

the making of Labour's foreign policy

BP 161511(433)

Rodney Fielding
fabian tract 433

30p



fabian tract 433

the making of Labour's foreign policy

| | | |
|----------|--|----|
| foreword | Eric Deakins | 1 |
| chapter | | |
| 1 | introduction | 2 |
| 2 | the foreign and commonwealth office | 5 |
| 3 | the party machinery | 14 |
| 4 | conclusion | 23 |

this pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving publications it issues as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement.

Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1H 9BN
January 1975 ISBN 7163 0433 3

foreword

R(P)

BP 161 S11 (433)



Eric Deakins

Following a Fabian weekend discussion in 1972 at which ~~Maylan~~ Kennett read a controversial paper on the Labour Party and foreign policy, the International and Commonwealth Bureau of the Fabian Society set up a working party to consider the matter. The Working Party held many meetings during which it talked with former Labour ministers and Party officials about formulation of foreign policy within the Labour movement when in opposition and implementation of foreign policy during periods of Labour Government.

This pamphlet by Rod Fielding could not have been written without the hard work of the members of the working party. I am personally grateful to them for giving so freely of their time in order to investigate a relatively unmapped area in the geography of the Labour Movement. The pamphlet does not of course reflect all the views of every member and at least one member disagrees profoundly with some of its conclusions.

The pamphlet's analysis is probably more important than its conclusions. As such it is a useful contribution to the continuing debate about Britain's relationship with other countries and about how the Labour movement should seek to work out and implement the policies it wants.

1. introduction

Internationalism has a significant place in the development of British socialism. From the principles first enunciated by the Union of Democratic Control at the close of the First World War to the National Executive Committee policy statement, *A Foreign Policy for Labour*, socialists from whatever quarter of the Labour Party have been anxious to prescribe the conditions for a socialist world and Britain's place within it.

In this evolution, the historical perspective of British socialists has suffered just as much as the most blimpish Tory from the illusion of "Pax Britannica". British power and influence has been persistently overestimated, which has allowed the belief to persist that a Labour Government with a solid majority behind it would be in a position to translate principles into practical policy, by the exercise of authority at the crucial junctures of world politics. Alongside this view has been the residual assumption that in some way the advent of a Labour Government in Britain would encourage other states to transform their policy along socialist lines. The actual experience of Labour in office in handling their foreign policy has of course contrasted sharply with these assumptions. Ernest Bevin's lament as Foreign Secretary of an unprecedented majority Labour Government that "if I had a ton more coal I could have a foreign policy" has proved to be far more the actual economic context in which successive Labour Foreign Secretaries have had to operate since 1945, than that of choosing between alternative socialist goals.

The limited nature of British power is only one side of the question. The international system, comprising some 140 states, is far too complex for dogmatic formulations about how it should be organised to be in any way useful as a guide to policy makers. The freedom of action granted to any state is so marginal in the international field—the super-powers themselves have become palpably conscious of this—that it has of necessity to search for a common basis of agreement with other states, and in the process the modification of ideal policies is essen-

tial. In the case of Britain, this general proposition is underlined by her heavy dependence on overseas trade.

The experience of conducting external relations has certainly led Labour leaders to shift the emphasis in foreign policy formulation away from abstract premises toward a recognition of the inherent power structure in the international system. The effect of this has been to produce an acrimonious division of opinion, when there is a Labour Government, between ministers having to face the facts of international life, and the left wing of the party bent upon creating a total transformation of the system. As Denis Healey has written: "Particularly when the Labour Party is in office, foreign policy becomes the last refuge of utopianism".

This discord between a Labour Government and its followers was most evident during Harold Wilson's administration of 1964-70. On several key issues such as Vietnam, the Nigerian civil war and, to a lesser extent, in regard to Rhodesia and Europe, the Labour Government found itself at odds with a large section of party opinion. Particularly over Vietnam the party hardened in its view that Government policy was excessively influenced by the Foreign Office's preference for backroom diplomacy. For its part the Government appeared to lack a coherent and integrated view as to the direction its foreign policy should take. It is true that circumstances were savagely arrayed against it; a deteriorating external economic balance that plagued it for much of its period of office and which conspired to make it heavily dependent on the goodwill of the US, combined with an overstretched military commitment abroad. In these conditions it was obliged quite apart from any predisposition on the part of the Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary, to take decisions on foreign policy which went against the grain of party opinion. A disenchanted and frustrated party became increasingly critical of the Government's performance, and in its search for the right direction in foreign policy, the party predictably reverted to fundamental principles.

The character of this continuing debate between the party leadership and the left wing has been unfortunate because it has generated an unproductive doctrinal dispute and failed to establish a relevant set of guidelines for Labour's foreign policy. Both camps have become entrenched in the virtues of their own beliefs. The group who largely because of ministerial experience have campaigned for a more realistic approach to foreign affairs have tended to surrender ideals to the needs of government, and propagating the image that Labour is "fit to rule". Once this happens there is to all outward appearance little to distinguish Labour from Conservative foreign policy. On the other hand, the ideologists in the party have often given the impression that they are more concerned to preserve the integrity of their beliefs than seeing them tested in the arena of international politics. This old controversy within the party has become a somewhat sterile debate in which both sides go over their parts like worn out actors, having long forgotten the point of the play, and the existence of the audience. Moreover, it is an exercise that is irrelevant to the circumstances in which foreign policy has to be enacted, for the quite basic reason that a discussion about the interpretation of fundamental principles can only be conducted at a theoretical level.

This pamphlet is not primarily concerned with the question: what is socialist foreign policy? And what principles should, or should not, be included in a socialist perspective? It is an attempt to deal with the policy making machinery which helps to formulate Labour foreign policy, with a view to showing how this might be better adapted to secure Labour's goals. Even so, it is necessary to say a brief word about the substance of policy as a background against which to judge the efficiency of the policy making machinery.

Any attempt to provide guidelines for Labour's foreign policy, other than in the form of some general statement of principles, must take account of Britain's current position in the world, and prognosticate the main drift of events in the

world throughout the 1970s. In hand with this, Labour's policy has to be based upon meshing its major tenets with the basic interests essential to Britain in the international system; and by the nature of the system these interests are not constant, they change and require re-interpretation over time as conditions in the world change. For example, no British government, be it Labour or Conservative, can ignore the long term implications of the world oil crisis of 1973, following the action of the oil producing states, or remain aloof to the co-ordinated efforts of states to bolster the fragile world monetary system. Labour's policy has to exist in the clear recognition that Britain no longer influences world affairs on the grand scale. This is not to say that British policy no longer has a vital role to play, only that to use her influence effectively her policy has to be closely associated with states that have common interests. Changes in British policy abroad such as those envisaged in the NEC statement, *A Foreign Policy for Labour*, including the banning of certain categories of arms sales to South Africa, as well as systematically reducing trade with that country, impose their own domestic price, which have to be included in the overall economic reckoning just as much as a schools building programme or new hospitals.

There is also the tendency for interested groups within the party to put pressure on their own Government to make pronouncements upon issues in the international sphere where no specific British interest or involvement exists. It may be the nature of a particular internal regime, such as the military dictatorship in Greece before its abdication of power, apartheid in South Africa, Spain's treatment of trade unionists, or the sale of arms to a military junta. Issues such as these touch the nerve centre of political belief of some group or other within the Labour party. Here again gestures exact their own price. A particular course of action in foreign policy cannot be confined to the political level; nowadays it invariably has important consequences for British industry and the domestic economy. Moral intervention in the world

may not only meet with disapproval by the Foreign Office but may cause other departments whose interests are involved to complain about the effects on British trade. In these circumstances, the effects of policy have to be carefully weighed up through the co-ordinated efforts of the other departments concerned in conjunction with the Foreign Office. This is not to say that moral action should be ruled out by a Labour Government, indeed it would be a sad outcome if this were so, but the anticipated gain from such action has to be set alongside the cost in hard economic terms.

There will always be the shifting sands of international behaviour that no government, no matter how carefully it has worked out its position beforehand, can foresee or respond to according to a political policy. And on these questions a Labour Government must always be prepared to face the charge from those who are apt to be wise after the event, that it has acted mistakenly. Whilst this is the contingent nature of a world of sovereign states, the international system does include relatively stable features upon which Labour could have general attitudes worked out in opposition. For example, the party could formulate its views in advance on issues such as : alliances, policy toward the United Nations and other international agencies, aid to the third world and defence policy. Lastly, it cannot be too strongly emphasised that it is necessary to have a policy carefully worked out in opposition which has been discussed and generally approved throughout the party. Such a policy could have agreed general approaches toward the relatively permanent features of the international system ; where radical change is envisaged the implications of policy should be worked out in some detail, including possible effects upon the domestic programme. The value of this is underlined by the contrast between the opening months of Labour in office in February 1974 and the foreign policy of the 1964-70 Labour administration. In the period preceding 1964 the party gave little attention to developing a major strategy in foreign affairs, and was preoccupied with

economic policy, whereas between 1970 and 1974 more thought was given to establishing general guidelines for foreign policy, culminating in *A Foreign Policy for Labour*. As a result, the general impression of the present Labour government is that it has a clearer idea about its objectives abroad than its Labour predecessor.

Within the compass of action outlined, the measure of achievement of a Labour Government will be the skill with which it adapts its socialist philosophy to achieve consistency between its domestic programme and its foreign policy objectives. With a clear idea of its objectives in external relations, a Labour Government depends upon two factors to help carry through its policy. First, it has to devote attention, more so than hitherto, to nurturing a basis of co-operation with the whole of the Labour movement. Second, it has to ensure that its policies are not thwarted by the determined efforts of permanent officials to maintain a continuity of policy.

2. the foreign and commonwealth office

There is the traditional suspicion widespread in the Labour party that it is the Foreign Office which diverts a Labour Government from pursuing a radical course in foreign policy. This suspicion is twofold: the first is that the Foreign Office itself, because of its own inherent collective view, operates to block the more openly socialist aspects of Labour's foreign policy. And secondly, it is the belief that a Labour Foreign Secretary, no matter how clear and determined in his ideas about foreign policy, eventually succumbs to Foreign Office pressure. The periods of Labour Government, far from alleviating this doubt, have confirmed the bulk of party opinion in the view that its ideals are betrayed in foreign policy. Although feeling has run very high within the party on this subject little has been done since 1945 to examine seriously the relationship of the Foreign Office to the foreign policy programme of Labour. This is surprising in view of the fact that as early as 1925, in conducting a post-mortem on the 1924 minority Labour Government, provoked by the Foreign Office's handling of the Zinoviev Letter, the party's own International Advisory Committee expressed profound mistrust of the Foreign Office personnel. It went on to lament: "the absence of anyone in high position in the Foreign Office or the Diplomatic Services who even remotely understood the mentality of Labour, and drew attention to the absence of any link, except for the overworked Foreign Secretary and Parliamentary Secretary, between the Foreign Office and the Party, and the lack of anyone to interpret and execute Labour Policy throughout the Office".

Without suggesting that there is any necessary antithesis between Labour's ideals and the attitude of the Foreign Office, the fact remains that the permanent officials occupy a central, strategic position in the planning and execution of Labour's foreign policy. Any study of the Foreign Office must concern itself with two facets of the Office: the basic attitudes which prevail within the Foreign Office establishment, and their method of working. The Foreign Office conceives its function as one of administering day to

day external affairs, and managing relations with other states in such a way as to disturb the balance of the international system as little as possible, in order to minimise interference with British interests. In pursuing this major objective the basic guideline for the Foreign Office is the protection of British interests, and quite naturally it will stress the necessity of continuity of policy—of acting with caution and according to precedent—in order to safeguard these interests. It is not in the nature of this function to see policy as creating conditions for change, or aiming to transform the attitudes of other states. The preservation of the *status quo* is the overwhelming motivation of all Foreign Office personnel in assessing the impact of events abroad upon British policy. In essence the Foreign Office is bound to oppose major departures from the traditional approach because this is seen as potentially dangerous to the National Interest as perceived by Foreign Office officials. They would no doubt claim that it is their duty to act on behalf of the National Interest, because if they do not do so, there is no guarantee that British interests will be safeguarded, certainly not by other states. There is also the vested interest of the Foreign Office in the present system, which cannot be discounted. Major change in foreign policy introduced by a Labour Government carries with it the threat to the continued survival of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in its present form. All of this leads the Foreign Office machine to move in a very deliberate, cautious, and slow manner when confronted with any major proposals for change. In the view of one Labour Minister of State at the Foreign Office, the capacity of such a machine for inhibiting radical change is increased by the very high intellectual and professional standard of foreign service officials. They are, generally speaking, men of impressive academic qualifications who study their profession with great care and are usually very much better informed on the principles and the details of foreign policy issues than most labour ministers when they first arrive in office.

This general disposition on the part of

the permanent officials is reinforced by the method of working in the Foreign Office. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office steeped in a combined tradition of responsibility for the external affairs of a great imperial power with its own *haute politique*, places it amongst the most prestigious of foreign services in the world. Its internal organisation and method of operation, managed by officials renowned for their energy and skill, enable the Foreign Office to exert a collective expertise that is difficult for a Labour Foreign Secretary bent upon changing the direction of foreign policy to overcome. A new Labour Foreign Secretary on going to the Foreign Office will quickly find himself enmeshed in the wide and intricate range of decision taking. He cannot but be dependent on the advice offered by his permanent staff. Lord George Brown recounting his period at the Foreign Office pinpoints this aspect of the problem: "... obviously there were vast areas of the world of tremendous importance to us and to our allies which I hardly knew at all and on which I had to be very fully briefed. The Foreign Office is equipped to give the best information, the best of briefing on any international issue one cares to mention. But what bothered me, made as I am, was the thought that it was they who were deciding the areas I should be briefed about, and I quickly became aware that, unless I was determined, I would inevitably become the purveyor of views already formed in the Office" (George Brown, *In my Way*).

While this is true it oversimplifies the question of the relationship of the minister to the permanent official. The problem chiefly resides in the fact that the officials of the Office are always able to produce weighty evidence for why a given line on policy should not be taken, which it is difficult for a minister on his own initiative to challenge. He probably has only his own political instinct to go on; the officials are able to cite hard factual evidence. The minister's choice is also impeded by the fact that he is confronted with a monolithic official policy, instead of a series of options each compatible with the same basic political decision. The

Foreign Office policy when presented to the minister will have been thoroughly prepared on its way up through the Office hierarchy to remove conflicts of view, so that by the time it reaches the highest level it has been impressively argued and documented. It takes a very strong and well informed minister to resist this sort of policy formulation. Furthermore, it is important not to overlook the effect which the implicit technique of a vast bureaucracy has upon trying to keep policy objectives clearly in view. As one observer has commented: "... (the) .. consequence of a largely bureaucratised administration of foreign relations is the difficulty of attempting to formulate a coherent foreign policy ... in the sense, and it is a limited sense, that policies directed at particular goals or events are compatible with each other and cumulative in their effects. Keeping the desk clean, attachment to precedent and stability, dealing with matters as they arise and 'on their merits' all have the effect of inhibiting a strong, centrally directed and, above all, centrally conceived policy. Such a policy can only be formulated where there is the will to ride roughshod over administrative boundaries and factual detail alike. It requires either passion or intellectual arrogance" (D. Vital, *The Making of British Foreign Policy*).

There is the sense too in which it is the minister who is on trial. Given that it is he who wishes to change policy and the Office that wishes to preserve the element of continuity, the onus is upon the minister to make his case against his officials who have simply to defend an existing policy. In this sense the whole climate in which policy is created is uncongenial, indeed antithetical, to change.

domestic departments

A coherent definition of foreign policy is inhibited by a further consideration. Questions of economic policy overseas, involving monetary issues, trade and investment, and aid programmes too, each of which are related to domestic economic objectives, impinge upon the political aspect of policy planning. For example,

by the end of the 1960s the British Government was spending between £20 million and £25 million a year in the promotion of exports and assisting industry with information on export opportunities; and Anthony Wedgwood Benn, whilst he was Labour Minister of Technology, estimated that he was spending about twenty five per cent of his time on international business. Increasingly in the conditions of the modern world, foreign policy involves not only the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its close associate the Ministry of Defence, but also the Departments of Trade and Industry as well as the traditional influences of the Treasury and the Bank of England. There is no automatic conjunction of interests produced from amongst these interested bodies. The conduct of policy overseas entails a complex coordination between these principal departments, in which the balance of interests may well work against a policy designed to secure political objectives. Indeed, when it is seen that Departments like those of Trade and Industry represent powerful domestic interests in a way which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not, the voice of the latter is invariably not the determining one in formulating policy abroad.

A Foreign Secretary lives more in the company of his civil servants than is the case with other ministers, and consequently has less contact with fellow politicians. Inevitably therefore, the Foreign Secretary will look to his permanent officials for the standards by which to judge his views and policies. Once this isolation of the Foreign Secretary from the bulk of his political colleagues occurs it creates a situation of tension, and sometimes conflict, between the Foreign Secretary and the Parliamentary Labour Party. Lord George Brown has this to say about his own position as Foreign Secretary: "I found myself very much the target for pressure, attacks, even abuse, on the floor of the House and in the committees, both official and unofficial, which abound in the Commons and are assiduously 'looked after' by outside lobbyists. Very soon it became clear to me that I would have to pick my own priorities, try to make the right decisions, and stick to

them" (*In my Way*). It is worth noting here that George Brown, more so than with other Labour Foreign Secretaries, made deliberate efforts to involve the party machinery in foreign policy.

There is a continuous thread of tension running through the relationship of successive Labour Foreign Secretaries to the Parliamentary Party, from the accusation that Bevin was merely the mouthpiece of the Foreign Office in his advocacy of the connection with the US and the North Atlantic Alliance, to the charge made against successive holders of the office in the 1964-70 period that they were willing victims of Foreign Office pressure in supporting US involvement in Vietnam. In his published record of the Labour Government of 1964-70, Harold Wilson at times reveals that he was himself aware of the influence of the Foreign Office over Vietnam. He has said that as he entered the House for Question Time in March 1965: "George Thomson, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, with strong Foreign Office pressure behind him, tried to get me to take a much more committed pro-American line on bombing in Vietnam. I refused". And during the same month on the occasion of Michael Stewart's visit to Washington which occurred at the same time as America's declared intention to step up the campaign in Vietnam, the Prime Minister warned against a public statement of support; "I was fearful that Foreign Office pressure would be exerted on him to express support; this was in fact unfair to Michael Stewart".

In these circumstances there is a very strong tendency for a Labour Foreign Secretary to become caught up in applying exactly the same criteria as those of his permanent advisers when deciding issues of policy. The political secretary to the Prime Minister, Marcia Williams (now Lady Falkender), who was in the unique position of being able to observe the proceedings of the 1964-70 Labour Government at first hand, states that Mr Wilson did not always display the vigilance toward Foreign Office advice which she felt was called for: "It is the fact that (Harold Wilson) does have such an

admiration for and such a working knowledge of the 'System', that he tends to lean over backwards in his relationship towards it. He gives it the benefit of the doubt. He doesn't really want to argue with it. He admires the way it is organised and its methods of working. He admires its efficiency and he is often myopic about its failings and its shortcomings and its inefficiencies, and this is a great drawback" (*Inside Number 10*).

Labour ministers who have served in the Foreign Office or have been closely associated with its work confirm the value of having its wide ranging experience and expertise at their disposal, and would not wish to change this aspect of its function. Most informed observers of international affairs within the Labour Party would not argue with this view, but would go on to argue that what is required is some means of supplementing the work of the Foreign Office to provide the Foreign Secretary with an independent source of information and advice, and to ensure that he is kept in touch with party feelings.

political advisers

The need for this was advocated in a "private programme" as part of a memorandum entitled *The Foreign Office and Labour Governments* drawn up by the International Advisory Committee of the party in 1925: "This private programme would consist mainly in the appointment of competent and trustworthy supporters to certain posts of great strategic importance at home and abroad, outside the Permanent Civil Service, and in other actions of a like administrative character". This has remained a neglected feature of Labour's reforms for a very long time. Only after the experience of the 1964-70 Labour Government did a Fabian Foreign Policy Group again examine the proposal to augment a Labour Foreign Secretary's private office with a political adviser.

Several ways of providing political advice for the Foreign Secretary have been discussed. The principal method amongst these was the proposal to recruit a suit-

able person from within the Labour party with appropriate expertise in international affairs, to work closely with the Foreign Secretary and advise him on the political context of foreign policy. It was clear that close liaison between a Labour Foreign Secretary and the party could best be promoted by appointing the political adviser from amongst the staff of the International Affairs Department of Transport House. The precedent for drawing upon a political headquarters for advice was established when Sir Alec Douglas Home appointed a political secretary from the Conservative Central Office to integrate with the work of the Foreign Office during 1970-74.

When Labour returned to government in February 1974 the Foreign Secretary moved in this direction by drawing upon the services of Tom McNally, the Head of the International Affairs Department of Transport House. McNally's appointment was not at that time made permanent; initially he worked on a secondment basis which allowed him to retain his position as international adviser to the National Executive Committee of the party. Since Labour's victory in the general election of October 1974, as part of the general policy of appointing political advisers, Tom McNally has been officially established as adviser to Jim Callaghan. For this policy to be a success it is important that the political adviser should integrate both with the work of the Foreign Office and with the party. It will be necessary for him to work in close collaboration with the permanent officials of the Foreign Office and have access to documents and information within the Office. The coordination of views with the party has also to be maintained. To achieve this, there is obvious merit in allowing the political adviser to continue to advise the NEC and especially to provide for close links with the work of the International Sub-Committee. At a further level it is desirable that the harmonisation of policy with the party is pursued by continuous contact between the political adviser and the head of the International Affairs Department of Transport House. It is too early to judge how successful the experiment of a political adviser is going

to be from the standpoint of providing the Foreign Secretary with the right kind of political support. The present arrangements will need to operate over the lifetime of the present government with, hopefully, information being made available by the parties concerned—the Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Office, the political adviser, and the party—before it can be seen whether this is the best way of advising the Minister and keeping him in touch with the view of the party. However, a tentative judgment at this stage on the role of political advisers should be made in view of the known scepticism to the idea by the civil service. Initial experience of a political adviser will perhaps encourage the view that the Foreign Secretary, together with his adviser, ought to be able to draw upon a wider body of expertise to advise on policy formulation.

This could be achieved by strengthening the political adviser's role with a small panel of additional advisers. A team broadly sympathetic to the aims of Labour could be recruited from amongst the universities, research institutes, such as Chatham House and the Institute of Strategic Studies, and also those specialist areas of business concerned with particular aspects of international trade. The drawback in having a single adviser is that he too, as with the Foreign Secretary, can become absorbed into the method of Foreign Office working and thus find it difficult to retain an independent view and judgment whilst it is more difficult for the Foreign Office to "take over" a well concerted team. Though for that very reason such a proposal would probably encounter the determined opposition of the Foreign Office.

Apart from providing specialist advice on specific aspect of current policy, the more important function of such a group would be to study the long term implications of implementing various parts of Labour's foreign policy, and to prepare alternative methods for achieving objectives. Whichever method of policy advice becomes the established practice it is important to ensure that Labour's Foreign Secretary does not depend exclusively upon the Foreign Office network, but has

outside advice available to him and continuous links with party opinion.

It would be foolish to deny that there are not difficulties in the way. A principal obstacle is the reaction of the Foreign Office itself to the idea and how it would respond to having its traditional hold upon policy formulation encroached upon. The setting up of the Arms Control and Disarmament Unit by the Labour Government of 1964 is indicative of the problem. In the view of the minister concerned with this programme, it was established only in the face of considerable opposition from the Foreign Office. Even then it was progressively absorbed into the Foreign Office machine and eventually lost any independence that it might ever have had. An attempt to appoint a personal adviser to the minister on Arms Control and Disarmament from outside the Foreign Office was effectively defeated by the officials. In the case of this particular experiment it is true to say that its achievements were mitigated by inadequate political backing from above and insufficient sympathy with party objectives in its direction. For example, the minister concerned was a new recruit to the party and without experience in the workings of the Labour party, its policy in this field, and its general disposition toward disarmament questions. Whilst the first Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit was concerned more with the issues of control of armaments than implementing schemes of disarmament. Nevertheless, once this has been said in part explanation for its lack of success, in terms of its actual working the institutional problem of linking the work of a specialist unit with the machinery of the Foreign Office is the one most deserving of attention.

At the same time some Labour ministers, including the present Foreign Secretary, are known to object to having their relationship with their permanent officials damaged by a system of outside advisers. They prefer to see them integrated with the civil service. In their view to set a political adviser apart from the civil service creates tension between the permanent officials and the political adviser,

which makes life difficult for the minister and involves him in settling differences. The way in which the political adviser is to fit into the total machinery of advice available to the Foreign Secretary is in fact the root of the difficulty of the triangular relationship of minister, Foreign Office officials and political adviser. Quite obviously if the role of the political adviser is kept separate from that of the Foreign Office, his advice *vis-a-vis* the permanent officials must be at discount because he is not in possession of the same information and is not familiar with the reasoning behind the formulation of views put to the minister. In this kind of situation, the political adviser's role will not only become increasingly ineffective but will also bring him into conflict with the Foreign Office staff. Equally there is a danger in the political adviser being absorbed into the Foreign Office machinery, in that his independent line of communication to the Minister would be lost and his views would become part and parcel of the Foreign Office brief. It is necessary to establish a function for the political adviser which is between these two extreme positions. In relation to the Foreign Office the political adviser should work in close liaison with the permanent officials and be party to their deliberations, whilst at the same time having independent access for his views to the Foreign Secretary.

An alternative method of providing the minister with a political context, which has received considerable attention amongst interested policy thinkers within the Labour party, is that of a ministerial *cabinet* along the lines of the French *cabinet* system. This would of course introduce an entirely new element into the present system by which foreign policy is conducted, by replacing the existing private office. A *cabinet* system of top level policy advisers brought in to provide the Foreign Secretary with the political context within which to formulate policy, would certainly go some way to allay the fears of the party about the influence of the Foreign Office over the minister. However, it would be handicapped initially at least, by not having experience of the actual mechanics of con-

ducting policy, nor would it be in a position to evaluate a current policy decision in the light of previous decisions within this area inside the Foreign Office.

The formulation of foreign policy has to possess a basis of consistency for it to carry credibility in the outside world. A body of expert knowledge and experience accumulated over a long period of being responsible for the conduct of British foreign policy, such as exists within the Foreign Office, is indispensable to any sound and viable policy. In any case, to introduce a ministerial *cabinet* system into the Foreign Office machinery is an unlikely development without it being accompanied by similar changes across other departments of government. This kind of fundamental examination of the whole machinery of government is unlikely to take place in the immediate future given that a number of government reforms, introduced in recent Parliaments, have not yet been in operation long enough for their efficacy to be fully judged. Such a scheme if seriously considered by a Labour Government would unquestionably meet with fierce opposition from within the Foreign Office, and the ill will that would be engendered has to be set against what might well be only a marginal gain in policy terms.

civil servants abroad

There is one further aspect of the case related to Foreign Office advice and information. A wide section of the Labour party is critical about the staffing of British Embassies and Delegations overseas, and the kind of information conveyed by them. There is the view that embassy staff, because they are themselves part of the Foreign Service with careers linked to the Foreign Office, transmit information home in a form known to be the most suitable for Foreign Office purposes, but which is not necessarily the most relevant to a wider consideration of policy. In some instances insufficient knowledge is revealed about the social structure of the country represented, the state of labour relations, and the industrial set-up generally. Such information is not only helpful

from the standpoint of formulating policy in the most relevant way, but is also significant in relation to how trading policy and aid programmes should be linked to foreign policy. For this reason it has been recommended that where there are known sensitive areas greater attention should be paid to making political appointments as ambassadors and the work of embassies strengthened by the appointment of Labour Attaches outside of the Civil Service. In many cases, the trade unions are better placed to provide relevant information about the industrial and political situation inside a country, than the conventional sources available to the Foreign Office. The TUC has recently recommended to the Foreign Secretary that someone with experience in Labour relations should be appointed to the British Embassy in South Africa, and for some time past has argued a similar case in respect to Spain.

It is recognised that the inherent character of the Foreign Office's work tend to isolate it from developments at home. In the view of many people however, not confined to the Labour Party, this isolation is reinforced by the narrow basis of recruitment to the Foreign Office. The popular view of the Foreign Office is of a highly elite system, whose personnel reflect a very narrow set of class values, with little understanding of the lives of ordinary men and women. It has been described by one Labour critic as "... more and more the centre of a life absolutely artificial in its methods, its ceremonies, its views of the government and life of States".

This image which is popularly held is in fact an unfair representation of the Foreign Office in the present day, but it nevertheless continues to exist and poses a problem for those who wish to change it. Following the recommendations of Reports upon the Service, genuine efforts have been made to recruit from a wider social stratum. The Foreign Office have personnel who regularly visit the redbrick universities and other institutions of higher education to encourage applications from undergraduates who might otherwise consider the career closed to

them. Greater attention has also been given to recruiting from amongst graduates in the social sciences. These efforts have not substantially changed the basis of recruitment, however, and one is tempted to conclude that the Foreign Office, more successfully than other professions, manages to surround itself "with a magic which warns off the ordinary man from its precincts". A Labour Government itself should take positive steps to encourage more recruits from varied social backgrounds into the Service.

This homogeneous social base of the Foreign Office indirectly affects the formulation of Labour's foreign policy. The restricted social outlook and social contact of the personnel of the Service means that they are far removed from any basic understanding of the working of the Labour Party, and of its members. The Labour movement, as a coalition of interests covering a wide spectrum of views as well as affiliated bodies such as the trade unions and the Cooperative Movement, expresses itself in a complex organisational structure designed to reconcile as many of these interests as possible. A Labour Foreign Secretary, quite apart from being formally responsible to the Cabinet and the House of Commons for his policy, will also come under the critical gaze of his own Parliamentary Party, the NEC and party conference. This is not a particularly edifying process from the viewpoint of the outside observer, and might well seem to the permanent official in the Foreign Office as remote and irrelevant to the demands of foreign policy making. Yet it is one of the extreme parameters within which a Labour Foreign Secretary has to operate, and it is therefore important that the Foreign Office staff should be acquainted with these democratic processes inside the Labour Party. There exists little real knowledge and understanding within the Foreign Office of the political aspirations of the average working class Labour Party member operating at the grass roots, who is expecting results from a Labour Government. For example, it is to be doubted whether, other than at the very top level, any Foreign Office staff attend an annual Labour Party conference when Labour is

in office. All of this is part of the clear need to make the Foreign Office reach out and become more responsive to the domestic environment which foreign policy should be designed to promote.

So far the case has been argued in terms of encouraging more understanding of the basic nature of the Labour movement and its political principles. There is also the more direct point that the social base of the Foreign Office is such as to make it at the worst antithetical, and at the least indifferent, to the aspirations of Labour. Few Labour ministers who have served at the Foreign Office would support the view that permanent officials deliberately set out to block Labour's policies. Together with Lord George Brown, they would agree that the Foreign Office does not obstruct a Labour Foreign Secretary who is clear about what he wants to do. The difficulty about accepting this view is that it has never been comprehensively put to the test, for no Labour Government has seriously set about implementing a radical programme which has been carefully worked out in Opposition. The examples which George Brown quotes in support of his claim, such as shifting Foreign Office personnel and reversing the bias within Foreign Office Minutes against de Gaulle and Nasser are not in themselves in the forefront of a socialist foreign policy. This apart however, it may be that there is a greater disposition within the Foreign Office to look seriously at major departures in policy and work out viable avenues of implementation, than is commonly realised inside the Labour Party. The younger members of staff in the Foreign Office are probably more attuned to the forces of change and keen to initiate fresh approaches to conventional issues in foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the need to make the Foreign Office more responsive to the demands of radical change in foreign policy does argue in favour of trying to broaden the base of recruitment to the Foreign Service along the lines recommended. And this general purpose of making the Foreign Office sensitive to Labour's aims would be assisted by providing different training for Foreign Office staff, to in-

clude courses in foreign policy making where this does not already exist, and to incorporate Labour's perspective of foreign policy.

One of the distinguishing features of Labour's foreign policy compared with a Conservative formulation is that of actively promoting change in the international system. Labour's foreign policy is not only directed toward safeguarding the immediate interests of Britain but is also concerned with changing the international system—such as removing the underlying causes of tension and curbing their short term effects in the build-up of arms, alleviating the gross inequality between rich and poor states, and strengthening respect for a code of international conduct in conformity with the charter of the United Nations. All of this calls for long term planning, in which decisions taken in respect to issues in different regions of the world are seen to be consistent with a pattern of overall objectives.

The Foreign Office because of its combined tradition and function is not equipped to handle this long term perspective. It has of necessity to preserve the continuities of policy between the different political emphasis of Labour and Conservative governments. In turn this means largely concentrating on the day to day problems and ensuring that these harm British interests as little as possible.

The kind of long term planning envisaged could best be undertaken by supplementing the work of the political adviser to the Foreign Secretary with a research team together with consultants along the lines previously suggested. Such a team would be able to examine Labour's programme in detail and see just how viable the particular parts of it are in the light of international developments.

This consultative body could be set up on a full time basis and work in close association with the political adviser to the Foreign Secretary, having access to Foreign Office documents, similar to that of the Arms Control and Disarmament Unit set up in 1964. Alternatively, it

3. the party machinery

Previous experience of Labour Administration suggests that poor communications between the Government and the party are perhaps as responsible for alienation between the two as any real differences which exist over policy. Both sides have been at fault in the past. With recent Labour Governments it should be said that some ministers showed a marked tendency to keep aloof from any arrangement that would involve them in regular discussions with the party. This detachment on the part of ministers is no doubt influenced by the considered need to preserve the constitutional proprieties of office, in view of the charge made by their political opponents that a Labour Government is largely influenced, if not controlled, by the decisions of the Party Conference. There is also the fact that some Labour ministers feel that the party's concern with political principles has little direct relevance to their work in the running of a government department, and that therefore discussions between them leads only to a futile doctrinal dispute.

On the other side, during periods of Labour rule there is the inclination on the part of a significant section of the party, including a number of the Parliamentary Party, to act as if Labour were still in Opposition. Adjustment to the idea of Labour as a governing party, having to compromise points of principle in the face of internal and external circumstances, has proved particularly difficult for the left wing of the party. And criticism of a Labour Government becomes sharpened amongst an important section of the Parliamentary Party, supported by similar views from the constituencies, as anticipated results from their government fail to materialise.

At the same time the party organisation has often shown no positive desire to become actively involved in making a success of Government policy. At one level of argument this is perhaps no more than the natural instinct of a democratic party to preserve its sense of independence and judgment at all levels, though the price paid for this independence can be high. Loyalties can become divided

between the party and Government, and the Government loses confidence in itself as it feels its support in the party draining away. There is little doubt that this seriously affected the Labour Government of 1966-70. At a further level, the disposition of the party to remain aloof from the work of a Labour Government resides in the ideological premise of not compromising political ideals by having them tested in practical policy. Yet it is essential that the idealism of the party and the work of Government be brought together in a working relationship between the National Executive Committee of the party and a Labour Government.

the national executive committee

At the top level of communication, the role of the party through the NEC during the previous Labour Government of 1964-70 appears to have been very limited. The impression of party officials is that the NEC was treated by Labour ministers generally as simply one more group from amongst a whole range of pressure groups with which the Government had to negotiate, rather than the formal link with the party with whom constructive discussions could be held. Between 1967 and 1970 the International Affairs Department of Transport House prepared more than 500 research and position papers for the NEC in its discussions with the Government. Yet despite this enormous amount of solid work the contact apparently never formed part of a genuine dialogue between the Government and the NEC in the formulation of policy. Quite the contrary, ministers together with the Foreign Office saw their role in these exchanges as one of reacting to party criticism as they saw fit. The Policy Coordination Committee which was set up in 1967 to heal the rift between Government and party over the whole range of problems domestic and foreign, never once discussed a foreign or defence policy issue on the initiative of the Government side. An NEC proposal in 1968 that the appropriate ministers should be invited to NEC Sub-Committees to discuss various aspects of party policy got off to a good start

when George Thomson attended the International Sub-Committee to discuss Rhodesia. There was only one such meeting. The Prime Minister vetoed further meetings on constitutional grounds. Later, in 1969, a Coordinating Committee of the Cabinet and the NEC was set up to try and establish better relations between Government and party; this was not particularly successful because by this time the relationship between the two had suffered from years of neglect.

Conscious efforts could, and should, be made to ensure that there is full dissemination of information about the policies of a Labour Government throughout the party, and full consultation between the different parts of the party structure and the Government. This chain of communication involves the relationship between the Government and its own backbenchers, the Government and the NEC, and the Government and Transport House, apart from the relations which these bodies will have between themselves.

It is obviously desirable that there should be a clear and close relationship between a Labour Foreign Secretary and the International Sub-Committee of the NEC. As the executive body of the party, the NEC occupies the important bridge between a Labour Government and the party at large. It should aim to interpret the various aspects of Government policy to the party, and equally it has the duty to argue continually the party's point of view before Government ministers. This function cannot be performed properly if there is not regular contact between the NEC and Labour ministers.

The experience of the previous Labour Government indicates that this close degree of cooperation between the International Sub-Committee and the Foreign Secretary did not exist, apart from brief interludes. The fault was not entirely on the side of the Government. More than any other Labour Foreign Secretary, Lord George Brown sought actively to engage the party in the policy making

of the Government. According to him he tried on several occasions to establish regular meetings with the International Sub-Committee, as well as with the International Affairs Department of Transport House, and the TUC. He quickly formed the opinion however that they did not want to become involved because consultation of this kind could be construed as sharing responsibility, and this view is shared by at least one junior minister at the Foreign Office during this time. Only the Socialist International expressed a desire to consult regularly with George Brown during his period as Foreign Secretary.

It is also claimed by some party staff with experience of the working of the International Sub-Committee that its collective knowledge of international affairs is very limited, and that its discussions are on occasions more concerned with points of party dogma than the true nature of international problems.

Consequently the Committee does not have the status and force to parallel its formal position. This picture of the Committee is given added substance by the fact that it often appears to be capricious in the manner in which it selects international issues for attention. Again it often conveys the impression of being more concerned to project issues with an obvious moral appeal, than those which bear most heavily upon the interests of British policy. This of course is explained in part by the actual composition of the Committee which is based on the need to achieve a balance of interests from within the Labour movement, rather than nominating individuals with an interest and knowledge of international affairs. In any case the parent body, the NEC, is itself elected on the basis of representing the large formal interests within the party, and this process does not automatically produce the international expertise required. It is not altogether surprising therefore that after a time even the most committed Labour Foreign Secretary views the International Sub-Committee as an intrusion to be avoided if possible, rather than as an important link with which to communicate with the party.

Nevertheless, if party strife on issues of foreign policy is to be kept to a minimum, it is necessary that the work of the International Sub-Committee should be taken more seriously, with the Committee for its part aiming to acquire greater international expertise. In support of this role, in addition to using the services of the International Affairs Department of Transport House, the Committee should be brought into consultation with the political adviser to the Foreign Secretary, together with the research panel. And, assuming that a Labour Foreign Secretary continues the link with the International Affairs Department through his political adviser, it is important, as suggested earlier, that this person retains some connection with the work of the International Sub-Committee. Furthermore, there should be no objection to the Committee drawing upon its own foreign policy advisers from amongst party sympathisers in academic institutions. This has to some extent been the practice in the past through the setting up of working groups composed of staff from Transport House, MPs, trade unionists, and some academics. These groups have looked at particular aspects of foreign policy but have tended to operate in a rather *ad hoc* manner instead of being part of an organised and consistent programme. This method of having working groups should be used more extensively to keep the International Sub-Committee briefed, which in turn can report to its parent body. It remains then for liaison between the Foreign Secretary and the NEC to be put on a regular footing so that the views of the party conference and the grass roots membership can be regularly conveyed to the government. In this way the party membership could be made to feel that it was playing some constructive part in the foreign policy process.

Transport House

A policy of involving the party in the work of a Labour Government in the sphere of foreign policy requires that the International Affairs Department of Transport House be engaged more

actively in the process. The reluctance of Transport House staff to discard their role as exclusive custodians of the party, and become involved in promoting the work of the Government can be overcome if it is part of an overall plan to draw the party closer to the work of a Labour Government. The Department is very well equipped to handle international affairs generally, and in some fields is better placed than the Foreign Office to advise the Foreign Secretary. For example, as we have seen, it is often better informed on such matters as Labour conditions and industrial relations in many countries than the traditional embassy sources available to the Foreign Office. A Labour Foreign Secretary in particular could benefit from having this kind of information available to him, to help balance the orthodox view of the Foreign Office and to help him develop a wider range of contacts abroad on which to build policy.

With a Labour Foreign Secretary having a political adviser drawn from the staff of Transport House it should be possible to establish the closest cooperation with the International Affairs Department in a way which could be beneficial both to the Foreign Secretary and to the party headquarters. Additionally, as part of this process, informal links between the International Affairs Department and the Foreign Office could be cultivated along the lines that George Brown encouraged when he was Foreign Secretary. If this were carried out Transport House would then be in a position to interpret Government policy in a more informed way to the constituency parties, which it has not been able to do adequately up to now.

By building and developing these links between the party machinery and a Labour Government two objectives would be promoted. First, it would help to counter the isolation of a Labour Foreign Secretary from the main sources of the party. As foreign policy is still seen as a ministerial prerogative and the impression given is that Labour Foreign Secretaries reflect the Foreign Office view in contrast to the bulk of the party, all methods of drawing the Foreign Secretary into a

party context should be encouraged. Though here again it must be said that the success of involving the party will depend as much upon the will and determination of the Foreign Secretary, and how important he judges this to be, as upon the initiative of the party through Transport House. Second, the link between the International Affairs Department and the Foreign Secretary, as part of the general process of cooperation between Transport House and a Labour Government will help to create a better understanding of the realities of foreign policy amongst rank and file membership.

the Parliamentary Labour Party

Foreign policy is for all practical purposes the monopoly of the Executive in Britain—that is the Cabinet. More specifically, whichever party is in power the political control of foreign policy belongs with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. In large part because of the repercussions of international events upon the freedom to handle domestic policy, modern Prime Ministers have increasingly taken a close interest in foreign affairs. They have chosen to do this either by assuming virtual control over policy themselves (in Ramsey MacDonald's case becoming his own Foreign Secretary) or, by appointing someone Foreign Secretary with whom they know they can closely collaborate. In respect to Labour Cabinets this explains Attlee's appointment of Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary in preference to Hugh Dalton, the reputed Labour specialist on foreign policy at the time, and Harold Wilson's initial preference for Patrick Gordon-Walker at the Foreign Office until his failure to re-enter Parliament at a by-election made it impossible to retain him in that post. The Executive hold over foreign policy is also underlined by the fact that probably more than any other democratic state, British foreign policy is surrounded by a veil of secrecy.

All of this is anathema to the democratic instinct of the Labour Party and feeds its long standing suspicion of the "closed

politics" of the Foreign Office. Yet despite the fact that the party gave much attention to the need to democratise foreign policy in its early days, it has remained surprisingly quiet on this issue during the post-second world war Labour Governments. There has been a lot of disquiet by a large element of the Parliamentary Labour Party over aspects of successive Labour Governments' foreign policy, but this has not crystallised into practical suggestions as to how Parliamentary control over policy might be increased.

As early as 1917 in its *Memorandum on War Aims*, the party had expressed itself as being strongly in favour of "the placing of foreign policy, just as much as home policy, under the control of popularly elected legislatures". The minority Labour Government of 1923-24, consistent with this objective started off with the best of intentions, with the aim of subjecting its foreign policy to democratic control by Parliament, but ended up with nothing more than the "Ponsonby rule" . . . a guarantee that international treaties would be brought before the House of Commons. Since those days the impact of international events upon British domestic affairs has increased immeasurably, with a corresponding need to coordinate foreign policy with domestic objectives and to bring the House of Commons more effectively into the process. Parliament has not acquired the powers concurrent with this development necessary to exercise greater control over foreign policy formulation, and a Labour Government ought seriously to undertake the task of Parliamentary reform in this field.

A start could be made by putting the Labour household in order, beginning with the Parliamentary Labour Party. During previous periods of Labour Government, the Foreign Secretary has come under heavy fire from sections of his own backbenchers. Ernest Bevin, Michael Stewart and George Brown all experienced these attacks, especially from the left wing of their own ranks. In this sense there has been no lack of vigilance by the Parliamentary Party over the foreign policy of successive Labour Gov-

ernments and Foreign Secretaries have strongly resented these "stabs in the back". It would be easy—too easy in fact to do justice to the matter—to portray these clashes as attributable to Labour Foreign Secretaries having been beguiled by the Foreign Office. Part of the fault lies within the Parliamentary Party itself and the way it manages its own affairs through its Foreign Affairs Group. In the view of the junior minister at the Foreign Office during the last Labour Government, the Foreign Affairs Group was extremely dilatory in its approach to foreign policy questions. Meetings of the Group were not always well attended, and when a minister addressed them on some issue in foreign policy, there were a few desultory questions and the meetings then ended with no positive outcome. Clearly when Labour is in office, the Foreign Affairs Group's relations with Labour ministers at the Foreign Office needs to be put on a much more businesslike footing. There should be regular meetings between Foreign Office ministers and the Group, and the Foreign Secretary himself should regard a call to appear before the Group as a priority commitment.

The Foreign Affairs Group should be given an altogether more serious status in the whole process of foreign policy discussion with a Labour Government. This would help to counter the impression that some Labour Foreign Secretaries have had, that the Parliamentary Party is only interested in foreign policy in an episodic way when issues touch party principle. Yet foreign policy is very much a continuum in which a single event or issue is interlocked with a range of other interests. Clearly in this sense the Foreign Affairs Group has an important function in providing the focus for the Parliamentary Party in its relationship to the foreign policy of the government. As a first step, efforts should be made to ensure that the Foreign Affairs Group is drawn from amongst MPs with a strong interest in international affairs, and preferably with some expert knowledge, so that the Group is able to present an informed outlook on foreign policy. With appropriate members on it the Foreign Affairs Group would be in a position to

systematically examine government policy and would require some standing within the ranks of the Parliamentary Party.

To assist it in its work and to ensure that it is kept well informed, the Foreign Affairs Group should have opportunities to regularly visit the Foreign Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Defence Ministry and other relevant departments, to discuss policy questions and to put their view. This has happened in the past but such meetings have been rare and those MPs who took part in them did not feel that much notice was taken of anything they said. Furthermore, if a policy research team is established the Foreign Affairs Group should have access to their advice and expertise as well as that of the political adviser to the Foreign Secretary. Closer liaison than has happened hitherto between the Group and the International Affairs Department of Transport House should also be encouraged. With the general support of the Parliamentary Party behind it, the Group could achieve an official standing that a Foreign Secretary would have to regard seriously as representative of the party in the House of Commons. Finally, as stated previously, in order to obtain a concerted view on key foreign policy issues, it is important that there should be close association between the NEC and the Foreign Policy Group of the Parliamentary Party when there is a Labour Government. For much the same reason, there should be coordination between the NEC and the Parliamentary Labour Party on planning Labour's foreign policy when the party is in Opposition.

Reference has already been made to the need to establish a greater degree of Parliamentary control over foreign policy. In the first place, a Select Committee on Foreign Affairs could be set up as has been done in recent years in selected areas of domestic legislation. There is already a Select Committee on European Legislation in existence, but this deals specifically with EEC business, and unlike other Select Committees of the House it does not examine policy but serves more as a clearing house and points out the major implications of legislation emanating

from Europe. The advantage of a Committee for Foreign Affairs is that it would be able to keep the whole range of external affairs under review, and subject the more important aspects of Government policy to close scrutiny. The Committee, representative of the whole House, should be provided with adequate powers of inquiry and investigation. It would have the right to call before it and to question ministers, civil servants and ambassadors, and to make recommendations to Parliament. As the Committee would nearly be dealing with matters that affect the security of the state, there would need to be some form of security clearance for members of the Committee. This might be handled in the same way as that provided for members of the Defence Sub-Committee of the Expenditure Committee.

The work of such a Committee could be of great value in asserting the right of the House of Commons to control and shape foreign policy. It could be particularly useful in examining the implications of policy for the future, especially if Governments made more information available to the House of Commons about their foreign policy goals. Both Labour and Conservative Foreign Secretaries have expressed their irritation at the quality of debate in the House of Commons on foreign policy. Yet the Commons has so little part to play in the field of foreign policy in the present day that there is insufficient inducement for MPs to concentrate in this area in a serious way. One suggestion which has been made is that the Government should issue an annual White Paper on foreign policy setting out the Government's major objectives for the period ahead. An immediate objection to this, of course, is that the international system is such a complex of problems with so many unforeseen obstacles which are beyond the scope of any single Government to handle, that any statement in a White Paper would either commit a Government to policies that would inevitably have to be broken or it would be at such a level of generality as to negate the purpose of the exercise. All of this is true; but once the limited and hazardous nature of the exercise is recog-

nised there is some merit in having a clear indication of the Government's policies, and its listing of the priority issues in the form of a White Paper. This would not be breaking new ground entirely. The Dutch Government, for their part, declared their intention to introduce an annual White Paper on foreign policy.

A White Paper looking back over policy as well as forward would help to concentrate the attention of the House upon the relevant issues for British policy in the ensuing debate. In any case, it has been the convention for the Foreign Secretary to make an annual statement to the House in which he summarises the Government's policy over the past year in relation to key world issues; but whereas the succeeding debate has been largely concerned with looking back over the Government's record, a White Paper is likely to induce a better focus for looking to the future.

In association with the publication of a White Paper on foreign policy the Foreign Office might be encouraged to set out its ideas in particular areas of policy in the form of Green Papers. The work of a Select Committee on Foreign Affairs together with the House of Commons as a whole would be assisted by having this sort of policy formulation made available to it. As advance indication of policy ideas to other countries has obvious drawbacks for the Government in its conduct of external affairs, Green Papers would probably have to be confined to long term strategies in fields such as foreign aid, European defence and the United Nations.

the Labour movement

We have considered ways in which the formal party machinery together with the Parliamentary Party might participate more fully in the work of a Labour Government and Opposition, in the field of foreign policy. Over and above this it is necessary to look at the relationship between a Labour Government and the whole of the Labour movement. This relationship is in essence the problem of

how to manage effectively foreign policy formulation, including resolutions from the Annual Conference, within a movement as diverse and democratic as the Labour movement. There never has been unity in the movement as a whole on major international issues. This is not particularly surprising in view of the fact that it is not only the Labour party itself which is involved but also other interested and affiliated groups. Operating on the periphery of the Labour movement, and in some cases inside, are several organised bodies which have included the CND, the World Peace Council and the Communist Party, all of which seek to influence Labour party policy. In several cases these bodies have operated as lobbies campaigning to influence opinion within the constituency parties as well as the Parliamentary Party. Their influence should not be exaggerated but even so they play some part in helping to shape the climate of opinion in which Labour policy is formulated and to this extent they add a dimension of fragmentation which serves to highlight the problem of formulating policy which is acceptable to the range of groups composing the Labour movement.

More so than with domestic affairs foreign policy usually becomes the concern of only an active, sometimes vociferous, minority inside the Labour party. It is perhaps the case that the leadership of the party cannot hope to do much more, when in Government, than secure the support of a sizeable element, with the grudging acquiescence of a sufficient number of others to make their policy viable. This is probably the price that has to be paid within any party based upon a coalition of left-of-centre interests. However, a dedicated minority can have an extremely divisive effect upon the party.

Armed with the faith that it is the custodian of the party's socialist conscience, the minority focuses upon international affairs as the last refuge of socialist ideals, and is able on this basis to appeal to a larger sector of the party. Primarily for this reason, foreign policy issues have divided the party more intensively, and with greater bitterness, than the

domestic programme; as the issues of the rearmament of West Germany, nuclear weapons and Vietnam plainly show.

The difference of view over foreign policy which becomes manifest when Labour is in office is also due to what happens when the party is in Opposition. The view is still widely held that elections are won and lost on domestic programmes, and consequently the party machine gears itself to formulating acceptable compromises on this front. This argument maintains that, by contrast, the imperative of election winning is absent from foreign policy discussions, with the result that any formulation of policy is largely aimed at placating the small element in the party which organises itself most effectively for the purpose of getting its views accepted at the conference and elsewhere. The policy tends to be more radical than the general climate of opinion in the party, and is most certainly in advance of opinion throughout the country. However, because such policy is thought by the leadership to be irrelevant to an election, it is not modified and once in Government the party leaders, and principally the Foreign Secretary, ignore such policy decisions, as they are found to be impractical. This inevitably engenders dissatisfaction with the foreign policy of a Labour government amongst a wide spectrum of the party both in and outside of Parliament.

A previous Labour Foreign Secretary has argued a similar view to this, pointing out that the party has no policy worked out in Opposition, and that conference decisions are unhelpful in this respect. Consequently Labour Foreign Secretaries have a clear hand. There is much truth in this view, and a reading of the last NEC statement *A Foreign Policy for Labour*, whilst generally a well reasoned document, does nevertheless reveal in places the difficulty of reconciling conference resolutions with a balanced presentation of policy. This is most obvious in respect to those aspects of policy which have obvious economic implications. For example, the section on Overseas Development in *A Foreign Policy for Labour* calls for "a profound and radical change in the traditional

economic, political and military relationships between rich and poor countries". But then in the section on trade, it is stated that "We do not believe that opening wide markets to manufactured goods for the poorer countries should put a disproportionate burden on particular groups of British workers".

As already mentioned, it may be that this division between Labour ministers, acutely aware of the limitations placed upon British power and influence in the world, and the party's ideologues clamouring for a socialist foreign policy is an inevitable political fact, reflecting not only a difference of view but also the inherent difference of function between the two. But even if this is accepted the sharper effects of this division of opinion could be mitigated by more careful attention being paid to establishing a continuous dialogue between Government and party. Furthermore, this constructive relationship should be prepared whilst the party is in Opposition, by establishing coordination between the NEC and the Parliamentary Party.

The lesson of all this however, is that the party needs to take the whole subject of international affairs and British foreign policy much more seriously whilst in Opposition. And central to this function is the NEC and the party conference. Of course the role of the party machinery in Opposition cannot be entirely dissociated from its relationship to the Labour leadership. When the party is in office. This relationship bears on the constitutional question which was first brought out into the open with the famous Attlee-Laski feud of 1945 concerning the appropriate role of the party in the affairs of a Labour Government. Labour leaders have adhered closely to constitutional propriety in order to demonstrate that they are not being controlled by the dictates of the party. There is also the concern shown by Labour Shadow ministers and reinforced whilst in office that too much consultation with the Party organisation leads only to arid doctrinal confrontation. This is one side of the question, but it is also fair to say that the various parts of the party machinery

jealously protect the independence of their position in relation to Government, and are most reluctant to enter into consultative arrangements which could be construed as sharing responsibility. As we have seen, various Labour ministers have confirmed that despite efforts by them, Transport House and the NEC have resisted overtures at cooperation.

In these circumstances a degree of conflict is inherent in the relationship between a Labour Government and the top echelons of the party machine, which then percolates down through the party organisation and generates similar conflict at all levels.

The constitutional position need in no way be breached if a positive dialogue between the NEC and its Sub-Committees and Government ministers is encouraged. This could develop into a constructive two-way process in which the NEC could, similarly to Bagehot's dictum, consult, advise and warn the Government, whilst the Government for its part could explain the reasons for its policies. The annual Party Conference as the principal means of associating the grass roots membership with policy formulation also calls for attention. The record of Labour Party Conferences in respect to foreign policy is a poor testament to the ability of a democratic party to produce informed and rational discussion. The Conference is primarily concerned with expressing party unity by securing endorsement of the NEC's programme and the policies of the Government when Labour is in office. The whole emphasis therefore is toward avoiding clashes between the party and the leadership and, inevitably, patchwork formulas aimed at maximising agreement take precedence over the international circumstances in which foreign policy has to be enacted.

Very few rank and file members will be knowledgeable about the intricacies of foreign policy and have only the party programme to guide them. It may also be true that foreign policy is the interest only of the active left wing of the party, with the majority prepared to accept the Government's point of view. It has

become conventional wisdom to state that there is a general lack of interest in foreign policy, based upon the view that there is a clear distinction between issues of foreign policy and domestic affairs, and that people are only interested in those matters which affect them directly in their everyday lives. It is questionable whether this division of interest was ever really the case, but in the present day with the interaction between domestic and foreign affairs increasingly evident, especially in the fields of monetary policy, trade and technology, it is clearly untrue. It is incumbent upon those responsible for the conduct of affairs to show how particular facets of foreign policy relate to everyday issues and ultimately affect the quality of life at home. One of the merits of the NEC statement, *A Foreign Policy for Labour*, is that it seeks to make foreign policy objectives consistent with the domestic programme, and points clearly to the implications of particular policies for home affairs.

The Party Conference could become a more effective instrument of control and influence on Labour foreign policy. To achieve this more time should be made available to debate foreign policy at the Conference, with more attention given to those parts of policy which are clearly related to domestic issues, rather than free-ranging across the whole field. Assuming that a Labour Government goes ahead and produces a White Paper on foreign policy, together with Green Papers these could provide the parameters for debate at the Conference. It should also be made possible for the Foreign Secretary when Labour is in office to address the Conference whether or not he is a member of the NEC.

Similarly when in Opposition the party should concentrate its attention upon those aspects of policy which can realistically form part of its foreign policy objectives. One way of achieving this would be to have the Conference divide up into working parties across a range of legislative fields for one session. It would be open to constituency party delegates and others to select their working party, and the conference could then convene

as a whole to receive reports from the working parties in much the same way as other conferences conduct their business. In the field of foreign policy the working party might take for its agenda the reports of study groups set up by the International Sub-Committee and the foreign policy research team if brought into existence. A form of procedure along these lines might also help to avoid the number of tendentious resolutions which the Conference has previously considered and passed, which serve only to generate antipathy between a Labour Foreign Secretary and the party because of their impractical nature. If some of the suggestions made here for improving the work of the Conference are acted upon, it could have a more positive and realistic role in the shaping of foreign policy than it has had hitherto.

4. conclusion

the author

Labour's success in pursuing a distinctly socialist path in its foreign policy will depend upon a combination of having thoroughly prepared its position whilst in Opposition, displaying the necessary will and determination in following its policies in Government, and re-appraising the machinery of foreign policy formulation to make it fit the task in hand. The NEC statement, *A Foreign Policy for Labour*, which forms the basis of Labour's foreign policy, is a valuable contribution to pointing the way to Britain's international role. In calling for a foreign policy inspired by "the ideals of morality, equality and justice", whilst warning that "a radical foreign policy has its costs and consequences" the foreign policy statement shows a blend of idealism and realistic assessment. The domestic price and sacrifice which is entailed in the pursuit of socialist goals in foreign policy need to be fully spelt out and clearly understood at all levels of the party. If resolutely followed the policy outlined in *A Foreign Policy for Labour* could point to a new style and purpose in the direction of British foreign policy.

At home and overseas circumstances are propitious for Labour to carve out a new international role for Britain. After a long and painful period of disentangling from post-imperial commitments abroad, which produced its own kind of national psychosis, Britain is now in the category of middle powers with interests appropriate to that station. One of the achievements of the Labour Government of 1964-70, whether through force of circumstances or not, was that it finally reduced Britain's commitments overseas to a level more commensurate with national resources. And despite the odd gesture, such as reinstating a token presence in the Far East, this trend was not set back by the Conservative Government of Edward Heath. In the present day a Labour government whilst still confronted by economic difficulties of gargantuan proportions, including the precarious balance of our economic position with the rest of the world, nevertheless has more room perhaps for manoeuvre in its foreign policy. Quite apart from her membership of the EEC, the logic of events have determined

the need to focus British economic and defence policy primarily within Western Europe. To this extent the circumstances which led to the move in the first place will continue whether Britain were to withdraw from the Community or not, but in the world outside of Europe a Labour government has the opportunity to fashion its foreign policy in relation to key issues.

It is necessary of course to recognise that Britain's influence is very much less in the modern world and as *A Foreign Policy for Labour* makes clear a Labour Foreign Secretary cannot be expected "to ride out like some international Don Quixote to tilt at every windmill". Even so, within the parameters of her present position it is still possible for British influence to make itself felt within the regional context of Europe, and in the wider world through international bodies. Also, because Britain's interests have been circumscribed abroad, it is feasible for a Labour government, more so than before, to achieve foreign policy objectives compatible with the claims of a domestic programme. It is precisely over this element of manoeuvrability in Britain's foreign policy that the essential difference between the Labour party and the Conservative Government of Edward Heath developed over British membership of the European Economic Community. The Labour Government of Harold Wilson basically opted for a European policy, including membership of the EEC, but felt that in negotiating the terms for entry the British Government was fashioning its relationship to the continent as a whole. Whereas in Opposition a large part of the Labour party quickly formed the view that Ted Heath was prepared to sacrifice British independence by submitting to almost any terms that the EEC, under French aegis, insisted upon. The European issue is still potentially schismatic for the Labour party because it does touch the fundamental roots of its internationalist sentiment. But if a balance of views can be maintained between the pro and anti-Europeans in the party, with neither side prepared to commit the party to fratricide on the issue, there is a reasonable prospect that a Labour Gov-

ernment will succeed in re-negotiating Britain's membership of the EEC.

In respect to Europe, the demise of French predominance in the affairs of the Community based upon Gaullist notions, and Willy Brandt's departure from the scene of German affairs, has opened up a fresh opportunity to map out the future evolution of the EEC, and not least in respect to Community relations with Eastern Europe. A Labour Government determined to renegotiate terms and play its full part in European affairs is in a position to grasp this opportunity; to see not only that British interests are safeguarded but also to use British influence to establish Labour's ideals within the Community. Once it becomes clear that the Labour government has succeeded in re-negotiating terms with its EEC partners, it will be an opportune moment for Labour to play its full part in Community affairs by sending delegates to the European Parliament.

At the global level the breaking down of the monolithic system created by the superpowers during the cold war, offer a much greater role for the middle range powers, including Britain, to take initiatives and work for common policies. The problems are many; ranking high in the list is the need for industrial states to agree upon international policies for combating inflation and new machinery for the international monetary system, establishing a new set of rules for the conduct of trade between themselves, and adopting a common approach toward trade and aid programmes with the underdeveloped countries. The nature of these problems demand that narrow views of states' interests must be subordinated to an international approach, in which Labour's policy has a vital role.

The internal affairs of states in the modern world are becoming increasingly the concern of the whole international community. The overthrow of the dictatorship in Portugal and the granting of independence to her colonies, the voluntary handing over by the Greek colonels to a civilian government, and the moves by the Smith regime in Rhodesia to come

to terms with African majority rule, cannot be entirely dissociated from the effects of collective pressure by the international community through the UN and other channels. The long standing view of the realists that states could continue with policies that the international community found objectionable, and remain impervious to international pressures no longer coincides with the facts of life in the international system. Labour's ideals of "morality, justice and equality" in the relations between states are more likely to find acceptance in the working of the international system than at any previous time.

fabian society the author

The Fabian Society exists to further socialist education and research. It is affiliated to the Labour Party, both nationally and locally, and embraces all shades of Socialist opinion within its ranks—left, right and centre.

Since 1884 the Fabian Society has enrolled thoughtful socialists who are prepared to discuss the essential questions of democratic socialism and relate them to practical plans for building socialism in a changing world.

Beyond this the Society has no collective policy. It puts forward no resolutions of a political character, but it is *not* an organisation of armchair socialists. Its members are active in their Labour Parties, Trade Unions and Co-operatives. They are representative of the labour movement, practical people concerned to study and discuss problems that matter.

The Society is organised nationally and locally. The national Society, directed by an elected Executive Committee, publishes pamphlets, and holds schools and conferences of many kinds. Local Societies—there are one hundred of them—are self governing and are lively centres of discussion and also undertake research.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the General Secretary, Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1H 9BN; telephone 01-930 3077.

Rodney Fielding is Head of the Department of Modern Studies at Trent Polytechnic and was formerly Principal Lecturer in International Studies at Lanchester Polytechnic. He went to Ruskin College, Oxford, on a Robert Addy Hopkinson Scholarship in 1954 and later graduated at the **LSE** in international relations. His study of British foreign policy includes a Master of Philosophy degree from Sussex University on the career of Sir Norman Angell. Rodney Fielding is the author of Fabian Tract 401, *A socialist foreign policy?* and is chairman of the Coventry Fabian Society.

Cover design by Dick Leadbetter. Printed by Civic Press Limited (TU), Civic Street, Glasgow, G4 9RH.

ISBN 7163 0433 3

recent fabian pamphlets

research series

| | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|--|-----|
| 297 | Della Adam Nevitt | Fair deal for householders | 25p |
| 300 | Christopher Foster | Public enterprise | 30p |
| 305 | O. Kahn-Freund, Bob Hepple | Laws against strikes | 85p |
| 308 | Peter Coffey, John Presley | Europe: towards a monetary union | 25p |
| 310 | Jim Skinner | Fair wages and public sector contracts | 20p |
| 312 | Bruce Douglas-Mann | The end of the private landlord | 20p |
| 313 | Elizabeth Young, Brian Johnson | The law of the sea | 50p |
| 314 | H. Glennerster, S. Hatch | Positive discrimination and inequality | 40p |
| 316 | John Ellis, R. W. Johnson | Members from the unions | 30p |
| 317 | Laurence Whitehead | The lesson of Chile | 40p |
| 318 | David Bleakley | Crisis in Ireland | 40p |
| 319 | Rupert Greer | Building societies ? | 30p |

tracts

| | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|---|-----|
| 399 | R. H. S. Crossman | Paying for the social services | 20p |
| 410 | Anthony Crosland | Towards a Labour housing policy | 20p |
| 411 | Dennis Marsden | Politicians, equality and comprehensives | 30p |
| 421 | Malcolm Wicks | Rented housing and social ownership | 25p |
| 422 | David Lipsey | Labour and land | 20p |
| 423 | Wayland Kennet | Still no disarmament | 25p |
| 425 | Peter Shore | Europe: the way back | 30p |
| 426 | John Garrett, Robert Sheldon | Administrative reform: the next step | 20p |
| 427 | Julian Fulbrook and others | Tribunals: a social court ? | 20p |
| 428 | E. A. Webb | Industrial injuries: a new approach | 30p |
| 429 | Chris Cossey | Building better communities | 30p |
| 430 | Jeremy Bray, Nicholas Falk | Towards a worker managed economy | 30p |
| 431 | Giles Radice (ed) | Working power | 25p |
| 432 | Stewart Lansley, Guy Fiegehen | One nation? housing & conservative policy | 45p |

young fabian pamphlets

| | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 17 | Colin Crouch (ed) | Students today | 30p |
| 30 | James Bellini | British entry: Labour's nemesis | 25p |
| 31 | James Goudie | Councils and the Housing Finance Act | 30p |
| 33 | Larry Hufford | Sweden: the myth of socialism | 40p |
| 34 | Graham Child, John Evans | Britain, Europe and the law | 60p |
| 35 | a study group | A policy for public ownership | 30p |
| 36 | Stewart Lansley, Guy Fiegehen | Housing allowances and inequality | 25p |
| 37 | David R. Allan | Socialising the company | 50p |
| 38 | Young Fabian steel group | Crisis in steel | 30p |
| 39 | S. Murgatroyd, S. Thomas | Education beyond school | 20p |
| 40 | Donald Roy | State holding companies | 30p |

books

| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| R. H. S. Crossman and others | New Fabian Essays | cased £1.75 |
| Brian Abel-Smith and others | Socialism and affluence | paper £0.60 |
| Peter Townsend and others | Social services for all ? | paper £1.00 |
| Peter Townsend and others | The fifth social service | cased £1.50 |
| George Cunningham (ed) | Britain and the world in the 1970s | cased £3.00 |
| P. Townsend and N. Bosanquet (eds) | Labour and inequality | paper £2.20 |