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BRITISH POLITICAL ATTITUDES

THE 1959 ELECTION IN BRITAIN determined that a large part, and perhaps the whole, of the sixties will be presided over by the Conservative party. Historians of the future will no doubt see the post-war period as one in which the country recovered from a daring lurch to the left, and came to place its destiny by progressive, albeit hesitant, stages back into the hands of its natural rulers. If it is still their wont to label by-gone eras, they might find themselves calling this the Age of Progressive Conservatism: no Canadian connotation is necessarily implied here, although recent British experience is often spoken of as part of a general trend to the right which takes in, mistakenly, the last two Federal elections in this country. Indeed, for some time now, such talk has been presaged by references to a general reaction against reason and the idea of progress, against rationalism and liberalism. The historian with his eye on the game; the philosopher engrossed in the subtleties of language; the social scientist disillusioned with the outcome of schemes of improvement: these typify the current of thought that has made each of these perspectives, and others (for example, in the natural sciences), seem precursory of the new era. Renewed emphasis is now put on liberty as freedom from state interference rather than on the notion of freedom that has been fashionable hitherto and that concerns opportunity to lead a full life—opportunity that can be broadened as a result of state activity. Many people who might otherwise be taking an active part in affairs have felt so overwhelmed by the plethora of prevailing and conflicting ideas that they have sought refuge in non-political activity, taking on a non-committal, quietist, conformist outlook that is attuned to a world in which ideas in themselves are at a discount. Lack of enthusiasm for politics on the part of those who can thank the welfare state for having enabled them to perceive its shortcomings has provided the perfect intellectual climate for Conservative resurgence.

Nevertheless, in view of the ease with which people talk of the trend to the

right, and even of its inevitability, it would be well to recall that in no election since the war, except that of 1955, has the trend been obvious enough to indicate a foregone conclusion. The Conservatives had to fight for their laurels; and although, in 1959, Mr. Macmillan improved upon all past performances, not only by leading his party to its third successive victory but also by securing a further increase in the size of its majority, its proportion of the popular vote actually declined slightly and was a little less than that of the Labour and Liberal parties combined. The competition for the votes of a comparatively small number of crucial electors reduced the differences in the party programmes. In this connection, variations in party prospects between elections were important: from the autumn of 1955 to the spring of 1958, for instance, Labour was the more popular of the two parties and Conservatives were doing most of the soul-searching. Mr. Macmillan and his government, unlike some of their supporters, might have been sure that the unpopular but, in their view, necessary measures of the time would lead to an appropriate reward later; nevertheless, they did not hesitate to adopt and adapt other people's policies that seemed to be attractive. And although elections and Gallup polls did much to bridge the gap between party attitudes, these attitudes themselves were important in setting the gap to be bridged, and they were not derived primarily from electoral considerations. Such fundamental differences of outlook remain, but only when effective competition between the parties is restored will they again make possible a fruitful political dialogue. What are these fundamental differences between the parties?

In economic matters, the party battle proceeds within a context of common agreement on the desirability of full employment and social security, steady prices and a stable currency, economic expansion and a rising standard of living, and a balance of payments that supports a substantial volume of investment overseas. Differences of attitude, though not necessarily of achievement, arise over the ordering of priorities, the devising of means, and the pursuit of equality. Conservatives have to maintain full employment if the post-war party's progressive, broad-based "image" is to be preserved, but they are inclined to adopt a wider definition of full employment and to take more risks and worry less about fluctuations in order to avoid inflation and "over-full employment" than is the Labour party. The government has taken the view that an excess of monetary demand is the principal cause of inflation, and it has relied heavily on monetary mechanisms to effect a cure. Such simple, impersonal devices—which interfere in no way with personal choice, save by confronting one with the harsh realities of scarcity—appeal to a party which sees virtue in limiting the extent to which people are cushioned from the hard blows sus-

tained by the nation in its efforts to earn a living in a highly competitive world. The individual chooses and he counts the cost. Socialists, however, assert that those people who are in a favourable position gain inordinately, that when interest rates are allowed to rise wealth is transferred from those who do not to those who do own capital, and, therefore, that what is being invoked is in effect the principle that to him that hath shall be given. The government, they say, is not likely to win the co-operation of the trade unions upon whose restraint (in conditions of full employment) so much depends, nor is the government entitled to ask for national solidarity, effort, and restraint, unless there is some sign of purpose, of design, of equity, in the management of the national economy; trade union leaders who co-operate with the government on any other conditions are likely to find unofficial leaders coming to power behind them. Exhortation, which is bound up with the socialist ideal of voluntarily undertaken service to the community, is not likely, except in times of grave emergency, to be successful on a national level without more incentives in the workplace, and the development of a sense of participation in particular enterprises. Liberals believe that it is at this level that significant advances can be made, and many socialists are now interested in Yugoslav experiments in industrial democracy.

There is no doubt that Labour's reputation has been tarnished of late by the trade unions' help in sustaining that freedom of the jungle which they attack as characteristic of Conservative economic policy. The unions no longer have quite the influence they once had in government circles, and it is significant, too, that, at the 1959 Trades Union Congress, during the election, and since, Mr. Gaitskell has gone out of his way to emphasize that the Labour leadership, in or out of office, will not simply do their bidding. Labour is, of course, the offspring of the trade union movement, but it is also much more than this. Unless, however, it can show that it is much more, it is unlikely that it will be able to help bring out the best in its opponents and ensure that they are more than mere spokesmen for the business world. Further legislation is certainly required, in Britain as on this continent, to induce business men to think of themselves as trustees by providing for more publicity; but—as the last Chancellor of the Exchequer has now discovered—there are limits to what a Conservative party that is so secretive about its own finances can do unless it is prodded by an effective opposition which is prepared, on taking office, to use the power of knowledge to have reform effected wherever public ownership is inappropriate. Labour's proposals for government holding of equities and representation on boards of directors warrant more attention from this point of view, particularly as they were linked to the party's national superannuation scheme. This scheme not only had the merits of effectiveness (the Conservatives later introduced

their own proposals), of being open to everybody, and of recognizing that diversity of contributions and benefits is consistent with the best social service principles; it also met the pressing need to arrest the proliferation of private pension schemes which hamper freedom of movement.

The report of the Radcliffe Committee, which pointed out that in many ways monetary policy is a blunt instrument, was seized upon by socialists, who believe that money should be the servant, not the master, of economic policy, who contend that the individual cannot possibly assess the community's investment needs, and who therefore want more communal saving through budget surpluses. Labour, in fact, would seem to be prepared to accept a modest degree of inflation, coupled with compensation for pensioners and others who cannot protect themselves, if there is no other way to avoid stagnation and encourage the fullest use of the country's resources. This is a serious problem at present, for all attempts to invest more seem to be doomed by the measures that are taken to deal with the difficulties of inflationary pressure and balance of payments that arise as a result. The electoral accelerator and the mid-term brake are now applied alternately every two years. The disparity between the rates of economic growth in Britain and in the European Economic Community, let alone in the Communist bloc, provides a *prima facie* case for broad, long-term, economic planning (as well as for Britain's reconsidering her relations with Europe). The management of an economy is a matter of such delicacy, however, that, if the reins are too tight, it will be caught by crisis after crisis of such magnitude as to force governments to turn from one expedient to another and so lose effective control altogether. Such was the situation during the first few years after the war; that is what people remember of those years, insufficient allowance being made now for the difficulties which confronted the government at that time, possibly because too many socialists spoke then as if they could see no end to such a condition. Memories are important when prescriptions have a familiar taste, and that is why it has been easier for Labour's opponents to represent it as the party of austerity than for Labour to attach the stigma of Suez to the Conservatives. The expense of that operation, although enormous, did not appear to be a recurring charge.

Socialists regard the development of the affluent society as distasteful in so far as it is geared to conspicuous personal consumption stimulated by high-powered advertising; but, of course, they favour expansion of productive capacity in view of (1) Britain's need to pay her way in a world that is continually making it more difficult for her to do so, (2) her lag in living standards behind those of Canada and the United States and the consequent and persistent threat to the size and

quality of her working force, (3) her responsibility for helping underdeveloped countries, and (4) the need to expand the social services as part of the quest for social justice. Like Professor J. K. Galbraith, they regard the chaotic manufacturing of wants and the consequent imbalance between private consumption and essential social provision as a contradiction inherent in modern capitalism. Unfortunately, an intellectual appraisal of this kind often serves to support mere disdain for the pleasures of other people. It is in this connection that one can see the initiative as really having passed to the Conservatives. Where it used to be the fashion to talk of Labour governments leading the country along the road to socialism (whatever that meant) while Conservative governments merely provided pauses for efficient consolidation, Mr. Gaitskell's pledge during the election not to increase personal income and other taxes except in grave circumstances restricted the debate to how the *future* wealth of the country should be allocated between private and social consumption: the Conservatives are now in a position to set the pace in the coming years by making further reductions in taxation from which not only the more prosperous will benefit. Both parties are inclined to be unrealistic about taxation, the Labour tendency being to regard the level of the moment as one of equilibrium, departures from which are justified with too little regard for economic incentive; Conservatives *qua* business men look upon taxation as simply something that is taken away from them, rather than as something that they owe, in part, to society. If Mr. Bentham is to prevail over Mr. Burke in this way, there will be need of all the dissenting voices and irrepressible spirits available (with Mr. Bevan's death, Britain has lost the most vital of these) if the dialogue of democracy, dependent as it is upon communication between different levels of discourse, is to ensure that what is good in British life is preserved, let alone improved.

There will certainly be a struggle to keep intact such principles as those of town and country planning, and to prevent private profiteering from booms in land values. Education, too, is bound up so intimately with social environment that there is scope for further consideration of the merits of a system which the rich contract out of, thereby insulating their children from the social influences for which they are largely responsible and against which state schools have to contend. A comprehensive study of the country's educational institutions might serve to show how Britain could renew the attack on class privilege without making education a mere means to some other end and without further popularizing the myth that one opinion is as good as another. Mass media are the danger here: that is why the self-assured assertiveness of a Randolph Churchill is a national asset when it gives rise, for example, to the discomfiture of powerful press lords. The Thomsonization of

the press and the demise of London's last two Liberal newspapers do not constitute progress. Another issue which is fundamental to all discussion of the cultural osmosis which seems to be bound up with the spread of affluence is television, now the principal medium for the dissemination of ideas, the sharing of aesthetic experiences, and the widening of popular horizons, as well as for the provision of mass entertainment. The left—and not only the left—believes that it is of the utmost importance that it be regarded as of significance in itself and not be looked upon as a mere adjunct of commercial enterprise. Now that there is commercial as well as public-service television in Britain, it will require constant vigilance if viewers are not to be subjected to advertising at the expense of enlightenment or entertainment; one hopes that it might also stimulate thought on the possibilities of "pay as you view" schemes designed to make available programmes for the discriminating.

This last possibility suggests that more use could be made of the price mechanism in the development of public policies. If Labour is to make any contribution here, it must talk less of the wickedness of "rationing by the purse". It is as important for the state to look at personal expenditure in terms of the person as it is for the individual to see public spending from the point of view of the community. It is not difficult to establish a case for improvements in many of the social services, and Labour is likely to continue to be the forward-looking party in this area, since it sees the social services not simply as a means of providing a bare minimum for those who fare worst in a materially competitive society, but as something to be expanded for the benefit of the whole community. (In the case of the health service, they believe that benefits should also be extended to visitors from abroad, not only because it seems right to do so, but also because it is hoped that one day such benefits will be shared between nations on a reciprocal basis.) Socialists need to clarify their thinking, however, in the case of payments that simply transfer income from one pocket to another (often in the same pair of trousers). When, for instance, in 1957, the government at last attacked the housing subsidy and rent control confusion, Labour was most unwise to react by threatening, and then promising, that it would require local authorities to take over all property that had been subject to rent control. It was absurd to allow the belief that there is something morally wrong in the relationship between private landlord and tenant to inspire a policy full of alarming implications for local government, diversity of housing development, and personal freedom. It is important that public subsidies (as well as state-enforced "concealed subsidies") be seen to be reasonable if the state is to maintain that good reputation without which its capacity to do what is really necessary is impaired. Had the party borne this in mind, Labour could have sought

to influence Conservative policy for the better.

There is scope in the British economy for more sensitivity to the tastes of consumers and for less detailed regulation of hours of sale, of hotel management, and so on. At the same time, more needs to be done to help consumers choose wisely, and Labour could, but is unlikely to, take advantage of its period in opposition to encourage the co-operative societies to follow the Swedish example and engage in vigorous competition with the chain stores. Both the main parties paid more attention to leisure in the 1959 election (as one might expect in a society that has got rid of dire poverty), and the Conservatives, though conceding much to the interests affected, have now made a modest contribution to the clearing away of the Victorian *bric-à-brac* of restrictions on gambling and drinking. Labour is apt to be old-fashioned about these matters: it would never have taken the initiative. Conservative leaders, on the other hand, find it difficult to resist pressure from their rank and file who wish to retain capital punishment, to reintroduce corporal punishment, and to keep intact the law as it affects homosexual conduct, all of which issues continue to arise from time to time. Labour is more conscious of the need to expand state aid in the arts, and the Liberals are the only party that seems to be seriously concerned about the threat to liberty posed by modern organization. The attitudes of the parties to all these questions can be understood according as they dwell on either the frailties or the potentialities of human nature.

Labour's electoral prospects and its effectiveness as an opposition have been impaired by the way the party is organized as well as by its adherence to a blueprint drawn up more than forty years ago and providing for a state of affairs towards which, it is thought, society must be directed. The socialist passion for tidiness, clamouring for the removal by the state of almost every anomaly at almost any cost on the assumption that to every problem there is a fairly simple solution, has often led the party astray. But it is the idea of a fixed destination which must have deterred many voters who are sympathetic to the left from joining a party and signifying their agreement to a constitution, both of which have proved to be so rigid as to ensure that the party's policy statements cause more acrimonious debate in public between party members than between the parties. The attempt to reconcile internal party democracy (a sham) with the requirements of parliamentary democracy has played no little part in maintaining the image of the Labour party as a divided one kept together (in so far as it is kept together) by machine-like manoeuvres and by attempts to resolve differences by means of agreed formulae which satisfy and convince no one.

The failure of Mr. Gaitskell's attempt to get the party to amend part four of

clause four of the constitution, which makes it a party object to secure, *inter alia*, the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, is regrettable, for what he wanted to put in the place of this threat to all private property (or, at least, to qualify it) was more radical, more inspiring, and more in accord with socialist tradition, as well as with current Labour attitudes. Socialists believe, he said, in social justice, an equitable distribution of wealth, a classless society, and racial equality; also, that the pursuit of material satisfaction by itself is empty, that the good society is one in which the human personality is developed to the full, that the pursuit of private gain should not take precedence over the public good, and that these principles must be achieved with and through freedom and democratic self-government. Socialists agree that both public and private enterprise have a place in the economy, but they differ as to whether an "extension of common ownership substantial enough to give the community power over the commanding heights of the economy" means that the public sector must be dominant. This is crucial, not only for the economy, but also for society. There is a long way to go, however, before this question can possibly become a practical issue. What is important at the moment is that there should be a party which is not prevented by its paymasters from nationalizing a firm or industry, where that is genuinely thought to be in the public interest. As time goes on, more social ownership will in any case be called for by changes in technology and attitude and by increased opportunities for substituting the principle of service for that of profit. Such opportunities are more likely to arise, however, if reformers take as their starting point people's needs and aspirations as they now are. If they are to educate, they must proceed from the known to the unknown. What is to be done is implicit in what is now being done: articulation of existing incoherences is necessary for there to be significant improvement. No party leaders have a right to public office when they adopt policies merely in order to demonstrate to a section of the party their fidelity to a set of abstract principles. Mr. Gaitskell's weakness, unfortunately, has been in giving the impression that he wishes to water down and even abandon the party's principles; he has become a symbol of this, while the adherence of others to Clause Four has been thought to indicate steadfastness. Hence the farcical sequence of events which culminated in the Wilson bid for the leadership last November. It is time that Labour understood how futile it is to disagree about the exact delineation of a distant future when there is a crying need for action this day.

As is true of most doctrinaire parties, Labour suffers from too much discipline and organization. The parliamentary party is organized in opposition as if it were sustaining a government. Where there are only two major parties they cannot be

expected to be monolithic, nor should they be. An innovating party which contains within itself so many diverse causes must maintain an intimate connection with the imaginative and the thoughtful, with those who prescribe for the country's ills but who are not particularly interested in having marginal changes made in current policies. Such a party, however, like any other, must be led by men whom it is possible to imagine forming a government. Labour, as a rationalist party in the eighteenth-century tradition, believes that politics should not be left to a ruling class, that the enlargement of freedom as the control of one's own destiny requires the development of a democracy of participation. Since most people do not wish to participate, those who do are likely to appear to the rest to be professional wire-pullers for whom politics is an all-consuming, desiccating business. Of all too many socialist leaders of the present generation this would be a fair description: it is not easy, indeed, to maintain one's faith in the notion that politics has a part to play in man's improvement of himself when such are the politicians: one is led, perhaps, to hope for too much from improvements in institutions and machinery.

The truly professional politicians, however, are the leaders of the Conservative party, for their role, as they see it, is to rule the people, as that of the medical profession is to care for them. An election or a party conference is to them a necessary but time-consuming diversion—something like the bedside chat to the medical man. The important thing is to bring down the temperature—and keep it down. Government is an art that should be practised by those who understand it—by statesmen; party politics is a game that one should not take too seriously (and that most people do not take too seriously) unless people begin to lose confidence in their rulers. It is not so difficult, of course, for Conservative leaders to placate their militants for the sake of electoral victory as it is for Labour, largely because Conservatives and socialists join their parties for different kinds of reason. Labour is oriented to desired ends, Conservatives to the administration of the unforeseen. Like most right-wing parties, the Conservative is a party of *notables*. The leadership constitutes a team—what Mr. Peter Laslett has called a face-to-face society and what others describe as the old boy network—in which each has his allotted task and feels that he has an intuitive understanding of the other, and of a situation, where much is taken for granted, and where difficulties are often resolved as a result of what is not expressly formulated. The positive pursuit of good is preferred to moralizing, striking attitudes, and wishful thinking. “If we can't beat them, join them,” says the American. “If we can't beat them, let them join us,” says the British Conservative. “Don't rock the boat,” is the motto.

In view of all this, one may wonder why the present Conservative government

is still as far to the left as it is, at a time when there is no immediate threat from the left. There would seem to be two reasons. Mr. Macmillan, Mr. Butler, and Mr. Macleod (but by no means all members of the Cabinet) see themselves as sincere Conservative reformers; they are also imaginative realists who believe that if fighting causes likely to unite socialists are withheld from them the Labour party will finally disintegrate. This would not only make possible a long period of Conservative rule ahead: it would also mean the expulsion from the British body politic of what they regard as a foreign, doctrinaire, ideological cast of mind and style of politics, with its false gods and prophets, its slogans and catchwords, its faith in majorities and mandates and "the movement", and its self-conscious intelligentsia. Conservatives have declined the role that socialists had so thoughtfully provided for them—that of a passive, efficient party alternating in office in a two-party system but having to accept socialist achievements and a socialist context. If they can guard their right flank by giving those who favour policies of a more *laissez-faire* flavour an opportunity to attempt a limited retreat from government, then all to the good. The major challenge in the years to come, they believe, will be provided by national problems, and they hope to meet it with a people who by then will find it difficult to imagine any other party in office and who will not be distracted therefore by alternative policies. Unfortunately, moral and rational distinctions are liable to become hopelessly blurred, with sophistication degenerating into slickness.

The Labour leadership also constitutes an *élite*, of course; for instance, many socialists (notably, Mr. Crossman) have echoed the remarks which Aneurin Bevan made after the election: that one should find out where the true interests of the country lie, look ahead to future difficulties, and formulate appropriate policies, rather than pursue the will-o'-the-wisp of easy popularity. They seem, however, to have overlooked four aspects of the matter, of which Bevan himself was no doubt well aware: (1) that the success of political activity—or any other—is not always to be measured according to the extent to which the end achieved is premeditated; (2) that the public interest is neither an aggregate of private-cum-social interests nor merely one that transcends them, but something that partakes of both and which has to be formulated tentatively with imaginative tolerance; (3) that a vision of what one would do in some utopia does not justify an interim morality, or attitude of '*ohne mich*', in the world as one finds it; (4) that regard must be had for priorities. The attitudes of a number of reputable journals, the increase in the Liberal vote, and the greater militancy of younger "ginger groups", all testify to the fact that the Conservative record in foreign affairs, and colonial and defence policy, put many voters in 1959, who disliked Labour's domestic programme, in a predicament. If

Labour, too, felt that these aspects of Conservative rule were the worst, then it should have been prepared to sacrifice much in order to make them the election issues.

Mr. Bevan tried to present the election as an opportunity to "send to an international conference, not the better sort of people, but people with the better sort of message," one which was linked in no way with such irresponsible adventures as that of Suez. The Conservative party, on the other hand, wished the electorate to regard Suez as something that happened in the distant past for which Mr. Macmillan was not primarily responsible, but of which, at the same time, he was not ashamed. It was the Conservative record since 1957, not since 1955, for which Mr. Macmillan was asking for a vote of confidence. The reputation he had gained for himself as a man who spoke for Britain and her friends to the rest of the world was an important Conservative asset. Much was made of his long experience by party spokesmen; yet, when he became Prime Minister, he had, with the single exception of Housing, held no Cabinet office for longer than thirteen months. If there is one thing that Mr. Macmillan's career shows, it is that some men can reach high office and grow in stature to approach what the office demands, in spite of lack of experience and lack of earlier distinction. He has displayed in his journeys abroad considerable capacity to learn, to explore, to take calculated, diplomatic risks while remaining calm, and, on occasion, to act decisively while paying proper attention to timing. He has tried to see what is called for by a situation as a whole, as well as by the parts of that whole: he thought it possible, for instance, to speak for Britain and win the election, without there being any conflict between the two. His television appearance with President Eisenhower was a masterly demonstration of the art (or craft) of weaving the domestic with the global. He was able to convey to the electorate how it was possible (for him) to be intimate with the Americans and influence them, yet be capable of disagreeing with them from time to time; how he could speak of post-war reforms at home and Commonwealth developments overseas as if he were responsible for them all, and had supported them; how he could do quietly what Labour had been noisily clamouring for. Although it is open to question whether his agreeing with Labour on the desirability of a summit conference was the best response to Mr. Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin, nevertheless, a prime minister of this kind is likely to do best by his country when the country's station and its duties have been clarified by debate.

Left-wing parties have an internationalist tradition, which they like to think distinguishes them from others. Communists and democratic socialists both recognize that the kinds of society which they favour cannot be brought into being fully ex-

cept on an international scale, and it is natural therefore that both should talk in terms of "socialist foreign policies"—policies which are informed by a socialist ethic and grounded in a socialist interpretation of history, and which require that a sense of direction be communicated to other governments upon whose attitudes success depends. Because so much does depend on others who are beyond one's control, it is in foreign affairs and defence policy that wishful thinking has to make the biggest concessions to reality. "Socialism" does not, of course, mean the same thing to these two groups, but there is sufficient affinity for Labour attitudes to Communism to range from one of sympathy to one of bitter rivalry; Communists, on the other hand, regard democratic socialists with deep suspicion. In general, Labour is less inclined than the Conservatives to see revolutions overseas in terms of plots, Communist or otherwise, than as the strivings of an international proletariat to secure a place for itself in the international community (not that poverty is the cause of the cold war itself). When King Faisal and other leaders were murdered in Iraq in 1958, socialists were not shocked as was the Government: they were inclined, rather, to blame the West for relying too much on military arrangements and for not having done more to encourage economic and social reform. On the other hand, their "world view" led them to blunder into voting against British intervention in Jordan in 1958 (as if it were a repetition of Suez) after it had acquiesced in the American landings in Lebanon. And their attitude to the Arab-Israeli dispute is equivocal, to say the least. Labour believes, indeed, that force should be used only in self-defence or in pursuance of international obligations under the Charter of the United Nations.

The issue of Britain's entry into the Common Market—an issue that should have been settled years ago—cuts across party, and even intra-party, lines. The misgivings of many socialists stem from their reluctance to accept a capitalist and politically reactionary and authoritarian framework for Britain, as well as from their opinion that the country should not be associated with any scheme that weakens her ties with the rest of the world—a world which they think is moving inevitably to the left. They are also suspicious of those leaders, such as Dr. Adenauer, who are in the forefront of the cold war, and they are therefore opposed to any consolidation of the present division of Europe between the two world camps. Conservatives and socialists are both exposed to the pressures of various interest groups and both would like to protect domestic agriculture and a few other industries. Many people, moreover, are disconcerted by the instability of government in some of the Common Market countries, by the institutional ambitions of European federalists, and by the differences in style and temperament which they see reflected in Continental politics. On the other hand, there are enthusiasts in both parties, and in this they are

joined by most Liberals, who see association with Europe as a means of escape not only from economic stagnation but also from insular complacency, cultural decadence, and diplomatic ineffectiveness.

Those who favour and those who oppose Britain's entry are alike convinced that theirs is the only way to safeguard Britain's special relationships with the United States and the Commonwealth. Certainly, the ventilation in the press in recent months of the arguments for and against should have done something to educate the public in Commonwealth affairs. It should now be more generally understood in Britain and in Europe that the Commonwealth is not held together by intangibles alone, but rather by a network of advantages and concessions which are mutually reinforcing. Within and between member-states there are clearly countless numbers of overlapping links such as constitute any community and such as enable a community to cohere. These links are not distributed at all evenly and some countries—Canada, for example—have themselves to blame if Britain can no longer put their interests first. On the other hand, because of her multifarious relationships with all members, it is in Britain that one might expect to find an overall perspective on Commonwealth relations. Unfortunately, the public discussion that has taken place so far has seemed contrived, as though it were moving towards an inevitable conclusion—the one to which the government has committed itself in the belief that the country now has little choice. The government has been so insensitive to Commonwealth susceptibilities that any assurances that it may now give its partners are likely to be discounted.

Mr. Macmillan and Mr. Sandys and their colleagues do not seem to realize that by their mishandling of the negotiations to date, Dr. Verwoerd's prophecy of an early end to the Commonwealth has been brought somewhat closer to fulfilment. For even if the total disintegration of the Commonwealth could never come to pass, its present scope and significance might all too easily be reduced.

Labour tries to counter what it calls the remnants of colonialism in British government policy: looking upon the development of Empire into Commonwealth as one of progress, it tries to speak for the few remaining colonial "underdogs" at Westminster. It displays more sympathy for countries having difficulty in applying western concepts of democracy, or following "other roads to socialism", such as Ghana: it has always gone much further than the Conservatives in denouncing South African policies; some socialists are inclined to regard India and Ghana as being more important to the Commonwealth than older members, perhaps because they seem to them to epitomize the multi-racial and socially progressive ideal for which they think the Commonwealth, and ultimately the world, should stand. Cen-

tral Africa, where the multi-racial ideal is thwarted by racial contiguity, has been an outstanding issue between the parties for a number of years, and, although in the last year or so the government has had to move much closer to Labour's point of view, serious mistakes are still being made in that part of the world.

The attitudes of the parties to domestic questions tend to be projected on to the international scene. Labour, for instance, sees the weaknesses of British foreign policy as representing the failure of empiricism: as the degeneration of policy into an aggregate of separate reactions to crises, degeneration that is attributable to a lack of informed, forward planning. Unfortunately, too many socialists allow themselves to be carried away by the argument that in the mid-twentieth century Britain's ability to remain a great power depends on her readiness to assume the moral leadership for which the world is waiting. Labour attaches less importance to physical power, and even to certain forms of psychological power: many people, for instance, are suspicious of the hydrogen bomb because it seems to have become a national status symbol. The party's defence policies (for example, the 1959 proposal for a non-nuclear club) have always borne the stamp of intra-party compromise. Mr. Gaitskell's change of front on the subject of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent was forced upon him by trade-union leaders, many of whom now espouse the cause of unilateral nuclear disarmament. It has, therefore, been difficult for Labour to direct the public's attention to the government's appalling defence record, particularly the extent of its dependence on the threat (or bluff) of massive nuclear retaliation. Fortunately, Mr. Gaitskell has so far been able to prevent the unilateralists from taking over control of the party.

The attitudes of parties shape, and are shaped by, other forces and groups and persons in society, by events, by what is going on elsewhere, by the need to make compromises, by the tempering effects of office (and, of course, the memories and prospects of office); not least important, political parties are affected by one another and by changing conceptions of the role of the country and of the state. In Britain, almost everyone has something of the conservative, the liberal, and the socialist in him. At the moment, however, the Labour party has little influence. It is unfortunate, perhaps, that it is not disposed to sponsor some kind of *rassemblement des gauches*, in which it could participate without losing its separate identity, which would provide a political vehicle for the radical spirit that is still alive in Britain, and which would therefore strengthen the hand of those radicals who find themselves within the Conservative party. Not that there is any likelihood of Labour's being ousted from its position by the Liberals in the near future, or that the future calls for a return to a flabby Lib-Labism: the point is that there is no likelihood

of Conservatives being ousted from *their* position, and no assurance that they will have the stimulus to do what is best for the country, unless British politics are rejuvenated by tapping sources of enthusiasm that are now running to waste. The loss, moreover, is not confined to Britain. The liberal tradition is one of appealing to man's reason, not to men as one may find them; it thrives on informed comment and makes possible the clear articulation of issues. It is platitudinous today to point out that liberals had too much faith in man's reason; but it would be folly now to put so little faith in it as to allow the illiberal to get away with murder. Britain has always made it easy for an interested world to criticize her; in so far as her difficulties have been theirs also she has made it easier for other countries to criticize themselves and to take appropriate action. Britain might have learned more and done better, and so might they, but all have gained something. It is of some importance that British thought and practice, her ideas and her arguments, continue to make their contribution to a troubled world.