

# a socialist foreign policy?

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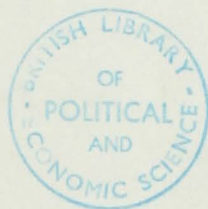
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# I. introduction

The recent general election in Britain confirms the view that foreign affairs play little part in deciding the issue. Indeed, on this occasion international affairs featured less prominently in the campaigning of the parties than in any previous election since 1945, despite the fact that which ever party was returned here were going to be negotiations for membership of the EEC. That the electorate are concerned almost exclusively with domestic issues, is perhaps conclusive evidence that people accept Britain's new status in the world; but if this is the way the public mind has turned it is a regrettable development, for whilst Britain is no longer able to command events on the international scene she nonetheless continues to have an important part to play. Together with other powers of comparable standing Britain could draw upon her tradition of international involvement to work constructively for the betterment of international society. But to do this the present trend towards narrow inwardness in Britain has to be reversed, and in this respect the quality of the political leadership will be all important.

How important is the socialist view of foreign policy to Britain's role in the future? In the immediate period ahead his will now be a matter of judging the policy of the Labour Party in opposition.

During its period of office the Labour Government had to concentrate its attention upon the economic problem at home and consequently was unable to use effectively British influence abroad. Inherited economic problems appear in fact to be endemic to Labour rule, looked at from the experience of 1945-51 and 1964-70, which make it extremely difficult to carry out a positive foreign policy. How a Labour government might have developed Britain's role in the world in the early 1970s from a position of domestic strength, must now remain one of the interesting speculations of history. In the meantime the Labour Party has the responsibility in opposition of formulating its attitude to the key issues which confront Britain abroad, particularly in relation to the negotiations for entry to the EEC.

This moment of transfer from government to opposition provides an opportunity to look back upon the ideas which have helped to formulate the Labour Party's view of foreign affairs, and to see how as a government it has attempted to translate these ideas into policy. Finally, it is important to consider how appropriate its philosophy will be to Britain's future place in the world.

The essential thesis of this pamphlet is that British socialism, in relation to foreign policy, has been based upon an illusion: the illusion that British power ensured the easy translation of a particular set of ideas into foreign policy. In this British socialists have drawn too heavily upon the imperial past in their formulation of world programmes. When confronted with the reality of the situation by having a Labour government the tendency of many socialists is to return to the formulation of Utopian concepts, and to attribute the behaviour of the government to the corrupting effects of power. This view is a direct denial of the need to handle the power factor in politics and is fundamentally at fault in a party which aims at assuming responsibility for the nation's affairs. These are the politics of the outsider, refusing to expose moral concepts to the practical test of political action. The contraction of our involvement overseas and the concentration of the British interest in a European context have at least created the conditions in which suitably circumscribed objectives in foreign policy based upon realistic principles can be realised. A foreign policy imbued with contemporary socialist principles should have a clear purpose. This need to have a definable purpose in foreign policy is particularly necessary for Britain at this juncture in order to give people in Britain a sense of direction and belief in what their country is doing. In outline what is needed is a sound appreciation of the power factor in international affairs whilst working to curb the effects of power politics; the desire to have a moral criterion for political action; a concern for mankind as a whole expressed in internationalism and a sense of realism in relation to objectives.



## 2. socialist principles and foreign policy

The traditional view of socialists about international affairs has not been a very useful guide to the Labour Party in its effort to understand the processes of international politics. For whilst it did not produce a marked effect upon the attitude of the leadership of the party, nor seriously influence its conduct of foreign policy as a government, it helped to perpetuate a division between the leadership and a sizeable proportion of the rank and file. It also meant that Labour leaders had to give a disproportionate amount of time and attention to matters of internal party cohesion. In a general way this need to look over its shoulder did not help the Labour government to act with confidence in the field of foreign affairs. The experience of the last Labour government in its handling of the parliamentary party suggests that a great deal of time and energy has to be expended on simply keeping the party in order.

### ideology

For socialists the problem of squaring international facts with ideals derives in large measure from a misunderstanding of the nature of foreign policy. Often it has been assumed that foreign policy is "made", in the same way that the decision to nationalise an industry at home might be taken; or, that if a Labour government legislates in order to transform domestic society then similarly it has only to legislate to create change within international society. Resolutions introduced at the annual conference of the Labour Party year after year give testament to this view. It is perhaps natural that a party attached to a set of *a priori* principles should find it difficult to accept the limitations placed upon a Labour government in its handling of inter-state relations. Within a large area of foreign policy, however, ideology is quite marginal to the relatively straightforward matter of dealing with affairs as they present themselves. Even where the ideological conception of foreign affairs finds its most complete expression as in the Marxist view, it is significant that it proves a quite inadequate guide to action.

The changes in the behaviour of the Soviet Union in her relations with other states over the years, whilst partly due to the tactical demands of ideology, has also been largely influenced by the experience of living in a non-communist world. As Leonard Woolf observed, "the relation between socialism and questions of foreign policy is nearly always remote and obscure". This may have been the unduly pessimistic conclusion of a man reflecting in his later years upon a lifetime's study of foreign affairs, and, as these words were written in 1949, Woolf may have been influenced by the already disillusioning effects of the "cold war". For all that, however, there remains a considerable element of truth in the comment. This is not to deny that principles have their place, but their relationship to a specific aspect of policy, as distinct from a general formulation, is by no means as palpable as the pure socialist view would maintain and persuade us to believe.

Even so the commitment to beliefs persists and with it the sense of betrayal when a Labour government fails to translate the ideals into firm policies. At the same time, a kind of political schizophrenia develops; reasons are evoked to explain away the actions of a Labour government which enable the traditional beliefs to be upheld. Thus the two minority Labour governments of the inter-war years failed in foreign policy because of their slender majorities and the economic conditions at home and throughout the world. The foreign policy of Ernest Bevin, despite the sustained and at times bitter attack upon it from within his own party, could at the end of the day be excused on the grounds of the "needs of the moment", the economic weakness of Britain (a plausible explanation for the failure of all governments in Britain since 1945), reliance upon the strength and goodwill of the United States, and the intransigent attitude of the Soviet Union. Underlying the whole of this approach is the notion that if the circumstances were different a Labour government would be able somehow to make a socialist conception into a viable foreign policy.



Nothing could, in fact, be more mistaken or more unhelpful to a future Labour government which is trying to curb the impact of power politics and humanise the relations between states. The root of the matter, which is that extenuating circumstances provide the normal factor in international politics and that it is this which a Labour government, like any other government, has to come to terms with, is hardly ever given its due weight, if indeed it is even recognised.

The international system, consisting of some 140 sovereign states, is far too complex to allow of dogmatic formulations about how it should be organised. Whatever the view of a particular state may be, its freedom of action is so limited in the international field that it is a matter of necessity to compromise and search for a common basis of agreement. This is as relevant to the two super-powers in our day, despite appearances to the contrary, as to a country such as Britain, which has witnessed gradual but vast diminution in its power. It is not stretching the point to say that to a British foreign secretary the external circumstances will often present themselves more in the shape of imperative conditions than malleable situations that can be moulded according to political principle. "Needs of the moment" constitute the permanent feature of the international environment and the job of a Labour foreign secretary is to weave socialist principles into his responses to those needs, rather than always attempt to transmute the needs. Moreover, as a power with world interests and a large stake in international trade, it is not granted to Britain to adopt unilateral moral and political positions. To do so would be to relegate us to a not particularly splendid form of isolation. It is questionable how far Britain influenced other states by her own policy even at the height of her power in the nineteenth century. It is certain, however, that this margin of influence has deteriorated in our own day. British policy, socialist or otherwise, must be to seek those points at which our interests merge sufficiently with the interests of other states to establish workable agreements.

Within the Labour Party as a whole the general predilection to view foreign affairs in terms of a set body of ideas can be partly attributed to Labour's failure to retain the support of the British electorate over long periods of time. Relative inexperience of high office has meant that the party has never fully acquired a direct governmental attitude—the pragmatic, administrative technique which goes to make up so much of the business of government, not least in the realm of foreign policy. Hence the sense of unease, almost of shock, which reverberated through the Labour Party when Harold Wilson in response to a question said that the policy of his government was "to govern". The party as a collective entity still could not think of power and government with a proprietorial air. Opposition mentality is not only a matter of ideological disposition, it is also influenced by the lack of contact with power. Equally, political realism is not so much the result of rational analysis as due to the experience of exercising power. Even when Labour has begun to acquire familiarity with high office and a knowledge of the constraints placed upon the exercise of power, particularly in the face of the exigent nature of the international system, as it did in the period 1945 to 1951, this was quickly dissipated when the party reverted to opposition. These brief periods of government interspersed between long interludes of opposition have not in the past encouraged the Labour Party to engage in the painful process of adjusting theory to reality.

There is, however, a constructive side to ideology that is important to a progressive movement such as the Labour Party: the function of synthesis. With a comprehensive set of ideas, a consistent pattern of interpretation can be given to events, and it helps form the mental attitudes of both the rank and file and the leadership. This creates unity of conviction and purpose throughout the party, whatever might be the differences between particular sections. Principles and ideals are important in that they provide the ultimate goals of political action and the conviction by which judgment is made upon immediate and con-



temporary issues; but they also help to give the moral content to political action. This aspect of socialism, most completely and articulately expressed on the left of the party, can have a salutary effect upon the leadership, particularly when as a government there is a danger of them veering too far toward the purely administrative approach and neglecting the philosophy of the party. The ideological purists embodying the conscience of the party do serve to alert the leadership to "its duty" and generally reminds them of the "correct" party course of action. In this way the more devout element acts in a general and continuous manner as the ideological obstacle against which government policies have to be tested, and on occasion the pressure of the militants is more explicit through the threat of open revolt.

In the recent experience of the Labour Party the central fault with the militant section in their exhortations to the government to take a stronger line on Vietnam and on Rhodesia and, from another section, to get the moral issue clear over Nigeria/Biafra, is that they have continually failed to take account of the limits upon Britain's power effectively to influence events at all points in the world. Moral influence is directly related to the ability to place power behind it, and at a time when Britain has been reducing her international commitments because of her inability to support them, it is next to useless to suppose that we can influence other states by adopting a moralising posture. Above all it is important to remember that for ideology to retain a useful function it has to be closely related to the politically possible. Once a strong tendency develops the other way, it easily degenerates into doubtful righteousness untouched by real issues, or it becomes merely the mouth-  
ing of slogans.

### socialist principles

British democratic socialism has never possessed a systematic theory of international affairs, preferring eclecticism to the watertight formulations of Marxism.

It has grown out of, and built upon, the liberal tradition and been refined by several leading theoreticians within the Labour Party, such as Leonard Woolf, Kenneth Younger, John Strachey and Denis Healey. Also, the limited experience of Labour governments in handling foreign affairs has helped to produce a practical appreciation of the subject. It is surprising, however, just how little there is in print on Labour's conduct of foreign affairs in contrast to the amount published on defence and strategy, which is perhaps indicative of how international affairs are seen in a strategic form. Nevertheless these contributions do not add up to an integrated way of interpreting world affairs. The socialist view of foreign affairs has been influenced extensively by the liberal/radical tradition with its general bias toward pacifism and belief in moral progress. Socialists have also shared the liberal belief in the essential co-operative quality of men and nations. This linking of the two modes of thought has become so close in our own day that some observers of the current scene have suggested that there are no significant differences between the two. In terms of foreign policy the modern Labour and Liberal parties may not be so very different, but it would be wrong to conclude from this that they hold identical views on all matters. It is necessary to look at the whole programme of a political party which should be, and often is, traceable to an integrated political philosophy, and when viewed in this way differences appear between parties which are not apparent when selecting isolated parts of their policy.

The socialist image of international society was, and still is to a large degree, of democratic nations devoted to the pursuit of welfare and equality conducting their relations with one another within a moral code and framework of law. But whereas liberals talked of the co-operation of men generally and meant specifically their economic behaviour, socialists placed the concept on a class basis and talked of the international solidarity of the working class. Held in this form the concept had an even more tenuous hold on reality than its earlier liberal formu-



ation. Should this solidarity be confined to the industrial proletariat? As a political weapon based upon perceived interests this is how the doctrine evolved. In this way the theory limited itself to industrial states with well developed proletarian movements and ignored the mass of peasantry and, indeed, the industrial labour of states which had not developed in the classical Marxist sense. More important, is the objection that in a world of nation states the worker's loyalty will be, and must be, to his own state which, in the last resort, is the only political unit through which he can work to safeguard his interests. Nor has the view of solidarity based upon common socialist systems been of great value to Labour administrations. It is perhaps true that there will be a disposition toward agreement on foreign policy issues between socialist states, but the awkward fact remains that states possess interests which are not removed, even if interpreted differently, by changes of government. The doctrine of "left talking to left" received a sharp blow on the occasion of Ernest Bevin's negotiations with the Soviet Union after 1945, and there is no reason to suppose that it would be significantly different between specifically democratic socialist states. An inclination to view politics in this way is clearly different from a Conservative approach to foreign policy with its emphasis upon the national interest and the pursuit of power. Conservatives are disposed towards "rule of thumb" and "feel of the situation" methods, which easily become a matter of conducting foreign affairs according to a narrow definition of the national interest. Also capitalism with concomitant imperialism has provided socialists with the firm edge to their own philosophy and the opportunity to dissociate themselves from the legacy of the British imperial past.

Once the more primitive aspects of ideology are removed there remains a residue of socialist values which help to influence Labour's foreign policy. Foremost amongst these influences has been the desire to curb the power factor in the international system. Whilst Labour governments have recognised the importance

of power in international politics they have worked to check the effects of power politics. Particularly, the Labour Party has sought to legitimise the use of power through international institutions. This is apparent both from the attention which the Attlee government gave to ensuring that its foreign policy was based upon the charter of the United Nations and the emphasis which the last government gave to placing British policy firmly in line with UN principles. Consistently Labour's view has been that expressed by Hugh Gaitskell in 1957 that a nation "should never use force except in self defence or unless in obedience to UN recommendations; and it should always take contentious issues to the assembly". Apart from these considerations a Labour government will be judged by what it pronounces itself to be. As with other political parties it is entrapped by the image it seeks to promote. If it declares in favour of a moral approach to political problems and wishes to place suitable constraints upon the sources of power, it will be judged accordingly. A political party cannot escape this. The Labour Party in particular cannot encourage the notion that it eschews the use of power politics and then try to wield the big stick. A party which acts contrary to the view in which it is held by the public will quickly find the basis of its support crumbling. So that electoral pressures of this kind, however subtle and indirect, do serve to keep a party on the straight and narrow.

Socialist internationalism also permeates Labour's foreign policy. For all its shortcomings, its lack of precision, and the sentimentalism, it does at least try to move away from a policy exclusively based upon national interest. More than this, however, it indicates a positive approach toward international policies which commend themselves to other states, such as the advancement of freedom, the right to national independence, and the welfare of mankind as a whole. The point was eloquently put by Sidney Webb in the 1920s, "It is high time that we based our foreign policy not on what we presume to think our rights, but on what we can discern to be in the com-



mon interest of the world; not on national hatred, national greed, or even national fear, but on a sense of brotherhood with all men; not on what we may hope to make out of other nations to our own profit, but on how, with our particular gifts and special opportunities, we can best serve humanity as a whole".

Thus Labour's policy is characterised by its close relationship with the principles of the charter of the UN, and its specialised agencies in the field of social and economic matters. Internationalism also implies a sympathy for the needs and aspirations of the peoples of other lands based upon the idea of the brotherhood of man. This is particularly true in relation to the underdeveloped parts of the world. The expectations of these peoples may not be satisfied by the actions of a Labour government in Britain, but it remains true that they continue to have faith in the international ideals of the Labour Party. It is up to a Labour government to ensure that its foreign policy has high regard for the interests of the less well off regions of the world. Recent Labour foreign policy would seem to be influenced, therefore, by these socialist aspects: emphasis upon moral ideals, a civilising effect upon power, and internationalism, otherwise expressed as a concern for the whole of mankind.

### Labour's experience

The Labour movement as a whole gained little from the experience of the two minority Labour governments of the inter-war years. If they influenced the mass movement at all, they confirmed it in the view that radical change in foreign policy waited upon the return of a Labour government with a large majority behind it. To the intellectual element within the party and particularly those who professed to expertise in international affairs the inter-war experience meant that an independent socialist foreign policy depended equally upon radical transformation of the domestic structure. It was necessary to have control of the pre-eminent power sectors of the economy in order to have leverage in

foreign affairs. In fact, under MacDonald's leadership both periods of Labour minority rule were marked by the contrast between their achievements in foreign policy and their lack of ideas at home. In the field of foreign affairs the Geneva Protocol was at one and the same time the most imaginative and practical attempt to ensure collective security proposed in the inter-war years. Labour based its policy on firm support for the League of Nations, and the 1924 government went a long way toward restoring friendly relations with France. It also accorded diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union which cleared the way for a trade agreement. Certainly if a government is judged by what it sets out to do then the record of both the minority Labour governments is good in the field of foreign affairs.

With an overwhelming majority behind it, in 1945 the opportunity to embark upon a truly socialist foreign policy seemed at last to have been granted to the Labour Party. In the event two factors came rapidly to condition Labour's foreign policy. First, was Britain's economic weakness, a condition which has since come to be regarded as endemic. The precarious state of our economic position plagued the Labour government to the end of its stay in office. It is worth recalling that in 1945 Britain inherited vast debts from the war, overseas assets had been seriously reduced to pay for the victory, and lend lease was brought to an abrupt end. Britain lost approximately one quarter of her national wealth during the second world war and lost two thirds of her export trade. The economy had been geared to the war effort to the extent that by 1945 some 9 million people were serving in the armed forces, civil defence and the war industries. Suddenly, to meet the demands of international earning power, Britain had to swing her industry into the export market, and this, largely meant dollar exports to pay for the badly needed supplies. There was little choice in the matter. "The economy of the United Kingdom," wrote Aneurin Bevan, "was inextricably interlocked with that of the United States". That alone dictated the close association with her.



second, the then apparently intractable nature of the international situation also limited their freedom of manoeuvre in foreign affairs. As a result of this a dichotomy soon developed within the Labour movement between the leadership and a group of intellectuals supported by a substantial number of the rank and file. Whilst Labour leaders quickly grasped the exigencies of the international situation and appreciated the importance of the power factor, this alienated those who clung to the idea of a purely socialist foreign policy and drove them more deeply into utopian views. The Labour government soon realised the need for a military alliance of the western democracies and seized upon NATO as a means to get the US firmly committed to the defence of western Europe. The Attlee government also took the decision to produce independent nuclear weapons.

The real issue of debate between the leaders and their critics in the party centred upon the question of whether Britain should work in close harmony with the United States, or seek agreement with the Soviet Union. The Government's diligent efforts to have the US associated at all stages with its policy in relation to Europe, which saw fulfilment in securing US military involvement in Europe through the Truman Doctrine and NATO, further antagonised the left. The left wing of the party varied its position from an initial desire to have agreement with the Soviets to advocacy of a form of "third force" through agreement with the countries of western Europe in association with the commonwealth. The precise form that such an arrangement should take was at no time made clear. As developed by G. D. H. Cole, for example, it appears to have been seen as an economic entity. It was, however, the desire to be free of the constraints of the "cold war" rather than a positive urge to link with western Europe that encouraged the notion. It certainly held no wide attraction for a large section of the Labour Party as a practical programme, whatever might have been its emotional appeal. At this time Labour was still inclined to cling to its socialist

achievements at home. What is interesting and significant about this formulation of British interests is that it anticipated in several respects the expression of the British attitude in recent years.

Looking back upon this controversy of Britain's relationship to the superpowers it can be seen that the left wing position was weak. Setting the ideological question aside, a close working agreement with the Soviet Union was not a practical policy in terms of Britain's historic relationship with Europe. It was only with considerable reluctance that Britain had entered into arrangements with Russia in the past, and from a very early day Russia had posed the long standing threat to British interests at a number of points throughout the world. In 1945 she constituted the one threat, the ability to dominate Europe, that had caused Britain in the past to interfere in the affairs of the continent. British weakness in the years after the second world war and the even more depleted condition of the countries of western Europe meant that the supplemental power of the United States had to be sought to protect the area against possible Soviet expansion. The traditional elements in British foreign policy combined with necessity, to lead Britain in the direction of close association with the US. There was never any doubt, therefore, but that Bevin would prefer the freedom of manoeuvre and anticipated coincidence with British world interests that close association with the US appeared to offer.

In marked contrast to the other aspects of its policy in international relations the Labour government of 1945 managed to satisfy all sections of the party in its benevolent handling of colonial policy. It displayed a large measure of sympathy with the aspirations of the colonial peoples of Asia and Africa in their desire for self government. Attlee's "grand gesture" to India enabled Labour to embark upon a commonwealth policy based upon the co-operation of free and independent peoples together with economic assistance to newly independent states. What it could not do on the world stage in the way of creating a socialist interna-



tional community it endeavoured to establish through its formulation of the commonwealth concept. There can be little doubt that this policy did much to gain the approval of the peoples of Asia; an appreciation that has extended down to the present day, which partly explains the attachment shown to the British by Singapore, when it became known that we would withdraw by 1971. In Africa which had not begun to experience colonial freedom under a Labour government the understanding has been less in consequence.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the Labour government showed a deft understanding of the nature of international politics in the post-war world, a significant element of the party remained unconvinced about the need to adapt to international reality and continued to believe in the viability of a socialist foreign policy. There was the idea too that the Labour government had been able to get away with its policy because of the massive authority of Ernest Bevin in the cabinet, within the Parliamentary Labour Party, and in the party and trade unions throughout the country. In other words, the left retained the belief that a less commanding figure as foreign secretary in a Labour government would have to respond to socialist pressures inside the party. If there be an overall criticism of the foreign policy of the 1945-51 Labour government it is that in its desire to grasp the power factor in international relations it too readily accepted traditional policy based upon "the facts of the situation" and "the merit of the case", and thus undervalued the place that goals and objectives should have in policy making.

### the struggle in opposition

The long years of opposition of the 'fifties and early 'sixties witnessed the bitter fight between the right and the left, at times bordering on the fratricidal, for possession of the party's ideology. The struggle in the main focussed upon foreign and defence policy. Such issues as German re-armament, neutralism, alli-

ance politics, and attitudes toward the US and the Soviet Union, which held the party and threatened to tear it apart, were mirrored in the early 'sixties by the all possessing nature of the debate upon the "bomb"; more specifically as to whether Britain should retain nuclear weapons. The subject of German re-armament struck deep into the party's traditional opposition to armaments; and worse, the militaristic background to German politics was calculated to put the party's faith in its own beliefs to the severest test. In fact, the party divided over this issue in almost equal proportions, between those who advocated a German contribution, headed by the new realists (Healey, Younger, Mayhew, and Strachey) and those who held to their traditional socialism. Indeed the shadow cabinet's motion in favour of German re-armament, when put to a meeting of the parliamentary party on 23 February 1954, was approved by the narrow margin of nine votes.

This rift between left and right re-occurred in the controversy over nuclear weapons. The long drawn out debate concentrated upon the "independent" quality of the British nuclear deterrent, and concerned not only its effectiveness but also the moral aspect of the case. There was the argument by those who had a grasp of power politics that the British nuclear contribution gave us leverage in our dealings with the United States, and at the same time prevented "excessive dependence on the United States". The left, on the other hand, revealed its classical dilemma. There were those who wanted the unilateral gesture of renouncing nuclear weapons as a moral example to other states, directed in particular presumably at the super-powers. But there were also the long standing advocates of general and complete disarmament who through the multilateral process looked to the establishment of a genuine international community. This latter position coincided with the official policy of the Labour Party until, in 1960, the annual conference carried a unilateral resolution. In this debate upon nuclear weapons inside the party throughout the late 'fifties the



left wing socialists depended on moral claims, the technical and political aspects favoured the right. Furthermore, the left were put into disarray when Aneurin Bevan, as shadow foreign secretary, declared his position as one of favouring British retention of nuclear weapons at the 1957 party conference. From there on the left's position faded and lacked coherence; yet it persisted in its opposition and in fact carried the unilateral vote in 1960. It required all of Gaitskell's skill as party leader and a not insignificant amount of moral courage to assert the right of the parliamentary party not to be bound by this decision.

It is ironic that the left should have triumphed politically at the annual conference at a time when the technical argument would have granted them victory in any case. The cancellation of Blue Streak in 1960 by the Conservative government altered completely the nature of the debate inside the Labour Party. Previously Labour's official position in favour of Britain's independent nuclear role had been based, apart from other reasons, upon its assumed effectiveness. Now, with the collapse of the Blue Streak programme it was seen that Britain could not produce an effective rocket based delivery system, and this in turn made the idea of an independent nuclear deterrent less feasible. As a result, the party was soon able to mend its fences on this issue and come out in favour of renouncing the independent deterrent. In retrospect this ramification around the subject of nuclear weapons and Britain's independent role can be seen as almost totally irrelevant to the issue that was soon to become crystal clear; that Britain's reduced means were no longer adequate to the sophisticated technological demands of the nuclear age. By the close of Gaitskell's leadership it is true to say that for one reason or another most of the controversies over foreign and defence matters which had previously divided the party at one stage were now healed, and Harold Wilson inherited a relatively united party with which to go into the election of 1964.

By the time the party was bequeathed

to Harold Wilson in February 1963 many of the previously controversial matters had been resolved, or were no longer relevant. In the fight inside the party it was those who argued in favour of a realistic policy who won through, and the Labour Party in 1964 had very largely refined its ideas in foreign policy by discarding the more old fashioned, moralistic aspects of socialism. The general lines of policy agreed under Gaitskell were built upon and amplified by Wilson in a series of major speeches which he made during the course of 1964. There was the firm declaration to remove the pretence of Britain's independent nuclear role, and to substitute for it a more prominent policy within NATO by placing our nuclear forces inside the alliance. A shift in policy away from a narrow regard for British interests and toward a positive role in international society was envisaged. This was seen as involving greater respect for and participation in the UN, developing the commonwealth concept, and extending moral and material support to the underdeveloped parts of the world. Much of this became embodied in Labour's election manifesto, which stated that "Labour will reassert British influence in the United Nations", and then went on to say that the UN could become "the chosen instrument by which the world can move away from the anarchy of power politics towards the creation of a genuine world community and the rule of law". In all of this there was a judicious balance between keeping in touch with the traditional idealism of the party and a realistic assessment of Britain's ability and power in the modern world.

There was also the intention to strengthen the original objectives of the charter of the UN and to follow the lead set by Canada and the Scandinavians by earmarking military units to its service. This was made clear by Harold Wilson in a speech in March 1964, and again stressed by him when, as Prime Minister, he told the House of Commons on 23 November 1964 that his government, "certainly want to make real progress towards strengthening the peace keeping functions of the United Nations, and we are very



ready, as a government, not only to pledge our general support to this, but to make an effective British contribution". The idea of a Commonwealth force, based upon the idea of "fire brigade" units to cope with limited outbreaks of violence, was also aired. The attempted coup in Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1963 and the renewed trouble in Cyprus in 1963-64 undoubtedly helped to call forth this view. In both instances British forces had been used and it was to safeguard against a repetition of this whilst ensuring that Britain continued to play a role within the Commonwealth, which helped inspire the idea of a Commonwealth force. It also had the added advantage that it would enable Britain to continue with the semblance of a world role whilst having the practical side of it supplemented by Commonwealth countries. In the event the idea was not taken up by the Commonwealth with any enthusiasm and so it was quietly dropped from the party programme.

On the other hand, at a more practical level the party endeavoured to tailor its policy to the realities of power as it existed in the mid-'sixties. Foremost in this line of thinking was the declaration to remove the illusion of Britain's independent nuclear status, and in its place to work for a more positive role in the western alliance. This was to be done by committing our nuclear element firmly within a comprehensive programme of integration inside NATO. To achieve this objective, soon after it came into office the Labour government put forward its own proposals for the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF) as a substitute for the American conceived Mixed Manned Force. The intention behind the proposal was that it would give the non-nuclear members of the alliance a genuine measure of control over nuclear policy and also help to prevent the spread of the weapons. Proposals for reforming NATO in this manner have usually come unstuck over the difficulty that essentially the United States, as the super power, will go to extreme lengths to ensure that her nuclear sovereignty remains unimpaired. In the meantime, the NATO policy structure has had to be remodelled be-

cause of the withdrawal of France from the military side of the alliance. With the desuetude of the ANF idea the Labour government's pledge to make both the V bomber force and the Polaris submarines of this country available to the ANF has not been implemented in full. Only the V bomber force has been completely handed over to NATO.

In office a number of minor official changes by the Labour government were introduced to mark the distinction from its predecessor. To keep faith with its principle to steer British foreign policy more in line with the charter of the UN the British representative to the UN was given ministerial status. To give further emphasis to the need to make progress with disarmament a minister at the foreign office with special responsibility for this task was appointed, while to give meaning to that part of the programme related to developing countries a separate Ministry of Overseas Development was established. Underlying all of this is the curious fact that Labour gave so little real attention during its preparation for return to office to the likely economic condition of Britain in the event of their becoming the government.

Whilst the party argued out the big moral issues in foreign and defence policy, it gave the economic situation in Britain no fundamental scrutiny. Yet, ultimately, as the Labour government found to its cost, Britain's external role is largely determined by the state of health of the economy. The lessons of history had still to be learnt.



### 3. Labour since 1964

Labour come to office in 1964 in circumstances that would have tested the most hardened and experienced ministerial team, and they, apart from a mere handful of men, such as Harold Wilson himself and Patrick Gordon-Walker, were relatively untried with only their enthusiasm for office to set against their as yet unknown governmental qualities. Two factors from these circumstances were to be with them for the next 18 months; the narrow overall majority of five (reduced still further during the term of parliament) and the recurring problem of the balance of payments. Clearly the government's slender margin meant that they would not be able to play a confident initiatory role in international affairs, nor significantly alter the balance of relationship within the Atlantic-European framework. An inherited deficit on the balance of payments of the order of £800m is calculated to upset the policies of any government, let alone one that had only just emerged from 13 years in opposition.

The Labour government in these circumstances never got under way with a chance. The advent of a Labour government in Britain generates an external economic environment that makes it extremely difficult for such a government to pursue a policy of its own choice. This weakness basically derives from the character of Britain's economic vulnerability; because of dependence upon foreign trade, her role as an international banker and the extreme sensitivity of the balance of payments to external pressure. The elements abroad, such as investors, bankers, traders, and speculators, initially suspicious of a Labour government in Britain are in a position to apply pressure upon the British economy and thereby influence, if not determine, the policies of a Labour government in Britain. I think perhaps the biggest mistake that would feel," admitted the Prime Minister one week after devaluation in 1967, "is that I underrated, we underrated, if you like, the power of speculators at home, or abroad, even when our balance of payments was improving, as it was last year, to put the pound in jeopardy and force us into short term measures which are injurious to this country". This

extreme vulnerability of Britain to outside opinion and therefore the corresponding need to create confidence abroad in the measures which a Labour government wishes to implement is perhaps the hardest, yet most important lesson for British socialists to learn. It is a phenomenon which for all practical purposes has become a law of Labour politics, and which was masked in 1945 only by the very poor and low state of world economic activity generally. What is quite inexcusable in the light of this is the kind of optimism that was radiated by the Prime Minister in 1965 when he is reported to have said to a parliamentary party meeting, "The economic crisis with the unpopular measures it has demanded is now virtually over. The future is bright with promise"—a mood which was at least publicly maintained up to the point of devaluation in November 1967. If this is a problem likely to beset a Labour administration during its early months in office it is that much more important that the party should have a plan of action to cope with this type of situation, instead of simply living in the hope that all will come out well in the end.

A second aspect of the recurring balance of payments problem since 1945 is that there has been a long standing and deep malaise in Britain's internal economic structure, and at the same time Britain has been involved in commitments abroad far beyond the capacity of any government in this country to fulfil. These internal difficulties derived from an industrial structure much of which had become obsolete and required modernisation on a vast scale. Britain's role as banker of the sterling area also did not permit her to engage fully in domestic economic reforms which, although necessary by internal criteria, conflicted with the demands of her sterling role. The extent to which the awareness of this position underlay the responses of successive British statesmen is a matter for argument, but that it has contributed towards the piecemeal approach of meeting issues as they arise is beyond question. Together with the limitations that are placed upon the freedom of a coun-



try to choose its foreign policy, it is necessary to add that in the case of Britain, and particularly for a Labour government, a viable, independent policy based upon principles is not possible while statesmen have continually to look over their shoulders to see that they have the margin of strength to grapple with particular situations. Very largely the conditions experienced by Labour after 1964 mirrored Ernest Bevin's lament about British power whilst he was Foreign Secretary, "I had neither coal, goods, nor credit, I was not in the same position as my predecessors . . . I have nothing with which to do it . . . I have had nothing with which to negotiate".

### issues in Labour's foreign policy

There is very little doubt that in relation to a wide range of foreign policy issues Labour's reputation has taken a hard knock. It may be that its own public relations were bad, and that it did not have a sympathetic handling of its policy by commentators who were generally disposed to its cause. It is true also that the humdrum nature of foreign policy with its unheroic achievements, does not lend itself to good publicity in the same way as the apparent neglect of great moral issues. Whatever the reason, the general impression was of a government which lacked a coherent and integrated view of foreign policy with hardly anything at all to distinguish it from its Conservative predecessor.

In fact this is wrong, and when separate parts of policy are looked at, there is much to suggest that it has been guided by a clear sense of principle. The government's refusal to dissociate itself publicly from American policy in Vietnam has probably been the most persistent and divisive issue in the Labour Party. It is not part of the case presented here to defend or to condemn American policy, but rather to seek to understand the actions of the last British government. It must be taken that both the government and its left wing critics wanted the war to end, the question therefore concerned, and still concerns, the means of

bringing it to an end. A unilateral moral gesture of denouncing American policy in Vietnam would perhaps satisfy the conscience, but it must seriously be questioned whether it would have affected American policy. One of the faults of those who become committed to a particular moral cause that requires the stricture of an ally is that they fail to take account of the overlapping and extensive nature of the interests and relationships between friendly states. Whatever might be the moral feelings toward the Vietnam war a Labour government in Britain had to balance the moral consideration against the benefits it derived from American support of its interests nearer home, for example, in Rhodesia.

This is not to argue that the government of this country should not warn, or caution the United States when it believes that the policy of that country can no longer command the support of its allies. Indeed, that has been done on several occasions; for instance, Attlee's warning to Truman over General MacArthur's conduct of the Korean War, and similarly Eden's warning to President Eisenhower concerning the proposed military involvement by the US, perhaps at tactical nuclear level, on behalf of the French in Indo-China in 1954. What is suggested is that where the relationship between two allies is unequal to the extent that it is between Britain and the US, the most positive way of exercising influence over the powerful ally is by friendly advice, persuasion, and cogent reasoning, rather than engaging in a form of moral blackmail. It is to the credit of the Labour government that despite its precarious economic position, and its heavy dependence upon the goodwill of the US, Harold Wilson persisted in his initiatives to bring the war to an end, and had the good sense to muster support for a Commonwealth initiative in order to supplement the British voice in Washington.

The government remained firm to a moral course of action in respect of two issues in foreign affairs; the sale of arms to South Africa, and its insistence upon constitutional advancement to majority rule in Rhodesia. The decision to refuse



to sell arms to South Africa was a difficult one to take. It was likely adversely to affect Britain's balance of payments at a time when they badly needed supporting; the arms sales decision was taken in December 1967, and it was always open to the South Africans to retaliate by denying us naval facilities at Simonstown, which at that time was important to the British position in the Persian Gulf and the Far East. The refusal to sell arms was clearly decided on consideration of its effect upon our moral standing amongst the Afro-Asian countries, and because it accorded with the traditional moral principle held by a large section of the party.

The issue of Rhodesia is at once complex and involves a great moral problem. It has already been written about in a Fabian context (George Cunningham, *Rhodesia: the last chance*. Fabian tract 368, September 1966), and so does not require extensive comment here. It is sufficient to say that short of being able to associate a British decision to use force with a United Nations action, then quite apart from all the other reservations related to the use of British force against the Smith regime, including the difficulty of conducting a military campaign against a land locked state, it was not possible for a Labour government to contemplate a unilateral British military operation. An aspect of this kind simply does not correspond to the range of expectations held about a Labour government by the public. Here again, despite the enthusiasm for action by a militant section of the Labour Party, the freedom of action open to the government was affected by the popular image which it represented. As a party that abhors the use of force in the affairs of nations, it cannot readily muster public support for military action other than on an issue which is seen to bear directly upon the vital interests of this country. The difficulty over Rhodesia is that it is remote from the reality of life in Britain. Perhaps, principally for this reason, Harold Wilson's comment at the outset of the crisis that "force it out" was a shrewd attempt to avoid future embarrassment inside the party and in the country at large.

Though, if the issue of Rhodesia has remained difficult and obscure, the issues at stake in the civil war in Nigeria with the secession of Biafra were at all times clear to the government, and its policy was without ambiguity throughout. That it acted in a correct manner in supporting the legitimate government of a sovereign state in the Commonwealth is not in doubt. What did cause anxiety amongst some elements of Labour opinion, and elsewhere, was the British government's support of Nigeria with arms. The point is both moral and legal. Legally, Nigeria, as with any other sovereign state, was perfectly entitled to ask and receive arms from other countries. to that extent, it was a straightforward transaction between sovereign states. Morally, the criticism was that the sale of arms helped to cause the agony of suffering in Biafra. As so often with moral questions the issues were not clear cut. The right of a people to express national self determination and to live under a government of their own choice, has to be set alongside the equally strongly held view that the integrity and unity of the state must be preserved. A balance has to be reached between morality and expediency. There is in fact a strong case for arguing that by giving firm support to the Nigerian government the war was more effectively perpetrated and thus brought to a speedier conclusion, which in turn helped to reduce the total amount of suffering. In view of the almost certain ultimate victory of Federal Nigeria what perhaps was misguided humanitarianism was the support given to the Biafran people in both words and deeds by a lot of people who felt they were doing the morally correct thing.

An aspect of foreign policy which has always been important to socialists is that of aid to underdeveloped countries. In this field the Labour government's record was not as good as many hoped for, nor was it as good as perhaps it could have been. It is true that no cuts were made in the aid programme in the January 1968 economy measures, but on the other hand the total volume of aid going to undeveloped countries remained depressingly low and never reached the



point of being one per cent of the GNP—the figure stipulated as the minimum target by the Pearson Commission on International Development in its report of September 1969. In fact, the British figure, in common with that of several other leading industrial countries, has declined during the 1960s. For example, the total flow of public and private resources from this country to developing countries declined from 1.21 per cent of the GNP in 1960 to 0.77 per cent in 1967, although it increased again in 1968. And while the recently announced increases in the British aid programme do represent an advance on the present situation, the total still does not approach the minimum 1 per cent target. The point, which has previously been argued in a Fabian pamphlet in favour of raising British aid by 50 per cent, can only be reiterated here (*Britain and the developing world*, Fabian research series 267, February 1968).

### Britain's reduced role

The compelling and persistent nature of Britain's economic weakness, exacerbated by the failure on the part of the government to inspire international confidence, virtually forced it to take decisions to reduce British commitments overseas, which should perhaps have been taken on grounds of political principle as argued by the socialist foreign policy advocates. In any event there is little case for a country to spend in the proportion of 6.5 per cent of its GNP on defence (more than health and housing combined) unless a major external role is necessary to the defence of its own direct interests. Following devaluation a series of measures were taken to reduce our commitments abroad, the most important of which was the decision to discontinue our military role east of Suez, involving the withdrawal from the Singapore base and the Persian Gulf by 1971. At the same time there was the firm indication that British forces would be concentrated in Europe. As the discussions took place which led to the cabinet measures of January 1968, a list of priorities became established in which the domestic claims

of health, housing, and education, were set alongside the needs of military expenditure overseas. There was taking place, perhaps for the first time in recent British history, a fundamental appraisal of British interests and objectives in foreign policy; and again, perhaps for the first time for many years, defence policy was designed to support foreign policy rather than the other way round. Instead of taking our commitments and interests for granted, both were examined and then made to fit the political objectives. In brief, a definition of British interests, foreign policy to support these interests, and military effort necessary to defend them, was outlined.

Occasionally, it is granted to a country to choose between continuing the general lines of its policy in the traditional way, or setting off on a new course. This comparative freedom can result from a drastic curtailment of world commitments and obligations, in which the policy makers find that it is possible to give a different orientation to policy. Broadly this analysis corresponds to the position of Britain in the modern world. She can choose to continue to have as wide a range of international contacts as possible, she may stress the quality and benefits of the Anglo-American ties, or she may select the European option. In that she is free to choose, however, it is a modification of the point made earlier that foreign policy is not "made". Policy in this situation will be "made", and it is for this reason that recently Britain presented socialists with the unique chance to view principles in relation to different courses of action and to see which appeared most appropriate to British interests and their own ideal.



## 4. the future

It is possible to continue British policy along lines that have been basically accepted by both political parties in this country since 1945; that is a policy based upon the Atlantic Alliance with primary emphasis on the quality of Anglo-American relations. This would not necessarily rule out an association with Europe, indeed actual membership of the European Economic Community, but it would imply that British policy was not to be totally oriented toward Europe. Such a policy would perhaps broadly correspond to the position that Harold MacMillan endeavoured to establish in his bid to enter the Common Market. In many respects this is a course of action which corresponds closely to the traditional British approach, and one which, if it were entirely within the province of a British government (Labour or Conservative) to select, would no doubt be the one adopted. The practicability of such a policy, however, depends upon two factors. In the first place, it requires a willingness on the part of the United States to recognise this particular role for Britain and to accept her differentiation from western Europe in certain important matters. This is in fact to claim a great deal when most of the evidence about American views on Britain and Europe since 1945 suggests the contrary. This view of Britain's role by her own statesmen has also meant that American administrations have had to put up with the solicitations of successive British governments presuming upon our especial status in Washington. In this respect the "special relationship" has not had in recent years quite the same value or emphasis in the US as it has in Britain.

Nevertheless, the relationship is not entirely devoid of meaning, and would perhaps have more value if British governments did not presume too much upon it.

It would seem, yet again, that at the very moment when many were prepared to perform the burial rights of the relationship, Harold Wilson's visit to Washington to confer with the President in January 1970, may have done something to resuscitate our consultative power with the Americans. The timing of the visit

is not without significance in view of the fact that the President was soon to deliver to Congress his report on American foreign policy in the 1970s. In that report he suggested that the European allies "deserve a voice in the alliance and its decisions commensurate with their growing power and contributions". More specifically, the President was requesting that the Europeans assume a larger burden for their own defence. The success of such a policy depends heavily upon the measure of support given to it by the British government and the influence that we can exert upon the European allies, and for this reason President Nixon was no doubt anxious to find out in advance the British reactions to his proposals. In the light of this it is reasonable to claim that Britain's special status with the US continues to rest on the fact that her support is necessary to the success of America's European policy.

The value of the American tie to Britain is that it allows us a freedom of action within the Atlantic Alliance in not forcing us to identify with a strictly European approach. At the same time part of its importance to the United States since 1945 has been that it has helped her to understand the needs of western Europe without having to become too engrossed in their affairs. This argument has, of course, lost its value with the increasing strength and independence shown by western Europe through the EEC, and by the breakaway of France from the military structure of NATO which has compelled the US to talk more directly with her. This tendency to consult with the Europeans in addition to Britain has become more apparent under the Nixon administration. A further advantage to Britain stemming from the American connection has been that America's role as a world power has supplemented our interests throughout the world. As Britain has withdrawn from one area after another on the world scene it may be that our desire to be involved in world affairs will similarly contract; in which case American support of British interests is no longer so necessary and by the same token we will not feel so bound to support American policy in all regions.



Anglo-American relations can also be interpreted in terms of domestic affinities which are in some respects congenial to socialist views. It is true that aspects of American society revealing the worst sides of competitive freedom are anathema to socialists in this country, and it has long been a standing complaint of the left wing that American society is the worst example of untamed capitalism. On the other hand, there is much in what contemporary American administrations have been trying to do in recent years which meets with the approval of socialists. For example, the extent to which the federal government intervenes to enforce rights, or establish reforms. Also, the equality of opportunity afforded in the United States appealed to Gaitskellites in the party, as did such specific features as the American system of redistributing wealth through a capital gains tax. Furthermore, the freedom of action that the association with the United States allows a British government corresponds with the tradition of internationalism in British socialism. Where the relationship appears more constricting, it may be argued that a socialist policy should be aimed at keeping the avenues open to a world power in order to influence her international policy generally, and particularly toward the underdeveloped world. This can best be achieved within the consultative framework of the relationship.

The major blot upon the relationship over the last two or three years has, of course, been American policy in Vietnam, and the signal failure of the Wilson government significantly to change that policy. This, it could be argued, is ample evidence that because of reduced circumstances Britain no longer commands influence in Washington concerning areas of the world in which she herself no longer has a major presence. Moral exhortation is not enough, power is the more relevant criterion of influence.

However, with the Nixon policy of edging the United States out of Vietnam, a more normal and balanced relationship between Britain and the United States may be achieved. Clearly the Anglo-American

relationship has changed, but that is not to suggest that at a lower, less global level it cannot still be active. It no longer means that the United States can call up British support on behalf of its own commitments around the world; the disenchantment of the western allies with US policy in Vietnam has contributed toward this development; and it does not imply that a British government will automatically be taken into American confidence over major decisions on world policy. Alternatively, it can mean that both countries see the value of complementary diplomatic initiatives in world affairs, particularly in dealing with the Soviet Union over European affairs. Consistently since 1945 Britain has been the least intransigent of the western allies in handling the Soviet bloc. Successive British governments have sought to initiate talks with the Russians upon European issues in order to produce agreement that would make the *status quo* in Europe more manageable and acceptable to both sides. Moreover, despite the numerous setbacks to these efforts there is still reason to think, and hope, that the British view carries weight in Moscow because it is seen as a modifying influence upon the more rigid attitudes of the other members of the western alliance. In the current phase of effort by the US to find agreement with the Soviet Union on outstanding European questions, there may be a positive mediatory role for Britain to play as a power concerned with Europe though less directly committed than the western Europeans, whilst more closely involved in its affairs than the US.

The major objection to this line of discussion is that it begs the most important question: would the EEC countries allow Britain to continue with this "middle" role if she joined the European community. The answer is almost certainly in the negative. Even though it was de Gaulle's personal veto, based upon his conception of what the European community should be, which closed the door upon the Macmillan government and the first approach by the Labour government, it should not be assumed that matters will readily change under the management of M. Pompidou.



The President's first response to Britain's renewed application at the EEC summit in January 1970 was perhaps more indicative of the real attitude of France than his later conciliatory approach at the end of the meeting. The plain fact is that de Gaulle's attitude, whilst extreme, nonetheless reflected real interests in France and indeed perhaps of the EEC countries as a whole. After all, none of them was prepared to force the hand of France in their support of the British claim for entry. What is certainly at the root of the French attitude, and perhaps that of other members of the Six, is the question as to whether Britain is ready to become truly European in her commitment, which in the long term goes well beyond the economic community and extends into the field of foreign policy and a political community. British policy is at a critical juncture, for it appears to be no longer possible to keep the traditional "bridge" position open in the Atlantic partnership. If Britain declares for membership it would seem to require an unqualified acceptance by Britain of the conditions laid down by the EEC countries, and in this they would, of course, be asking for no more than they were themselves prepared to undertake. This position has been made clear by various European statesmen at repeated intervals in the recent past, and it is as well to be very clear upon this point.

### a re-appraisal

All the relevant factors in Britain's present and projected condition point toward a closer association with Europe. That much is not in doubt. The continued reduction in Britain's role as a world power since the end of the second world war, and the need primarily to focus British policy within a region, leads inexorably, for all practical purposes, toward Europe. Consistent with this view a number of re-orientations of British policy have been made. The defence review of 1969 more explicitly than before expressed British defence interest as specifically residing in Europe. In its designation of Europe and North America as an "area of concentration" the Duncan Re-

port (the Report of the Committee on Overseas Representation 1968-69, Cmnd 4107. Summer, 1969) also expressed British interest as fundamentally based upon a European policy. Furthermore, the context in which the Duncan Committee was set up substantially determined its terms of reference, which lends emphasis to the orientation of British policy towards Europe. The committee was asked "to review urgently the functions and scale of the British representational effort overseas (including defence and other attachés and advisers and British defence staffs) in the light of the decisions on foreign and defence policy announced by Her Majesty's Government on 1 January 1968), the balance of payments and the changing international role which these imply for the United Kingdom".

After 1967 Harold Wilson was looking for some part of the British industrial stock that could be made attractive to the EEC countries, and thus make us a worthwhile proposition for inclusion in the community; hence the concept of a "technological community". Its appeal lay in two directions: first, it had the appearance of presenting the opportunity to the western Europeans of preventing an American investment takeover of their own technology . . . "a powerful Atlantic partnership", as Harold Wilson said during his round of talks in the European capitals in January 1967, "can be realised only when Europe is able to put forth her full economic strength so that we can in industrial affairs speak from strength to our Atlantic partners". And second, it helped to portray Labour in Britain as having grasped a new European dimension in contrast to its previous insularity.

If this is a fair interpretation of British interest and policy then the important question is: to what extent could the then Labour government influence the basis of its entry in a way that was consistent with socialist objectives, whilst recognising that in any major policy decision the relationship of principles to policy is uncertain. This involves making assumptions about a whole range of matters in Europe related to its future development. For example, what form



should the British relationship with Europe take? Should it be limited to some form of "associate" status? Should we seek full membership of the European Economic Community but limit our commitment to the economic sphere? However much either of these courses of action might appeal to opinion in this country, or fit British needs, they have virtually been ruled out for the present by the statements made at official level about the intention to seek full membership. The Labour government made it quite clear that it rejected associate status, it also shared the desire of the six for greater political unity. The election of a Conservative government has in no way altered this particular policy. That being the case it is important to be clear about such matters as the extent of influence that Britain might be expected to hold in the community; and related to this, the scope for Britain to help shape a political community. There is also the matter of the relationship which this community should have with the countries of eastern Europe, which in turn relates to the perplexing question of the two Germanies. Finally for socialists an important point is the form and quality of the relationship of the EEC with international institutions and with the outside world, particularly the vast underdeveloped part.

The international links historically embodied in British policy of which socialist internationalism is an expression, might suggest that Britain should not tie herself exclusively to one area of the world but aim to keep open the avenues of international contact. In keeping with this view is the idea that British interests outside Europe have been not so much the result of imperial rule as rather the other way round, and that the imperial role grew out of involvement with the world beyond Europe. In this case the nature of British interests in the world continue beyond the liquidation of empire. In the language of the Duncan Report, as a "first rate power of the second order" should we not be looking in the direction of that group of "middle" powers as the best way of enabling us to conduct an international role. The

nature of British interests, particularly in relation to trade and security in the modern world suggest that we should look to international channels as a means of buttressing our own needs. If we, together with other middle sized powers, having interests in common, endeavour to build the general lines of policy in relation to multilateral techniques, then international institutions and the concept of an international community could take on a new and enlarged meaning. It is in relation to the United Nations that Britain can most obviously be in the vanguard of a new approach to a range of international subjects. Canada and the Scandinavian countries have already set an admirable example in their approach to the work of the United Nations, and in other directions. These are efforts with which we, particularly under a Labour government, should have been associated.

## the European Economic Community

It is necessary at the outset to be clear about the kind of community in Europe we wish to join, and the kind of community we wish it to become. It is all very well talking about the desirability and inevitability of our having a closer association with Europe, but within that broad policy, even in actual membership of the EEC, there is a margin of preference and choice, and it is about these preferences that socialists should have clear ideas. It is a mistake to claim too much for British influence inside the community as some pro-marketeters, both in and outside the Labour Party, are apt to do. There is in this view a tendency to think that by entering Europe Britain can in some way gain fresh access to the corridors of world power; a hankering for the trimmings of the imperial role in a new guise. But the idea of Britain, exercising world influence through Europe as a kind of third "super power" is a very questionable asset. If it were to succeed it could well add a new element of instability to the present equation of East/West power. The essential point here is that the logic of the present European power structure derives from the predominance of the two super powers in



their respective spheres of influence, and the military strategic deadlock between them. Out of this there has developed the need for some form of mutual understanding, and to sustain this atmosphere neither super power welcomes developments within their respective alliances calculated to weaken the confidence in one another's ability to control events. It is against this background that further moves to strengthen the integration of western Europe, including the enlargement of the community and steps toward political integration with common foreign and defence policies, have to be judged. If further unification in western Europe is impelled by the motive to be independent of the US it could, at this stage in the development of East/West relations undermine the relationship between the super powers.

To serve the wider purpose of stability in Europe the moves toward further integration in the western half, of a political and defence character, should be consonant with the policy of a European détente which the us and the Soviet Union wish to promote. The British government, for this reason alone was right to insist upon being involved in the talks amongst the six for a common foreign policy framework and the plans for a political community. The strength of the position from which we negotiate for entry to the EEC will make a lot of difference to the influence that we might wield later on. In asking us to be more "European", in order to make us a suitable candidate, the six have meant that we should jettison all the features which add to the appearance of a world role—the Commonwealth, EFTA, and the "special relationship". Thus we will not bargain from a position of strength based upon this supplementary leverage from the outside. This aspect of the case has passed largely unexamined by those who strongly advocate British membership. They argue in favour of British influence as though we would still have these incremental advantages in support of our position. There is no such likelihood, in fact it was precisely the fear of this very thing happening that caused the door to be slammed on our first application.

Britain would be one of eleven countries, assuming that the other EFTA applicants came in simultaneously with us, and whilst it is likely that we would have equality of voting with the big three (France, West Germany and Italy) that would not give us a particular advantage. The influence which Britain might have will reside largely in the strength of our case and the force and persuasiveness with which it is put forward. Here again, the situation is likely to work against us. Influence amongst states normally exists in common interests based upon similarities, be they geographic, traditional ties, trade connections, or political institutions. In relation to these features several of the countries within the EEC, indeed the bloc as a whole, have enough in common and are sufficiently different from Britain in terms of interests and methods of procedure, to suggest that on major issues of policy inside the community Britain will usually be in a minority position. Furthermore, any influence that we may possess is likely to be discounted by the fact that we will be the latecomers into a community that is already well formed, with established procedures, almost habits, and in which there may well be resentment at having arrangements, carefully drawn up, upset by the outsider. "... Their entry into the Common Market", de Gaulle said in 1967, meaning Britain, "would amount to imposing the building of a completely new structure which would virtually wipe out everything that has just been built". There is in this view the quite natural desire to protect and preserve what has already been achieved. Nor would the veto device in our hands be as powerful as it has been to France, for the simple reason that whereas the other members have already indicated that they regard France as essential to the survival of the EEC, no such assumption is warranted concerning Britain's position.

If this line of discussion is continued it follows that the pursuit of British interests requires that we should seek to enlarge that element inside the EEC with which we have most in common. The states which have similar interests to our-



selves, in relation to European affairs and to the outside world, are those within the EFTA. For this reason, it should be as much our concern as for those EFTA countries who are applicants with us for membership of the EEC to see that their interests are treated in a similar manner to our own. Quite apart from a certain likemindedness based upon similar interests, the support of the Scandinavians is consonant with socialist objectives in Britain. Socialists in Britain have found it relatively easy to come to an understanding with their Scandinavian colleagues about the nature and purpose of social democracy, in contrast to the experience of working with the continental left.

Admittedly, this is not so true today as it was in the 1950s. In the case of the German Social Democrats there is perhaps an affinity of approach with British Labour that is becoming more obvious now that the SPD have control in Germany. In fact, with the British Labour government and the German Social Democrats holding similar views upon the future of Europe, there was a good chance of achieving a basis of mutual understanding in Anglo-German relations for the first time since the Federal Republic was established. Within the middle range of powers, to which Britain appears to have admitted herself, the Scandinavian countries approximate in their behaviour more closely to a socialist conception of an international community than any other group of states. Their general sense of obligation to the international community goes well beyond the regional concept. Indeed, the practical service given by these states including Canada, to the United Nations, provides a record with which this country, with its own history of international involvement, should have been associated. The internationalism of British socialism must, equally, convey this general sense of obligation to an international community, and for this reason it was important that a Labour government in its effort to gain access to the EEC should not have forgotten the wider concept of Europe and its own relations with the world at large.

Furthermore, the extent of British influence in making the EEC more outward looking in its approach must be set in the context of what Britain has already done to direct its policy towards Europe. By the liquidation of a large part of our overseas commitments linked to the need to get our balance of payments strong, the earmarking of our military possessions to the European arsenal, and the recommendations of the Duncan Committee, British policy is clearly envisaged as that of a regional European power. Whilst on the whole these policy changes have been decided upon, by reference to British criteria, nevertheless their coincidence with the decision to re-activate our application to the EEC give the appearance of measures aimed at making us acceptable to the six. There is also an important institutional obstacle in the way of making the EEC enthusiastic about the needs of the underdeveloped world, that will in turn restrict British influence inside the community. Creating the appropriate political institutions, whether they be federal or something less, carries with it a substantial degree of insularity. It took the United States a long time, even after it had welded together the Union, to take up its place in the international society, and the Soviet Union as a further example of a large federal state showed no great inclination to become involved in world affairs until their communist society had been forged. It may be said that the political maturity of the western European states will enable them to overcome this initial tendency to look inward, but it is as well to appreciate that, in its early stages of development, a community has a strong inclination to concentrate upon its own affairs. It has to focus the loyalties of all sections of society (from the political hierarchy through the administrative bureaucracy to the different populations) upon the new community. A regional grouping of states of community status will tend therefore during its formative years to look inward and discriminate against, or at least be indifferent to, states outside the system. British weight alone in the European scales will not seriously affect this tendency; indeed if anything, it will assist the process through



the renewed incentive that British membership will give to progress towards a political community. In view of this, it is in Britain's interest to see that the other EFTA applicants are admitted at the same time as ourselves so that the outward looking group is enlarged.

## East and West in Europe

European security and the relationship between western and eastern Europe is of major importance. It does not much matter what the present Soviet motive might be in accepting the need to reach some form of understanding with the West upon issues in Europe. What is important is that an opportunity does appear to exist for some basis of discussion between the two sides on means to lessen tension in the area. The question of relations between the two Germanies is central to any programme of détente in Europe. That two Germanies exist, and are likely to continue to exist into the foreseeable future, must by now be the cardinal fact that has to be accepted. Only if that is taken for granted can there be real progress in the relations between the two halves. With the present SPD coalition government in Bonn there is the chance of a gradual understanding being worked out with the German Democratic Republic. The recent talks between the two sides, and held on each other's territory, are encouraging, if only because they mark a break in the more open hostility that existed between them. More than that it is difficult to claim. Initial exchanges upon issues that divide them are obviously necessary to any eventual normalisation of their relations but it would be unwise to make predictions concerning the eventual outcome.

Whilst the question of the two Germanies is the most important aspect of the European scene, it is only part of the general approach now being renewed by the eastern European bloc to reach a satisfactory understanding with western Europe. To the extent that this eastern move can be shown to be genuine and not just a further step in the long standing game of East/West politics in

Europe, it should be treated seriously. It is of course difficult from a western standpoint to establish the seriousness of any one offer from the Soviet bloc. Proposals from eastern Europe are so much tied up with the internal politics of the Warsaw Pact and the vagaries of the Soviet Union that western policy has to remain cautious without shunning attempts at settlement. It is true that if eastern European initiatives are looked at over a period of time, say from the Bucharest communiqué of the Warsaw Pact in 1966 to the present, there is revealed a consistent attempt to raise the subject of European security, embodied in the proposal for a European Security Conference. In responding to these proposals the western powers have to be clear about what they are willing to accept in the way of Soviet control in eastern Europe. In a recent United Nations Association pamphlet, the authors argued that "it is clear that Russia has kept large numbers of troops in eastern Europe, less to be ready to invade the West or to repel invaders, as to keep eastern Europe aware of her presence and ensure no escape from the communist fold". This is the most important aspect of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. It is necessary in relation to any effort to arrive at a better understanding in Europe for the western powers to realise the true nature of, and reasons for, Soviet control of eastern Europe, and to accept into the distant future that the Russians will continue to regard the area as one in which they have a "legitimate" security interest.

At the same time it is important to remember that it is in the interests of the eastern European countries to reach agreement with the western half of Europe. To secure a greater degree of independence of the Soviet Union and alleviate the necessity for her intervention in their affairs, the states of eastern Europe need positive indication that the two halves in Europe can work together. This does not conflict with the view that the communist governments of eastern Europe are aware that their ultimate military safeguard is in Russian hands, or that in the overall East/West balance



in Europe they are in the Soviet sphere of interest, but it does mean that they desire to make an immediate Russian presence less necessary by pointing to the willingness of the West to engage in détente. The effect of the Brezhnev doctrine has been to encourage eastern Europe to reach agreement with the West, though understandably the Warsaw Pact countries are careful to interpret the Soviet attitude accurately in any initiatives they take.

### European security

How can further development in western European integration, including the enlargement of the community, take place without adversely affecting East/West relations in Europe? Soviet fears concerning the consolidation of western Europe with Britain inside are well known, and perhaps stem from the simple ideological point that Russia does not want to see a strong western Europe. In relation to a possible West European Defence Community, however, there is a firmer base to Russian hostility. Her main fear is that inevitably West Germany would dominate this development, with the added factor of control over nuclear weapons. To keep an atmosphere of détente going at the same time as negotiations are taking place for enlarging the Economic Community and extending it into the foreign policy and defence fields, will entail considerable diplomatic skill. The ideal situation would be that in which the defence plans of western Europe formed part of a comprehensive system of European security guaranteed by the super powers, but this is unlikely to be a practical programme in the foreseeable future. However, it is at least possible to avoid creating a defence union in western Europe that would increase tension and have the additional effect of driving the eastern states more firmly into the hands of Russia.

As the possibility of the two super powers negotiating the future of Europe without reference to their allies became more apparent, the idea of a West European Defence Community based upon

nuclear deterrence gained favour. This notion has perhaps acquired a new impetus in the light of President Nixon's statement, in February 1970, concerning United States' policy toward Europe with its envisaged force reductions. The British attitude is important in this matter. A European deterrent would initially at least depend upon British co-operation. Our experience and guidance in these matters together with the practical contribution of our warheads would be necessary to the success of the project. Most informed writers upon European defence are now of the opinion that a European nuclear deterrent is no longer the major consideration. Whether this be true or not, the fact remains that at this juncture in western European affairs with the British application for membership of the EEC pending, and the West Europeans looking for ways to strengthen and develop their institutions, British co-operation in a nuclear scheme becomes a relevant factor. With her nuclear status Britain has a measure of power to determine the character of events in this field, and many would argue that the wisest use of that power would be to maintain the effectiveness of the western alliance and not to create a new element of instability by helping to develop a European deterrent. Harold Wilson's words in 1967 made very clear British policy at that time, "I certainly do not believe that to join the community . . . means fundamental changes in European defence arrangements, destructive of the western alliance, destructive of the hopes of a East/West détente". More recently Denis Healey specifically rejected the idea of a "European NATO". This policy should continue to form part of the present British government's basic approach to Europe. It is a policy aimed to preserve the western alliance and to accommodate East/West security talks.

The idea of Anglo-French nuclear co-operation within the framework of the western alliance has two main implications. In the first place, Anglo-French collaboration could have a cohesive effect upon the Atlantic alliance, bringing the French more closely into the military structure of NATO again and requiring



them to join NATO's nuclear planning group. This would result in a strengthening of the alliance and a more even distribution of its burdens, with concomitantly a greater voice by the principal European partners. Denis Healey pointed that British co-operation with France upon nuclear matters would be possible, "if France were to decide to do this (join NATO's nuclear planning group), a new situation would arise which could lead us all to a closer cooperation in the nuclear field". Secondly, given the anti-US orientation of French policy, Anglo-French nuclear co-operation could be used by France to establish a western European nuclear capacity from which a negotiating position on East/West relations could be adopted independently of the US. In view of this, British insistence upon keeping nuclear collaboration with France **firmly inside the** Atlantic alliance, is the necessary safeguard against France using the conjunction of the British application for membership of the EEC and nuclear co-operation as an anti-American device.

The traditional opposition of socialists to armaments can find partial satisfaction in the policy which the Labour government pursued on the question of European security. Included in recent exchanges between East and West has been the idea for an all European security conference as a means of working out a comprehensive security system for Europe. Whilst it is premature to talk of a security system for the whole of Europe, this will remain the long term objective. In the meantime certain initial measures can help toward the realisation of comprehensive security. For example, rather than working directly for the single "settlement" type conference it is perhaps more realistic to aim at establishing joint East/West working parties at a lower than official level, though including some government representation to ensure that the centres of power are carried along. This might take the form of preceding a full conference by a series of such preparatory working parties and continuing beyond it with similar exchanges. In this way, the holding of talks about common security problems be-

tween the two sides would become established, and once the practice was embedded it would be difficult for either side to reverse the process. As an alternative it should prove possible for representatives of the two alliance systems to exchange views upon security questions. The super powers might make a gesture to European feeling in this respect by allowing only the European partners to hold the initial exchanges **and, depending upon the progress made,** allow them to do most of the preparatory work.

Having got themselves into a military confrontation in the centre of Europe with complex alliance systems, both sides are going to find it very difficult to extricate themselves and engage in the practical side of détente. There will be a great amount of preparatory work entailed, with signs of sustained good intent, and practical steps in arms control pointing the way to a security system. The accepted lines of development are likely to include joint inspection of zones where phased military withdrawal has been approved, in order to prevent rapid re-entry, agreed means of ensuring that rapid troop movements do not occur, and a suitably composed supervisory body consisting of both sides and meeting at agreed intervals to ensure that the system is working satisfactorily. If this can be achieved both sides may approach the condition in which they can live together in Europe and agree upon procedures to accommodate change in, and between, their respective systems. The British view of its contribution to European affairs should continue to be that outlined by Harold Wilson in 1967 when discussing European unity with the Parliamentary Labour Party, "**our conception of European unity is not based on something narrow or inward looking . . .** There are far bigger issues at stake. The essential one is whether it is going to be possible to build up Europe, as I think most Europeans understand it, with as a major objective the breaking down of tension between East and West. The countries of western and eastern Europe alike all have a vital role to play in achieving this objective".



## 5. conclusion

In recent years Britain has been compelled to come to terms with her reduced circumstances. The process has been painful, and has in large measure contributed to the current mood of national introspection. Nevertheless this was essential if we were to be a credible power. Working now from a different premiss of power contemporary socialist philosophy can be realistically conceived and made relevant to Britain's role in the future. The exigencies of international politics combine with the nuclear factor to narrow the margin of unilateral action of any state, and at the same time create the necessity for a sense of international responsibility.

In Britain's case, of course, these internal and external developments have helped to produce a bi-partisanship in foreign policy. Ernest Bevin had to withstand attacks from the left wing of the Labour Party because of his alleged conservative foreign policy, but what is not sufficiently emphasised is that Conservative foreign policy has in turn been influenced by the socialist view. This similarity of the parties on basic issues in foreign policy was bound to happen as the "elbow room" in our external relations became restricted. Successive British governments since 1945 have found it necessary to achieve a consensus among their allies in order to make British policy viable, and have been susceptible to the pressure of other states operating through the UN. This can be seen in the fact that Conservative governments have been more influenced by the effects of the UN than ever their inter-war counterparts were by the League of Nations.

As Britain adjusts to her new place in the international system, different factors will correspondingly be emphasised in her foreign relations, such as efforts to strengthen the concept of international society, more assistance to the poorer areas of the world, and policies to curb the impact of power politics. Britain has a long history of international involvement and increasingly in the future her policy will have to be based upon agreement with other states in Europe, and elsewhere in the world. In this context,

the socialist view of foreign affairs will help to formulate a large part of British foreign policy, in contrast to its previous assignment of a revolutionary doctrine seeking to supplant the conventional pattern.

The conjuncture of Britain's loss of world power and the consolidation of western Europe has forced Britain to reassess her relationship with Europe in a far more critical way than hitherto. As a result, whatever happens—whether we join the Common Market or not—British policy will become more absorbed with Europe. On balance, the projected interests of Britain come out in favour of a positive European policy involving full membership of the European community. But it is unfortunate that membership of the EEC rather than being considered as one of several problematically balanced options, has been presented more in the form of a necessity, thus putting rational discussion at a discount and weakening our negotiating position in Europe.



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