been made to solving the problem. It is now up to the Government to make sure that these tougher laws are enforced and that the initiative over the 40 tips is followed up with preventive action.

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