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# Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour Party and foreign affairs 1955-63

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**HUGH GAITSKELL, THE LABOUR PARTY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS 1955-63**

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

School of Humanities & Cultural Interpretation  
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**Simon Rippingale**

**Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour Party and Foreign Affairs 1955-63**

**Abstract**

Hugh Gaitskell was leader of the Labour Party between 1955-63. The Cold War was at a critical level and bi-partisanship in international affairs was expected. With Gaitskell's accession this appeared to end, marked in particular by the disputes over Suez, the independent nuclear deterrent and Britain's application to join the European Economic Community. Simultaneously, he was challenged by the Left over nearly every aspect of Labour's foreign and defence policy. Despite these major controversies, Gaitskell's influence over international affairs remains a neglected area of research, and he is remembered more for the domestic controversies over nationalisation, his ill-fated attempt to revise Clause IV and defeat at the 1960 Scarborough conference.

This thesis addresses that imbalance by examining Gaitskell's contribution to foreign affairs and the following inter-related areas: bi-partisanship; policy formulation; internal divisions and the power struggle between Left and Right. In addition, it also considers how the structure of the Labour Party benefited the leadership during this turbulent period.

The conclusions revise Gaitskell's reputation as a figure of unyielding principle, and demonstrates that his leadership was marked by a mixture of finesse and blunder. His responsibility for the end of bi-partisanship can be discounted, as Labour remained firmly committed to the policies laid down and followed since 1945. Yet, the personal control over policy that he exercised, allied to his determination to mould the Labour Party in his own image, needlessly accelerated the internal struggles for power. While the Scarborough defeat illustrates the limitations of his authority, Suez and Europe display his acute political awareness of the requirements needed to balance national interests, electoral prospects and maintain party unity.



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## **Abbreviations**

The following abbreviations occur in the text and footnotes

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASFS	Anglo-Soviet Friendship Society
ASSET	Association of Supervisory Staffs, Executives and Technicians
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIPO	British Institute of Public Opinion
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy (of the EEC)
CDS	Campaign for Democratic Socialism
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CMD	Campaign for Multilateral Disarmament
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CWS-C	Commonwealth Sub-Committee (of the Labour Party)
DS-C	Defence Sub-Committee
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDC	European Defence Community
EDM	Early Day Motion
EEC	European Economic Community (Common Market)
EES-C	European Economic Sub-Committee (of the Labour Party)
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
EIFTA	European Industrial Free Trade Area
FO	Foreign Office
F&ES-C	Finance and Economic Sub-Committee (of the Labour Party)
HC Deb	House of Commons Debates ( <u>Hansard</u> )
HDD	Hugh Dalton Diary
HGD	Hugh Gaitskell Diary
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HPS-C	Home Policy Sub-Committee (of the Labour Party)
ID	International Department (of the Labour Party)
IS-C	International Sub-Committee (of the Labour Party)
ITV	Independent Television
LCMC	Labour Common Market Committee
LHBC	Labour H-Bomb Committee
LPCR	Labour Party Conference Report
MEDO	Middle East Defence Organisation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCANWT	National Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests
NCL	National Council of Labour
NEC	National Executive Committee (of the Labour Party)
NUGMW	National Union of General and Municipal Workers
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
PC	Parliamentary Committee (Shadow Cabinet)
PGWD	Patrick Gordon Walker Diary
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PPS	Parliamentary Private Secretary
PRO	Public Record Office (Kew)
RCD	Richard Crossman Diary
RD	Research Department (of the Labour Party)
SCUA	Suez Canal Users Association
SEATO	South East Treaty Organisation
TBD	Tony Benn Diary
T&GWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress (and by extension its General Council)
UN	United Nations
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
VFS	Victory For Socialism

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### **Author's Declaration**

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Signed.....*S. R. King*.....  
Date.....*1st August 1996*.....

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to examine the British Labour Party's views on foreign and defence policy under the leadership of Hugh Gaitskell between 1955-1963. This was a period where the Cold War was still at a critical level and the world was beset with international crises. World War Two had ended the predominance of the European states in world affairs and propelled the Soviet Union and United States of America to international primacy. Britain itself had emerged from the war victorious, but seriously weakened. Despite both major British political parties clinging to the notion of parity with the new superpowers it was increasingly evident that this position was unrealistic. Serious economic difficulties, the ending of empire and an increasing dependence on America were widely thought of as demonstrating Britain's diminishing world role.

In opposition from 1951, bi-partisanship in international affairs was largely adhered to by Labour despite pressure from the Party's left-wing. With Gaitskell's accession to the leadership in December 1955, the tacit acceptance of the Conservative Government's foreign policy appeared to break down, marked in particular by Labour's attitudes to the Suez Crisis, the dispute over the 'independent' British nuclear deterrent and the application to join the European Economic Community (EEC). In addition, his period as leader witnessed bitter internal divisions over foreign affairs, especially defence policy, which culminated in the unilateralist victory at Scarborough in 1960.

Gaitskell's political career still arouses considerable controversy. Although the major cause of Gaitskell's disagreement with the Left lay in foreign affairs, he is primarily remembered for domestic, social and economic policy, and as leader after 1955, for the controversies that arose over nationalisation and the ill-fated attempt to revise Clause IV of the Labour Party's constitution. Gaitskell's leadership appeared to be divided into three phases.

Between 1955-1959, albeit with some difficulty, he managed to hold the Party together. After the general election defeat of 1959 he was subjected to defeats over Clause IV and unilateralism, only reversing the latter defeat in 1961. Finally, the Party came together again, regaining the Left's support over his stand on Europe, until his death in January 1963.

As Kenneth O. Morgan has observed, despite the controversial nature of these 'crises', Gaitskell's foreign policy has remained 'relatively neglected'.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this thesis is to address any imbalance and provide an overview of Gaitskell's influence on Labour's foreign and defence policy. While it will focus primarily on the controversial issues of Suez, the H-bomb and Europe, the research will examine the nature and extent of Labour's opposition to government policy; the Labour Movement's foreign and defence policy-making process, the internal divisions over policy and the power struggle between left and right. Linked to these factors is a consideration of the Party's structure which, with the exception of the 1960 conference defeat, demonstrates Gaitskell's personal control. In a wider context, the thesis will argue that Gaitskell's political career as leader is in need of reassessment in order to avoid the rigid polarisation that it has attracted from historians and political scientists.

### 1. British Foreign Policy Since 1945: Bevin's Legacy

In July 1945 the Labour Party swept into power with a large majority over the Conservatives. Labour proceeded to embark on an ambitious domestic programme including nationalisation, the implementation of the National Health Service, social welfare legislation, a commitment to full employment and the promise of a fairer society. These measures caught the public imagination, albeit briefly, and were hailed by allies and opponents alike as constituting a 'social revolution'. In foreign affairs the same optimism was to be found, and with Labour in power, many confidently expected a different



approach in Britain's conduct of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Wartime co-operation and widespread admiration for the Soviet Union, a rejection of the pre-war policies of the National Government and a long-term antipathy to imperialism appeared to bind all sections of the Party in a new spirit of internationalism.

This optimism, however, was shortlived: it soon became clear that the wartime alliance of Britain, America and the USSR had simply been a 'marriage of convenience' forced upon all of them in order to defeat the common enemy. Once achieved, the *raison d'être* of the alliance ceased to exist and was replaced instead by the mutual suspicion and the polarisation of the two power blocs that lasted for the next forty five years. The fear of communism gained momentum with the threat to British interests in Iran, Greece and Turkey between 1945-46. On a wider scale, communist agitation in France and Italy, the 'coup' in Czechoslovakia and the Berlin Blockade seemed to confirm the fears of impending Soviet domination of western Europe. From a British perspective, Bevin's tactics as Foreign Secretary were to manoeuvre the Americans into assuming responsibilities that Britain could no longer offer, while skilfully preserving an illusion of independence and national prestige. This policy prevented the United States from returning to its pre-war isolationism and culminated in the Truman Doctrine, economic help in the form of Marshall Aid and the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>3</sup>

While Britain had succeeded in committing the Americans to the defence of Europe, they in turn pressed for an end to the British Empire. Labour's victory in 1945, promised this in the near future. Indeed, withdrawal from the Indian Subcontinent rapidly followed. Despite the communal violence on partition, and some Conservative regret, this is usually regarded as a great success for the Labour Government, especially when it is compared with some European experiences of decolonisation. Unfortunately, the same

cannot be said of Palestine where the British withdrawal was confused, bitter and has earned widespread condemnation ever since.<sup>4</sup>

While the Government's foreign policy attracted approval from the British political establishment generally, there was some dissent from Labour's left-wing. A fluid alliance of pacifists, fellow-travellers, anti-militarists and neutralists, encapsulating principles long held within the the Party, were generally critical of the Government's growing hostility to Russia and subservience to America.<sup>5</sup> Shifts of opinion within this alliance occurred according to the behaviour of the two superpowers. Between 1945-47 the Left pressed for a distinctive 'Socialist' foreign policy: in effect, a 'Third Force' with Britain taking the moral leadership of a united socialist Europe (later to be directed to the Commonwealth), holding a balance and remaining independent of Russia and America. This policy collapsed during 1947-49 due to a combination of factors: perceived Soviet intransigence and aggression; the re-emergence of right-wing governments in France and Italy (which denied hopes of a united socialist Europe); and above all the American offer of economic aid to all of Europe in the form of the Marshall Plan. This was particularly important, as many on the left took this as a sign that the Truman administration was similar in ideology to the Labour Government and its ideals of democratic socialism.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, many of these fears reappeared with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950.

Korea turned the 'Cold War' into a 'Hot War'. The emphasis of American policy abruptly swung from economic aid to military preparation and the 'containment' of communism, and they expected their allies to follow suit. The Labour Government accepted the need for heavy rearmament, even though many were alarmed by the escalating costs and the effect on the fragile economy. This in turn threatened the recently expanded social services, regarded as some of the Party's proudest achievements. Although the Korean conflict and the issues raised over German rearmament disturbed

many Labour MPs, they were unwilling to vote against their own government for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, in April 1951 the internal crisis came to a head when Bevan, Wilson and Freeman resigned. Whatever the subsequent controversy over Bevan's contribution, he was adopted as the rallying point of the Left and played a key role in Labour's internal politics until his death in July 1960.

The Conservatives returned to power under Churchill in October 1951 with a small but workable majority of seventeen. In opposition during 1945-51, the Conservatives had been critical over a number of features of Labour's domestic programme. In foreign affairs and defence policy however, they had followed a bi-partisan approach, despite some misgivings over Indian independence and the problems in the Middle East. In fact, ever since his 'Iron Curtain' speech at Fulton, Missouri, Churchill had rarely missed an opportunity to boast that the Labour Government was actually following policies that he had recommended. When Anthony Eden returned as Foreign Secretary, the basic tenet of British foreign policy was to maintain Britain's influence as one of the 'Big Three' wherever possible. This was to be forged in the 'three interlocking circles' approach: the 'Special Relationship' with the United States; the dominance of Western Europe and the leadership of the global 'alliance' of Empire and Commonwealth nations.<sup>7</sup>

There is little doubt that in the decade after the end of World War Two Britain projected itself as a great power. Yet it was also clear that the maintenance of the world role chosen was incompatible with the economic problems that Britain faced. In 1952 Britain had become the third nuclear power after the USA and USSR, seven years ahead of France. During 1953 nearly 10 per cent of GNP was being spent on defence and keeping 865,000 personnel in the armed forces.<sup>8</sup> A struggling economy, bedevilled by rising defence expenditure due to international crises and exacerbated by nationalist

agitation in colonial possessions, led to monetary crises that could not be ignored. By the mid-1950s, economic considerations, more than anything else, led to a reassessment of foreign and defence policy.

## 2. International Affairs & Opposition

Though defeated in the general election of 1951, few in the Labour Party were unduly concerned. There was a general belief that once the Tories were back in office, they would dismantle many of the popular measures that the Labour Government had put into effect. In turn this would cause increasing unpopularity amongst the electorate and, as the Conservatives only had a small majority in Parliament, it would not be long before Labour regained power. Despite these hopes, Labour did not actually return to power until 1964. In the general elections of 1955 and 1959, the Tory Government actually increased its majority in Parliament by 58 and 100 seats.

During the election campaign of 1951, Labour had warned that the Tories would take a far more aggressive stance over foreign affairs. Although Conservative rhetoric over the Abadan affair had given this concern some credibility, there was actually little change. While the Conservatives had followed a bi-partisanship approach in opposition, back in office they expected Labour to do the same. In fact, it was difficult in many respects to do otherwise, even if Labour had wished. To do so, with the Cold War still at a dangerous level and nationalist movements threatening perceived British overseas interests, the Labour leadership would have left itself wide open to charges of irresponsibility; a charge not to be taken lightly when it was considered quite possible that Labour could soon be returned to power. In addition, the Labour leadership were hampered by the fact that many of the policies that were being put into practice by the Conservatives had been initiated by them in the first place, something that the Labour Left rarely let their leadership forget. Even though there were occasions when Labour felt

compelled to criticise the Government, the period between 1951-55 was remarkably free of any fundamental disagreements over foreign affairs between the opposing front benches.

When Gaitskell became leader in December 1955 bi-partisanship in foreign affairs appeared to deteriorate. Initial misgivings over government policy in the Middle East, especially the decision to use the Baghdad Pact to boost British predominance, rose to outright condemnation over the use of force during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Similarly, despite the Labour leadership's support for a British nuclear capacity, the 1957 defence review and its policy of 'massive retaliation' resulted in Labour's advocacy of a 'non-nuclear club' and harsh criticism later, of the Government's insistence that Britain should retain an independent nuclear deterrent. On Europe, after a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the Government's decision to apply for EEC membership in 1961, Gaitskell appeared to come out in total opposition at the Labour conference the following year.

Yet any supposition that Gaitskell's leadership caused a breakdown in bi-partisanship needs qualification. Despite the cited rifts, Gaitskell and the majority of the Labour Party supported 'traditional' British foreign policy goals. They believed in the Atlantic Alliance, the importance of the Commonwealth and the maintenance of British political influence on a global scale. As all three were threatened by the Government's Suez policy, Labour could justify their objections on this basis. Similarly, they supported the manufacture and testing of British nuclear weapons, and would only contemplate reductions on a multilateral basis. Even Labour's EEC policy reflected the widespread resentment that Britain had lost the opportunity to lead Europe, that it might restrict a socialist government's freedom of manoeuvre and threaten the sentimental ties to the Commonwealth. If bi-partisanship did deteriorate, then it was the Conservative Government that

had drifted away from the policies laid down and followed since 1945, rather than the fault of Labour under Gaitskell.

While the Labour leadership essentially followed the traditional approach to foreign affairs, the same views were not held in all sections of the Party. After the 1951 election defeat the Party's latent rivalries emerged and divided openly into antagonistic factions. Nowhere in the period between 1951-1964 was the internal rivalry more clearly illustrated than in disputes over foreign and defence policy: initially, the most important issues were German rearmament and later, the H-bomb. During the thirteen year period of opposition there were a total of 35 revolts against the leadership's policies and only two of these concerned domestic issues.<sup>9</sup> Although there are other factors, including a sincere wish for moral leadership, it does appear that overseas and defence policy were considered a useful weapon by the Left with which to attack the Labour leadership, as it represented an area where a clear distinction of socialist ideology could be drawn. This was in stark contrast to domestic policy where the Left was not so sure of itself, apart from the familiar insistence on further nationalisation.<sup>10</sup>

Since the end of the war, the Left's 'distinctive socialist foreign policy' goals had manifested themselves in many forms, whether advocating a 'Third Force' as a wedge between East and West, pro-Russian and anti-American sentiments or anti-imperialist ideals. From 1951 on, they were turned to issues such as German rearmament and unification, national service and decolonisation. While Attlee remained leader, the rivalry was generally held in check by ambiguity and appeals for Party unity. With Gaitskell's succession, the Left felt that the revisionists had obtained too much control, gone too far, and were determined to do something about it. As a result, dissent developed into the pitched battles over nuclear weaponry and the arms race, unilateralism, NATO, Polaris, the training of German troops on British soil and the EEC.

### 3. Gaitskell as Leader: The Historical Debate

Gaitskell's political career, especially as leader, still arouses considerable controversy amongst historians, political scientists and the Labour Movement, and suffers from the way it has attracted either total support or outright opposition. To his supporters, Gaitskell was a leader who would not propose policies that could not be carried out in office, and was far more willing to give a strong and early lead, in marked contrast to his predecessor, Clem Attlee.<sup>11</sup> According to his official biographer, although Gaitskell believed that Labour's left-wing had failed to recognise the socio-political changes that had transformed the country, he nevertheless set out to reunite Labour, both by healing bruised personal relations and working out a new and broadly acceptable policy. As proof, he cites the fact that all the leading rebels made their peace with him, at least until 1959. Williams blames the 1959 election defeat, and the controversies over Clause IV and unilateralism for having diverted attention from Gaitskell's successes. He points out that after this, the conciliatory stance that had characterised the early years of his leadership was readopted, despite the fact that it alienated some of his close allies in the process.<sup>12</sup>

In the view of Professor Stephen Haseler, Gaitskell's greatest achievement was that he combined middle-class egalitarianism with traditional constitutionalism and patriotism. This dual appeal to the working-class, forged throughout his leadership, left a legacy which both the Party and his successor, Harold Wilson, heavily relied on in the approach to the 1964 general election.<sup>13</sup> More detached but nevertheless sympathetic commentators of Gaitskell's career hold slightly more critical views. According to Robert McKenzie, he lacked the political antennae of Attlee, with the result that he frequently found himself in difficulties through a failure to anticipate the consequences of his own initiatives. More recent studies go further: they suggest that Gaitskell's eagerness to tackle issues

head-on, sometimes needlessly, compounded and prolonged Labour's problems.<sup>14</sup>

Despite support for his leadership challenge in 1955 from a majority of the PLP, trades union leaders and traditional Labour supporters, Gaitskell still had many opponents within the Movement, both from the Left and amongst those who nursed more personal grievances. At the time, the Left condemned Gaitskell on several grounds. He was never forgiven for having supported rearmament and for imposing national health charges while Chancellor in Attlee's second administration. He had compounded this out of office, with the 1952 Stalybridge speech and in his attempts to oust Bevan in 1955. In addition, he was regarded as the leader of a small clique of Hampstead revisionists, supported by right-wing trades unions, who had betrayed the Party's socialist ideals and pandered to the electorate.<sup>15</sup> To the Left, the Party was no longer even in the hands of an errant socialist, but had instead been captured by an anti-socialist, an outright traitor. Despite the passage of time, and some mellowing, this is a view that still persists.<sup>16</sup>

Others in the Party had grievances against Gaitskell too, though of a more personal than political nature. They also viewed him as an intellectual with shallow roots in the Movement and were determined to see him ousted, or at least, harassed at every opportunity. Emanuel Shinwell had been replaced by Gaitskell as Minister of Fuel and Power in 1947 and remained hostile thereafter. Herbert Morrison, who had lost the leadership contest to Gaitskell in 1955, was another leading figure who became increasingly bitter. George Wigg, Shinwell's Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) in 1947, was also extremely critical of Gaitskell. In early 1956, just a few weeks after the leadership election, rumours circulated that Wigg had tried to mobilise some of the older working-class leaders, including Morrison, for a revolt which Bevan might join.<sup>17</sup> Although nothing came of this particular incident Morrison, Wigg and Shinwell continued to pursue a vendetta against the



Labour leader throughout his period of office, and in Shinwell's case, even after Gaitskell's death.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the hardcore of opposition to his leadership, and with the exception of 1959-1961, Gaitskell appeared as Attlee before him, to have benefited in a large measure from the very structure of the Labour Party. During this period, the leader was elected solely by the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP). The 1918 constitution had created a tripartite division of power between the PLP, the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) and the Annual Conference, the latter effectively dominated by the trades unions. In theory, this was arranged to maintain a balance and ensure that no single source of authority had control, but in practice it meant that the Party was prone to factionalism. In office a Labour Prime Minister and Cabinet, able to supplement Party powers with national prestige, argued that national concerns must take precedence over party matters and sometimes felt justified in ignoring Conference decisions. When the Party was out of office the National Executive Committee (NEC), elected by Conference, regained much of its influence.<sup>19</sup>

Robert McKenzie and Stephen Haseler argue that the Party leadership held the key to policy-making: that despite the role granted to the extra-parliamentary wings in theory (i.e. the CLPs and Conference), in practice final authority rested with the PLP and its leadership, of whom the most important individual was the Party Leader. Denis Kavanagh also believes that policy-making was concentrated in the hands of an elite few. Rather than just concentrating solely on the PLP and its leader, Kavanagh emphasises the importance of the individuals who were members of several key committees, the union barons who controlled the block vote, or a combination of both.<sup>20</sup>

Others take a different view, and have argued that it is a mistake to simply concentrate on the primacy of the leadership regarding policy formulation. Samuel Beer has argued that all the individual Party members had equal say in policy-making and that 'ultimate control...belongs to the members acting through the democratic structure of the party conference'.<sup>21</sup> Lewis Minkin also concludes, that despite all other considerations, Conference remained the cornerstone of policy-making.<sup>22</sup> Michael Gordon suggests several reasons to counter the primacy of leadership argument: the relative numbers and importance of the opposition to the leadership; the adherence to socialist symbolism which still had a great impact and appeal far wider than for just those on the left-wing; that while Gaitskell's heavyweight supporters had mostly disappeared by 1955, the Left had articulate individuals who used their own influence in the media to their advantage; that the leadership could not discipline the rebels effectively due to their number, the absence of any widescale enthusiasm within the PLP to act, and because of constituency opposition.<sup>23</sup>

In general terms, the approach taken by McKenzie, Haseler and Kavanagh appears to hold the upper hand. For much of his term of office Gaitskell and the leadership held the whip-hand, while Conference and the right-wing trades union block vote denied the Left any successes. Nevertheless, after the general election defeat in 1959, Gaitskell's primacy was seriously challenged and, although ultimately unsuccessful, shows the validity of the Beer - Gordon - Minkin argument. Gaitskell's decision to update, or even question that revered article of faith, Clause IV, led to the defection of many of his former friends and allies, especially in the trades unions. This created the opportunity the Left had waited for with which to turn the tables. They believed they had succeeded when the 1960 Conference defeated Gaitskell over unilateralism, putting his position at risk and prompting the leadership challenge by Harold Wilson. However, unilateralism was defeated in 1961 and it is worth pointing out that with the exception of the Clause IV

controversy, Gaitskell and his supporters won every major battle in the eight years of his leadership. The two views demonstrate the polarisation in the debate, whereas both are valid.

#### 4. The Historical Debate: Filling the Gaps

Up to the general election of 1992, the years between 1951-64 found the Conservatives in office for the longest term of any British political party this century. For the Labour Party, it was a period marked by internecine warfare. It has been argued that the vast majority of the internal disputes that plagued the Labour Party in this period arose over foreign affairs. There is ample evidence to suggest that foreign policy, the issues it raised and the personalities it brought to the fore, were crucial to the future development of the Party. Yet in their own right, Labour's attitudes over foreign and defence policy are of interest. The course pursued by the Labour Government during 1945-51 is not that surprising, considering the situation imposed by economic factors and the rigid polarisation of the Cold War. What may be more surprising is how closely Labour remained attached to the same orthodox policies once back in opposition where, without the responsibility imposed by office, they might have been expected to avoid many of the internal disputes simply by reverting to the principles of Hardie and Lansbury. That they did not, especially under Gaitskell's leadership, illustrates the very nature of Labour's social democratic tradition, the acceptance of responsibility and the control exercised by their leaders.

With such considerations in mind it is difficult to imagine that these issues would not have been fully covered; yet this is far from the case. Despite a massive amount of literature written about the Labour Party, this is an area that has been relatively neglected and where there is clearly a need for the 'gap' to be filled. Although the period in opposition 1951-64 has continued to attract enthusiastic scrutiny, this has concentrated on domestic policy,

especially the battlefield of further 'socialisation' versus 'consolidation' and 'revisionism'. Where foreign and defence policy issues are raised, they are usually associated with the battle for control of the Party between the rival wings, and in particular the struggle between Bevan and Gaitskell. After they came to terms, it was pursued by the remnants of the Bevanites and converging groups on the left, culminating in the controversy over unilateralism at the end of the decade.

Although there is no comprehensive work examining Gaitskell's influence on foreign affairs in the years 1955-63, there are many valuable background studies. Socialist ideology and its influence on Labour foreign policy formulation have been examined, though they tend to concentrate on the 1930s and the reaction to the growth of fascism in Europe.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the wartime years and the period in government are well documented. Specific studies such as the work on the Labour Government's foreign policy, with contributions by specialists such as Northedge, Fieldhouse, and Ovendale are of immense value.<sup>25</sup> So too, in a different way, is Alan Bullock's biography of Ernest Bevin. With its attention to detail and extensive use of primary material, this is still regarded as a classic study of British foreign policy during Bevin's term of office as Foreign Secretary.<sup>26</sup>

Various studies on Labour Party foreign policy views which cover the period concerned do exist, but cover specific issues and use a longer time scale than the one envisaged here. As they provide a basis for further investigation on topics such as the Atlantic Alliance, Europe, imperialism, unilateralism and the internal conflict over foreign affairs, their value and limitations in relation to this work need some further explanation.

One of the most neglected areas is that of the Atlantic Alliance and its effect on the attitudes of the Labour Party. Although various works have mentioned this, they tend to concentrate on the anti-Americanism from the

left-wing at the expense of the views of the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party or, indeed, the Movement as a whole. The exception to this is Pelling's work on America and the British left.<sup>27</sup> Yet, even this is of limited value since it was published in 1956. The relationship between the British left-wing and America is covered in some detail up to Roosevelt's 'New deal'. After this, although the period up to 1955 is briefly examined, it inevitably puts more emphasis on Anglo-American relations during 1945-51. Another work that deserves some mention is that of Leon D. Epstein.<sup>28</sup> This is a study, from a left-wing perspective, of the post-war Labour Government's relationship with the Americans. Like Pelling's, it was written in 1954 and so again is of limited value to this particular study.

Labour and Europe has received more attention. The most detailed analysis is to be found in the 1979 study by L. J. Robins. Nevertheless, although it covers the period between 1961-75, it concentrates on the Labour Government's attitudes to Europe between 1964-70, and from 1974 to the EEC referendum. A study which views Gaitskell's actions as positive in terms of party management, it includes a brief examination of Gaitskell's terms for entry into the European Community, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS) and the concern over the Commonwealth's reaction. However, it does suffer from a reliance on secondary sources, notably the works of Haseler, McKenzie and Gordon. To be fair, the work is a general one and the author, as he acknowledges, did not have access to the invaluable primary sources such as Research Department papers, Parliamentary Committee, PLP and NEC meeting minutes.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, there is little evidence of a willingness to use the other primary material available, apart from Labour Party Conference and Trades Union Reports. Other general studies are those by Miriam Camps and Robert Leiber, which although dated, are useful. Both examine British politics and European unity. Leiber takes the view that Gaitskell's stand over Europe was

highly principled, in marked contrast to the alternative hypothesis, that he used the European issue merely as an instrument of party management.<sup>30</sup>

The Empire, Commonwealth and the more general question of Imperialism are areas that have been examined in more depth, and recent studies allow further elucidation for the purposes of this thesis largely unnecessary, apart from their effect on other issues such as Suez and the EEC. The works by Gupta and Howe are especially noteworthy. Gupta's work covers the period 1914-64 and provides an overall assessment of the Labour's attitudes to imperialism, while Howe's recent study examines that of the British left as a whole.<sup>31</sup> In a wider context, Goldsworthy's work on colonial issues between 1945-61 is a useful guide; as are the recent studies by John Darwin.<sup>32</sup> Regarding Britain's role east of Suez to 1967, the work of Darby is a standard text, while G. L. Williams' consideration of this from Labour's point of view is invaluable.<sup>33</sup>

The nuclear issues are the exception to the rule, in that there is a large amount of material written about the Labour Party and the Bomb. This emotive issue obviously holds a fascination and there are some notable studies.<sup>34</sup> Despite this, they again tend to examine a longer time period and do not concentrate on Gaitskell's outlook: the exception are those that examine the personalities, such as the biographies of Gaitskell and Bevan.<sup>35</sup> This is hardly surprising in the circumstances when their respective supporters and detractors use it to justify their subject's actions. Work on the battle between the Left and Right over the question of nuclear weapons falls into a similar trap.<sup>36</sup> Two studies worth mentioning from a related angle are Driver's work on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and Taylor's recent study.<sup>37</sup>

Labour's internal divisions over foreign policy are contained in a number of works (the biographies), but of specific interest is Michael Gordon's study

which covers the period from 1914 to 1965.<sup>38</sup> Gordon concludes that there is very little hope that all sections of the Labour Party will ever reach consensus on foreign policy considering the diversity of opinion within it. His work provides a good basic overview of the unity and divisions regarding overseas affairs. In addition, he examines the wide range of opinions, arguing that it is a mistake to concentrate simply on the primacy of the leadership regarding policy formulation. His thesis provides an alternative view to McKenzie and Haseler, namely that the structure of the Party is weighted to the leadership's benefit. Whatever the merits of that particular argument, once again it has limitations as far as this work is concerned. First of all, one chapter out of ten deals with the period 1951-64: secondly, it concentrates on the disputes within the Party rather than the development of policy, though of course that is what the author intended; and thirdly, it was written in 1969 and therefore, a common theme, did not have access to many of the primary sources now available.

## 5. Chapter Outlines

These, then, are the specialist works that examine various aspects of Labour's foreign policy. While they are all useful for the purpose of this study their limitations have been outlined in this context, especially regarding the period covered, lack of access to primary material and their assessment of Gaitskell's role. The purpose of this thesis, using material previously unavailable, is to provide an overall assessment of Gaitskell's contribution to Labour's foreign policy and discuss its nature, successes and limitations.

The first chapter is divided into two main parts. The first discusses Gaitskell's accession to the leadership, his outlook on foreign affairs and the team appointed to assist him. The second examines the period from December 1955 to July 1956, focussing on Labour's changing policy towards the Middle East prior to the Suez Crisis and the evolving attitude towards the Soviet Union in the wake of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. In

particular, it demonstrates the primacy of the leadership and Gaitskell's determination to assert his own stamp on foreign affairs. The desire to distance Labour policy from that of the Government soured relations between himself and Eden, and was to have a profound effect during the Suez Crisis.

Chapter Two examines Labour's response to the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Beginning with the Party's initial reaction to government policy, it traces the development and extent of their opposition. Labour's concern over the international consequences, especially the effect on world opinion, the United Nations, the Americans and the Commonwealth cannot disguise a desire from all sections of the Party to embarrass the Government and promote Labour to the British people as the only alternative; a strategy that actually proved surprisingly counter-productive. However, this chapter shows that the controversy over Gaitskell's role has been inspired for partisan and personal reasons and that unity, after some initial doubts from the Left, was genuine. In addition, the chapter argues that any blame attached to the decline of bi-partisanship was the product of Conservative policy, rather than the fault of Labour.

Chapter Three examines Labour policy towards nuclear weapons between 1955-59. Support for the nuclear deterrent, combined with deep concern over the hazards and a desire for disarmament made this an emotive issue within the Party. While the leadership was reluctant to renege on its earlier acceptance of a British H-bomb, a number of factors, the Government's policy of 'massive retaliation', left-wing agitation and the loss of the moral highground to CND, made some change in policy necessary. However, this chapter reinforces the McKenzie - Haseler thesis, as it demonstrates Gaitskell's determination not to concede any change until absolutely forced to do so, and only then in order to avoid a schism which could harm Labour's electoral prospects. In addition, it also contests the orthodox view



that 1957-59 was a period of unity and conciliation; instead it argues that the scale of opposition within the Movement was far wider than often assumed.

Chapter Four continues to follow the nuclear dispute, from the general election defeat in 1959, through the unilateralist challenge, to the defusing of the crisis in late 1962. This period is regarded as marking the end of bi-partisanship in nuclear policy, and when the bitter internal divisions within the Labour Movement over the issue came to a head, culminating in the unprecedented defeat of the leadership at conference in 1960. This chapter argues that on the question of bi-partisanship, the leadership's adherence to the nuclear deterrent, multilateralism and the Atlantic Alliance remained as strong as ever. It also examines the validity of the arguments for and against the primacy of the leadership. It demonstrates that while Gaitskell's position was seriously undermined by his tactical blunder over public ownership, he stubbornly refused to countenance the demands of the unilateralists, even though some of his closest allies deemed it politically prudent to do so. Indeed, with the structure of the Party working in the leadership's favour and Gaitskell's control of the Party elite intact, the Left had very little chance of turning Scarborough into long-term victory. It was also clear that far from flowing from unshakeable principles, the furore over the Bomb was inspired by the struggle for control of the Party.

Chapter Five examines Labour's policy towards the European Economic Community between 1955-63. From tacit approval for the formation of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), Labour proceeded through various stages of pro and anti-Common Market sentiments before rejecting the Government's proposals to apply for EEC membership in October 1962. This is one area that appears to show a decisive break in bi-partisanship. However, the chapter argues that while the Government had revised their position, Labour continued to follow the 'traditional' approach to Europe. Within the Party itself the European question, with some exceptions, stirred

few emotions and was not initially treated as an issue of any great importance. This has been cited to explain Gaitskell's apparent lack of interest until 1962. Nevertheless, this chapter contends that on the European question, the Labour leader displayed a greater degree of political awareness than on other issues, both in his response to public opinion, in his concern to win over his opponents and to avoid another damaging split in Labour's ranks. While again supporting the McKenzie - Haseler case, this chapter also illustrates the validity of Kavanagh's argument.

This thesis demonstrates that Gaitskell's role was central to Labour's foreign and defence policy during his period as leader. Unlike Attlee, Gaitskell was determined to shape policy as much as possible in order to safeguard his personal notions of national prestige and power. Although this jarred with many, particularly the Left, it appealed to the majority of those determined to promote and uphold British interests, both within and outside the Labour Movement. When attempts were made to thwart his preferences, for instance over unilateralism, he could rely on the ambiguity of Labour's 1918 constitution, appeals for unity and a hard core of support amongst Labour's elite. In this, as the thesis argues, he was undoubtedly assisted by the party's structure and its emphasis on the primacy of the leadership. Although his unwillingness to compromise over nuclear weapons led to the 1960 conference defeat, this was due more to the struggle for power between the different factions, rather than the actual issue itself. While this is often cited to demonstrate Gaitskell's limitations, it has drawn attention away from the successful handling of the Suez and European disputes which also threatened to split Labour. Here Gaitskell demonstrated an astute awareness of what was required to safeguard national interests, maintain intra-party unity and in the latter case, boost Labour's electoral chances. Overall, the thesis provides a more balanced interpretation of Gaitskell's effect on foreign policy, and thus avoids the polarisation that his career has been subjected to for so long.

## Notes for Introduction

1. Morgan,K,O. 'Hugh Gaitskell and International Affairs', Contemporary Record Vol.7(2), Autumn 1993, pp.312-20, p.312.  
Gaitskell's papers are deposited at University College, London. They are not expected to be open until 1999.
2. Morgan,K,O. Labour in Power 1945-1951 (Oxford: OUP, 1984).
3. For a fuller discussion of the implications of the Marshall Plan and Bevin's contribution to British policy in this period see, Pelling,H. Britain and the Marshall Plan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) and Bullock,A. Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary (Oxford: OUP, 1985).
4. For some of the best work on the end of the British Empire and the historical debate, see Darwin,J,G. Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988); The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and 'The End of Empire', Contemporary Record Vol.1(3), Autumn 1987, pp.51-55.
5. For many on the Left, their hopes and goodwill towards the Labour leadership changed for good with the acquisition of complete power in 1945 and their realisation that the problem was no longer whether the Attlee administration would find ways to apply socialist principles, but rather whether it was interested in doing so at all. Gordon,M,R. Conflict and Consensus in Labours Foreign Policy 1914-1965 (California: Stanford University Press, 1969), p.263. Also Meehan,E,J. The British Left Wing and Foreign Policy: A Study of the Influence of Ideology (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1960), pp.28-29; Seyd,P. The Rise and Fall of the British Left (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.14-15 and Chapters 2 & 3 of Schneer,J. Labour's Conscience: The Labour Left 1945-51 (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp.28-77.
6. Pelling,H. America and the British Left: From Bright to Bevan (London: A & C Black, 1956), pp.150-151; Also, Schneer,J. (1988), pp.53-77.
7. Bullock,A. (1985), p.787.
8. Reynolds,D. 'Britain's Decline', Modern History Review Vol.4(3), Feb 1993, pp.15-17.
9. Jackson,R,J. Rebels and Whips: An Analysis of Dissension, Discipline & Cohesion in British Political Parties (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp.114, 152 & 175.
10. Seyd,P. (1987), p.32.
11. Attlee's 'faltering performance' after 1951 is examined by the journalist, Leslie Hunter, a Labour sympathiser in Hunter,L. The Road to Brighton Pier (London: Arthur Barker, 1959). A more sympathetic portrait is found in Harris,K. Attlee (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982).  
Gaitskell's election to the leadership prompted high hopes from a broad cross-section of the Party. The diaries of Richard Crossman (a former

Bevanite) and Patrick Gordon Walker (a protege of Morrison) demonstrate that they both considered Gaitskell the best candidate, though for different reasons. Pearce,R.(Ed) Patrick Gordon-Walker: Political Diaries 1932-1971 (London: Historian's Press, 1991), 11 Dec 1955, pp.226-7 [Hereafter known as PGWD] and Morgan,J.(Ed) The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman 1951-1964 (London: Hamilton & Cape, 1981), 16 Dec 1955 p.459 [Hereafter known as RCD].

For assessments from supporters, see Rodgers,W,T.(Ed) Hugh Gaitskell (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964) & Jay,D. Change and Fortune: A Political Record (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

12. Williams,P,M. Hugh Gaitskell: A Political Biography (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), pp.403-4; the introduction to Williams,P,M.(Ed) The Diary of Hugh Gaitskell (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), pp.xiv,xx [Hereafter known as HGD] and in 'Changing styles of Labour Leadership' Kavanagh,D. (Ed) The Politics of the Labour Party (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), pp.50-1, 55-7. Even the political scientist Robert McKenzie, highly critical of Gaitskell at times, viewed the 'rebels' coming to terms with their former opponent as 'striking'. See McKenzie,R,T. British Political Parties: The Distribution of Power within the Conservative and Labour Parties (London: Mercury, 1964), p.602.

13. Haseler,S. The Gaitskellites: Revisionism in the Labour Party 1951-1964 (London: Macmillan, 1969), p.240.

14. McKenzie,R,T. (1964), p.595; Morgan,K,O. Labour People: Leaders and Lieutenants. Hardie to Kinnock (Oxford: OUP, 1987), pp.220-1 and Shore,P. Leading the Left (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), pp.72-78 & 84-5. Also, see Howell,D. British Social Democracy: A Study in Development and Decay (Leeds: ILP Square One Publications, 1981), pp.206.

For further biographical material on Gaitskell, other than those already cited, see McDermott,G. Hugh Gaitskell: A Leader Lost (London: Leslie Frewin, 1972); Vaisey,J. In Breach of Promise (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), pp.8-33 and Jenkins,R. in Contemporary Record Vol.7(2), Autumn 1993, pp.306-11.

Unpublished work that also provides an assessment can be found in Goodman,E,J. 'Hugh Gaitskell and the Modernisation of the Labour Party', PhD thesis, University of Nebraska, 1965 and Godfrey,R,J. 'The Bevan-Gaitskell Rivalry: Leadership Conflict and Divisions within the British Labour Party, 1951-1959', PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1985.

15. Until 1956 the Labour rebels, though a minority a vociferous one, could count on at least a fifth of the PLP's support. This number declined after Bevan's reconciliation with the leadership in 1957. For assessments, see Davies,A,J. To Build a New Jerusalem: The British Labour Movement from the 1880s to the 1990s (London: Michael Joseph, 1992), pp.202-5; Gordon,M,R. (1969), pp.253-64; Haseler,S. (1969), p.251; McKenzie,R,T. (1964), p.602; Campbell,J. Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987);

For the extent of Bevanism, see Howell,D. The Rise & Fall of Bevanism (Leeds: ILP Square one Publications, 1981 and Jenkins,M. Bevanism. Labour's High Tide: The Cold War and the Mass Democratic Movement (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1979). For views on Gaitskell from his close colleagues on the

Left, see RCD 11 May - 3 Nov 1960, pp.840-96 and Castle,B. Fighting All the Way (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.322.

16. Michael Foot in The Guardian 7 Aug 1993, p.25 and Ch.11 in Mikardo,I. Back-Bencher (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), esp. pp.150-64.

17. See Richard Crossman's diary, RCD 9 Feb 1956, p.470.

18. For more on these intrigues, see Williams,P,M. (1979), p.408; For Shinwell's view of Gaitskell, a good example of his continuing enmity is to be found over the Suez Crisis in Shinwell,E. I've Lived Through It All (London: Gollancz, 1973), p.225.

19. For a brief but useful explanation of how the Party's constitution was developed and some of the problems associated with it, see Davies,A,J. (1992), esp. pp.234 & 263; Also McKenzie,R,T. Ch.10 (1964) and in 'Power in the Labour Party: The Issue of Intra-Party Democracy', in Kavanagh,D. (1982), pp.190-201 & 203-9; For the NEC and its structure, see Haseler,S. (1969), esp. pp.12-15; For the role of conference, see Minkin,L. The Labour Party Conference: A Study in the Politics of Intra-Party Democracy (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1980).

20. McKenzie,R,T. (1964), pp.426, 625-35 and Haseler,S. (1969), pp.13-14; Denis Kavanagh 'Representation in the Labour Party', in Kavanagh,D. (1982), pp.190-201, esp. pp.203-6. Also see Drucker,H,M. 'Changes in the Labour Party Leadership', Parliamentary Affairs Vol.34(4), 1981, pp.361-91

21. Beer,S. Modern British Politics: a Study of Parties and Pressure Groups (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), p.83-90.

22. Minkin,L. (1980), pp.9, 326-31.

23. Gordon,M,R. (1969), pp.264-67.

24. Meehan,E,J. (1960); Naylor,J. Labour's International Policy: The Labour Party in the 1930s (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) & Jones,B. The Russia Complex: The British Labour Party and the Soviet Union Manchester, Manchester U.P., 1977).

25. Eatwell,R. The 1945-51 Labour Government's (London: Batsford, 1979); Jefferys,K. The Attlee Government's 1945-1951 (London: Longman, 1992); Morgan,K,O. (1984); Pelling,H. The Labour Governments, 1945-1951 (London: Macmillan, 1984); Pritt,D,N. The Labour Government 1945-1951 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1963); Ovendale,R.(Ed) The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government's 1945-1951 (Leicester: Leicester U.P., 1984).

26. Bullock,A. (1985).

27. Pelling,H. (1956).

28. Epstein,L,D. Britain: Uneasy Ally Chicago: Chicago, U.P., 1954).

29. Robins,L,J. The Reluctant Party: Labour and the E.E.C. 1961-1975 (Omskirk: Hesketh, 1975), p.6.
30. Leiber,R,J. British Politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites and Pressure Groups (Berkeley: California U.P., 1970), p.175; Camps,M. Britain and the European Community 1955-1963 (London: Oxford U.P., 1964). Also, see Gupta's assessment about the Commonwealth's influence in Labour's EEC position, Gupta,P,S. Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914-1964 (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp.380-84.
31. Gupta,P,S. (1975) and Howe,S. Anti-Colonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918-1964 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
32. Goldsworthy,A,J,R. Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945-61 (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1970) and Darwin,J.(1987 & 1991).
33. Darby,P. British Defence Policy East of Suez 1947-68 (Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1973) and Williams,G,L. 'The Ideology of Labourism and Britain's Withdrawal from East of Suez' PhD, Open University, 1978.
34. For a specialist study see the unpublished PhD thesis, Cross,D,R. 'Labour and the Bomb', PhD, University of Lancaster, 1986; For policy-making, Rowley,D,W. 'Labour and the Bomb: An Examination of the Labour Party's Policy-Making Processes, 1964-1984', PhD, UEA, 1991.  
For an analysis of Labour's post-war defence policy, see Keohane,D. Labour Party Defence Policy Since 1945 (Leicester: Leicester U.P., 1993). For general studies see Freedman,L. Britain and Nuclear Weapons (London: Macmillan, 1980); Gowing,M. Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945-52, Vol.1 Policy-Making (London: Macmillan, 1974); Groom,A,J,R. British Thinking About Nuclear Weapons (London: Francis Pinter, 1974).
35. For Gaitskell see: Williams,P,M. (1979) and McDermott,G. (1972). For Bevan see: Krug,M,M. Aneurin Bevan: Cautious Rebel (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961); Foot,M. Aneurin Bevan: a Biography 1945-60 Vol.2 (London: Davis-Poynter, 1973); Campbell,J. (1987); Lee,J. My Life with Nye (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980).
36. Jenkins,M. (1979).
37. Driver,C. The Disarmers: A Study in Protest (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964) and Taylor,R. Against the Bomb: The British Peace Movement 1958-1965 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
38. Gordon,M,R. (1969).

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Gaitskell Takes Over: December 1955-July 1956**

In May 1955 the Conservative Party, under its new leader Anthony Eden, won the general election with an overall majority of fifty five. After this defeat Clement Attlee carried on as leader of the Labour Party until, on 7 December, he resigned abruptly and went to the House of Lords. Attlee had been leader of the Party for twenty years. Assessments vary: regarded as aloof and taciturn with few friends, in Cabinet or NEC meetings he tended to sum up the prevailing opinion rather than giving a lead. Attlee's period in government has been credited with enacting Labour's pre-war policy, and reconstructing the post-war economy, but it has been accused of reacting to successive crises instead of trying to shape events. In opposition after 1951, the Party was riven with internal disputes and confused by the Tories' exploitation of affluence. Attlee's leadership during this time has been held to be weak, confused and ineffective, by both supporters and critics.<sup>1</sup>

With Attlee's departure, three candidates stood for the leadership of the Party: Hugh Gaitskell, Herbert Morrison and Aneurin Bevan. Gaitskell's election was assured with a clear majority on the first ballot, with 157 votes to Bevan's 70 and Morrison's 40, a result which gave him the largest margin of victory any Labour leader had received up to that point. Gaitskell's victory was undoubtedly helped by having the support of most of the leading parliamentarians and several powerful trades union leaders. Bevan had antagonised too many people and Morrison's age would mean only a brief term of office. In addition, former prominent supporters of Bevan and Morrison switched their support to Gaitskell. Despite some reservations, Gaitskell's accession to the leadership appeared to offer a great deal: the 'honeymoon period' promised a greater degree of unity and avoided another leadership contest in the near future.<sup>2</sup> Labour also had a leader, with the Party's structure firmly balanced in his favour, who was prepared to lead

rather than follow. Many within the Labour movement believed that the internecine warfare that had plagued the last four years in opposition would subside and that they could instead concentrate on opposing the Conservative Government of Sir Anthony Eden.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first considers the problems facing Gaitskell at the beginning of his leadership, his outlook on foreign affairs and the composition and reasons behind the team appointed to assist him. The second examines Labour's foreign and defence policy from December 1955 to July 1956, assessing the changing policy towards the Middle East prior to the Suez Crisis and the reaction towards the Soviet Union in the wake of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. This demonstrates Gaitskell's determination to assert his own stamp on foreign affairs and a desire to distance Labour's policy from the Government's. Although largely ineffectual in practice, this policy nevertheless managed to sour the relationship between the parties, especially between Gaitskell and Eden, and was to have a profound effect during the Suez Crisis later that year. In addition, the chapter illustrates the new leader's control over policy, supporting the McKenzie - Haseler thesis, and how this set the scene for his future role.

## **PART ONE**

### **The Honeymoon Period**

#### **1.1 Gaitskell's Accession: Problems & Views**

After Attlee's resignation Gaitskell faced the problem of leading a political organisation torn apart by internal feuding and a Conservative Government that had won the last two general elections, and was benignly presiding over a welfare state created by Labour and reaping the political benefits of rising living standards. Despite support for his leadership challenge in 1955 from a majority of the PLP (reflected by 60 per cent voting for him), trades union



leaders and traditional Labour supporters, he still faced a hard-core of opposition within the Movement.<sup>3</sup> As Gaitskell knew, foreign policy had been one of the main causes of internal strife within the Party. In opposition between 1951-55 there had been fifteen major public rebellions against the Labour leadership, all but one of them over foreign and defence policy.<sup>4</sup> To many, the revolts were all interwoven and dominated by one outstanding individual, Aneurin Bevan. The undisputed leader of the Left until his reconciliation with the leadership in 1957, Bevan had received 70 votes for the 1955 leadership contest and could rely on a fifth of the PLP's support.<sup>5</sup>

Although Labour was committed to harassing the Conservatives wherever possible, one area where the leadership's opposition to the Government could not be taken for granted was foreign policy. Since World War Two, the Labour and Conservative Party's had followed a bi-partisan approach, anxious to maintain Britain's influence as one of the 'Big Three' and typified in the 'Special Relationship' with the United States, the dominance of Western Europe and the leadership of the 'global alliance' of Empire and Commonwealth countries.<sup>6</sup> When relegated to opposition in 1951, Labour's leaders had felt that to attack the Government too strongly over foreign policy would invite charges of hypocrisy and irresponsibility. Yet at the same time, the four years to 1955 had witnessed major internal revolts against the leadership over foreign policy, and while bi-partisanship was desirable in some respects, internal unity had to be considered. Facing this dilemma, Gaitskell wanted to assert his own stamp on foreign affairs, an area where he was not an expert and where his personal approach was restricted by his acceptance, with some modifications, of 'traditional' British foreign policy goals.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most enduring of Gaitskell's views were those on the United States. Since 1945, along with the majority of the PLP, he was convinced that the Anglo-American alliance was crucial in order to rebuild and maintain

Britain and Europe's shattered economies in the aftermath of World War Two, and military assistance in order to prevent the possibility of any further Soviet expansion. Despite a genuine admiration for the USA dating from Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, he recognised that anxiety over their policy was a major cause of anti-Americanism in Britain: concern that increased when the new Republican administration entered office in 1953, with the crusading John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State. Differences over the Far East, America's bombastic military commanders, McCarthyite hysteria over communism, American superciliousness over some economic policies, coupled with Britain's increasing subordination to the USA, all fuelled this.<sup>8</sup> By 1954, Gaitskell had little doubt that the relationship had been severely strained by American policies in Europe, Asia generally, and China in particular.<sup>9</sup> While his nationalist instincts held that Britain should retain freedom of independent action from the United States, a prime example being Britain's nuclear capability, Gaitskell nevertheless regarded the possibility of any split in the alliance as potentially disastrous. Indeed, in his first major parliamentary speech on foreign affairs, he angered the Labour Left with his insistence that their preference for neutralism would result in a rift and revive American isolationism.<sup>10</sup>

If Gaitskell's strong views on the United States were subject to the occasional doubt, those on the Soviet Union and its particular brand of communism left none. Personal experiences in the 1930s had convinced him that democracy was an essential precondition of socialist advance and that it was both foolish and dangerous for socialist parties to confuse the democratic and revolutionary roads to power.<sup>11</sup> Gaitskell had been a member of Attlee's Government when the Soviet Union had been consolidating its grip on its satellites, encouraging communist agitation in western Europe, threatening Tito's Yugoslavia and blockading Berlin. He urged the strengthening of NATO to deter Soviet expansion, though he remained sceptical about similar alliances elsewhere. Despite his loathing of the Soviet system, the realities of

power politics convinced him that co-existence with the Soviet Union was a necessary part of western diplomacy, a recognition that would not have endeared him to Secretary of State, Dulles.<sup>12</sup>

While his suspicion of the Soviet Union always remained, even after the relaxation following Stalin's death in 1953, he recognised that other communist states should not be 'lumped together' in a monolithic collective. In eastern and central Europe, though having no time for the 'puppet states', like many Labour Party members, he admired Yugoslavia and Tito's insistence on his country choosing its 'own path'. Further afield in Asia, he agreed with the Government's view, that America's hostility to Communist China was seriously flawed, and that it was in the West's interests to exploit and encourage their detachment from Russia. He regarded the struggle in Indo-China as predominantly nationalist rather than communist, and condemned western military intervention in Asia as counter-productive.<sup>13</sup>

Gaitskell's view and affection for the Commonwealth mirrored the emotional response of many both within and outside the Labour Movement in the 1950s. Born in British India, he was a strong supporter of decolonisation from a moral standpoint and was anxious to maintain the friendship of the states gaining independence from Britain. Gaitskell accepted that the aspiring and newly independent states were entitled to choose their own way forward, even if this meant adopting a policy of neutralism. In his view, this was understandable because of their colonial history and their wish to avoid any alliances that would threaten their recently acquired independence.<sup>14</sup> Because of this, Gaitskell was increasingly worried by Dulles' claim that neutralism was immoral, and the Secretary of State's attitude that if third world countries did not align themselves to contain communism, they must be anti-West.<sup>15</sup> On this theme, Gaitskell maintained a special interest in Anglo-Indian relations. Despite Indian opposition to colonialism, her criticism of Britain's role in Malaya and other colonial territories had been muted, aimed instead at

other colonial powers such as Holland and France. Gaitskell felt that if Britain, urged by America, tried to persuade Nehru to abandon neutralism and take sides in the Cold War, it could threaten Anglo-Indian friendship and shatter Commonwealth unity. Despite the problem of American resentment, he felt that Britain should avoid involvement in their ally's proposed South Asia policy if India was sharply opposed.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.2 The Appointments: Conciliation or Captivity?

When he became leader at the end of 1955, foreign affairs replaced economics as Gaitskell's main single preoccupation. While domestic politics were enjoying a period of relative calm, both major political parties were confronted with the problems that faced British overseas interests. In Labour's case, increasing tension in the Middle East, relations with the Soviet Union and the escalation of the arms race all had to be treated with care in order to avoid a return to the internecine warfare of the past few years. Without a specialised knowledge on foreign affairs himself, it was essential for Gaitskell to surround himself with a team that had. When Attlee resigned, the shadow foreign and defence policy team was largely made up of the old stalwarts. The most notable were James Griffiths in charge of Colonies, Gordon Walker for the Commonwealth and Richard Stokes for Defence. The shadow foreign affairs spokesman was Alf Robens who had replaced the ageing Morrison earlier in 1955. Robens' advisors included Denis Healey and Kenneth Younger, both acknowledged experts on foreign affairs, as well as John Hynd, the leader of the PLP's Foreign Affairs Group.<sup>17</sup> Jim Callaghan, a comparative newcomer and a former naval officer, was admiralty spokesman under Stokes.

Gaitskell took the appointment of the Shadow Cabinet generally very seriously and the foreign affairs team was no exception. In early January 1956 he began seeing both members, and potential members, of the Parliamentary

Committee individually to decide who should be given which post.<sup>18</sup>

Without the expertise himself at this stage, Gaitskell had more or less decided to leave the foreign affairs team as it was, despite some reservations about Robens and Younger.<sup>19</sup> In mid-January, Gaitskell told Richard Crossman that he wanted a small informal committee to handle foreign affairs, which would include Robens, Healey, Younger, and rather to his surprise, Crossman himself.<sup>20</sup> Despite his wish to keep the same line-up, with Griffiths likely to become Deputy Leader (which he did on 2 February 1956, winning 141 votes to Bevan's 111), Colonies would become vacant. This left Gaitskell with the dilemma of offering it to Bevan or Callaghan. To the amazement of many, including Bevan himself, he was offered this post on 14 February and accepted it.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that Gaitskell wanted to retain the same foreign affairs team inherited from Attlee was of little surprise. Griffiths, Gordon Walker, Robens and Stokes, as the most important members could all be relied on to support him as leader, and as far as foreign affairs were concerned they were all 'traditionalists'. What appeared more of a surprise is the importance Gaitskell attached to having Crossman and Younger as part of it. Even more inexplicable, at least on the surface, was his decision to appoint his old enemy, Aneurin Bevan, to a key position; especially as Bevan had lashed out at the Labour leadership in a speech at Manchester a few days before.<sup>22</sup>

In Williams' view, this demonstrated Gaitskell's desire for conciliation, because as well as Bevan, Gaitskell appointed a third of the old Bevanites or Keep Calmers to the 34 shadow posts, a gesture clearly intended to unify the Party.<sup>23</sup> Krug believes that it was not so much a gesture of conciliation than one of realism: Gaitskell reasoned that he needed Bevan, in spite of their long standing mutual dislike, to solidify his leadership and ensure left-wing support.<sup>24</sup> As well as these reasons, McKenzie identifies another important link. In 1955 many of the old 'Heavyweights' had retired from the front

benches, which left Gaitskell with a small group of close supporters who carried comparatively little force in the PLP. Although it is probable that he would have wished to ensure that his front bench team represented a reasonable spectrum of opinion, he found it necessary to rely on his former rivals, primarily because they were far abler and experienced than the moderate or right-wing figures left in the PLP.<sup>25</sup>

While Gaitskell may have used these tactics to secure a wide measure of support to consolidate his leadership, his opponents in turn appeared willing to accept the offer. Two important considerations have been identified to explain the rapid acceptance of Gaitskell's leadership from his former rivals. The first was that if they persisted in their efforts to overthrow the Party's chosen leader, they would almost certainly destroy Labour's electoral prospects. The second was that as leader Gaitskell, was in effect the 'Shadow Prime Minister': if Labour won an election he would become Premier and have 80-odd offices to distribute. These considerations would not have escaped Bevan either. With the leadership contest over for the foreseeable future, the only way for him to regain influence in the PLP was to join that very leadership.<sup>26</sup>

These arguments all have their merits. However, bearing in mind Gaitskell's personality it is interesting to note how quickly he gained confidence as leader, demonstrated by his decision to assign 'shadows' who were only allowed to speak in the House on their allotted specialism, and the impatience he showed very early on if they did not fulfil his expectations.<sup>27</sup> The fact that he had appointed former political rivals and enemies like Younger, Crossman and above all Bevan, to important positions may have appeared sensible and conciliatory, but it also imposed restrictions on them in terms of collective responsibility. In addition, the crucial positions in foreign affairs were still largely in the hands of his trusted lieutenants and political allies, while those that still had to prove themselves were placed conveniently where an eye

could be kept on them. As McKenzie points out, 'There was no evidence during this period that Gaitskell was in any sense the "prisoner" of his left-wing colleagues'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, to the contrary it appears to have been the other way round.

## **PART TWO**

### **Policy & Practice**

Gaitskell's first few months as leader suggested little deviation from the bi-partisan orthodoxy on foreign affairs adopted since 1945. Within the Labour Party itself, two longstanding policy issues had begun to receive greater prominence by the end of 1955. One concerned the rising tension in the Middle East between Israel and the Arab states, exacerbated by the Baghdad Pact and complicated by the deterioration of Western relations with Egypt. The other concerned the Soviet Union, and in particular, the 'thaw' perceived by some to have taken place since Stalin's death in 1953.

#### **2.1 The Middle East, 1945-55**

The Middle East had long been regarded as a vital part of British strategic and economic interests. When Labour entered office in 1945, Ernest Bevin had been advised by his Foreign Office officials that if Britain was to remain a world power it would have to continue to exercise political dominance in the region and assume responsibility for its defence.<sup>29</sup> To achieve this, Bevin had hoped to create a British led regional defence organisation. However, beset by economic restrictions, the escalation of the Cold War, the creation of Israel and their subsequent war with their Arab neighbours, the British could not control the region on their own. As stability in the area was vital to Western as well as British interests, they were compelled to seek help from their allies. Although the Foreign Office and Bevin generally favoured the Arab nations over Israel because of historical and economic connections, this led to the

inclusion of the United States and France in the Tripartite Declaration of May 1950: an agreement that was designed so that a balance of power between Arabs and Jews would be guaranteed along with their respective borders.<sup>30</sup>

After their election defeat in 1951, the Labour Party remained committed to the provisions of the Tripartite Declaration and were concerned when this precarious power balance was threatened by the formation of the Baghdad Pact in April 1955. Labour criticised the Pact because they felt it alienated the USSR at a time when a thaw in relations seemed possible, antagonised the Egyptians because it challenged their status in the region and upset France, Britain's ally, as they were not invited to participate.<sup>31</sup> Most important of all, it led to serious concern over the security of Israel and presented a clear danger in two ways: first, that the Arab states may feel strong enough to attack Israel again; secondly, that Israel, isolated by the Pact, might launch a pre-emptive war. This fear increased when David Ben Gurion returned as Premier of Israel in November and after Eden's Guildhall speech on 9 November, when the Prime Minister implied that Israel should concede a large proportion of her territory in return for a general regional peace settlement.<sup>32</sup> Labour publicly condemned the proposals because of the bias in favour of the Arabs. They pointed out that Israel was 'being forced into making all the concessions' and that such statements would force them into war.<sup>33</sup>

There had been a noticeable shift in Labour Party policy towards the Middle East by the end of 1955, away from the pro-Arabist stance of Bevin to a broader pro-Israeli line. Gaitskell himself was an enthusiastic supporter of Israel and his wife Dora was from a Jewish family. In the Party itself, a large majority favoured Israel, far more than the number of Jewish MPs would indicate. Pro-Israeli sentiment stemmed from sympathy for the Jewish wartime experience, admiration for her progressive democracy and a sense of socialist solidarity. Within the group dealing with foreign affairs the split reflected that of the Party as a whole, a pro-Israeli majority with a vociferous pro-Arab minority.



Bevan and Crossman, two of the most prominent figures, as well as Gaitskell took the majority line. On the other side of the divide, Richard Stokes was one of the most ardent Arabists and George Brown, although appointed to Supply still concerned with foreign affairs, was another.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.2 The Tanks Scandal

With Arab-Israeli tension rising steadily in the last few months of 1955 and full scale conflict threatening, the angry reaction of the Labour Party to the news that Britain was supplying Egypt with extra armaments was not surprising. For some time rumours had been circulating that disused British tanks had been sold for scrap, were reconditioned in Belgium, and then re-exported to Egypt. Although the tanks were of World War Two vintage their addition to Egypt's armed forces, considering the volatility of the region at that time, appeared inappropriate. On 30 December 1955, Alf Robens acted on these rumours and sent Eden a telegram asking him to suspend all further exports of war supplies, new or old.<sup>35</sup> Two days later (New Year's Day 1956), the 'Tanks Scandal' story broke in the national press. Gaitskell, who had simultaneously been informed that a large shipment of arms for Egypt were being assembled at Liverpool, called a meeting of Labour's Foreign Affairs Group. They arranged that he should see Eden the following day, express Labour's concern about this problem and widen it to include Britain's Middle East policy generally.<sup>36</sup>

At the meeting, the Labour representatives pressed the Government to halt the export of arms from Britain and Belgium, and to publish a White Paper clarifying the situation. In Gaitskell's view, the Government was clearly breaking the 1950 Tripartite Declaration by supplying Egypt with equipment denied to Israel. Eden and Lloyd argued that as Israel was militarily stronger, they were restoring the balance by sending tanks to Egypt. Eden, rather disingenuously, continued that the situation had altered because Russia had

supplied Egypt, and that even if Britain sent arms to Israel they could not match this. When Gaitskell challenged them over supplying Centurion tanks to Egypt, Eden and Lloyd appeared to be more concerned that if they stopped British supplies, the Russians would take full advantage and gain predominance in the region; a situation Gaitskell thought unlikely. The meeting broke up with little resolved, and left Gaitskell convinced that the Government had no clear policy.<sup>37</sup>

Gaitskell believed that the meeting with Eden was perfectly friendly, if unproductive. Yet, in the Times under the headline 'Eden Refuses Opposition's Demands', the Prime Minister rejected Labour's request to suspend arms shipments, ask Belgium to suspend them, agree to a parliamentary debate or publish a White Paper.<sup>38</sup> In Egypt itself, the newspaper Akhbar reported that Eden had accused Labour of obtaining information from Israel's intelligence services, while in the editorial, it mocked their views on the Middle East. While the British press reports were considered provocative, the Egyptian account was clearly aimed at souring Anglo-Israeli relations. Gaitskell had received information from Israel, although from their Ambassador in London, not the intelligence service.<sup>39</sup> Disturbed by these events, the Shadow Cabinet challenged the Government to publish a White Paper and hold a parliamentary debate. In private, it was decided that the whole issue of Middle East policy needed to be questioned.<sup>40</sup>

By mid-January, the quarrel between Eden and Gaitskell in the press was partially settled when the Government announced that a White Paper would be published, followed by a debate on 24 January. The document regretted that surplus arms had found their way 'through third parties' to Egypt, but stated that the quantity had been small, the quality poor and that they had been balanced by a similar amount reaching Israel (it did not specify where from).<sup>41</sup> Dissatisfied with their explanations, the debate gave Labour their first public opportunity to challenge the Government since Gaitskell had taken over as

leader. As expected, his speech began over the export of surplus war material to Egypt. This was followed by criticism of Conservative Middle East policy generally, and then specifically for having tilted the diplomatic and military balance against Israel. The Government replied that they would reconsider the qualitative balance of arms and that a UN frontier force was desirable. However, there were no detailed commitments and Labour hopes of involving the Russians were rejected.<sup>42</sup>

Although it offered few concessions, the Government's obvious discomfort was demonstrated when Selwyn Lloyd accused Labour, and Richard Crossman in particular, of 'delighting Britain's enemies'.<sup>43</sup> Within the Party it was generally felt that the debate was successful, as it earned praise from all sections. Crossman's assessment, supported by many, was that the leader had mounted a skilful attack on the Government. Gaitskell, in private at least, was more reticent. He believed that Labour had been pushed into a difficult position, because the surplus arms did not amount to much in military terms and made it look like they were making a fuss over nothing. On the wider issues raised in the debate, he was far more satisfied.<sup>44</sup>

In political terms, Labour's effort could hardly be classed as a victory, because the Government did little to ease their concerns. While the Opposition could be satisfied at having brought the Middle East situation, and in particular the plight of Israel to light, the issue that had initiated it, the 'Tanks Scandal' was more of an embarrassment, as Gaitskell himself recognised. Although supplies of surplus British war material to Egypt would not help peace, little was made of the fact that brand new equipment was still being exported. The Centurion tanks and jet fighter aircraft supplied by Britain were far more of a threat to the balance of power in the region, than the obsolete World War Two equipment cited by Labour. The Government had actually made little effort to conceal these exports and justified it as legitimate under the 1954 Anglo-Egyptian agreement; this, even though it was clearly a breach of the

1950 Tripartite Declaration. This information was known to the Labour leadership and the way in which they failed to capitalise on it appeared to indicate either undue consideration for the Government's position, or an appalling gaffe.

Although the issue itself may not have been very successfully exploited, other explanations for Labour's actions can be suggested. There is ample reason to suggest that Gaitskell used the situation in the Middle East to raise his own profile as Leader. He had only assumed the position a month before and, as his biographer admits, was anxious to make his mark. The unprecedented visits to Eden during the Christmas recess, in addition to the publicity gained by their arguments, appear to substantiate this.<sup>45</sup> Gaitskell had also only recently overcome the suspicions of many, though not all, within his own Party over the taint of 'Butskellism'. What better way of establishing his credentials than to take a different line on foreign policy, hitherto an approach remarkable for its bi-partisanship between government and opposition. From the PLP's perspective, the attack on the Government would also have been useful, establishing unity behind the new leadership and diverting attention away from the internecine warfare that had raged since 1951. Considering Gaitskell's character, a 'pathfinder' who wanted to lead from the front and establish an alternative identity, the reaction was even more understandable. Yet, his emotional response and the way in which Labour blindly followed his lead, missing two key points in their haste to attack government policy, illustrated the drawbacks of not having prepared a well thought-out alternative.

### 2.3 Glubb, Nasser and the Approach of Suez

While the 'Tanks Scandal' and subsequent debate had little impact, the next crisis in Britain's Middle East policy was far more significant and gave Labour greater opportunity for effective opposition. On 1 March 1956 Lieutenant

General John Glubb was dismissed as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) of the Arab Legion, by King Hussein of Jordan. It was widely believed that Jordan had been pressurised by members of the Arab League, especially Egypt, to get rid of Glubb because of his reluctance to allow hostilities against Israel. Although Anglo-Jordanian relations had deteriorated since December 1955 when the British had tried to persuade them to join the Baghdad Pact, Glubb's dismissal came as a surprise to many, not least to those in the Labour Party.<sup>46</sup>

Aware of the significance of the impending crisis, and how the Government could be severely embarrassed by such an important reversal, the Shadow Cabinet decided to press for a debate.<sup>47</sup> The following day (6 March) Gaitskell, Younger and Crossman considered what line to take. Gaitskell's concerns centred around the danger to Israel posed by Glubb's dismissal (in case Jordan or the Arabs now felt free to attack). To counter this threat, it was decided that Israel needed to be provided with arms and the Tripartite Declaration needed to be strengthened. Gaitskell was also worried that the British might consider reimposing a protectorate on Jordan. Crossman was more concerned that British policy over the Baghdad Pact had led to the problems in Jordan and had antagonised Egypt by altering the region's balance of power. As John Hynd and Denis Healey were away, Crossman was in charge of the Foreign Affairs Group. As a consequence, it was primarily his advice that was given to the Shadow Cabinet.<sup>48</sup> At their meeting, it was agreed that Labour should vote against the Government in the debate the following day.<sup>49</sup>

In Parliament, Robens and Gaitskell launched the attack, based on the eight main points suggested by Crossman. On Jordan, Gaitskell urged that the Government continue to monitor the situation carefully, but let the Jordanians choose their 'own path', becoming a neutral ally of Egypt if they wished. If this was chosen, all British subsidies and troops should be withdrawn. However, if Jordan wished to remain a British ally, the size of the

Arab Legion should be reduced and priority given to economic rather than military aid. Gaitskell then turned to Israel. He condemned the Government's refusal to arm Israel even after the Soviet Bloc's arms deal with Egypt. To rectify this he suggested that British troops should defend Israel's frontiers, that arms should be sent for her defence and that a treaty which encompassed these points should be agreed. Widening the attack, Gaitskell criticised British attempts to bring Jordan and other Arab states into the Baghdad Pact. On the economic side, he demanded an end to Anglo-American oil rivalry and argued that their profits would be better directed helping development in the Middle East, rather than just benefiting Western oil companies. Winding up, he urged that Russia should be invited to participate in the region, along with the original signatories of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration and within an overall UN framework.<sup>50</sup>

Defending the Government, Anthony Nutting argued against a treaty with Israel and rejected any Soviet involvement as unnecessary. Eden told the House that information on the situation was scanty, and that he could not announce a definite policy because it was dangerous and premature to do so. However, the end of his speech infuriated the Labour benches because he compared Gaitskell's criticism of the Baghdad Pact to a 'faint echo of Radio Moscow'.<sup>51</sup> Despite the Labour furore that accompanied this (at one stage the Speaker came to Eden's aid to restore order) and the muted reception from his own side, the Opposition's censure motion was easily defeated by 312 votes to 252.

Of course, although Labour had little prospect of defeating the Government, contemporary accounts show that the debate was effective and raised Party morale. Gaitskell had been concerned beforehand about the content of his speech and how the Party would react to it. However, this anxiety was unfounded and the speech impressed many Conservatives as well as Labour members. Pleased at the positive reception, he was surprised at the support he

received, even from prominent left-wingers such as Konni Zilliacus. He felt that this was due to the speech's widespread appeal, from die-hard Tories to Fellow-Travellers; wisely, he also attributed it to an appalling display by the Government, a view supported by one of Eden's prominent advisors.<sup>52</sup>

Although both Labour's attacks on the Government's Middle East policy were easily brushed aside, a distinction should be drawn between the two. Both had differed from Conservative policy, notably over the concern for Israel and criticism of the Baghdad Pact. However, the January debate had clearly been misguided, concentrating on the surplus arms rather than the new equipment as well as overlooking the contravention of the Tripartite Pact. In addition, as already discussed, it also appeared to have been a 'bungled' attempt by Gaitskell to raise his profile. In marked contrast, the March debate was both more measured in tone and effectively delivered, a view supported by the non-partisan praise it gained both in and out of Parliament.

Even more significant, some Labour suggestions received more attention from the Government, especially those regarding Israel. In a private meeting with Selwyn Lloyd in April, Gaitskell recorded that the Foreign Secretary had given him the impression that the Government was changing its mind over supplying arms to Israel. Although Lloyd was concerned that this would affect Britain's relations with Jordan, Gaitskell thought that it was clear that the Government was so exasperated with Nasser and Egypt generally, that they were being drawn into accepting Labour's position on supporting Israel. The meeting ended with Gaitskell more optimistic that Israel would soon receive Centurion tanks from Britain to counter the Russian supplies to the Arab states.<sup>53</sup>

Encouraged by the Government's apparent willingness to take a more pro-Israeli line, Richard Crossman wrote a discussion paper for the PLP, which clarified Labour's Middle East policy. Presented at the end of May 1956, it

proposed a UN security pact which guaranteed the independence and protection of every state in the region. As a first step to a settlement, the balance of power would be restored by the supply of defensive equipment to Israel. With parity achieved, an embargo would be imposed on arms to the Middle East from the Superpowers and their allies. In addition, economic aid would be channelled through UN agencies rather than through the Baghdad Pact. Finally that, 'the last vestiges of semi-colonial status should be ended...especially in Jordan'.<sup>54</sup>

As well as optimism over the Government's apparent change of heart over Israel, a reassessment towards Soviet involvement appeared too, despite Nutting's rejection of this in March. The NEC, concerned about the escalation in the fighting between Israel and Egypt over the Gaza strip in April, had repeatedly called for a meeting with the Foreign secretary. Finally, at the end of June their request was granted. Since Gaitskell and Griffiths were away, Crossman led the Labour delegation. He immediately criticised the Government over the terms of a convention agreement that was heavily in favour of the Arab states. Lloyd interrupted Crossman and informed him that after the Anglo-Soviet meeting in April, the Government had decided to bring the Russians into their plans for a Middle East peace settlement after all. Lloyd also hinted that they were considering a UN arms embargo to the Middle East. Crossman, obviously taken-aback at these changes, retorted that they had been the very suggestions made in the March debate, which had been derided by the Government.<sup>55</sup>

Although many Labour claims to have influenced government policy over the Middle East were delusory, they had some cause for self-congratulation. By the end of June, the Government appeared to have considered some of their suggestions, although in reality this was due more to external circumstances, than to any particular pressure from Labour. Nevertheless, Gaitskell's contribution had demonstrated that the Conservatives could not



take bi-partisanship over foreign policy totally for granted, and that the Opposition's views needed to be taken seriously if public rows were to be avoided. Despite the mistakes over the 'Tanks Scandal' in January, Gaitskell's subsequent actions won acclaim from all sections of the Party, no doubt relieved that unity had been maintained and heartened that they were on the offensive once again. Over Labour's Middle East policy at least, Gaitskell had some justification for personal satisfaction: it had raised his profile in the country, given him the chance to assert himself within the Party and helped strengthen his position as leader.

Yet, subsequent events were to give these incidents an unexpected twist. Only three months after the meeting between Gaitskell and Lloyd, the Suez Crisis broke. Although Anglo-Egyptian relations had been strained for some time, this led to Anglo-Israeli co-operation in October 1956, unthinkable to the Government only six months earlier under any circumstances. The irony was, that in January and March 1956 the Labour Party had persisted in its attempt to change the Government's Middle East policy, most notably into supporting Israel. By October 1956, it was the other way round. Then, the Conservative Government was encouraging and supporting Israel's invasion of Sinai, with Labour imploring them to stop and at the same time fending off accusations of treachery and of supporting Egypt.

#### 2.4 The Soviet Union, 1945-55

Besides the Middle East, the Soviet Union loomed long in foreign policy during the first few months of Gaitskell's leadership. The death of Stalin in 1953 had brought a sense of optimism that a 'thaw' in the Cold War was possible. The cessation of the Korean War, Russian withdrawal from Austria, recognition of the Bonn Government, a relaxation in Soviet anti-Western propaganda and Soviet negotiators showing greater flexibility all contributed to this. This optimism increased in mid-March when the details of

Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, at the 20th Congress of the CPSU on 25 February 1956, were released. Within the Labour Party itself these events provoked a flurry of activity and set in motion a reassessment of policy towards the Soviet Union.

The social democratic tradition in the British Labour Movement had always been divided on its attitude to Russia, with an anti-Soviet majority but a vociferous pro-Soviet minority. World War Two had forged an alliance between Britain and Russia and widespread admiration for the Soviet Union was not restricted to those on the left. The Labour Government, returned in 1945 with a massive majority, had initially rejected the pre-war National Government's hostility towards Russia. Yet, almost at once it adopted a stance towards the Soviet Union which equalled in rigour that of any Tory administration. As the wartime partnership evaporated and the Cold War escalated, the hopes of many in the Labour Party, that left could talk to left, were dashed. In the general election of 1950 it was Winston Churchill, the Conservative leader and pristine Cold Warrior, who called for summit talks with the Russians, while Labour's Clem Attlee frowned on the idea.<sup>56</sup>

When the Tories returned to office in 1951 they followed many of the Attlee's Governments policies toward the Soviet Union. However, after Stalin's death, Churchill again called for high level talks between the Great Powers, and this led to the 1955 Geneva Conference. The British proposed a policy of disengagement in central Europe. They hoped that this would relax the Soviet grip on its east European satellites, lead to mutual armaments inspection and result in a larger disarmament agreement, thereby lessening the risk of confrontation in Europe. However, these hopes were largely derailed by West German demands, with American backing, that the reunification of Germany with free elections should be the chief subject of negotiation. This worried France, because the de facto division of their former enemy reduced their fear of invasion or German revanchism. Of course, the

Russians were intractable as they believed that free elections in Germany would result in the loss of their Eastern sector. Consequently, the talks did not live up to expectations and the 'summit' only agreed to cultural exchanges between East and West.<sup>57</sup> Although the original British policy had been thwarted, Soviet calls for further talks led Harold Macmillan to claim that Stalin's death and the advent of the Hydrogen Bomb constituted a 'new look' from the Soviet Union.

In Britain itself, it is generally accepted that the two front benches remained remarkably close in this period.<sup>58</sup> While acceptance of the British H-bomb and the strengthening of NATO urged by the Labour leadership since 1955 had attracted some dissent from the left-wing, Gaitskell's view was similar to theirs in some respects. He accepted disengagement, although he felt (correctly) that the Government's terms for German reunification would be unacceptable to the Russians. In addition, he believed that co-existence with the Soviet Union was necessary and welcomed any relaxation in international tension.<sup>59</sup> While many in the Party viewed the Soviet overtures with optimism, Denis Healey (an acknowledged expert and a strident 'realist' in defence matters) dismissed Macmillan's September declaration as 'wishful thinking'. In an address to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in October 1955, Healey conceded that although there had been some evidence of a relaxation since 1953, the basic aims of Soviet foreign policy remained essentially intact: to detach Germany from NATO; to get NATO out of Europe; and to persuade the West to abolish its nuclear armoury, a policy which left massive Soviet conventional forces in a dominant position.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.5 Labour's Defence Review, the Soviet Visit and 'That Dinner'

Despite Healey's stance, Labour's defence experts had been considering the implications of thermo-nuclear weapons on Britain's defence capability for some time. The Government's annual Defence White Paper, published on 17

February 1956, assumed that during the next few years Britain could rely on the massive destructive power of the H-bomb and reduce conventional forces. Clearly demonstrating their acceptance of the deterrent at this stage, Labour's defence team questioned the relevance of conscription and the two year national service period. The International Sub-Committee of the NEC pre-empted the Government's White Paper, and submitted a resolution in January 1956 which urged the PLP to secure a reduction in National Service and press for an independent enquiry into its conditions.<sup>61</sup>

Simultaneously, the perceived relaxation in the Soviet Union encouraged internal discussion on how to react and what policy to adopt. When the Government announced that the Soviet leaders, Khrushchev and Bulganin, were to visit Britain in April, preceded by Malenkov in March, the Labour leaders were anxious to arrange a meeting with them.<sup>62</sup> In his Daily Mirror column, Richard Crossman, who had long maintained that the Soviet threat to the West was through superior economic achievement rather than military power, urged his colleagues to meet the Soviet leaders with an open mind. He argued that it would be irresponsible to rule out the possibility that the Russians had learned from Stalin's failures and were now sincere in their willingness to deal with the West.<sup>63</sup> Then on 25 February 1956, Khrushchev denounced Stalin as an autocrat and the tyrant personally responsible for the pre-war purges and post-war liquidations. He went on to condemn the 'cult of personality' and disassociated the new leadership from the old. Khrushchev's speech, the defence review and internal pressure convinced many within the Labour Party that a full reassessment of policy towards the Soviet Union was necessary.

The full details of Khrushchev's speech emerged in mid-March. This coincided with Malenkov's (Soviet Premier until February 1955) visit to Britain and his meeting with Labour leaders. While Gaitskell made it clear that negotiations could only take place between the two Governments and not the Opposition,

he took the opportunity to air his views on Soviet foreign policy. He criticised Soviet actions since the war and stressed British fear of Russian expansion, though he claimed that the H-bomb's deterrent effect had significantly reduced the threat of a major war. Although he was encouraged by the new Russian proposals for controls on conventional arms, Gaitskell told Malenkov that mutual trust would never be achieved if Russia continued to stir up trouble: a direct reference to the Middle East, and in particular the recent Czech-Egyptian arms deal. Gaitskell recorded that while the visit may have been a public relations exercise, Malenkov's views encouraged some hope of a milder Soviet foreign policy.<sup>64</sup>

While the talks with Malenkov took place, the NEC was busy assessing the implications of Khrushchev's speech and whether it constituted a major turning point in social democratic - communist relations. This was further stimulated by a report from the Socialist International in early March 1956. Throughout March and early April, Labour's International Department continued to explore whether this provided the background for a general reassessment. The result, when it was submitted to the NEC on 10 April, concluded that 'no new basis of co-operation between Communism and Social Democracy had been created by the 20th Congress of the CPSU'.<sup>65</sup>

Although the report's conclusion would have been of little surprise to Gaitskell and the vast majority of the PLP, there was no indication of the spectacular events that followed. Khrushchev and Bulganin had been invited to talks with the British Government in April. As Leader of the Opposition, Gaitskell had met the Russian leaders at the Soviet Embassy, at 10 Downing Street and at Chequers. However, it was at a Labour Party dinner given in honour of the visitors on 23 April that caused a sensation, both within the Party and the national press. Of more interest was the way in which this episode reflected on Gaitskell and how it contributed to the first serious attacks on his leadership.<sup>66</sup>

Gaitskell, Griffiths and Robens had already met Khrushchev and Bulganin on 22 April. Beforehand, the Labour leaders had decided to raise two questions with the Russians: the plight of social democrats imprisoned in Eastern Europe and Soviet relations with British Labour. Gaitskell began with the latter point, and explained to the Russians that good relations could never be conducted through groups such as the Anglo-Soviet Friendship Society (ASFS) or the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR. This was because they were communist front organisations unacceptable to the Labour Party. Instead, he suggested that they should work through affiliated groups like the Anglo-Soviet Committee of the British Council. In answer to queries from Khrushchev over whether the head of the ASFS, (Dr Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury) was not approved of by Labour, Gaitskell replied that most people considered him a lunatic. This provoked a tirade from Khrushchev, who condemned Labour representatives and British trades unionists who had criticised Russia while visiting his country. He then complained about the Party's foreign policy, its anti-Soviet line since 1945, and for good measure, finished with the cutting remark that the Conservatives were easier to deal with than Labour.<sup>67</sup>

After this frank exchange, the events of the following evening were not as surprising as they subsequently appeared. The agenda for the dinner had been agreed beforehand with the visitors so that Edwin Gooch (Party Chairman that year) for Labour and Bulganin for the Russians would make speeches. After this, it had been agreed that a number of pre-arranged questions would be put to the Soviet delegation, including one on the social democrats. Although the antics of George Brown did not help matters, it was James Callaghan's repeated calls for Khrushchev to speak, followed by others, that brought the Soviet leader to his feet. Although he had not intended or been scheduled to speak, Khrushchev (by some accounts somewhat the worse for drink) launched into a furious attack on the West. Dismissing any hopes for controlled disarmament, he followed this up with a defence of the 1939 Molotov-

Ribbentropp Pact (drawing the notorious 'May God forgive him' retort from George Brown) and threatened that the Russians may again be forced to come to terms with Germany. Without the question time expected because of Khrushchev's hour long interruption, and due to wind up the proceedings, Gaitskell raised the matter of the social democrats and the treatment of Jews in central and eastern Europe. This provoked another furious outburst from the Soviet leader.<sup>68</sup>

During his speech and the questions afterwards, several Labour leaders rebuked Khrushchev as well as Brown: Sam Watson and Bevan amongst them.<sup>69</sup> This did not prevent some Party members complaining about the row to Gaitskell the following day. Considering the press reports and the concern expressed, it was inevitable that a post-mortem would be held. At an NEC meeting two days later, Barbara Castle attacked Gaitskell over the press conference that had been held immediately after the dinner, in which the Labour leader had criticised the Russians. However, it was George Brown who received most of the blame, even from allies like Robens. Although Gaitskell felt vindicated and received support for his actions from the majority of those present, there were some requests, notably by Edith Summerskill, that the Party should apologise to the Russians. This request, although rejected at the NEC meeting, was taken up by others. At a meeting of the PLP on 26 April Emanuel Shinwell, seconded by George Wigg, pressed for a letter of apology to be sent to the Russians on behalf of the PLP, but this was heavily defeated.<sup>70</sup>

For a while it looked as though dissent had been quelled, only to flare up again after a television appearance on 27 April when Gaitskell defended Brown, criticised Soviet intransigence, and in particular Khrushchev's aggressiveness. This forthright statement, which compared a 'moderate' Malenkov with a 'fanatical' Khrushchev presented Shinwell with another opportunity to attack Gaitskell. In the Daily Express, he complained about his

leader's treatment of the Russian visitors and claimed that Gaitskell's account of Khrushchev's provocation at the dinner was false; this, despite the fact that he had not attended it himself.<sup>71</sup> While Shinwell's longstanding feud with Gaitskell was the most likely reason behind these attacks, others took this as a cue to air their grievances.<sup>72</sup> There is no doubt that the Beaverbrook owned press sensationalised and used the dinner incident to attack Gaitskell and Labour in an attempt to restore some prestige to the hard-pressed Prime Minister, Eden. After all, the Tories had been handed a gift by Khrushchev's comments that if he were British he would be a Conservative and that the Tories were easier to deal with.<sup>73</sup>

With the affair beginning to fade, Gaitskell, incensed at the exploitation of the 'Dinner' incident by Eden and his colleagues, tried to turn the tables on the Government over the 'Commander Crabbe affair'. Lionel Crabbe was a naval frogman who vanished while diving near the Soviet delegation's cruiser, 'Ordzhonikidze', in Portsmouth harbour.<sup>74</sup> Eden denied any knowledge of government involvement, but declared that it would not be in the public interest to disclose the circumstances of Crabbe's death, although he promised disciplinary action. Gaitskell's speech in Parliament was cautious, questioning the role of the security services and asking to whom were they ultimately responsible.<sup>75</sup> Beforehand, rumours had circulated, partly due to Gaitskell's indiscretion, that this was to be a major attack on the Government. When delivered, the speech's timidity therefore resulted in an anti-climax. Several Labour MPs, including Morrison and Shinwell actually abstained, giving the impression that the Party was split and that it had been brought over an unnecessary issue.<sup>76</sup>

## 2.6 Defence Expenditure and National Service

While the Party was distracted by the visit of the Soviet leaders and the dinner débâcle, the policy review on defence expenditure and conscription which had



begun in January 1956, was nearing completion. The Government's White Paper, published in February 1956 (Cmd. 9691), had recommended a reduction in conventional forces, in accordance with an international agreement of 1953. Labour's assessment of the changes had reached the same conclusion. The long-term Labour belief that defence spending was too high was accentuated in the mid-1950s with the 'balance of terror' concept created by thermo-nuclear weapons. Due to this, Labour viewed the production of obsolete equipment and the maintenance of conscription as an unnecessary drain on economic resources. In a discussion paper 'Manpower and Defence' drafted in June 1956, the International Department demanded that the Government urgently address the situation. It suggested that: national service should be phased out with no further call ups after 1958; that defence expenditure should be cut to no more than 6 per cent of national income; that a reorganisation of the services and fewer weapon types, particularly aircraft, were required. Almost as an afterthought, it included a provision that all decisions must conform with NATO commitments.<sup>77</sup>

Contributions to the draft paper had been provided by Crossman, Bevan and Shinwell, and its contents were enthusiastically approved by the Foreign Affairs Group. However, because of its lukewarm support for NATO and the large reduction demanded in defence expenditure (33 per cent), Gaitskell regarded the paper as too radical. Crossman was not surprised by Gaitskell's reaction to what he described as a 'very left-wing' paper. While the Labour leader supported the abolition of conscription, he ruled out the commitment to cut the overall defence budget so drastically as 'out of the question'.<sup>78</sup> Due to his objections, the 6 per cent limit on defence expenditure in relation to national income originally called for, was replaced with more ambiguous phrasing. When the final draft was released on 25 June, it gave no precise commitment on the amount considered acceptable.<sup>79</sup>

While Gaitskell had voiced concern over the exact wording of the paper, Crossman's suggestions on Labour's wider foreign policy went further, especially over Western defence strategy. He concluded that NATO (as well as the SEATO and MEDO alliances) should be relegated to a secondary role under the UN; a view that attracted left-wing support.<sup>80</sup> Although 'Manpower and Defence' had been watered down and no firm commitments made, the Left had continually pressed the leadership to force a parliamentary debate over one of its objectives, National Service.<sup>81</sup> Crossman's paper had encouraged discussion and increased this pressure.

In early July, the Shadow Cabinet agreed two specific proposals. The first related to the abolition of National Service, or at least a reduction in the period of service. The second concerned limiting expenditure on defence.<sup>82</sup> In a full meeting of the PLP the following day, it was agreed that the Government should be 'reprimanded for not contributing to international disarmament...for not reducing conscription...[and] their policy towards Germany'.<sup>83</sup> At the same time the Left, encouraged earlier by the debate over defence, were isolated by Crossman's switch when he pledged support for NATO and backed Gaitskell. The result was that only a few, including Konni Zilliacus and Jennie Lee, objected to the proposals.<sup>84</sup>

By mid-July the Labour Party, united in its determination to raise the issue of defence expenditure, prepared to challenge the Government. However, the defence debates were overtaken by problems in the Middle East. In May 1956, Egypt had recognised Communist China, to the anger of the American Government. Eisenhower's administration, exasperated with what it saw as Nasser's continued flirtation with communism, withdrew their offer of financial aid for the Aswan Dam project on 19 July. The next day Britain followed the American lead, and the international Bank for Reconstruction and Development was compelled to do the same. Nasser, outraged by these actions, promised to finance the Dam without Western help and on 26 July

1956 nationalised the Suez Canal Company. As a result, the Labour and Conservative attitude towards foreign affairs, remarkable for its bi-partisanship since 1945, was threatened by the events unfolding in the Middle East.

### Conclusion

Gaitskell had become leader of the Labour Party in December 1955 determined to assert his authority within the Movement and publicise the differences between Government and Opposition. Nowhere was this determination more marked than in foreign affairs. Yet in reality, Labour's policies, despite differences in emphasis, remained as close to those of the Conservative Government as they had since 1951.

In the Middle East, Labour had pledged support for Israel, criticised British involvement in the Baghdad Pact and pressed for Russia to join the 1950 Tripartite Pact. By mid-1956 the Government had reconsidered its relationship with Israel and moved away from the traditional bias in favour of the Arab states, largely as a result of exasperation with Nasser and his increased influence over the other states in the Middle East. In addition, the Government indicated, after the Soviet visit in April, that the Russians should be included in a comprehensive peace settlement. While Labour optimists claimed that some of these changes were due to Labour Party pressure, in reality the Government's policies were shaped by the volatility and realignments in the region.

Encouraged by the 'thaw' in the Soviet Union, Labour had pressed for disengagement in central and eastern Europe, a reduction in defence spending and the abolition (or at least a reduction in the period served) of National Service. Once again the Government was pursuing similar goals. They too sought disengagement in central Europe, encountering American and West

German opposition in the process. The Government was also concerned at the escalating costs of defence and, as the White Paper of February 1956 had shown, were looking at ways to reduce it. This extended to National Service, and Labour's demand for this to be abolished was actually achieved by the Government, and sooner than Labour had hoped.

Despite some left-wing dissent, at this stage Gaitskell, the majority of the PLP and the wider Labour Movement were as committed to the British H-bomb, the 'special relationship' with the United States, NATO, anti-communism and 'traditional' British foreign policy goals as any Tory. Patriotism, a sense of responsibility and a desire for British political world leadership were all deeply embedded in Labour's psyché and restricted any deviation away from putting national interests first. With little difference separating the two front benches over foreign policy in reality, it is worth considering the reasons why Gaitskell's desire to achieve a more partisan approach was unsuccessful.

In one respect at least, the Labour Party had little control. When Attlee retired and Gaitskell became leader in 1955, most of the Party's old guard that had served during the war and in the 1945-1951 governments had gone too. Attlee and Morrison had worked closely with Churchill and Eden during the war, and whether in government or opposition the mutual respect between them had meant contacts were still maintained. Morrison, Labour's foreign affairs spokesman until 1955, had enjoyed the confidence of Eden, and this extended to many in the Foreign office too.<sup>85</sup> When Gaitskell took over, this confidence disappeared, Eden remarking in his memoirs that this 'was a national disaster' and that they 'never seemed able to get on terms'.<sup>86</sup> Of course, Labour's other foreign affairs 'experts' such as Crossman and Bevan were even less likely to receive the confidence of the Government or Foreign Office. Thus, Labour in this period lacked the information it needed in order to establish its own identity over foreign affairs, and was forced instead to react to events and changes in government policy, often without any warning.



When Labour produced new policy initiatives, they usually found that the Government had either pre-empted them, or considered it politically prudent to adopt some of their ideas already.

Arguably, Gaitskell himself contributed to some of the problems the Party faced. His desire to lead from the front, the seriousness in which he took his role as Leader of the Opposition and his lack of experience, all contributed to this. Although he was very much in the 'traditionalist' mould regarding foreign affairs, Gaitskell's impatience and determination to harass the Government wherever possible was in marked contrast to his predecessor, Attlee, and was undoubtedly linked with his wish to establish his own authority within the Party.

Nevertheless, this understandable desire to pursue a partisan approach led to unfortunate tactical errors of judgement in Gaitskell's first six months as leader: the 'Tanks Scandal' in January, the 'Dinner' for the Russians in April and the 'Commander Crabbe affair' in May are obvious examples. It was not just the Conservative Party and the right-wing press that made capital out of these incidents; and were to make even more out of the Suez, independent nuclear deterrent and EEC disputes. His opponents in the Labour Party, both ideological and personal, did too. Of more concern, even his friends and allies were aware of the problems that had been created, yet could do little about it. Unfortunately, it was the very structure of the Labour Party that allowed Gaitskell to make the errors, because it effectively gave the leadership, and in particular the leader himself, the opportunity to follow any course he chose.

## Notes for Chapter One

1. See Hunter,L. (1959); Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.263; Williams,P,M. 'Changing Styles of Labour Leadership', in Kavanagh,D. 1982), p.35.
2. PGWD 11 Dec 1955, pp.226-7; RCD 16 Dec 1955, p.459.
3. Davies,A,J. (1992), p.202.
4. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.323; Jackson,R,J. (1968), pp.113-14.
5. In Jackson's view, Bevan was more significant in providing the revolts than the issues themselves. Jackson,R,J. (1968), p.114. Of course, there is vast disagreement about the effectiveness of the Left in this period. For example, see Davies,A,J. (1992), pp.202-5; Seyd,P. (1987), pp.31-2; Jenkins,M. (1979), pp.260-2; Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.264; Haseler,S. (1969), p.251 and McKenzie,R,T. (1964), p.602.
6. Bullock,A. (1985), p.787.
7. Gaitskell's approach to foreign affairs was set out in the Godkin Lectures, although it appears that these were drafted by Denis Healey and Kenneth Younger. Written during the second half of 1956, they were published as Gaitskell,H. The Challenge of Co-existence (London: Methuen, 1957); For a useful explanation of Gaitskell's foreign policy ideas see Ch.11 in Williams,P,M. (1979); Also Haseler,S. (1969), p.239. Of course, Gaitskell's orthodox views were anathema to many on the Left. Since 1945, Britain's increased hostility to Russia and subservience to the USA was heavily resented. See Meehan,E,J. (1960), pp.28-29 and Seyd,P. (1987), pp.14-15.
8. HGD Doc. No.9, probably June 1952, p.316. Nevertheless, he condemned Bevanite criticism of America as hypocritical and unrealistic. The Times, 24 March 1952.
9. Gaitskell,H. 'The Search for an Anglo-American Policy', Foreign Affairs Vol.32(4), July 1954, pp.563-576, esp. p.573.
10. Gaitskell,H. (July 1954), p.563; Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.533, 18 Nov 1954, Cols.573-91, esp.583-4. On 1 March 1955, Labour tabled an amendment in the House of Commons to a Government motion approving the annual statement on defence. The amendment questioned the British defence system, but apart from some minor differences, accepted British manufacture of the H-bomb. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s Vol.537, 1 March 1955, Col.1917. It provoked trouble and 62 back-bench Labour MPs abstained.
11. Williams,P,M. in Introduction of HGD (1983), p.x-xi
12. Gaitskell,H. (1957), pp.40-50 and (July 1954), p.573.
13. Gaitskell,H. (July 1954), pp.573,575. Despite realism over communism abroad, Gaitskell never hid his contempt for the CPGB or the pacifist, neutralist and fellow-travelling elements within the Labour movement; e.g. 1952 Stalybridge speech and HGD 29-30 March 1956, p.487.

14. Gaitskell,H. (July 1954), p.569.
15. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.394.
16. Gaitskell,H. (July 1954), pp.369-70 and (1957), pp.85-97.
17. Denis Healey was Secretary of the International Department until he became an MP in 1952. Regarded as a 'realist' he was a prolific writer on overseas and defence matters. For an assessment see, Williams,G. & Reed,B. Denis Healey & the Policies of Power (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971). Kenneth Younger, like Healey, was an acknowledged expert on foreign affairs. A former Bevanite, Younger nevertheless became committed to Gaitskell.
18. HGD 9 Jan 1956, p.409.
19. Gaitskell's early criticism of Robens appeared to be because he acted on his own initiative, rather than his leader's instruction! HGD 9 Jan 1956, p.405; On Younger - 'not trusted as a former Bevanite...too indecisive'; On Crossman - 'Unreliable as always...one moment good, the next, totally lacking in judgement'. HGD 14 Feb 1956, p.444.
20. RCD 19 Jan 1956, p.466. Crossman suggested John Hynd should become a fifth member of the team. Although Gaitskell agreed, he doubted Hynd's ability, thinking him weak and too easily led. HGD 14 Feb 1956, p.444.
21. For an amusing account, see HGD 14 Feb 1956, p.442 and RCD 22 Feb 1956, p.472. The allocation of foreign affairs posts was settled on 14 Feb: Strachey as Shadow War Office and Geoffery de Freitas to the Air Ministry.
22. Bevan likened the leadership to a team of 'tiddlywinks players'. For the reaction, see RCD 6 Feb 1956, pp.469-67 and HGD 14 Feb 1956, pp.442-43.
23. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.409.
24. Krug,M,M. (1961), p.261.
25. McKenzie,R,T. (1964), pp.603-4.
26. McKenzie,R,T. (1964), p.603 and Krug,M,M. (1961), p.233.
27. The minutes record that Front-bench speakers must be 100 per cent Front-bench speakers and could not go outside their remit. PLPM 9 Feb 1956. Robens received a rebuke for acting without Gaitskell's authority very early on. HGD 9 Jan and 27 Feb 1956, pp.405 & 455-7.
28. McKenzie (1964), p.604.
29. Hurewitz,A in Louis,R,Wm & Owen,R.(Eds) Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p.22.
30. Bevin also saw the Declaration as the start of the regional collective security system, but Egypt would not accept this plan.

31. This had led to Egypt buying Czech armaments in 1955, which provoked Israel into obtaining arms from France. The 1950 Declaration was thus undermined as both power blocs armed rival states in the Middle-East. Labour Party Middle East Situation (press release) PCM 25 Jan 1956. Also see Tom McKitterick's 'The Middle East' in McKitterick, T.E.M. & Younger, K. (Eds) Fabian International Essays (London, Hogarth Press, 1957), pp.106-133.

32. The Times 10 Nov 1955.

33. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.547, 12 Dec 1955, Col.855 (Morrison).

34. 17 Jewish Labour MPs have been identified in this period. Epstein, L.D. British Politics in the Suez Crisis (London: Pall Mall, 1964), p.79. For Gaitskell's thoughts on the Shadow Cabinet's pro-Arabists (Summerskill, Brown and Stokes) see HGD 9 March 1956, pp.463-4; For a F.O. assessment of Labour's pro-Israeli bias, see Shuckburgh, E. Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951-56 (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), 10 Jan 1956, p.319.

35. HMG's response was not very forthcoming. On the same day, a coded F.O. telegram reported that an Egyptian transporter, the 'Al Kahira', from Zeebrugge and bound for Alexandria, had arrived in Gibraltar. Its cargo was declared as 48 tons of coal and 51 tractors, but was actually tanks. FO Telegram 3318, 30 Dec 1955 (from SOI Gibraltar to Naval Intelligence, DNI). In FO371/118965, PRO, Kew.

36. Confirmed by the Foreign Office on 2 Jan 1956. FO 371/118965; PCM 2 Jan 1956 (press release); Gaitskell seemed to relish the publicity. HGD 9 Jan 1956, p.406.

37. Representing HMG; Eden, Lloyd and Monckton (Minister of Defence). For Labour; Gaitskell, Robens and Younger. HGD 9 Jan 1956, pp.406-8. Gaitskell's comments over the confusion was matched by the F.O.'s Middle East supremo. Shuckburgh Diaries 3, 6 & 8 Jan 1956, pp.317-19.

38. The Times 3 Jan 1956.

39. FO371/118965; Elath told Gaitskell on 3 January that Egypt was to receive 150 MIG jet fighters and Stalin heavy tanks. Added to British Centurions, these were far more powerful than anything Israel had. HGD 9 Jan 1956, p.408.

40. The main points - The 1950 Tripartite Declaration to be backed by force if necessary; the need for a regional settlement and frontier rectification; recognition of Israel and the ending of the blockade by the Arab states; immediate strengthening of the UN Supervisory Commission and a comprehensive UN settlement for economic aid in the area; in addition, that the USSR should formally join the signatories of the 1950 Declaration (GB, USA and France) in maintaining peace and preserving a balance of arms. These points were used as the basis of Labour's parliamentary speeches on 24 January 1956 and published as Party policy. Labour Party The Middle East Situation (Press Release) 25 Jan 1956.



41. Cmd. 9676 Tanks for Egypt (London: HMSO, 1956). Though much of the equipment was obsolete, modern arms such as Centurion tanks, Meteor and Vampire jet fighters were also sent up to mid-1956. FO371/118969.
42. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.548, 24 Jan 1956, Cols.54-74 (Gaitskell, Crossman and Lloyd).
43. RCD 25 Jan 1956, p.468. In private, Lloyd's anger was even worse. See Shuckburgh Diaries 25 Jan 1956, p.325.
44. RCD 25 Jan 1956, p.467; Even Sydney Silverman applauded Gaitskell's performance, remarking 'At last we have a leader who can speak for all sections of the Party'. Quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.418; HGD 23-30 Jan 1956, p.425.
45. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.376. For the importance that Gaitskell attached to the press, see HGD 9 Mar 1956, p.462.
46. Nutting,A. No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez (London: Constable, 1967), p.22; There is little contemporary official evidence of the 'Jordanian Crisis' in Labour Party records such as NEC, PLP or PC minutes. The records of the Foreign Affairs Group (as referred to in RCD 8 Mar 1956, p.474) were accidentally destroyed in 1976. However, Hansard shows the line taken, as does HGD 9 Mar 1956, pp.462-66 and RCD 8 Mar 1956, pp.472-76.
47. PCM 5 Mar 1956. The discussion with other Shadow Cabinet members did not go smoothly. The pro-Arabist lobby (particularly Summerskill and Stokes) were against a debate, fearing that Israel's side would be taken rather than the Arabs. The meeting the following day was even more strained. HGD 9 Mar 1956, pp.462-63 and RCD 8 Mar 1956, p.475.
48. RCD 8 Mar 1956, pp.474-5.
49. PCM 6 Mar 1956.
50. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.549, 7 Mar 1956, Cols.2121-36 (Gaitskell).
51. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.549, 7 Mar 1956, Cols.2111-21 (Nutting), Cols.2223-34 (Eden). See also HGD 9 Mar 1956 p.465 and Shinwell,E. (1972), p.222.
52. HGD 28 Feb and 9 Mar 1956, pp.455 & 464-5; RCD 8 Mar 1956, p.475; Shuckburgh Diaries 7 Mar 1956, pp.344-5.
53. HGD 20 Apr 1956, p.493. These hopes were never realised. In a meeting at the end of March with Malenkov and Gromyko there were some signs of a change in Soviet policy. HGD Doc. No.16 'Gaitskell's talks with G.M.Malenkov' 29-30 Mar 1956, pp.486-7.
54. Richard Crossman 'Some Notes on Labour's Foreign Policy' (discussion paper) 29 May 1956, pp.126-32 in PCM
55. RCD 25 June 1956, pp.500-502.

56. Northedge, F.S. & Wells, A. Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.104.
57. Northedge, F.S. Descent from Power: British Foreign Policy 1945-1973 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), pp.243-4, 264.
58. McKenzie, R.T. (1965), p.600 & Haseler, S. (1969), p.239.
59. Northedge, F.S. (1974), p.246.
60. Later published as Healey, D. 'When Shrimps Learn to Whistle: Thoughts after Geneva', International Affairs Vol.32(1), Jan 1956, pp.1-13, esp. pp.1 & 3.
61. NECM 17 Jan 1956. Cmd. 9391 Statement on Defence: 1955 (London: HMSO, 1955). Unknown to Labour, the Government wanted to do the same, but it was not exacted until the Sandys Review in 1957.
62. NECM 17 Jan 1956. Prompted by Harold Wilson, the Labour Party was not alone in assessing the change. The Socialist International had set up a Collective Security & Disarmament Committee in January 1956. A report on this was presented to the NEC on 2 Feb 1956 and a full report with conclusions (S.I. 2-4 Mar) on 21 March 1956. NECM 22 Feb & 21 Mar 1956.
63. Daily Mirror 24 Feb 1956.
64. See HGD 16 Mar 1956, pp.469-70 and Doc. No.16, 29-30 Mar 1956, pp.482-91; also RCD 13 & 21 Mar 1956, pp.477-81.
65. International Department, 'The 20th Congress and Soviet Communist Policy', Mar-Apr 1956, pp.1-10 in NECM 21 Mar & 10 Apr 1956. This coincided with further discussion in the NEC on cuts in conventional forces and its effect on the ending of conscription.
66. For contemporary accounts of the dinner, see HGD 28 Apr 1956, pp.505-9; RCD 8 May 1956, pp.487-91; Also Daily Express 2 & 4 May 1956 & Evening Standard 27 Apr 1956. In memoirs, see Brown, G. In My Way (London: Gollancz, 1971), pp.71-75 & Griffiths, J. Pages from Memory (London: J.M.Dent, 1969), pp.146-51. Also see Paterson, P. Tired and Emotional: The Life of Lord George Brown (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), pp.79-84. Williams described it as the end of the 'Honeymoon Period'. Williams, P.M. (1979), pp.412 & 415. For those present (40 LP and 16 Soviet) see File E1/2 James Griffiths Papers, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
67. HGD 22 Apr 1956, pp.503-5.
68. RCD 8 May 1956 p.487; HGD 28 Apr 1956, p.506-8 and Griffiths, J. (1969), pp.147-9. For Krushchev's assessment of controlled disarmament and its limitations, see James Callaghan's report of 24 April 1956 in RCD 8 May 1956, pp.492-4.
69. Daily Express 2 May 1956; Griffiths, J. (1969), p.149.

70. HGD 28 Apr 1956, pp.510-11; RCD 8 May 1956, pp.487-9. George Wigg had telephoned Crossman to this effect and Julius Silverman, a prominent left-winger, had organised a 'round-robin' collecting signatures for an apology. PLPM 26 Apr 1956. Shinwell was not actually present.
71. Daily Express 2 May 1956; 'That Dinner. The Grand Inquisition: Have the Socialists already lost the next election?' Daily Express 4 May 1956. For Shinwell's side of the story, see Shinwell, E. (1972), p.222.
72. Sir Charles Trevelyan, a former Labour Minister, thought the Labour leadership's actions 'deplorable'. Daily Express 4 May 1956; Robert Edwards, a former Bevanite, stated that Eden was a 'better bet' for peace. Forward 26 May 1956.
73. The Daily Express and Daily Worker continued on this line, long after interest had faded elsewhere.
74. After Crabbe's disappearance, Special Branch removed the page of the register at the hotel where he had stayed and the press found out.
75. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.552, 14 May 1956, Cols.1751-60 (Gaitskell). George Wigg, who had advised him on the matter, recorded that Gaitskell 'deployed his case without laying the Party and himself open to a charge of damaging our security interests'. Wigg, G. George Wigg (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), p.203.
76. In his diary account, Gaitskell admitted that he had been indiscreet and that this led to the rumours of a major attack. HGD 4 June 1956, p.521. Jenkins called it '...a typical Opposition leader's mare's nest. A more experienced man would have left it alone'. Quoted from Williams, P.M. (1979), p.415.
77. International Department, 'Manpower and Defence', PCM June 1956. In 1954 Britain spent 9 per cent of GDP on defence, compared to 5 per cent in all other OEEC nations.
78. RCD 22 June 1956 pp.496-7.
79. 'Manpower and Defence' final draft, 25 June 1956. NECM June 1956.
80. Crossman, R.H.S. 'Some notes on Labour's Foreign Policy' 29 May 1956. In NECM June 1956. Here, Crossman's opinion on the role of NATO was at odds with the leadership, but the 2 main points - reduction in the defence budget and the phasing out of national service - were not only agreed to by Labour's various factions, but what the Government wanted. Using some of Crossman's ideas, Konni Zilliacus produced a much more extreme draft motion calling for far greater reductions in defence spending, immediate abolition of conscription, the end of restrictions of trade with communist nations and the replacement of NATO. Zilliacus, K. 'Defence & Foreign Policy' (draft motion) PLPM 14 June 1956: There were 32 signatories.
81. Since May 1956, several left-wingers had pressed a reluctant Gaitskell to call for a debate in the House. See Victor Yates PLPM 17 May 1956, Frank Allaun PLPM 31 May 1956 and Harold Davies PLPM 14 June 1956.

82. PCM 3 July 1956.

83. PLPM 4 July 1956. The minutes record that broad agreement was reached. Gaitskell called it very successful. HGD 14 July 1956, p.539. Crossman recorded that Labour's foreign policy ideas were having a positive effect on public opinion. RCD 16 July 1956, p.503.

84. HGD 14 July 1956, p.539. At a PLP meeting a few days later, William Warbey, another prominent left-winger and harsh critic of the leadership's foreign policy, proposed an amendment to 'delete all reference to commitments with NATO' but this was overwhelmingly defeated. PLPM 18 July 1956.

Even though the Left's threat had diminished, Gaitskell's doubts over some of his advisors continued, over Callaghan and especially Richard Stokes. He felt that he could not leave him in charge of defence because he could be 'bullied' by Crossman and Bevan too much. HGD 14 July 1956, pp.540-1. Stokes died in 1957.

85. This trust extended to Kenneth Younger. See interview by Richard Rose on 27 Dec 1961, in (File 17) Nuffield Oral History Project, Nuffield College, Oxford.

86. Eden, A. The Memoirs of Sir Anthony Eden: Full Circle (London: Cassell, 1960), p.320. Obviously, Eden's memories of the Suez Crisis had something to do with this!



## CHAPTER TWO

### Suez: Labour's Challenge

Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal in July 1956 and the subsequent crisis is still widely regarded as representing a watershed in British post-war history. To many, it pinpoints the moment when Britain effectively ceased to be a world power of the first order and was relegated to the sidelines. Despite the passage of time, Suez still provokes heated debate. With the release of the official records since 1986 a mass of material has appeared examining the crisis and its implications.<sup>1</sup> Although the volume of work is impressive, very little consideration is given to the political divisions it caused in Britain at the time, and especially the role of the British Labour Party in mobilising opposition to Eden's Suez policy.<sup>2</sup>

Labour's stand over Suez appeared to mark the effective breakdown of the bi-partisanship which had characterised British foreign policy since 1945. Labour justified this by claiming that the Government had gone to war without international agreement, in defiance of the United Nations, threatening the unity of the Commonwealth, straining the Atlantic Alliance and provoking fears of Soviet intervention. When the ceasefire was announced on 6 November Labour welcomed it as a moral victory, claiming that their opposition had played a leading role in halting hostilities and repairing Britain's reputation abroad.<sup>3</sup>

As well as the moral indignation, Suez presented Labour with an early opportunity to attack the Government and even raised hopes of a return to power. Although Eden's popularity had begun to slide before the Crisis, his resignation and replacement by Macmillan in January 1957 was more a result of the Conservative instinct for self-preservation than the role of the Opposition. Whether Labour had any real effect on the Government's policy during the period is doubtful too, even though some Conservatives blamed

them for the failure. In Parliament, Labour had little chance of overturning the Government's majority without a Conservative revolt, an unlikely outcome, despite many reservations about Suez within the Tory hierarchy. In the country as a whole, opinion polls demonstrated support for government policy, especially after the troops had been committed, and even after the humiliating withdrawal. In the 1959 general election three years later, little was made of Suez, even though Gaitskell pledged that an enquiry would be held into the débâcle.<sup>4</sup> It appeared that the voters were far more concerned with domestic factors rather than with an adventure that had misfired and was best forgotten.

Despite the failure of Labour's attempts to bring about the Government's fall over Suez, their actions provoked an angry response from Conservative supporters. Charges were levelled against Labour members, from questions over their patriotism to accusations of outright treason. Gaitskell in particular was singled out because of his condemnation of government policy, and accused of performing a political somersault for political gain.<sup>5</sup> These interpretations have not diminished with time and two partisan myths have been firmly established. The Conservative version is that Gaitskell and Labour were inconsistent in their response to Suez, at first supporting the Government, then changing their position to outright opposition due to left-wing pressure.<sup>6</sup> The Labour version is that this argument cannot be sustained and that they had been consistent in denouncing any military intervention without the sanction of the UN.<sup>7</sup>

To those sympathetic to Labour's cause, the Suez Crisis represented a period where the Labour Party's different factions forgot the internecine warfare of the preceding years and achieved a remarkable degree of unity.<sup>8</sup> Evidence to substantiate this view was to be found in the reconciliation of Hugh Gaitskell and Aneurin Bevan. Yet this hypothesis is an over-simplification. Many on the Left felt that the leadership's actions, especially in the first weeks of the

Crisis, supported the Government. They believed that they were responsible for countering this and for persuading the leadership to challenge the Tories. Conversely, on the extreme Right of the Party, there were those who believed that the Government's actions were justified. Although small, this group included several prominent members and tended to have more influence than the Left, who were usually dismissed as rebels. To complicate matters further, both groups contained those who seized on Suez in order to discredit Gaitskell personally.

Suez also forced the Labour Party into a dilemma over other issues. One of these was how to balance opposition to government policy while supporting legitimate British interests and avoiding charges of being unpatriotic. For a Party committed to internationalism and understandably anxious to maintain the moral highground, yet well aware of the partisan unpopularity such a stand could cause, this was an important consideration. In addition, there was a question mark over Labour's Middle East policy. Under Gaitskell, Labour had moved decisively in favour of Israel, despite objections from a vociferous pro-Arabist lobby. As Israel and the British Government became increasingly allied against Egypt, this placed Labour in an unenviable position for obvious reasons. This was compounded with the outbreak of hostilities in October 1956, when Israel invaded Sinai as a prelude to the Anglo-French intervention and the suspicion of collusion was raised. This situation not only appeared to threaten Labour's pro-Israeli sentiments but also placed Labour's 17 Jewish MPs in the uncomfortable position of condemning Israel's attack.

Beginning with Labour's initial reaction to the Crisis, this chapter traces the development and extent of the Party's opposition to government policy. In particular, it examines the issues of bi-partisanship, Gaitskell's consistency and Labour Party unity. It will show that while Eden's Government ignored the international community, Labour adhered to the principles laid down by

Bevin and cannot be convincingly blamed for the breakdown in bi-partisanship with which they are often charged. It also demonstrates that while Labour's internationalist credentials partly explain their reaction to the Crisis, Suez also provided an early opportunity to harass the Tories and unite the Party after years of internecine warfare. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that internal management and public opinion were low on the leader's agenda in this case, and the myth of Gaitskell's 'political somersault' advanced by political and personal enemies, can be dismissed. More than anything else, the mutual distrust that developed between the Labour and Conservative benches over Suez was to linger on over the next few years and prove that on foreign policy issues at least, close co-operation could no longer be taken for granted.

### 1. The Crisis Breaks

Gaitskell first heard of Nasser's nationalisation of the Canal while he attended a dinner at 10 Downing Street on 26 July. The following day, after discussing the situation with Griffiths and Robens, he raised the subject in the House of Commons. Deploring Nasser's actions, Gaitskell enquired whether the Government had referred the matter to the UN Security Council and suggested that if the Egyptian Government did not clarify the vague statements it had made over compensation, the Sterling balances to Egypt (£130m) should be blocked.<sup>9</sup>

Gaitskell and Griffiths requested a meeting with Eden on 30th July, hoping to find out the Government's intentions. Satisfied that they were still assessing the situation before deciding on what action to take, the Labour leaders summoned a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet for the next day to discuss the Crisis and the line to be taken in the parliamentary debate scheduled for 2 August. Aneurin Bevan attacked the preoccupation with narrow national interests and raised the idea that all essential international waterways,



including the Suez Canal, should be placed under international control. Gaitskell rejected this and warned that care should be taken over criticising government policy too severely in case Labour was charged with acting irresponsibly; a warning the rest of his colleagues agreed with.<sup>10</sup>

Despite agreement in the Shadow Cabinet, several members of Labour's Foreign Affairs Group, concerned at Gaitskell's initial response on 27 July, requested an emergency meeting of the PLP to discuss the situation. Although this request was refused, Gaitskell and Robens met them to explain the leadership's line on 1 August. The records of this meeting show that the Foreign Affairs Committee, which included John Hynd, William Warbey and Tony Benn, were much more sympathetic to Nasser's actions. After Gaitskell had briefed them on the line that he intended to take in his speech, Hynd warned him that military action against Egypt was imminent and demanded that a tougher line should be taken against the Government. Gaitskell believed that this was out of the question without full consultation, ridiculed the Group's pro-Nasser inclinations and rejected their request; an ominous sign of things to come.<sup>11</sup>

While Gaitskell had dismissed the committee's advice, Douglas Jay warned him that the military preparations currently under way went far beyond the scope of the precautionary force the Government had deemed necessary. As this gave Hynd's warning more credibility, Gaitskell agreed to conclude his speech, drafted by Kenneth Younger, with an appeal for caution over any military action by Britain.<sup>12</sup> Gaitskell also met Eden alone (at the latter's request) on the morning of the debate. He again pressed the Prime Minister over his intentions, and although they agreed on some military preparations, Gaitskell was satisfied that force would not be used unless Nasser took further action against British interests.<sup>13</sup> Despite the apparent satisfaction with Eden's assurances, the warning, now drafted into the speech, remained.

## 2. The 2 August Speech

It is the Opposition's conduct in Parliament on 2 August 1956 that has fuelled the debate over the Labour Party's, and in particular Gaitskell's, consistency. Used by supporters and detractors alike, it is worth examining it and the different interpretations it has received in greater depth.

Eden opened the Suez debate with a condemnation of Egypt's actions: that they had caused anger and alarm around the world, threatened the free navigation of the Canal and effectively torn up the international agreement that had guaranteed this. Attacking Nasser personally as a man who could not be trusted, he announced that Britain was taking precautionary military measures in the eastern Mediterranean in order to deal with any contingency.<sup>14</sup>

Gaitskell's speech followed. He attacked the Tories' Middle East policy, criticised their ambivalence and mistakes in the region, although he pointed out that this did not excuse Egypt's actions. Gaitskell then condemned Nasser for his declared intention of destroying Israel and encouraging subversion in Jordan and neighbouring states. In his view, Nasser had seized the Canal for propaganda purposes and to raise Egypt's prestige, an act worthy of Mussolini and Hitler before the war. However, Gaitskell ended on a note of caution. In a reference to some press reports which indicated that force would be justified under the circumstances, he warned that while certain military preparations might be necessary,

'...we must not allow ourselves to get into a position where we might be denounced in the Security Council as aggressors, or where the majority of the assembly were against us...It is important that what we do should be done in the fullest possible co-operation with the other nations affected. While force cannot be excluded, we must be sure that the circumstances justify it and that it is, if used, consistent with our belief in and our pledges to, the Charter of the U.N. and not in conflict with them.'<sup>15</sup>

As Gaitskell finished, Charles Waterhouse (leader of the Tory Suez Group) commended the Labour Leader for having made a courageous speech, and one that showed that the Opposition were firmly behind the Government on this issue. The Liberal leader, Clement Davies, also remarked that he agreed with just about everything Gaitskell had said.<sup>16</sup> Labour reaction to their leader's speech was mixed. Although Denis Healey expressed alarm at the bellicose way the press had reacted to the Crisis and had stressed the importance of a peaceful international solution under the auspices of the UN, other Labour speakers took a harder and more nationalistic line. Reginald Paget, Stanley Evans, Frank Tomney, Jack Jones and Herbert Morrison all attacked Egypt's past actions, the seizure of the Canal, and the failure of the UN to act decisively. Morrison went as far as to pledge the use of force if circumstances warranted it. He concluded that the Government should not be afraid to 'stand up' to acts of this sort, as failure to do so could have dire results for world peace. These speeches received an enthusiastic response from the Tories and drew praise from the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, who claimed that the debate had demonstrated a large measure of approval and agreement in the House.<sup>17</sup>

The first outright denunciation of this line came from the left-wing Labour MP, William Warbey. Warbey's scathing speech made it clear that while he did not condone Nasser's methods, he believed that Britain and America had provoked Egypt into nationalising the Canal. On the British side, he blamed the antics and pressure of the Tory Suez Group for forcing the Government into a more militant stand than might otherwise have been taken. Like Healey, Warbey concluded that the only chance of settling the dispute was through an effective UN settlement.<sup>18</sup>

To many commentators, the 2 August debate demonstrated a clear parliamentary consensus in condemning Egypt's action. The press reports the next day, with the exception of the Manchester Guardian and the

Observer, believed that the Government could rely on the full support of Gaitskell and Labour: the Times reported that on the Suez issue '...there has seldom been a higher level of agreement.'<sup>19</sup> The Conservative leaders and most MPs, especially those in the Suez Group, certainly appeared to think this. Some later observers also take the view that Government and Opposition were united at this stage.<sup>20</sup> Eden's official biographer, Robert Rhodes James, points out that Gaitskell's words were largely responsible for this, adding that his condemnation of Nasser's actions and the comparison with the pre-war dictators were not only passionate but bellicose.<sup>21</sup>

The notion that Labour's initial line resembled that of the Government was not restricted to Tory supporters either. Contemporary reaction in some sections of the Labour Party was extremely hostile. They believed that the Leadership, particularly Gaitskell, had fully supported the Government's condemnation of the nationalisation. Tony Benn recorded that Gaitskell's speech had been disastrous and had given the impression that Labour was only concerned with the affront to national prestige and influence.<sup>22</sup> The reaction of the Labour Left was epitomised by Tribune's severe criticism of Gaitskell, which denounced his speech and commented that he '...outdid the (Tory) Times in supporting ways of putting pressure on Egypt.' Instead, it suggested that,

'Labour's duty is clear. It must oppose the hysterical campaign against Nasser and his nation, to which at present some Labour politicians and the Daily Herald are making a disgraceful contribution...Gaitskell's reactions to the Crisis resemble those of the most orthodox Tory.'<sup>23</sup>

William Warbey pursued this line a few days later and argued that Gaitskell's speech put too much emphasis on national unity and had '...given the impression that the British people stand united with the Government, to bring Nasser to his knees.'<sup>24</sup>

From a purely partisan position, it is not surprising that the Tories would quote the sections of the Labour speeches they agreed with and gloss over, or



ignore completely, the parts they did not. Eden, who had followed the principles laid down by Bevin and of bi-partisanship in foreign policy since 1945, would be expected to suppose that this arrangement would be reciprocal. The Suez Group, who had opposed any withdrawal from Egypt and the Canal base in principle in the first place (and had been a persistent thorn in the Government's side over any concessions) were even more likely to seize on any opportunity that appeared to reverse the conciliatory policies towards Egypt between 1954-56. The apparent agreement uniting Government and Opposition against Nasser, fuelling calls for action against Egypt, presented just such an opportunity as far as they were concerned.<sup>25</sup> While the later Conservative myth over Labour's treachery was built from this, the Left's initial disquiet was quietly forgotten.

Yet the concept of Parliamentary unity is problematic. As Keith Kyle has written, 'Up to this point - and his speech was nearly over - Gaitskell might as well have concerted his presentation beforehand with the Prime Minister, so closely did the public positions coincide...But then came a passage at the end...'<sup>26</sup> The point is, Gaitskell's speech had concluded with a warning that force should not be contemplated without the sanction of the UN. As the Manchester Guardian reported on the day after the speech, this was quite clear, even though the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, had chosen to ignore it. Even the Times, despite its vision of 'Parliamentary agreement' in the same issue, reported that Gaitskell had given 'a solemn warning against the use of force and of the charge of Britain being denounced as an aggressor'.<sup>27</sup> Labour critics of Gaitskell's speech, such as Johnson and Benn, had also noted this, though both felt that it had had the appearance of an afterthought.<sup>28</sup> Gaitskell's biographer concedes that Gaitskell should have realised that the first part of the speech would attract far more attention than the latter part expressing his reservations over the use of force. He views this simply as a lapse in Gaitskell's communication skills, an occasional unfortunate professional weakness.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, Eden's biographer dismisses this

excuse and takes the view that Gaitskell's speech had misled not only Eden, but parliament, the press and public alike.<sup>30</sup>

As Leader of the Opposition, whose speech had directly followed that of Eden's, Gaitskell's statement was bound to attract attention from all sides. This was inevitable because of the coverage given to it in the press the following day. As the warning concerning the use of force was not until the last four paragraphs (out of 34) it is also clear that the focus would remain on the first part, especially as this had contained the memorable comparisons with Mussolini and Hitler's fascist methods. Frank Allaun, a Labour MP, admitted that although he had been present throughout the debate, he had not even noticed the warning at the end.<sup>31</sup> Johnson and Benn's assertion, that the last part resembled an afterthought has some justification. On the other hand, Gaitskell's defenders would point to the fact that he could not be seen to be acting against the Government in a purely partisan manner. In addition, as he could not contemplate them actually using force unilaterally, he would not have thought the warning necessary anyway.

While Gaitskell's speech is at the centre of the controversy, the contributions made by other Labour speakers in the debate, with the exception of Warbey, were far more likely to have given an impression of support for the Government. As Kyle points out, even Denis Healey, one of Eden's shrewdest critics who had taken the Premier to task during the debate over his Suez policy, had endorsed the military preparations announced by Eden.<sup>32</sup> Paul Johnson, while maintaining the view that Gaitskell was the main culprit, grudgingly conceded that Morrison's support had exaggerated the impression.<sup>33</sup> Morrison's emotional response in the debate, with his experience over the Mossadeq affair still fresh, can partially be understood. However, his close support for the Government, his advocacy of unilateral action by Britain if necessary, and his mutual regard for Eden (as highlighted by his biographers) would not have helped differentiate Labour's policies

from those of the Tories.<sup>34</sup> Apart from Morrison, the speeches of Paget, Evans, Tomney and Jones were even more strident, both in their condemnation of Nasser's actions and their calls for retaliation.

Although Gaitskell has to accept some responsibility for the confusion, close examination of the 2 August debate reveals that later Labour speakers must bear a higher proportion of the blame. Whatever the arguments for or against his speech being misinterpreted, the warning was explicit. If it had the appearance of an afterthought, as some thought, this was not surprising considering the circumstances under which it had been written. Without full domestic and international support, Gaitskell was not alone in dismissing any notion of British unilateral armed force against Egypt, despite the rumours circulating. In addition, the Labour Party was well aware of the danger of being branded as unpatriotic, so it was not unusual for the Labour Leader to refrain from launching a full scale partisan attack on the Government. This is even more understandable when they had not had the information or time required to fully assess the situation at that stage; to do so would have been foolhardy and counter-productive.<sup>35</sup> If Gaitskell's speech had given the Government's supporters, hearing what they wanted to hear and discounting or ignoring the rest, the notion that they had Labour's full and unconditional support, the events of the next few days should have caused them to reconsider. That it did not, was mainly due to the parliamentary recess from 3 August. The result of this was that they knew nothing of Gaitskell's, and some of his close colleagues', attempts to clarify their position with Eden.

### 3. The Leadership's Response

On the evening of the speech Douglas Jay, acting on information from W. N. Ewer, contacted Gaitskell to warn him that the Foreign Office had told journalists that Egypt would face invasion if they rejected Anglo-French

demands.<sup>36</sup> According to his diary account, Gaitskell did not take this threat very seriously at first, due to his previous meetings with Eden and because he felt that the course of the earlier parliamentary debate had not revealed any military strategy.<sup>37</sup> However, the following day (3 August) almost all the newspapers carried apparently authoritative statements of the Government's intentions to use force against Egypt.<sup>38</sup>

Because of the press statements and Jay's concern, Gaitskell wrote to the Prime Minister just before he left for a holiday in Wales with his family. The Labour leader reminded Eden that both he and Griffiths had queried the use of force before the debate, and expressed their doubts over whether they could support it; as far as they were concerned Nasser had as yet done nothing that would justify force.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, Douglas Jay had decided that the Government should be publicly warned against the use of force, and he and Denis Healey wrote to the Times on 5 August, warning of the 'stupendous folly' of any such action.<sup>40</sup> James Griffiths and Morgan Phillips, concerned about the Government's hostile intentions as well as the danger of Gaitskell's words being misinterpreted, had the leader's speech reprinted in full and sent to Labour MPs, prospective candidates, CLPs and affiliated groups.<sup>41</sup> Gaitskell, still on holiday, received a reply from Eden on 7 August, which he felt made it clear that the Prime Minister as well as the Tory press, were taking Labour support for granted. He responded by writing to his secretary in London, asking her to show Eden's letter to Jim Griffiths, and urging his deputy to see the Prime Minister as soon as possible in order to clear up the misunderstandings that had arisen.<sup>42</sup>

The concern shown by Gaitskell, Griffiths, Jay, Healey and Phillips appeared justified after the Prime Minister's BBC broadcast on 8 August. In this, Eden furiously denounced Nasser and compared him with the pre-war dictators. After he had continued with an analogy of Chamberlain's appeasement policies and their failure, Eden warned that this must never be allowed to



happen again.<sup>43</sup> The Manchester Guardian's reaction was suspicious, recording that there had been no mention of any attempt to negotiate through the UN and that nothing had been done to remove the impression of impending military action.<sup>44</sup> More recent views are divided. Eden's biographer regards the Prime Minister's speech as a measured statement, and that it is beyond comprehension that some Labour MPs saw the broadcast as a prelude to invasion. But as Keith Kyle points out, Eden had now publicly drawn up the battle lines, and even some Conservative members were dismayed by the tone of his speech.<sup>45</sup>

There is no doubt that Labour leaders were anxious over this development. Griffiths certainly believed that military preparations were on an extensive scale and contacted Gaitskell in Wales to confirm that he and Robens would see Eden.<sup>46</sup> Gaitskell also wrote to Eden again, emphasising that force should not be used under the present circumstances, that he fully endorsed the letter from Jay and Healey that had appeared in the Times on 7 August and that Griffiths would be seeing him shortly.<sup>47</sup> Griffiths and Robens did in fact meet Eden on 10 August. As well as expressing concern over the military preparations and the possible consequences, they also enquired whether there had been any agreement between Britain, France and America over the Crisis. Eden's reply was distinctly evasive. On the preparations, he told them that he was relying on contingency plans drawn up by his military advisers. As to the use of force, he would not go beyond what he had said in Parliament on 2 August: that although he would not rule it out altogether, he would not use it unless provoked by Egyptian aggression. Equivocal over discussions between Britain, France and America, he asked the Labour leaders to issue a press release stating that they had seen him.<sup>48</sup>

According to Jay and Griffiths, Gaitskell was so concerned over the reaction and misrepresentation of his speech that he interrupted his holiday and returned to London on 12 August. At a special Shadow Cabinet meeting the

next day, Griffiths and Robens gave a full report of their meeting with Eden. They also urged Gaitskell to have the 2 August speech endorsed and after an hour's discussion this was agreed unanimously, along with a decision to issue a press statement.<sup>49</sup> As well as the endorsement, this statement was the Shadow Cabinet's first official reaction. It included a call for the International Conference (assembling in London and due to convene on 16 August) to prepare a plan with the UN for: the efficient operation and development of the Canal; a fair financial return to Egypt; no interference with the right of free passage; and no discrimination against those using it. It also suggested that Parliament should be recalled immediately after the conclusion of the London Conference, and that the Government should emphasise that the military preparations were solely precautionary. It finished with the warning that, '...armed force...could not be justified except in accordance with...the Charter of the UNO' [and that] '...Nasser had not done anything so far which justified the use of armed force.'<sup>50</sup>

At a meeting with the Premier and the Foreign Secretary the next day (14 August) Gaitskell, Griffiths and Robens presented the statement and called for the recall of Parliament. Gaitskell later wrote that although Eden and Lloyd were ambiguous over the use of force, he felt that this meeting had left the Tories in little doubt over Labour's policy.<sup>51</sup> In an interview on ITV television later that same day, Gaitskell was quizzed over whether his 2 August speech had given an image of complete agreement with the Government. He replied that the agreement had been over the condemnation of Nasser's method of seizure and not over the use of force.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. A Left-wing Rebellion?

By mid-August, Gaitskell and his Shadow Cabinet colleagues had some justification for believing that Labour's Suez policy was clear. The private correspondence, the meetings between Labour Party and Government

representatives, Healey and Jay's letter to the Times, the endorsement of the speech and press statement, along with Gaitskell's television interview, all support this. However, because of the summer recess which began on 3 August, many Labour MPs (and Conservatives) were not aware of the actions behind the scenes and appeared to take little notice of the public announcements.<sup>53</sup> Instead, they were left with the recollections of the 2 August debate and Gaitskell's speech, which many on the Left believed disastrous.

Although Gaitskell's speech had attracted most of the attention, he was not alone in earning left-wing wrath. Aneurin Bevan, their champion for many years, had written an article for Tribune on 3 August (in the same issue that contained the scathing reaction to Gaitskell's speech) which was also highly critical of Nasser's actions, and condemned the nationalisation as a classic propaganda exercise.<sup>54</sup> To some of his most loyal supporters, Bevan's vigorous condemnation of Nasser caused alarm.<sup>55</sup> Combined with Gaitskell's speech and the press reports of 3 August, some left-wing MPs and activists called a meeting in order to change the leadership's perceived support, into an attack on the Government.<sup>56</sup> A few days later 24 Labour MPs including Mikardo, Warbey, Castle, Brockway, Lee and Orbach sent a letter to the NEC and the press which denounced the Government's reaction against Egypt. The letter also carried an announcement that a meeting would be held in London on 14 August to fight the Tories' Suez policy.<sup>57</sup>

The Daily Telegraph called this a major challenge from the Left.<sup>58</sup> In fact, the letter differed little from the leadership's preferences, although its signatories were not aware of this at the time. They also condemned the 'high-handed behaviour and language of Colonel Nasser' and the threat to the free passage of the Canal. There was no criticism of Gaitskell, and the letter stressed that the intention was not to 'formulate Party policy', but to raise the issue with the Government at the earliest opportunity because Parliament was in recess

and the NEC was not due to meet until after the London Conference.<sup>59</sup> Although Gaitskell expressed little concern, some of his senior colleagues initially appeared alarmed at the prospect of a revolt.<sup>60</sup> However, the press statement of 13 August and its emphasis on the warning, as well as a clear summary of Labour's policy, appeared to dispel any perceived threat. Bevan, writing in Tribune on 17 August, stated that it was clear that the Labour Party had left Eden in no doubt that it would not support the Government if their policy was to use force. In the same issue, the editorial commented that the 'sound and sensible' statements of the Shadow Cabinet on 13 August had responded to the mood of the rank and file. Only a fortnight after its condemnation of the Labour leadership, Tribune even allowed itself some cautious praise for Gaitskell.<sup>61</sup>

For approximately two weeks a small group of left-wing MPs, activists and Tribune had attacked Gaitskell and the Shadow Cabinet over their handling of the Crisis. This had been greatly exaggerated by the Tory press, especially the Telegraph, with the obvious intention of splitting Labour. As the leadership's condemnation of Government policy became public and more frequent, this situation began to alter. Meetings organised by the Left went ahead as planned, but the harsh criticism faded. Of course, there were still some exceptions: Barbara Castle remained highly sceptical and continued to blame the 2 August speech for letting the Movement down.<sup>62</sup> While Tribune's contribution to the attack had died down on the whole, an article by A. J. P. Taylor severely criticised the Labour leadership for giving Eden the wrong impression and he urged the radicals to 'Kick the Labour Leaders back into line'.<sup>63</sup> However, the facts suggest that Taylor had missed the boat. By mid-August the concerns of the Left had largely been reassured and their support had begun to swing towards the leadership. By the beginning of September, any dissent from that quarter was all but over as Labour moved firmly towards opposition: as one prominent Labour activist, eager for



confrontation with the Tories remarked, '...Suez buries bi-partisanship in British foreign policy'.<sup>64</sup>

### 5. The London Conference and a New Threat?

While the Left's criticism died away, Gaitskell was preoccupied with other developments. On 16 August an international conference convened to discuss the Suez situation.<sup>65</sup> As the Foreign Ministers and their advisors arrived in London, Gaitskell met the French, Australian and Norwegian representatives. To each, he emphasised Labour's position: that force could not be used without UN approval. In his meeting with Pinneau (the French Foreign Minister), Gaitskell was informed that although the French did not actually want war, they wanted Nasser to think that they would attack if he did not back down. Gaitskell's diary shows that he was sure that this was Eden's policy too, not just for the benefit of Nasser but also to appease his right-wing Tory critics.<sup>66</sup>

Towards the end of August, the London Conference (out of 22, 18 supported the British) concluded that an international board representing the maritime powers and Egypt should jointly manage the Canal and replace the nationalised company. On the last day of the Conference (23 August) it was decided that Robert Menzies, the Australian Premier, should lead a delegation to Egypt in early September to see if Nasser would negotiate along these lines.<sup>67</sup>

On 24 August Gaitskell met John Foster Dulles, presented Labour's policy and told the American that this view was supported by at least half the nation. The Labour leader proposed that the West should boycott the Canal if Nasser refused to negotiate on the London proposals and suggested that alternative pipelines, transport and increased American supplies of oil to western Europe could counter the problem.<sup>68</sup> In Reynolds News two days later,

Gaitskell claimed that the London Talks had persuaded the British and French Government's that they would receive little support from the international community if they resorted to force. Although he conceded that they had never publicly declared that this was their intention, the press releases from the Foreign office and other departments had implied this was the case.<sup>69</sup> However, Gaitskell's apparent optimism over the Conference's success was short-lived. The following week there were further reports that the Government intended to impose a solution by force.<sup>70</sup> In response, Gaitskell visited R. A. Butler, the Lord Privy Seal, to press for the recall of Parliament. This request was refused on the grounds that until the outcome of the Menzies mission was known, the Government would not be able to come to any conclusions.<sup>71</sup>

While the leadership was concerned over the Government's intentions, they could at least have taken comfort from intra-party unity, now the fears of the Left had been allayed; this, despite the efforts of the Tory press to the contrary and the start of a campaign to discredit Labour as unpatriotic.<sup>72</sup> However, another internal political threat was developing, not from the Left, but from the extreme Right of the PLP, and also briefly from the TUC. One of the most prominent Labour MPs who had backed the Government in the August debate was Herbert Morrison. It appeared that Morrison's memories of Iran, resentment of Gaitskell's promotion to the leadership over his head and confidence in Eden's judgement, resulted in a less than cautious view of the Government's handling of the Crisis.<sup>73</sup> According to Eden's biographer, Morrison met Eden on a regular basis during the Crisis and offered whatever help he could. In mid-August, Morrison had urged Eden to keep in close contact with Gaitskell, obviously believing that a bi-partisan approach was possible. In September, he told the Prime Minister that he should not retreat from the tough stand he had taken.<sup>74</sup>

Gaitskell himself recorded that Morrison was following a pro-government line after the latter had informed him of his meetings with Eden in August. He observed that under the circumstances this was rather odd, especially when Morrison revealed that Eden had sent for him. Gaitskell concluded that Eden had some vague notion of obtaining Labour support through Morrison and was using him. Although he felt that this was a miscalculation on Eden's part considering Labour's stand, he was aware of the problems it could lead to.<sup>75</sup> Gaitskell's concern was justified to some extent. Morrison's meetings with Eden, though not in an official capacity, could easily have led to more rumours of a split in the Party. The very fact that an important Labour figure was supporting the Government against his own Party's policy presented obvious dangers. This could have been far more dangerous than any left-wing split, as Morrison's reputation might have attracted more support in the Party and country. However, any potential conflict was averted when Morrison left Britain in September for a lecture tour in the United States. Because of this he was abroad during the Suez invasion, much to Eden's dismay.<sup>76</sup>

Morrison was not alone in the Labour Movement at this stage in pressing for tough action against Nasser. Before the TUC's annual conference at the beginning of September, Eden had sought the support of its President, Charles Geddes. Prompted by many union members, Geddes began to mobilise the General Council's International Committee behind the Government. Like many other traditional Labour voters, the trades unions contained a large number of people who supported government policy. This can partly be explained in purely patriotic terms and partly out of the anti-Egyptian prejudice of many of those who had served in the area during and after the war. However, Alan Birch (General Secretary of USDAW) and other members of the General Council persuaded Geddes to alter course. They argued that Suez provided an opportunity to bring down the Conservative administration, an opportunity which no loyal representative of the Labour

Movement should resist.<sup>77</sup> By 6 September, the TUC announced that it fully supported Labour Party policy. When Geddes closed the Suez debate, he criticised the Government's handling of the Crisis and warned that military action would split the nation.<sup>78</sup> With Morrison's departure and the TUC's change of heart, Labour solidarity appeared assured, at least until the outbreak of hostilities at the end of October.

#### 6. The End of Bi-partisanship?

As the TUC Conference ended, the Menzies Mission - to persuade Nasser to place the Canal under international control - ran into difficulties. On 9 September, after President Eisenhower had publicly denounced the military option, Egypt broke off the negotiations confident that without American support the use of force could not be considered. Eden's policy up to this point had been relatively straightforward, based on three premises: first, there was the London Conference; if that failed there was to be an appeal to the UN Security Council; in the last resort, and having been seen to exhaust all reasonable diplomatic accommodation, the military expedition was to set sail. When the Menzies' Mission failed, Eden told the Americans that Britain and France intended to use the Security Council to force an agreement on Egypt. However Dulles, aware of the dangerous split this could cause between America's allies and Third World opinion, wanted to prevent this. Stalling for time, he suggested a new scheme for controlling the Canal, the 'Suez Canal Users Association' (SCUA). This envisaged a consortium who would sail their ships through the Canal, using their own pilots and paying dues to a central office, not Nasser. If Egypt tried to stop the ships, this would break the 1888 Convention and thereby justify tougher measures. Eden reluctantly persuaded his British and French allies to accept the plan, hoping that Nasser would obstruct it and thus force America to act against Egypt.<sup>79</sup>



Of course, Gaitskell and the Labour Party knew nothing of these events or of SCUA. Labour's demand for the recall of Parliament had been agreed and a debate set for 12 and 13 September. In a special Shadow Cabinet meeting the day before, the Committee discussed Suez and decided that their actions would depend on the Government's statement. In a full PLP meeting on the morning of the debate, Gaitskell recalled the events of the previous six weeks. This was the first full meeting of the PLP since the 2 August debate, and therefore the Committee's first chance to outline the private correspondence and meetings between Labour and Government representatives. Gaitskell concluded that a compromise was possible after the London Conference and that negotiations must be pursued.<sup>80</sup>

Eden presented the SCUA Plan to Parliament on 12 September. He began with the claim that this would allow a substantial volume of traffic to pass through the Canal. After this, he issued a thinly veiled threat that if there was any obstruction, the warships escorting the convoys would be allowed to force their way through. Having known nothing of the plan, Gaitskell protested. He claimed that the Government had divided the nation with these threats, which had grave implications. Because of this, he warned that the usual restraint shown regarding international affairs could not be maintained and, '...on such occasions it is the duty...of the Opposition to speak out loudly and clearly. That is what...we feel we must do today.' Gaitskell criticised the Government's actions on 2 and 3 August: that the Foreign Office leaks over the use of force had been scandalous and led to the misleading press reports of Opposition support, when they had actually known nothing about it. Gaitskell concluded his attack with a demand for the Government to give a pledge not to use force and to settle the dispute at the UN. Eden was unwilling to give such a pledge and the debate ended with constant interruptions and heated exchanges.<sup>81</sup>

The following day, Labour continued the attack. Alf Robens argued that Nasser's refusal to accept Menzies' proposals was understandable because they were couched in such humiliating terms, and that Eden's threats were provocative. Then, to Labour's obvious delight, came a remarkable intervention by Sir Lionel Heald (a former Tory Attorney General). He stated that it was inconceivable for the British Government to use force in support of the London Plan without reference to the UN, and that a pledge should be given to this effect. Gaitskell, encouraged by the appearance of a Tory split, demanded that such a pledge be given. He was still speaking when he was told of Dulles' press conference statement, that American ships sailing in convoy under the envisaged SCUA Plan would not dream of 'shooting their way through the Canal', and that if they encountered any difficulties they would be advised to sail round the Cape. This was a serious setback for Eden, because he had relied on American support. In the last five minutes of the debate and amid continuous barracking, Eden appeared to change tack, replying that if Egypt did not give in '...[HMG] should take them to the Security Council-[Interruption]'.<sup>82</sup> Although the sentence had been drowned out by the uproar and he continued afterwards, the Prime Minister had appeared to accept Labour's demand: that Britain would go to the UN rather than force passage through the Canal.

Some Labour members regarded the debate as a victory, which left Eden without the option of a military solution; this, despite the Government's comfortable majorities of 70 and 71 in the divisions afterwards.<sup>83</sup> Gaitskell also seemed relieved: despite some misgivings he recorded, 'I may be optimistic, but my feeling is that we are probably over the hump now. Certainly the immediate danger provoked by trying to break through the Canal seems to have been averted'.<sup>84</sup>

As later events proved, this optimism was short-lived. However, Eden's problems with Dulles and his obvious reluctance to take the dispute to the

United Nations enabled Labour to claim that it was in favour of international law, while Eden was not. Of course, as Epstein's study clarifies, in reality there was little chance of persuading the UN, in the face of a Soviet veto and Afro-Asian opposition, to approve the use of force against Egypt, so to some extent Labour's stand amounted to 'the advocacy of inaction'.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, it allowed Labour to claim the moral highground and, victory or not, the September debate left little doubt over Labour's Suez policy.<sup>86</sup>

The reaction of the Tory press was hostile, and new reports of splits within Labour ranks were mounted to confuse and disrupt the Party.<sup>87</sup> If the reports had been accurate, then the Labour conference held in Blackpool between 1-5 October could be expected to confirm Tory expectations. This was Gaitskell's first conference as leader, and as Suez had aroused passionate emotions within different factions of the Party earlier, this was the most likely place for any breach to occur.

The first day opened with an Emergency Resolution on Suez (Composite No. 38): this condemned the Government, complimented Party policy and reaffirmed Labour's commitment to the UN Charter. Philip Williams has written that all the signs pointed to the Labour leader suffering a difficult time, the opening speeches so pro-Nasser that it appeared as though Gaitskell would be overwhelmed; that despite these difficulties, he had turned the situation to his advantage and won a considerable victory.<sup>88</sup> The Conference documents do not sustain this interpretation. The first four speeches all supported the motion and none were openly pro-Nasser, while the fifth, from a member of the Jewish Socialist Labour Party was understandably anti-Nasser. John Hynd was the first to mildly criticise Labour's stand, because he wanted stronger condemnation of the Government. Although a Manchester delegate supported Nasser, the majority of speakers closely followed the leader's line. Gaitskell seemed surprised at the reception, beginning his speech, 'I find myself as Chairman of the PLP, in the rather unusual position

of supporting a motion which compliments the PLP'. After he had outlined the reasons behind the attack on government policy, he urged the delegates to support the motion, and stated that Labour should be 100 per cent united on this issue.<sup>89</sup>

The diaries and recollections of some contemporaries, admirers and critics alike, demonstrated satisfaction with the outcome and Gaitskell's performance. Douglas Jay and Denis Healey were both pleased with the way things had gone, perhaps more out of relief that a split had not materialised than anything else. More significant, was the praise Gaitskell received from his former critics. Crossman recorded that while conference had been a real test for a new, untried and suspect leader, Gaitskell's performance had been remarkable. Tony Benn, highly critical just a few weeks before, also thought that the outcome had been excellent and that the Party's Leader deserved applause.<sup>90</sup>

With Labour united and growing public apprehension to Eden's policy, it is not surprising that Tory reaction was so hostile. At the Conservative's annual conference (Llandudno 11-14 October) Labour, and particularly Gaitskell, became the focus for Conservative retaliation. Peter Walker accused Labour of having divided the nation and that their stance, '...must surely rank as the most treacherous action of any political Party in the history of our country'. Playing the patriotic card, Walker turned on, '...that group of frustrated journalists and barristers who are always eager to applaud the actions of foreign nations and to decry the actions of their own countrymen'. Anthony Nutting pursued the theme of Labour's political somersault between 2 August and 12 September. He then blamed Gaitskell for 'breaking the bi-partisanship that had characterised British foreign policy since Ernest Bevin's day'.<sup>91</sup>



## 7. The Outbreak of Hostilities: Labour's Fury

At this time, unknown to Gaitskell, the Opposition, or even half the Cabinet, the British and French were about to enter the final stage of the episode.

Between 16-24 October, the British, French and Israeli Governments took the fateful decision at Sèvres for Israel to attack Egypt in Sinai, thus presenting the Anglo-French alliance with the excuse to separate the combatants by reoccupying and taking control of the Canal Zone. On 29 October Israeli troops invaded Sinai on the pretext of destroying commando bases used by the Egyptians for cross-border raids into Israel. The following day the Anglo-French ultimatum, for the Israeli and Egyptian forces to withdraw, was issued; while this was accepted by Israel, it was rejected by Egypt.<sup>92</sup>

Up to 30 October 1956, no one on the Labour benches had any clear indication that an attack was imminent. The previous day, Alf Robens had met Eden and Lloyd to voice Labour concern over Israel's invasion. At a Shadow Cabinet meeting at noon on 30th October, Robens told his colleagues that his talks with Tory leaders had not revealed their intentions.<sup>93</sup> Gaitskell and Griffiths decided to see Eden themselves and approached Butler to arrange a meeting later that afternoon. Butler informed them that as talks with the French were in progress, their request for a private notice question could be put at 3.30pm, the Prime Minister would see them at 4.00pm and make a statement in the House half an hour later. Eden and Lloyd met the Labour leaders at 4.15pm and gave them a copy of the ultimatum. Griffiths reaction was one of astonishment, saying "Good God, this is war!"<sup>94</sup>

After Eden had read out the declaration in the House, a full meeting of the PLP was called. Gaitskell, Griffiths and Robens recommended that the Government should give an undertaking that no British forces would be sent into Egypt until Parliament had considered the matter and the UN Security Council (meeting at that moment) had made its decision. If they refused, Labour would have no alternative but to divide the House.<sup>95</sup> In the debate

that followed, Eden's refusal to grant Labour requests to wait for the UN decision, despite constant pleas to do so, were followed by scathing attacks from Gaitskell, Alf Robens, Denis Healey and other Labour MPs. This provoked an angry response from Lloyd, who ridiculed Labour's complaints of not being informed, '...really, the idea that the government of the day can take action only after prior agreement with the Opposition'.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile at the Security Council, an American resolution which called for an Israeli withdrawal was vetoed by the British and French. This was the first time that Britain, one of the founders and leading proponents of that organisation, had exercised her veto. The following day (31 October) the British and French air forces began their bombardment of Egyptian airfields. Although the Shadow Cabinet and the PLP had no idea of the decision or timing of these attacks, the belief that an invasion was imminent made the meetings held that morning particularly tense. The outcome was that the Labour Party should, '...utterly oppose the war which has been forced on this country by the Government...that it was now necessary to carry this campaign to the country...and arrangements for demonstrations would take place'.<sup>97</sup>

At 4.00pm that afternoon Gaitskell told the Prime Minister that in Labour's view, the Government were committing an act of 'disastrous folly', the tragic consequences of which would last for years, causing irreparable damage to Britain's prestige and reputation. This, he claimed, abandoned the three principles that dominated British foreign policy: Commonwealth solidarity; the Anglo-American alliance and adherence to the UN Charter. It was also particularly ill-timed, considering the situation in Hungary and eastern Europe. He concluded that Labour could not support the action that had been taken, that they felt bound to oppose it by every means possible and appealed for Tory dissidents to fight it too. As the debate continued, Labour MPs were not impressed with Eden's statement that Britain was going in to ensure the

'separation of the combatants' or Lloyd's claim that there was no prior agreement between Britain, France and Israel.<sup>98</sup>

If the atmosphere in the House of Commons was tense on 31 October, then it descended into chaos on 1 November. The new Minister of Defence, Antony Head, (Monckton's replacement) attempted to make a statement about the military situation in Egypt. When he announced the bombing raids on Egyptian airfields and the sinking of a frigate by the Royal Navy, he was constantly shouted down. Gaitskell, Silverman and Shinwell all demanded to know why the British Government were acting in defiance of the UN, why there had been no declaration of war and whether there was any intention to use land forces next? Eden's reply, which evaded the issues of Britain's war status or if the Geneva Convention applied, infuriated Labour MPs. After the Prime Minister defended the attack on Egypt and condemned Labour's lack of support for British troops going into action, the furore forced the Speaker of the House to suspend the sitting for half an hour; the first time that this had occurred since 1924. After it reconvened, Gaitskell's attempts to clarify the situation were ignored by Eden and Head. As the Government were unwilling to respond, James Griffiths moved Labour's official motion, which condemned,

'...the actions of HMG in resorting to armed force against Egypt in clear violation of the UNO, thereby affronting...a large section of the British people, dividing the Commonwealth and gravely damaging the foundations of international order.'<sup>99</sup>

The following day, after Eden claimed that many other nations supported Britain, (in fact the UN General Assembly voted 64 to 5 against Britain) Denis Healey, in effect called him a "liar". On 3 November, Gaitskell launched another passionate attack on the Government and again appealed for anti-Suez Tories to vote against Eden's policy.<sup>100</sup>

Throughout the debates between 31 October and 6 November, Parliament was subjected to scenes of unprecedented anger.<sup>101</sup> Tony Benn recorded that

he had never seen the House in such uproar, or the members so angry as on 1 November 1956. Four days later, hearing from a colleague that Gaitskell had almost come to blows with the Conservative MP, Sir Robert Gray, Benn believed that fighting between MPs was inevitable. Benn's fears were confirmed the following day when he met the Labour MP, George Wigg. His contemporary account provides a graphic picture of the emotions affecting both sides of the House,

'George came in breathing heavily and sat down beside me. "I've done a bloody silly thing," he said. "I've walloped a Tory." "You've done what?" I asked. "I've walloped a Tory." he repeated "A few minutes ago in the members cloakroom. I was reading the ticker tape when he came up, and read an item about Gaitskell. It was Leslie Thomas. [A Conservative MP] He said, 'Gaitskell's a bloody traitor.' I said I'd rather be led by a bloody traitor than a f...ing murderer. He asked me to come outside and as we left the cloakroom he swiped at me. So I gave him one in the belly and two or three more and he went down like a felled ox.'<sup>102</sup>

The memoirs of Douglas Jay also demonstrate the atmosphere in Parliament during that period,

'From the morning of 31 October right through to Saturday 3 November the House debated Suez almost continuously, with repeated divisions and unprecedented sittings throughout Friday and Saturday. The first climax came, when as Eden again refused to call off the invasion, the whole Opposition side of the House stood up and called on him to resign as he walked out. The indignation and uproar were spontaneous, and behind the Speakers chair accusations of 'murderer' were thrown to and fro...'<sup>103</sup>

Denis Healey has written that in the whole of his political life he had never been so angry for so long as he was during the Suez affair.<sup>104</sup>

Anger over Suez was not restricted to Parliament. Labour's stand was supported by the Manchester Guardian and Observer as well as, rather belatedly, the Daily Mirror and Daily Herald.<sup>105</sup> Tribune was as outspoken as usual: under the headline, 'A Crime Against the World', Michael Foot called the Suez venture a disaster, demanded the destruction of Eden's administration and called for demonstrations to take place against Tory policy.<sup>106</sup> On 4 November (the same day as Soviet forces crushed the Hungarian uprising) a 'Law, Not War' rally was held in Trafalgar Square.



Addressed by Labour speakers including Aneurin Bevan, it attracted thousands of protestors. Although the rally, one of the largest ever assembled in London, passed off peacefully, 27 arrests were made when a section of the crowd marched on Downing Street.

During the next few days, Labour and Conservative leaders presented their respective cases on television. In response to the Prime Minister's broadcast on 3 November, Gaitskell called the plans to invade Egypt an act of aggression, and ridiculed Eden's excuse that the situation could not wait for a UN decision because it was actually Britain's veto that had caused the delays. He chastised the Government for having split the country, brought about international condemnation and forfeited Britain's moral standing in the world at the very moment of Soviet aggression in Hungary. The Labour leader demanded that the invasion should be abandoned, the UN ceasefire accepted and troops diverted to the Arab-Israeli borders. He ended with an appeal to Tories who did not support the policy to vote against it, and called for Eden's resignation.<sup>107</sup>

After the ceasefire was announced two days later, Selwyn Lloyd appeared on television. He condemned Labour's refusal to support the troops and went on to claim that British intervention had made it possible to assemble an international police force to control the area. James Griffiths replied for the Labour Party the following evening. Dismissing Tory excuses, he pointed out that the UN General Assembly had voted by 65 votes to 1 for the withdrawal of British troops as Lloyd was speaking. In Griffiths' view, the ceasefire was a victory brought about by the common sense of the British people.<sup>108</sup>

The Labour broadcasts, especially Gaitskell's appeal to Tory dissidents, provoked an angry backlash and as his biographer points out, were actually counter-productive.<sup>109</sup> Even though many Conservatives were alarmed at Eden's actions (as Monckton, Nutting and Boyle clearly were), the possibility

of Eden being overthrown and the Government collapsing, and worse still the prospect of a Labour administration, made such an outcome unlikely. Compounded by what had happened in Trafalgar Square and a feeling that Egypt should be punished, it was hardly surprising that Gaitskell's speech and Griffiths' exposure of the Tories' failures should have caused such a reaction against the Labour Party.

Labour continued to press the Government in Parliament on 12 November, deploring the economic effects of the Crisis. On the same day, Nasser accepted an emergency UN force into Egypt, which prompted an Israeli withdrawal from most of Sinai. Despite the UN Secretary General's visit to Egypt on 16-17 November and the American refusal to offer Britain financial help unless they withdrew, the British and French were still not prepared to pull their troops out. In the hope that their situation would improve, they replied that this would only be considered if the replacement international force was capable of completing the tasks set for it, including the clearance of the Canal. On 19 November it was announced that Eden was suffering from 'severe overstrain' and four days later he left to convalesce in Jamaica, replaced temporarily by Butler. It was not until 30 November that the Cabinet concluded that unconditional withdrawal of British forces was inevitable.<sup>110</sup>

The Government, faced with a humiliating climb down, would not admit this. As pressure mounted, Butler gave the first signal of conforming with the UN when he referred to its progress as an 'effective intervention.' He added, rather desperately, that this had been made possible by the Anglo-French action.<sup>111</sup> On 3 December Selwyn Lloyd stretched this theme even further, with the claim that the Arab-Israeli war had enabled the Soviet Union to interfere, supply arms to Nasser and threaten a large scale war. It was against this deterioration that the Anglo-French forces had intervened on 30 October and prevented a resumption of hostilities. Incredibly, he

claimed that this had resulted in the aversion of a general war and allowed an international peace-keeping force to be placed in position.<sup>112</sup>

This 'version' allowed Labour further opportunity to attack the Government. Lloyd's justification was greeted with derision by the Opposition benches, even more so when they were accused of having contributed to the withdrawal by a leading member of the Suez group. Aneurin Bevan, Labour's foreign affairs spokesman, led the attack in the Commons two days later. Picking apart the Tory claims of 'separating the combatants', their justification of 'ensuring safe passage of the Canal' and 'preparing the way for the UN', Bevan condemned the Government's successive excuses for the attack on Egypt. In what has been described as both a brilliant and witty performance, Bevan savaged the Tories relentlessly, followed closely by other Labour speakers.<sup>113</sup>

#### 8. Widespread Unity, Negligible Dissent

With their credibility subjected to increased scrutiny and exposure, it was perhaps inevitable that the Government and their supporters would attempt to divide their Labour opponents. Although Labour had suffered from these attacks since the Conservative's Llandudno Conference, this tactic grew increasingly vicious after the ceasefire. In both the Tory press and Parliament, attempts to divide the Labour leadership were pursued relentlessly. While Gaitskell was accused of treachery and reacting with 'pure hysteria', Bevan was applauded for his 'controlled and statesmanlike approach'.<sup>114</sup>

Despite the campaign to exaggerate and promote differences within Labour ranks, this largely failed. Within the Shadow Cabinet, unity against the Government's Suez policy appeared solid.<sup>115</sup> The most likely clash would have been expected to have come from Gaitskell's old rival, Aneurin Bevan.

However, after some initial doubts, this did not materialise and the years of emnity appeared forgotten when Bevan replaced Robens as the Party's foreign affairs spokesman on 28 November.<sup>116</sup> The arguments over a 'rapprochement' continue: while Michael Foot insists that Bevan was impressed by Gaitskell's performance and that Shadow Cabinet solidarity was genuine, David Howell points out that '...the spirit of reconciliation within the Party was facilitated by the Government's difficulties over Suez and the economy, with Bevan settling for influence on the inside'. John Campbell holds a similar view: in his opinion the prospect of office was a powerful incentive to keep on pulling together, one which Bevan himself, once he had the promise of a job worth having, would not miss.<sup>117</sup>

While the Shadow Cabinet appeared immune to the Tory manoeuvres, one source of dissent closer to home was a cause for concern. Despite overwhelming unity within the PLP as a whole, some dissent returned once the military action began. The most conspicuous revolt against the Party's line came from Stanley Evans, the Labour MP for Wednesbury.<sup>118</sup> In August, Evans had closely followed Morrison's line and, while his constituency party were unhappy about this, he did not receive an official reprimand until September. Nevertheless, Evans continued to criticise Labour's official policy. On 30 October, when Labour condemned Eden's ultimatum to Egypt, Evans argued against the decision to divide the House over the issue, and abstained in the vote which the Government won by 52 votes. In Parliament two days later, he attacked Labour's decision to oppose the use of force, and declared that he found it '...neither improper nor immoral to defend British interests'. He then criticised the Party's support for the American policy, and claimed that they had obstructed British interests in the Middle East. Turning to Labour's faith in the UN, he claimed that this was misguided, as the organisation was totally ineffective in helping Britain. While Labour MPs were shocked and dismayed by this outburst, it delighted Eden and the



Conservatives, even more so when Evans defied a three-line whip and abstained on Labour's censure motion.<sup>119</sup>

Evans' antics on 30 October and 1 November singled him out as the leading maverick. On 17 November he was summoned to a meeting of his CLP, who unanimously voted for his removal as their MP. Although this course of action was not technically enforceable, Evans resigned anyway. At a PLP meeting five days later, John Hynd asked the NEC to persuade Evans to leave the Party altogether. Herbert Bowden, the Chief Whip, replied that he and the other Committee members had decided that the matter should not be taken any further, so Evans was allowed to remain a member of the Labour Party.<sup>120</sup> Although very few in number, the pro-Suez Labour MPs were certainly a source of embarrassment. The reluctance to act against rebels such as Evans, was mainly due to a desire to keep any divisions out of the limelight. After all, media coverage of any dissent would damage the image of unity that Labour leaders were anxious to project, and provoke further mischief from their opponents. Because of this Morrison, Paget and Evans continued to criticise Labour's policy well into the following year, without censure.

Apart from this, the only other anticipated opposition in the PLP was that from the 17 Jewish Labour MPs.<sup>121</sup> There was an understandable inclination amongst many Jews in Britain to support Israel and the same tendency extended to some, though not all Jewish MPs. Labour's opposition to Tory policy appeared to present them with a dilemma: the choice of supporting their own Party, with its long-standing sympathy for Israel, or a Tory Government which had become openly hostile to Egypt and was now Israel's ally. This problem became even more complicated when the attack on Sinai was launched. Despite the dilemma, almost all of them supported the official line and voted with their colleagues in the divisions of 1 and 8 November.<sup>122</sup>

The notable exception was Emanuel Shinwell. Although he voted against the Government on 1 and 8 November, his vote on 30 October was not recorded. After the cessation of the military action, it became clear that Shinwell's position had shifted. Despite his support in the later divisions, he publicly indicated that he had deliberately abstained in the 30 October vote. He added that the Anglo-French intervention was justified because the UN had failed to take prompt action.<sup>123</sup> At the time, his abstention was not regarded as a serious breach of Party discipline. Six other Labour votes went unrecorded on that day, and was not a clear violation of Party rules as Epstein's study makes clear.<sup>124</sup> Had it happened once the military action was under way, and Shinwell had taken the same action in the later votes against a three-line whip, it would have been a different matter. Shinwell later wrote that he approved of the Government's policy, that Eden had taken the right course of action under the circumstances and should have seen it through. His motivation appears to stem mainly from his resentment of Gaitskell, as vividly reflected in his later memoirs.<sup>125</sup>

Of course, these isolated incidents concerned the Labour leadership, although it is equally clear that the vast majority of Labour MPs supported their policy. By the ceasefire on 6 November, out of 218 Labour MPs, only Evans had openly defied the whip, a remarkable achievement over such a divisive issue. Epstein has called the degree of PLP solidarity during the Crisis impressive, because the leadership received virtually unanimous support.<sup>126</sup> Of course, there were doubts, but these only emerged after the middle of November, and reflected the change in British public opinion once the military action against Egypt had begun.

#### 9. The Aftermath: Public Opinion, Doubts and Resolution

While Gaitskell's appeal to Conservative dissidents had failed to achieve the desired effect, just the opposite in fact, then Griffiths' claim - that the fiasco

had been ended by the common sense of the British people - was also somewhat optimistic. There is little doubt that many people in Britain opposed the Tories' Suez policy, but many approved of it too. In a British Institute of Public Opinion (BIPO) survey in September 1956, a sample had been asked whether they supported the way in which Eden had handled the Suez situation: 42 per cent of those questioned replied that they did. By the beginning of December, when the military action was over and a humiliating withdrawal only days away, the same question was posed and 51 per cent approved. Even some traditional Labour supporters had rallied to the Government, many of them as eager to teach Nasser a lesson as Eden. When these Labour voters were polled in early November, 16 per cent approved which rose to 22 per cent in early December.<sup>127</sup> Although the Government never received an absolute majority, public support actually increased once the action was over. Many of those who had opposed military action at first, changed their minds once the troops were committed.

These poll results concerned some Labour MPs. Richard Crossman, who had praised Gaitskell's earlier attacks on the Tories up to 6 November, now changed his mind. Two weeks later, he wrote that the Party had not received the full support over Suez for which it had hoped: instead, Gaitskell's continued harassment of the Government had had a negative effect on public opinion.<sup>128</sup> Although Denis Healey regarded the policy as correct, he expressed concern about the adverse effect that Suez was having on traditional Labour supporters, rather than the 'floating' votes that worried Crossman. When these concerns were aired, Gaitskell's reaction was unrepentant. He angrily replied that the policy was morally correct and could not be abandoned simply because it was unpopular.<sup>129</sup>

Although the Labour Party felt vindicated, the ultimate aim, to defeat and oust the Government, was never really feasible even though they had suffered such a humiliating defeat. On 22 December, two days after Eden had

denied collusion in Parliament, the evacuation of British troops from the Canal Zone was completed. Macmillan replaced Eden on 9 January 1957 and soon restored the Government's fortunes, both at home and abroad. In April the Suez Canal reopened. Somewhat ironically, Egypt accepted a settlement based on the 'six principles' for international management, which had been negotiated the previous October between the Egyptian, British and French Foreign Ministers. In May 1957, the Government advised British shipping to return to the Canal, a decision which especially dismayed members of the Suez Group, because they had to accept Nasser's terms.

As these events unfolded, Labour continued to chastise the Government and pressed for an inquiry whenever the opportunity arose, which in turn provoked Tory anger.<sup>130</sup> However, after May 1957, the Suez episode quickly faded into the background, despite some Labour efforts to revive it. During public meetings in the following two years, and especially during the general election campaign of 1959, Bevan continued to denounce the Suez fiasco, while Gaitskell promised to hold a full inquiry if Labour won.<sup>131</sup> Despite these efforts, the Suez Affair hardly featured at all. As with most other foreign policy issues, the electorate preferred to relegate it to the background in favour of domestic considerations.

### **Conclusion**

In October 1956 the British Government had resorted to force in order to re-establish control over the Suez Canal, a decision that the Labour Party believed was disastrous and which they tried to stop. As a consequence, Labour has been blamed for breaking the bi-partisan approach to foreign policy followed since 1945. In the sense that the two main British political parties parted company over Suez, this is undoubtedly true. However, while Labour remained committed to the principles laid down by Bevin, the Tory action threatened the Atlantic Alliance and Commonwealth unity, two of the



three main tenets of British post-war foreign policy. In addition, Eden's Government actually used their veto for the first time in the UN in order to obstruct the very organisation that the British had helped establish. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Opposition's dismay erupted into the fury witnessed, in and out of Parliament, when the attack on Egypt began in October 1956.

The Labour leadership and many of its supporters felt justified in attacking a government that had lost its senses, which had simultaneously divided the nation and threatened Britain's international reputation. Labour's opposition had little immediate or long term effect in forcing the Tories out of office, and in the short term it probably lost them more support than they gained. Although the PLP was virtually united against the Government, they were never able to obtain a mass following for their policy. Suez was hardly mentioned during the 1959 general election campaign, when the Tories retained power with an increased majority. If Labour's aim had been to use Suez for partisan gain, as many of their opponents chose to believe, then it was a dismal failure.

Labour leaders had not condoned Nasser's actions and were as anxious as the Government to place the Canal under international control, but they were not prepared to use the 'gunboat tactics' of the British and French governments. Instead, they insisted that the dispute should be settled through the United Nations, a demand that reflected the long-term belief in internationalism and collective security. In theory, Labour was prepared to use force, but only if the United Nations sanctioned it. In practice, the composition of the UN made this particular eventuality extremely unlikely. This has led some to question Labour's motives: in the words of one historian, 'the appeal to the UN, like the earlier reliance on the League [of Nations], provided an ideal escape from the world of painful choices'.<sup>132</sup> Whatever the merits of this argument, Labour was certainly not alone in

their support for the UN over the issue: most of the international community followed the same line too.

Whether Labour's policy and strict adherence to the UN Charter was realistic in the uncertainty of the post-war world, the question of Labour's consistency over the use of force has been a battlefield ever since. Critics of their Suez policy, both then and since, have claimed that Labour originally supported the Government but had turned against them because of left-wing pressure. This case rests largely on Gaitskell's parliamentary performance in the 2 August debate. Yet, closer examination of the speech reveals that, while he condemned Nasser's actions and accepted the need for military preparations, he also urged caution over any armed response. It has also been suggested that the 'warning' towards the end of his speech was an afterthought. Under the circumstances, this is understandable for two reasons: first, concern over Labour being branded as unpatriotic and irresponsible; second, that right up to the ultimatum of 30 October 1956, neither Gaitskell nor any other Labour MPs really believed that force could be contemplated without full domestic and international support. In this they were far from alone.

Gaitskell and some of his close colleagues were alarmed over the press reports that the Government was determined to force Egypt into concessions by whatever means necessary and that Labour would support this policy. They had written and visited Eden privately several times in order to clarify the Government's position and express this concern. Because of the parliamentary recess from 3 August, these doubts were not in the public domain. By the end of August and certainly by mid-September, even the harshest of Labour's critics would have known of the Party's total condemnation against the use of force. Whether a leader of the Opposition had any right to be consulted during the Crisis or not, it goes a long way to explain why Gaitskell and Labour reacted in such an angry manner when the invasion was launched.

Eden never mentioned these initial warnings, which were quite clear and to which his replies were vague. His memoirs also reveal little regard for Gaitskell, and as Anthony Nutting has written, Eden did not care what Labour wanted or said during the Crisis. Later critics have also ignored these warnings and persistently rely on the the August speech and Gaitskell's 'volte face', either not knowing, or choosing to ignore the full facts. The proponents of this 'myth' claim that the Labour Left had forced the leadership to change course. It was true that Gaitskell was a new leader, still suspected by the left-wing of pushing the Party to the right. The Tory press and some of their MPs, did everything they could to provoke a split in the Party in order to discredit Gaitskell and divert attention away from their own disastrous policy. The Labour leader's usual cool temperament had lapsed because of his desperation over the Suez affair, and this was ruthlessly turned against him.

After Eden's resignation, continuous taunts from his supporters did nothing to heal the rift between the Labour and Conservative benches, and for nearly a year after the Crisis Gaitskell found himself the object of bitter abuse every time he rose to speak in Parliament. Harold Macmillan, eager to repair Anglo-American relations, divert attention from the Government's record and launch a counter-attack, made no attempt to regain the confidence of the Opposition or its leader. As a result, the mutual distrust that had developed between the Labour leadership and Eden during the Crisis continued to sour relations between Gaitskell and Macmillan. While Gaitskell remained bound to 'traditional' British overseas interests, he no longer felt bound to follow the policies of a Prime Minister and administration that he considered reckless, opportunist and irresponsible. Suez constituted a major turning point because above all else, Labour support for the Government's foreign policy could no longer be taken for granted, as later events proved.

Labour radicals also believed grass roots pressure had forced a change, but the evidence refutes this. Left-wing pressure certainly existed, but was insufficient (not more than 30 MPs, even in early August) to force any change that could be regarded as a somersault. While some Labour leaders expressed concern about threats to unity, Gaitskell's own rigid commitment to any particular policy is well known and makes it most unlikely that he would have changed course without overwhelming pressure. As most Labour MPs were away because of the recess, and would have followed the leadership's direction anyway, this threat never arose. By late August, many on the Left had been reassured, and by mid-September virtually the whole of the Labour Movement was firmly behind the leadership. While the radical s' case was understandable due to their recent lack of success in shaping policy, it was nevertheless exaggerated.

Where opposition was prolonged, it came more from the far Right of the Party, and especially from those with an axe to grind. Five spokesmen from this wing contributed to the 2 August debate and all supported the Tory line to a degree: one even criticised other Labour colleagues. Whereas left-wing opposition evaporated very quickly, the Right's continued, fading in mid-October but re-emerging when the military operation began. More problems arose from former prominent Labour figures who held personal grudges against Gaitskell, and who used Suez in an effort to embarrass and challenge him. However, Morrison was away through much of the Crisis and Shinwell's opposition only became known much later. Like the Left, both groups were negligible and unlikely to influence the bulk of the Party or threaten the leadership. More concern centred on the swing of public opinion away from Labour after the military defeat and the later withdrawal from the Canal; but even here, and despite the reservations of Crossman and others, Gaitskell would not alter course.

In essence, Labour believed in a bi-partisan approach to foreign policy, but Suez was not conducted in this manner. None of the Labour leaders were informed of the Government's intentions, and what information was received, persuaded them that war would be averted. The Government, its supporters then and sympathisers since, well aware of the damage they had caused, were not prepared to take the blame and needed a scapegoat. Resentment of Gaitskell, frustration over Labour's moral indignation as well as their repeated attempts to thwart government policy, provided the Tories with an opportunity to retaliate: thus, the myth of Labour's treachery and Gaitskell's 'political somersault' was born. Yet the evidence suggests that the prime factor in their argument, left-wing pressure, was minimal, short-lived and certainly never enough to have caused a major U-turn. If there was a 'threat' from within, it came from the far Right, not the Left. Overall, Labour's unity during the Suez affair was impressive. Whatever the arguments over the realism of their adherence to the UN, or the charge that they had pursued a partisan attack in order to bring the Government down, they at least demonstrated a commitment to Britain's international reputation, which Eden's administration did not.



## Notes for Chapter Two

1. Three notable examples include Carlton,D. Britain and the Suez Crisis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Kyle,K. Suez (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991) and Scott Lucas,W. Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).
2. An important exception is Epstein,L,D. (1964).
3. Labour Party The Truth About Suez (London: Labour Party, Dec 1956).
4. Butler,D,E. & Rose,R. The British General Election of 1959 (London: Macmillan, 1960), p.64.
5. In particular, from Anthony Eden. See Eden,A. (1960), p.445.
6. For contemporary reaction see, Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 1 Nov 1956, Cols.1657-64. Later, Eden,A. (1960), p.445; James,R,R. Anthony Eden (London: Macmillan, 1987); Julian Amery in Troen,S,I. & Shemesh,M. (Eds), The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal (London: Frank Cass, 1990), p.119.  
The critics are not all from the political right. Emanuel Shinwell, somewhat belatedly and for dubious reasons held the same view Shinwell,E. (1973), p.225.
7. Jay,D. (1980), p.253; Wilson,H. Memoirs: The Making of a Prime Minister 1916-64 (London: Weidenfeld, Nicolson & Joseph, 1986), p.166; Williams,P,M. (1979), esp. pp.420-1 & 424-5 and in the introduction of HGD (1983), p.xiii. Also see Epstein,L,D. (1964), p.66.
8. Foot,M. (1975), pp.517-18.
9. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 27 July 1956, Cols.777-78 (Gaitskell).
10. HGD 30 July 1956, pp.562-3; PCM 31 July 1956; Griffiths,J. (1969), p.151.
11. Gaitskell was particularly critical of Hynd and Benn's support for Nasser. HGD 3 August 1956, p567; Healey recalls that Gaitskell saw the meeting as a complete waste of time and was extremely critical of the Foreign Affairs Group. Source: Denis Healey, 8 June 1991. Benn and Warbey's accounts confirm this view. Neither were satisfied with Gaitskell's assurances and felt that they had been treated with contempt. Warbey in Tribune 10 Aug 1956 and Tony Benn, Interview London, 5 June 1991.
12. Jay,D. (1980), p.254.
13. HGD 2-3 Aug 1956, p.568.
14. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Cols.1602-6 (Eden).
15. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Cols.1609-17 (Gaitskell).

16. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Cols.1617-20 (Waterhouse) and Col.1621 (Davies).
17. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Cols.1624, 1629 & 1630 (Healey); Cols.1631, 1664-67 (Paget); Cols.1633-36 (Evans); Cols.1653-61 (Morrison); Col.1661 (Lloyd). The other Labour speakers who followed this line were, Cols.683-4 (Frank Tomney) and Cols.1712-15 (Jack Jones).
18. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Cols.1641-49 (Warbey).
19. The Times 3 Aug 1956.
20. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Col.1640 (Hitchinbrooke) and Col.1671 (Waterhouse). Later, Eden,A. (1960), p.440 and not so partisan, Northedge,F.S. (1974), p.131.
21. James,R,R. (1987), p.482.
22. 35 years later, Tony Benn recalled that the speech had given an utterly false impression of Labour sympathies. Tony Benn, Interview London, 5 June 1991. Also see Winstone,R.(Ed) Tony Benn. Years of Hope: Diaries, Letters and Papers 1940-1962 (London: Hutchinson, 1994), 5 Nov 1956, p.203 [hereafter known as TBD].
23. Tribune 3 Aug 1956.
24. Tribune 10 Aug 1956. A line taken by Paul Johnson a year later: see Johnson,P. The Suez War (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957), p.51.
25. Gaitskell himself felt surprised and embarrassed by so much praise from the Tories. HGD 2-3 Aug 1956, p.569.
26. Kyle,K. (1991), pp.164-5.
27. Manchester Guardian 3 Aug 1956; Times 3 Aug 1956.
28. Johnson,P. (1957), p.52; Source: Tony Benn, Interview 5 June 1991.
29. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.423.
30. James,R,R. (1987), p.482.
31. Source: Frank Allaun, London, 3 Apr 1993; James Griffiths, Deputy Leader of the PLP 1955-59 and one of Gaitskell's closest allies, later wrote that the Labour leader had over-done the 'Nasser-Hitler line. Griffiths,J. (1969), p.151; Hugh Thomas points out that the Tories only remembered those parts of the speech which they had cheered. Thomas,H. The Suez Affair (London: Penguin, 1970), p.64.
32. Kyle,K. (1991), p.165.
33. Johnson,P. (1957), p.52.

34. Donoghue, B. & Jones, G.W. Herbert Morrison. Portrait of a Politician (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), pp.545-6. According to Mikardo, Morrison was 'predictably...more Edenesque than Eden'. Mikardo, I. (1988), p.157.
35. For Gaitskell's thoughts on this see: HGD 2-3 Aug 1956, p.568.
36. Jay, D. (1980), p.254; HGD 22 Aug 1956, p.579.
37. HGD 2-3 Aug 1956, p.568. Douglas Jay later wrote that Gaitskell was 'extremely reluctant to believe the warnings I passed on to him.' Jay, D. (1980), p.261.
38. E.g. 'Time Limit to be Set: Force if talks Fail' Daily Telegraph 3 Aug 1956; 'The position is that Britain and France are prepared to take action if reasonable agreement cannot be reached' Times 3 Aug 1956; 'We use force if Nasser says "No"' Daily Mirror 3 Aug 1956.
39. Letter from Gaitskell to Eden, 3 Aug 1956. HGD Doc. pp.570-1.
40. Times 7 Aug 1956; Jay, D. (1980), p.254.
41. Griffiths, J. (1969), pp.151-2. Of course, Griffiths' reaction was also prompted by fears of left-wing reaction.
42. Letter from Eden to Gaitskell, 6 Aug 1956 and letter from Gaitskell to Mrs Skelly (his secretary), 8 Aug 1956. HGD Docs. p.572.
43. Quoted in Northedge, F.S. (1974), p.130.
44. Manchester Guardian 10 Aug 1956.
45. James, R.R. (1987), p.492; Kyle, K. (1991), p.184.
46. Griffiths, J. (1969), pp.152-3.
47. Letter from Gaitskell to Eden, 10 Aug 1956. HGD Doc. pp.574-5.
48. For text of the interview see: Doc. on interview between Griffiths and Robens with Eden and Salisbury, 10 Aug 1956 at 10 Downing St. HGD Doc. pp 575-8; Griffiths later recorded that Salisbury looked worried and anxious at this interview. Griffiths, J. (1969), p.153.
49. PCM 13 Aug 1956; HGD 22 Aug 1956, pp.580-1; Jay, D. (1980), pp.256 & 261; Griffiths, J. (1969), p.153.  
According to Hugh Thomas, Gaitskell had been told of the size of the British force by Dom Mintoff, the Maltese Labour leader, but did not altogether believe him; nor George Wigg MP, who had recently resigned as Labour's army spokesman. Thomas, H. (1970) pp.74-5.
50. Labour Party, Press Notice [untitled], 13 Aug 1956.
51. HGD 22 Aug 1956, p.582; A view shared by, Griffiths, J. (1969) p.153.



52. For text of interview see Labour Party The Suez Crisis: Labour's Fight for Peace (London: Labour Party, Sept 1956), p.15.

53. Unlike the Shadow Cabinet, there were no meetings of the PLP from the start of the parliamentary recess on 3 Aug until its reconvention for the emergency debate on the Crisis on 12 Sept. Between that date and 30 October no other formal PLP meetings took place.

54. Tribune 3 Aug 1956.

55. Mikardo, I. (1988), pp.157-8.

56. This meeting took place at 'The Lamb' public house in Conduit St., London on 3 Aug 1956. Tom Driberg was one of the MPs present; Irene Wagner and Hugh Jenkins, also there, felt that Gaitskell's speech supported the government line and had to be reversed. Source: Irene Wagner, London, 3 Apr 1993.

57. Tribune 10 Aug 1956.

58. Daily Telegraph 10 Aug 1956.

59. For the full text of the letter, see File 1/11 'Suez' in Section One of Hugh Jenkins Papers BLPES.

60. HGD 22 Aug 1956, p.581. According to Williams, it was this concern that prompted Griffiths and Robens to circulate the text of the 2 Aug speech to Labour MPs, PPCs, trades unionists and CLPs. Williams, P.M. (1979), p.425.

61. Tribune 17 Aug 1956.

62. RCD 5 Sept 1956, p.508.

63. Tribune 24 Aug 1956.

64. Hugh Jenkins (London County Councillor and Chairman of VFS, 1956-60), in a speech to the City of London and Westminster CLP [undated]. File 1/11 Hugh Jenkins Papers.

Another result of the Left's initial concern was the establishment of the Suez Emergency Committee under the leadership of William Warbey. Although one of Gaitskell's fiercest critics initially, Warbey also soon reconciled himself to the leadership, and the group helped organise the demonstrations that took place in November.

65. This was held between 16-23 Aug 1956. The Conference for the 'Maritime Powers' (22 originally) had been arranged by Britain, France and the USA on 3 August 1956.

66. Meetings with government officials such as Peter Thorneycroft and Alan Lennox-Boyd appeared to confirm this impression. HGD 22 Aug 1956, pp.584-6 & 3 Sept 1956, p.591.

67. For a full account of the conference, see Kyle, K. (1991), pp.192-9.

68. HGD 26 Aug 1956, pp.586-7; Also see Doc. No.18 'Memo of Conversation between Dulles and H.G.' 24 Aug 1956, in HGD pp.588-90. Dulles actually sharply disapproved of Labour's critical attitude to the Government's position, believing that bi-partisanship would give Britain the best chance of retaining her position peacefully. Kyle,K. (1991), p.197.
69. Reynolds News 26 Aug 1956.
70. Manchester Guardian, Daily Herald, & News Chronicle 31 Aug 1956.
71. HGD 3 Sept 1956, p.592; Labour Party, (Sept 1956), p.19; RCD 5 Sept 1956, p.507.
72. The Times, having received the letter from Healey and Jay, plus the press release, now began to attack Labour, labelling them as 'friends of any country but their own'. Times 30 Aug 1956. This provoked a furious response from Bevan in Tribune 31 Aug 1956.
73. Eden certainly appears to have viewed Morrison's 2 August parliamentary speech as a pledge of full Labour support. Eden,A. (1960), p.440. See pp.323 & 320 for his regard for Morrison and distrust of Gaitskell.
74. James,R,R. (1987), pp.492 & 513; Also see Donoughue,B. & Jones,G,W. (1973), p.546.
75. HGD 5 Sept 1956, pp.598-9.
76. From an interview with Lord Avon by Donoughue and Jones. Eden believed Morrison a 'steadying influence'; the Premier's own relations with the Opposition would have been much better if he had stayed on. Donoughue,B. & Jones,G,W. (1973), p.546.
77. Williams,P,M. (1979) p.428; According to Rhodes James, Gaitskell was fully aware of this. James,R,R. (1987), pp.513-4; Epstein,L,D. (1964), p.79.
78. For text of Geddes' speech, see Labour Party, (Sept 1956), pp.19-20.
79. See Kyle,K. (1991), pp.219-222; Eden,A. (1960), pp.474-5 & Louis,R,Wm & Owen,R. (1989), p.122.
80. PCM 3.00pm. 11 Sept 1956 & PLPM 10.30am. 12 Sept 1956. Although many of Gaitskell's critics were there, including Warbey and Castle, there was no recorded dissent. Tony Benn, at first highly critical of Gaitskell over the issue, drafted a statement that could be used in the debate. Gaitskell replied, thanking Benn for his help, broadly agreeing with his suggestions and adding that these were the lines that would be pursued. Letter from Benn to Gaitskell, 'Draft of Suez Policy' 10 Sept 1956 & reply from Gaitskell 11 Sept 1956. Source: Benn Archive.  
In the Shadow Cabinet, Gaitskell also revealed his talks with Mollet (The French PM) and that he had been invited to Paris to discuss the Suez situation with the French socialists. This was not accepted. PCM 11 Sept 1956. See also HGD 14 Sept 1956, p.600.

Before Parliament was recalled, Gaitskell met Mollet (11 Sept). He told Gaitskell that France was determined to stand up to Nasser. After Gaitskell suggested that the UN was the only way forward to negotiate and reduce Nasser's prestige, Mollet replied that the UN was a sham, causing delays and letting Nasser get away with it. On force, Mollet said that,

'There would have to be an excuse...some kind of action...Nasser would either have to give way...or resist, and if he resisted there would be an excuse for force'.

Gaitskell believed that this was a sinister threat. HGD 14 Sept 1956 pp.599-600. James Griffiths had the same impression. Away when Gaitskell met Mollet, Griffiths recorded [in a page marked 'Very Secret and Confidential'] that on his return Gaitskell had told him what had been discussed, commenting,

'The most momentous and sinister thing that emerged was that - discussing what justified force - Mollet said, - with Nasser there - we should have an incident some day that will justify us. This was, I gathered, said almost as an after thought. But it stuck in my memory and kept coming up in all the subsequent controversy about collusion.'

Source: File E1/2, 27 Dec 1956 Griffiths Papers. This is not included in the drafts or final version of Griffiths' memoirs.

81. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 12 Sept 1958, Cols.11-15 (Eden), Cols. 16, 21-32 (Gaitskell). Only two days before Parliament was recalled, Gaitskell met Walter Monckton (Secretary of Defence) who confided that he totally opposed force and considered resigning over the issue. Although Gaitskell was sceptical about his intentions he believed (like Conservative Central Office's concern over opinion poll results that favoured a UN settlement) that this clearly showed the divisions that were opening up in Tory ranks. HGD 14 Sept 1956, pp.605-6.

82. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 13 Sept 1956, Col.176 (Robens), Cols.182-7 (Heald), Cols.297-304 (Gaitskell) and Col.305 (Eden).

83. Crossman felt that Eden had been 'boxed' in by the debate and recorded that there was an extraordinary air of exultation among the Labour side. RCD 14 Sept 1956, pp.515-16; Benn felt that Gaitskell had put up a magnificent performance which had electrified the Party. TBD 5 Nov 1956, p.204. Even Tribune praised Gaitskell whole-heartedly for his attitude and for refusing to co-operate with the Government. Tribune 14 Sept 1956; For a later assessment, see Jay,D. (1980), p.254.

84. HGD 14 Sept 1956, p.606; However, after press reports to the contrary, doubts set in and Gaitskell subsequently wrote to the Times pointing out that the interruption had drowned out the rest of Eden's reply, and that it was therefore uncertain whether Labour's demands had actually been met or not. HGD 23 Sept 1956, p.607. Also see Doc. No.19 Letter from Gaitskell to the Times written on 14 Sept 1956, pp.607-8.

85. Epstein,L,D. (1964), p.67.

86. Manchester Guardian 1 Oct 1956. Most contemporary commentators, even Gaitskell's critics, agreed on this. Later studies come to the same conclusion, e.g. James,R,R. (1987), p.514.

87. See the Daily Telegraph, Daily Express & Evening Standard from mid-September to October 1956.
88. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.430-1
89. LPCR 1956, pp.70-78.
90. Jay and Healey in the Daily Mirror 2 Oct 1956; RCD 26 Oct 1956, p.653; TBD 5 Nov 1956, p.204.
91. Quoted in Kyle,K. (1991), pp.284-5; Although Nutting's speech savaged Labour, he later wrote that he had tried to tone it down. Nutting,A. (1967), p.82.
92. For more on this, see Kyle,K. (1991), pp.314-331; Carlton,D. (1988), pp.56-81 and Scott Lucas,W. (1991), pp.237-256.
93. PCM 12.00 am, 30 Oct 1956.
94. Griffiths, clearly still angry thirteen years later, wrote, 'this was how the Opposition - representing half the nation - was consulted about an act of war'. Griffiths,J. (1969), p.154. Douglas Jay has written that Gaitskell 'was just as staggered and incredulous as the rest of us...saying later, I will never believe anything Eden says in print or public again'. Jay,D. (1980), p.261. Also see Thomas,H. (1970), p.138. Even Eden admitted that consulting Labour's leaders only 15 minutes before the statement was a mistake. Eden,A. (1960), p.527.
95. PCM 5.45pm 30 Oct 1956 and PLPM 7.00pm 30 Oct 1956.
96. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 30 Oct 1956, Cols.1341-4 (Eden), Cols.1344-51 & 1373 (Gaitskell), Col.1353 (Mellish), Cols.1356-60, (Mikardo), Cols.1367-71 (Mayhew), Cols.1371-73 (Robens), Col.1375 (Healey) and for the Foreign Secretary's response, Cols.1373-8 (Lloyd).
97. PCM 10.00am 31 Oct 1956; Censure Motion PLPM 11.00am 31 Oct 1956; PCM 12.30pm 31 Oct 1956.
98. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 31 Oct 1956 Cols.1454,1458-9,1461-2 (Gaitskell) and Col.1569 (Lloyd). For press reaction see Manchester Guardian 1 Nov 1956, which classed Gaitskell's attack on Eden as 'savage' and the Daily Telegraph 1 Nov 1956, who viewed his speech as, '...perhaps the most forceful speech Mr Gaitskell has ever made in the House of Commons'.
99. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 1 Nov 1956, Cols.1619-20 (Head), Cols.1620-1, 1623-4 (Gaitskell), Cols.1620-1, 1623 (Silverman), Col.1621 (Shinwell), Cols.1624-5 (Eden) and Col.1631 (Griffiths). The heated exchanges did not subside as the debate continued. When reports of disturbances outside Westminster involving anti-Suez demonstrators became known inside, it prompted the Labour MP, Betty Braddock to condemn the Conservative members as murderers. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 1 Nov 1956, Col.1745.



100. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.558, 2 Nov 1956, Col.1757 (Healey) and 3 Nov 1956, Cols.1859, 1862 & 1866 (Gaitskell).

101. For a flavour of the anger, see press reports of the Manchester Guardian and Daily Telegraph 1 & 2 Nov 1956.

102. Tony Benn Interview 5 June 1991; also see TBD 1, 5 & 6 Nov 1956, pp.195-205.

103. Jay,D. (1980), p.259.

104. Healey viewed Suez as a 'demonstration of moral and intellectual bankruptcy; in execution' he believed that, 'it was a political, diplomatic and operational disgrace'. Healey,D. The Time of My Life (London: Penguin, 1990), p.169. Interview: 8 June 1991. Also see Castle,B. (1993), p.253.

105. See the Manchester Guardian 1, 2, 6, 10, and 14 Nov 1956.

106. Tribune 2 Nov 1956. For the Trafalgar Square demonstrations see Thomas,H. (1970), pp.155-6. The National Council of Labour organised the 'Law - Not War' campaign at a special meeting on 1 Nov 1956.

Demonstrations were planned for Trafalgar Square and the Royal Albert Hall and were approved by the NEC. National Council of Labour NCLM p.1799 (16A22) 1 Nov 1956 and NECM 1 Nov 1956.

The demonstration in Trafalgar Square on 4 November 1956 attracted 10-15,000 people and Labour speakers included Anthony Greenwood, Beswick, Summerskill, Nicholas, Gunter and Bevan. The second, at the RAH on 6 November attracted 5,500 people with speakers including Gaitskell, Griffiths, Frank Cousins, Tom Williamson and Peggy Herbison. Both received extensive media reportage.

Between 4-11 November, several hundred demonstrations and public meetings took place. They took place in most larger towns and cities, i.e. Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol, Leicester, Derby, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Exeter etc.

107. Eden had broadcast on 3 November and Gaitskell had claimed the right to reply. Eden and the Chief Whip, Edward Heath, had tried hard to stop this, claiming that a reply to a ministerial broadcast was not necessary under the circumstances. In the end, the BBC accepted Gaitskell's right of reply, much to Tory annoyance. Tony Benn assisted with the speech and was instrumental in having it put on air. Benn's diary account of the way in which Gaitskell's broadcast was delayed by Harman Grisewood (BBC Director of Sound) and Sir Alexander Cadogan (BBC Chairman and a Director of the Suez Canal Co.) makes interesting reading. TBD 101 3-4 Nov 1956, pp.199-202. For full text of speech see Doc.20 'Gaitskell's broadcast on behalf of the Opposition'. Sunday 4 Nov 1956, in HGD pp.619-22.

108. Griffiths,J 'Labour Party Broadcast', BBC 8 Nov 1956. (L.P. Press & Publicity Dept, London). Source: File E1/2 James Griffiths Papers.

109. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.435.

110. See Kyle,K. (1991), pp.501-14.

111. Kyle, K. (1991), p.507.
112. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.561 3 Dec 1956 Cols.879-883 (Lloyd). His claim is worth quoting,  
'...we have stopped a local war. We have prevented it from spreading. The extent of Soviet penetration has been revealed. We have caused the U.N. to take action by the creation of an international force. We have alerted the whole world to a situation of great peril'. Col.883
113. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.561, 3 Dec 1956, Cols.889-90 (Amery); 5 Dec 1956, Vol.561 Cols.1268-82; Cols.1293-1300 (Dalton). For later assessments see, Campbell, J. (1987), p.325; Foot, M. (1975), p.533.
114. In Parliament, Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.561, 5 Dec 1956, Col.1471 (Macmillan) and Col.1520 (Butler). Crossman expressed surprise at the press campaign against Gaitskell. RCD 18 Dec 1956, p.556.
115. Griffiths, J. (1969) and Wilson, H. (1986), pp.64 & 166.
116. For contemporary accounts, see RCD 18 Dec 1956, pp.556-7; Pimlott, B. (Ed) The Political Diary of Hugh Dalton 1918-40, 1945-60 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), End of Dec 1956, p.683 [hereafter known as HDD]; TBD 29 Nov 1956, p.216. Foot, M. (1975), pp.516, 520 & 529. Foot's account of co-operation and unity is co-operated by Ian Mikardo and Harold Wilson, both of whom had been close to Bevan in the past. Mikardo, I. (1988), pp.156-7 & Wilson, H. (1986), p.159.
117. Howell, D. (1981), p.43 and Campbell, J. (1987), p.311.
118. Evans, an MP since 1945, was already a controversial figure who had resigned as a junior minister in Atlee's government almost immediately over Labour's agricultural subsidies for farmers. Evans was on the right-wing of the Party, particularly on foreign and colonial issues.
119. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.557, 2 Aug 1956, Cols.1633-36; Vol.558, 30 Oct 1956, Cols.1287, 1378 and 1 Nov 1956, Cols.1681-86 (Evans). In the PLP on 31 Oct, Evans argued that when British troops were involved, Labour should support the Government. The minutes show that the Chairman made a special appeal to any members who might not be in total agreement with the official line to do anything possible to 'keep in step and vote with the Party in the debate...most important that we should show a united front to the country at this time'. PLPM 31 Oct 1956. Bowden (Chief Whip) then announced that a three-line whip was in force till the end of the session.
120. PLPM 22 Nov 1956.
121. Because the nationalisation of the Canal meant that by October, Britain and Israel were in effect facing a common enemy - Egypt.
122. Epstein, L. D. (1964), p.188.
123. The Times 10 Nov 1956.

124. Epstein,L,D. (1964), p.189.

125. Shinwell,E. (1973), pp.225, 247. The nature of the attacks certainly give a strong impression that Shinwell was using Suez to settle old scores and discredit Gaitskell whenever possible. His claim that Gaitskell performed a political somersault for personal and Party gain have been challenged by Epstein,L,D. (1964), p.66 as well as Williams,P,M. (1979), p.436. They have also been rejected by Tony Benn, no admirer of Gaitskell now. Interview 6 June 1991.

126. Epstein,L,D. (1964), pp.75, 78.

127. Epstein,L,D. (1964), p.145.

128. RCD 7 & 21 Nov 1956, pp.541 & 547.

129. Healey,D. Int. 8 June 1991. For Gaitskell's insistence on this policy, see RCD 21 Nov 1956; Jay,D. (1980), p.259 and Castle,B. (1993), p.253.

130. At the end of 1956 a 28 page pamphlet was published, which condemned the Government, deplored the result of the intervention and justified Labour's stand. The Truth about Suez (London: Labour Party, Dec 1956).

131. Campbell,J. (1987), p.194. In 1959, Labour estimated the cost of Suez at £328m. From the 'Bill for Suez', extract from the Speakers handbook quoted in Thomas,H. (1970), p.228.

132. Robert Skidelsky in Bogdanor,V. & Skidelsky,R. (Eds) The Age of Affluence 1951-1964 (1970), p.182.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **The Fuse is Lit: The Bomb 1956-59**

The end of the Suez conflict witnessed Eden's resignation as Premier: the Conservative Party in disarray, in danger of being ousted from power; and the Labour Party united under the leadership of Hugh Gaitskell. In some respects, Suez appeared to mark the end of the bi-partisanship in foreign affairs that had existed since the end of World War Two. Labour had taken a different course from the Conservative Government, attracting strong criticism and accusations of treachery from the political right, and even dismay among some of its own supporters. However, the prospect of defeating and driving the Conservatives from office had had a galvanising effect and the unity in place at the end of 1956 looked set to continue with nearly all factions fully behind the Party leadership.<sup>1</sup>

After Suez, and before the general election of 1959, antagonism on foreign affairs between the two front benches focussed on several issues: continued concern over the Middle East; an escalation of violence in Cyprus; and the struggle for independence from British colonial rule in east Africa. However, these paled into insignificance with the onset of the nuclear dispute, an issue which dominated foreign and defence policy between government and opposition for years to come. Concern over nuclear tests and their effects were compounded by the Defence White Paper of April 1957. With its primary reliance on 'massive nuclear retaliation', even against conventional attack, the Sandys review provoked a wave of apprehension.<sup>2</sup>

In an attempt to benefit from this groundswell of opinion, the Labour leadership rather hesitantly challenged aspects of the Tories' nuclear policy. However, by doing so they were placed in a dilemma. Firstly, the principal motive for the Government's reliance on the H-bomb was based on economic considerations. Suez had convinced them that Britain's defence



capability and influence would be enhanced by possession of thermo-nuclear weapons, and that spending on costly conventional forces could be cut. Thus, Labour found themselves criticising a policy which had two goals that they had long advocated on grounds of economy, moral and political necessity, cuts in existing conventional forces and an end of conscription.

Secondly, there was the problem of taking a partisan approach on nuclear policy too far. The Labour administration of 1945-51 had taken the decision to go ahead with nuclear weapons in the first place. In 1955 they had approved the Conservative Government's decision to manufacture thermo-nuclear weapons, albeit with some dissent.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many Labour leaders were just as enthusiastic about the Bomb as the Tories. They thought it maintained Britain's influence in world affairs and, however mistakenly, demonstrated a degree of independence from the United States. Until 1960 at least, despite some differences in emphasis, Labour's official nuclear policy was virtually indistinguishable from that of the Tories.<sup>4</sup>

This led to the third and most compelling problem to face Labour. Between 1955-61 nuclear weapons grew from being a policy sideshow to nearly splitting the Party altogether.<sup>5</sup> While they later rejected an independent British nuclear deterrent (on economic grounds rather than moral considerations) Labour's official policy adhered to two basic principles: that nuclear weapons deterred aggression and their possession guaranteed influence in future disarmament negotiations. While disarmament was the desired goal, they believed that this could only be attained multilaterally. These principles were in stark contrast to growing hostility against nuclear weaponry as immoral, too expensive and as a threat to, rather than a guarantor of, world peace. With increasing concern over the possibility of a nuclear Armageddon, many on the Labour left (as well as many outside political party affiliation) believed that Britain should renounce nuclear weapons unilaterally, in order to retain Britain's moral leadership. Although

it was not initially restricted to an ideological position, the nuclear issue soon became enveloped in the struggle for power between left and right and provided the means with which to challenge Gaitskell and the leadership at Labour's annual conference in 1960.

This chapter examines the controversies surrounding Labour and the Bomb from Gaitskell's accession to the leadership until the 1959 general election. The leader's influence will be considered along with an assessment of Labour's official nuclear policy. The shift in the Party's attitude to nuclear weapons will be contrasted to the Government's defence policy, along with internal and external pressures on the Labour leadership. The view, that 1957-59 witnessed a period of conciliation and intra-Party unity, only to be shattered after the 1959 general election defeat will be challenged on two levels.<sup>6</sup> Rather than conciliation, it shows that on nuclear weapons, Gaitskell was not open to the compromises taken on other issues. Instead, he was inclined to bulldoze his way through, discounting other viewpoints and only shifting when it became clear there was no choice. On unity, it demonstrates that in this period the threat to the official policy was not just confined to CND, Frank Cousins of the T&GWU or other peripheral elements. Rather, it was spread across the whole Movement and included a surprisingly large number of MPs and Shadow Cabinet members. Although Labour approached the 1959 general election united and the leadership never lost control of nuclear policy, this was out of a desire for office and the way in which the Party's structure benefited the leadership (supporting the McKenzie - Haseler thesis), more than anything else. Whatever, the increasing pressures of these years gave more than a taste of the trouble to follow.

For convenience, the chapter is divided into three main sections. The first examines the origins of the nuclear dispute under Gaitskell's leadership through to its rise to prominence at the 1957 annual conference. The second considers the aftermath of the Brighton conference through to Scarborough

the following year. This demonstrates that although the leadership believed that the dispute had been settled for the foreseeable future, anti-nuclear agitation had increased markedly and made attempts to side-line it impossible. The third, charts the period from Scarborough through to the general election of 1959. This shows the leadership's anxiety, and how their initial concessions looked unlikely to prevent defeat until the announcement of the general election drew the warring strands back together in an ill-concealed image of unity.

### 1. Keep the Lid On! From Suez to Brighton

The internal debate over nuclear policy had caused serious concern to the Labour leadership, ever since Bevan had attacked Attlee in Parliament over the question of 'first use' in March 1955. From this point on, in international affairs at least, the H-bomb replaced German rearmament as the Left's focal point in their battle with the leadership. However, the beginning of the Suez Crisis in July 1956 diverted attention away from the nuclear issue. Gaitskell's diary demonstrates that he recognised the illogical compromise in Labour's position, and how he was obviously relieved to see it side-lined. He privately admitted,

'We have been in a jam on the H-bomb tests. We have supported producing the bomb and, obviously, if you want to produce it, you must be able to test it. At the same time we demanded the abolition of all tests.'<sup>7</sup>

Anxious to avoid embarrassment, Gaitskell had persuaded his front bench colleagues to call for 'control, rather than the abolition of tests' and that it was 'clearly a subject which...the leadership ought to avoid raising in parliament due to our vulnerable position'.<sup>8</sup> Further evidence to illustrate the ambiguity of Labour's nuclear policy was demonstrated at Labour's annual conference in October 1956. Vague calls for the abolition of all nuclear weapons received support from all sides. On specific issues however,

although there was opposition to the 'continuation of nuclear explosions', there was no outright demand for the abolition of tests.<sup>9</sup> The NEC, concerned about the lack of coherent policy on nuclear weapons decided to set up an Ad Hoc Sub-Committee on Disarmament in early 1957.<sup>10</sup>

While this new sub-committee struggled to find a suitable policy for the next conference, three major events in early 1957 ensured that the Bomb would become a central issue within the Movement. The first was the Government's announcement in March of its intention to hold thermo-nuclear tests on Christmas Island in the Pacific; the second was the publication of Sandys' Defence White Paper in April; and the third was the adverse publicity over the hazardous effects of nuclear testing and Strontium fall-out. Combined with the anti-nuclear publicity, many Labour supporters believed that the sharp decline in Conservative fortunes after the Suez fiasco would mean the imminent return of a Labour administration. However, after Eden was replaced by Macmillan in January 1957, the new Prime Minister was quick to exploit Labour divisions over nuclear policy.<sup>11</sup>

In March, Macmillan and Eisenhower met in Bermuda to repair Anglo-American relations, badly strained during the Suez Crisis. During the talks, the Americans agreed to supply Britain with guided missiles that could carry British nuclear warheads. Anxiety over the health implications of the recently announced British tests in the Pacific had prompted some Labour back-benchers to call for their postponement.<sup>12</sup> Aneurin Bevan, Labour's Foreign Affairs spokesman, had called for the Government to take the initiative and stop the test programme as an example to the rest of the world. On tour in India later that month he had gone further still, and declared that he could see no reason for Britain to arm herself with that 'useless weapon'.<sup>13</sup> However, splits in Labour's front bench were clearly evident when George Brown (Labour's Defence spokesman) publicly insisted that Britain must retain the deterrent to counter any threat, and that they had to



be tested.<sup>14</sup> Brown's comments confirmed his preference for the manufacture and testing of the British H-bomb, while Bevan's remarks were applauded by the growing ranks opposed to the Bomb on moral grounds.<sup>15</sup>

While Labour's principal Foreign and Defence spokesmen appeared at loggerheads, worse followed in Parliament. During the Bermuda Conference debate, Macmillan, eager to restore Tory morale, diverted attention away from Suez and concentrated on the nuclear issue. He exploited the divisions in Labour's ranks by challenging the Party's attitude over the Bomb, and demanded to know whether Gaitskell would cancel the tests. Gaitskell was caught in an acute dilemma, between criticising the Tories and opening up internal divisions. He replied that only the Government had all the facts with which to make a decision, but admitted that he did not feel Britain should stop testing 'unilaterally and unconditionally'.<sup>16</sup> This reply prompted a number of Labour MPs to criticise Gaitskell's performance and lack of leadership.<sup>17</sup> Macmillan's memoirs make it clear that he had fully intended to trap and confuse Gaitskell, expose the inconsistency in Labour's policy and above all, exploit the split. Philip Williams admits that Gaitskell's actions had 'deeply troubled' the PLP, but denies that it threatened his position.<sup>18</sup>

The confusion in Labour's position had been revealed both in and out of Parliament and clearly needed clarification. In an attempt to achieve this, several meetings were held by the Shadow Cabinet and the PLP on 2 and 3 April. The outcome resulted in a compromise resolution which called for a temporary suspension of British tests and for the two superpowers to cancel theirs.<sup>19</sup> Gaitskell was not satisfied, because he had had to accept the compromise in order to avoid a split in the Party, despite the fact that it made them 'look rather silly'.<sup>20</sup> Williams believes that Gaitskell's conciliatory manner and willingness to accommodate the Left's demands had actually helped the Government and inadvertently led to a Tory revival.<sup>21</sup> However, the Manchester Guardian's contemporary account, that the

leadership had yielded to general rank and file pressure, appeared more accurate.<sup>22</sup> It was not just the Left but a large section of the PLP, including several Shadow Cabinet members (around 80 supported the resolution - approximately 30 per cent) who expressed concern over the effects of thermo-nuclear tests.<sup>23</sup>

Gaitskell had little choice but to back down. Without a clear policy and the fear of a major split developing, not to do so would have been foolhardy. Yet the furore caused by the resolution was quite unnecessary. The 'compromise' had simply requested that British tests be suspended temporarily, giving the USA and USSR the opportunity to follow suit. Gaitskell's preferred option was that Britain should only suspend tests at the same time as the other powers did so. A temporary suspension of British tests, even if undertaken unilaterally, hardly represented a major shift in policy. In order to achieve a meaningless compromise, four difficult meetings had been needed to avert a serious internal split. Labour had been exposed to ridicule from the press and their political opponents, and all for clarification of a policy which they had no chance of putting into practice anyway. In Gaitskell's defence, it could be argued that his reluctance to take a line in opposition which he would not take in government demonstrated his responsible attitude. However, Macmillan's comment in January 1959, that the Labour leader took his role far too seriously, appears nearer the mark.<sup>24</sup> As David Cross argues, it was not Gaitskell's eventual acceptance of the compromise policy that led to the Tory revival, as Williams believes, but his failure to respond to the widespread Labour concern or attack the Government.<sup>25</sup>

A fortnight later, Sandys' Defence White Paper was debated. The doctrine of 'massive nuclear retaliation', even against conventional attack brought swift objections. Labour's amendment regretted '...the undue dependence on the ultimate deterrent' and called for the British tests to be postponed 'for a limited period' while international agreement was sought.<sup>26</sup> George Brown

and John Strachey both questioned the details of Government policy, but neither criticised the principle of a British deterrent. The only deviation from Labour's official view was from Richard Crossman, who attacked the policy of massive retaliation and questioned the very retention of nuclear weapons.<sup>27</sup>

This debate highlighted the problems of Labour's nuclear policy, or rather lack of it. The leadership were in a difficult position, forced to adopt a delicate balancing act. Their underlying support for the British deterrent made it virtually impossible for them to attack the Tories effectively. At the same time, they were desperately trying to appease a large body of anti-nuclear opinion within the Party and prevent a split.<sup>28</sup> Britain's first thermo-nuclear test took place in the Pacific on 16 May, followed fifteen days later by a second. Both Bevan and Gaitskell protested, though Gaitskell's reluctance to press home the attack was demonstrated by his care in stressing the difficulties involved in obtaining agreement over the nuclear issue.<sup>29</sup>

Although Labour's parliamentary spokesmen demonstrated a clear reluctance to press the Government, there was no such reticence in the rest of the Labour Movement. In February 1957 the National Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests (NCANWT), a forerunner to CND, had been founded to co-ordinate opposition to H-bomb tests.<sup>30</sup> In March Tribune, followed closely by the New Statesman, had demanded an immediate end to nuclear tests and for Labour to reverse its position on thermo-nuclear weapons.<sup>31</sup> At a speech in Reading on 5 May, Bevan provoked further fears of a split within the Shadow Cabinet when he called on Britain to give moral leadership,

'If Britain had the moral stature she could say: We can make the H-bomb, but we are not going to make it. We believe that... the human race needs leadership in the opposite direction away from making the bomb and we are going to give it.'<sup>32</sup>



The unilateralist overtones in this speech and the two British tests in May again prompted Tribune to attack the rest of the Labour leadership, and urge nation-wide protests against nuclear weapons.<sup>33</sup>

In an effort to fend off the growing agitation against nuclear weapons, the NEC and its sub-committee s began a frantic search for a solution that would halt the criticism and gain approval at Labour's annual conference.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that although the PLP and the extra-parliamentary groups played their part, the nerve centre of policy-making was the NEC. This in turn was dominated by the Party leadership and by Gaitskell. This made any attempt by the committees or other groups to radicalise policy virtually impossible.<sup>34</sup>

The Ad Hoc Sub-Committee for Disarmament, set up in December 1956, had met five times by March 1957. Despite other defence issues, such as manpower levels and budgets, the controversy over thermo-nuclear tests dominated their agenda. The committee produced a draft which suggested that a control agency should be set up by the UN which would provide a framework under which disarmament could be achieved.<sup>35</sup> Simultaneously, the NEC's Defence Sub-Committee considered Sandys' defence review, and by early June had produced a discussion paper, Defence and Disarmament. The first of two parts detailed the existing official Labour policy. The second, contained schemes by Labour's three main defence strategists, Brown, Strachey and Crossman. Brown's contribution simply restated Labour's existing policy. John Strachey challenged the accepted orthodoxy by suggesting that better equipped and trained western conventional forces could withstand a numerically superior Soviet attack and thus reduce the 'menace of nuclear warfare'. Richard Crossman suggested that western Europe should abandon the idea of having nuclear weapons altogether and instead leave the deterrent solely to the USA.<sup>36</sup>

By July, after further drafting and meetings between these sub-committees, the proposals by Strachey and Crossman had been deleted and only Brown's preferences were considered. The new document, imaginatively entitled Disarmament and Defence, called for a two-stage disarmament agreement open to international inspection. The first stage included a suspension of all nuclear tests by international agreement, followed by a ban on production of nuclear weapons, and linked to reductions in conventional weapons. The second stage envisaged the destruction of all stocks of nuclear weapons combined with further conventional disarmament.<sup>37</sup>

In fact, both Strachey's and Crossman's ideas had had little chance of success as they challenged the basis of Labour's official policy. In effect, this was a clear victory for Brown and Gaitskell, neither of whom were prepared to separate nuclear from conventional disarmament. Gaitskell's careful control of the drafting process allowed alternatives to be put forward, only to be swiftly rejected in favour of moving as little as possible from his preferred line. This determination had also been clearly demonstrated in speeches at Newcastle on 16 June, to the Socialist International on 3 July and in a series of disarmament proposals presented (with Philip Noel-Baker) to the PLP a week later.<sup>38</sup>

Despite Gaitskell's confidence in the new document, the International Sub-Committee decided to delay its publication until after the resolutions on disarmament submitted to conference had been examined.<sup>39</sup> This delay appeared to be in response to further divisions that had surfaced. In July, the T&GWU had debated the nuclear issue and its General Secretary, Frank Cousins, called for the Labour Party to launch a crusade against the Bomb. Although Cousins believed that Britain should cease manufacture unilaterally, he was unable to obtain his union's support and the resolution they approved did not follow his line.<sup>40</sup> In September, the TUC also approved a resolution that was clearly multilateralist.<sup>41</sup>

The NEC was doubtless relieved that the T&GWU and the other unions had not swung to the unilateralist cause with conference looming, but other trends did not look so promising. Tribune had continued its attack on official Labour policy throughout the summer, and called for national protests to force change on the leadership. By September, the paper shrilly described the British Bomb as futile, dangerous, a drain on resources and morally reprehensible.<sup>42</sup> In addition, 30 MPs had formed the Labour H-bomb Campaign Committee and their first rally in Trafalgar Square attracted a crowd of 4,000.<sup>43</sup> Although the unions had not been converted to unilateralism and attacks from Tribune were nothing new, the dissident MPs were a source of concern. With such public hostility to the official policy within the PLP, it was certain that it would also exist in the wider Movement, and might cause problems at conference reminiscent of the Bevanite revolts of the early 1950s. As 127 resolutions had been submitted to the NEC for discussion, many of them clearly unilateralist in intent, this apprehension appeared justified.<sup>44</sup>

Yet the *Fear* of such a split was not shared at this stage by Gaitskell. At meetings of the International Sub-Committee on 17 and 26 September, the demand for Britain to unilaterally suspend thermo-nuclear tests was absent from the latest version of Disarmament and Defence, drafted by Phillips and amended by Crossman. Instead, there was a vague pledge that Britain might suspend future tests if a 'suitable opportunity' arose.<sup>45</sup> In effect, pressure from Gaitskell had ensured that there were no concessions to any unilateral action by Britain whatsoever, even though most of the resolutions considered by the NEC had advocated this in one form or another.<sup>46</sup> The Leader's determination to issue this statement to conference as it stood provoked a major disagreement at the NEC meeting on 26 September, especially between him and Bevan. However, Gaitskell and his supporters regained control with Crossman's help, and with the promise that the final statement would make it clear that no final decision had been made.<sup>47</sup>

Although the NEC had agreed that a revised statement for conference should be prepared by Gaitskell, Bevan and Watson, this never materialised. Instead, at the meeting of 29 September, the NEC examined the composite resolutions submitted and decided that Bevan should present Labour's official policy at conference.<sup>48</sup> Gaitskell's belated decision, that no definitive line be taken on the nuclear issue, was obviously taken in order to avoid a damaging split on the eve of conference. Bevan's conversion to the leadership's cause by Sam Watson and the subsequent result at conference is too well rehearsed to be examined here. Nonetheless, its significance was far-reaching. Bevan had spoken on behalf of the NEC and endorsed the official policy, favoured by Gaitskell all along. Thus, Bevan had publicly sealed his reconciliation with the leadership and the Left had effectively lost its most powerful exponent.<sup>49</sup>

The nuclear issue dominated the proceedings in the disarmament and foreign affairs debate at the Party's annual conference at Brighton on 3 October. The leadership's case against unilateralism was supported by Tony Benn, Philip Noel-Baker and John Strachey, while Judith Hart and Frank Cousins opposed it. Then Bevan delivered the speech in which he urged acceptance of the official policy and rejected unilateralism. His caustic criticism, especially that over the unilateralists' naive approach to foreign affairs, shocked and antagonised many of his supporters. Subsequently, Composite No.23 (which supported official policy) and No.25 (if altered to postponement rather than total cessation of British tests) were accepted, while the unilateralist motion (No.24), backed by Cousins but thwarted by his union's delegates, was rejected.<sup>50</sup>

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The 1957 Brighton Conference was regarded as a victory for the Labour leadership because it prevented any deviation from the multilateralist line they preferred.<sup>51</sup> In reality, the policy in place since 1955 remained intact and Labour's official support for the British Bomb closely imitated that of the



Government's. Half-hearted attempts by the leadership to establish their own stamp on the nuclear issue ~~were~~ negligible, and demonstrated the desire to keep Labour united, rather than provide any radical critique of government policy. After six months of tortuous discussion and draft policy statements, no clear line acceptable to the Party as a whole had emerged. While Gaitskell's preferences had clearly prevailed through his control of the NEC, the leadership had realised how important it was to convince their opponents that their concerns had been noted.

In order to maintain this fragile unity, the NEC and Party leadership had endorsed a statement which contained idealistic platitudes on disarmament, but which avoided the unilateralist's fundamental concern: the future of the British H-bomb. In April 1957, Gaitskell had accepted the temporary suspension of British tests, but even this had been withdrawn five months later. At the end of September, after he had consistently argued for a forthright statement on disarmament, Gaitskell suddenly changed his mind and agreed that no final decision on nuclear policy had been made. While this was clearly a device to prevent a split and save the leadership from any embarrassment at conference, they were saved by an unexpected source. Rather than present the statement and provoke left-wing anger, Bevan was persuaded to extol its virtues. The attractions of this option to Gaitskell and his supporters are not difficult to imagine. If Bevan, still the most prominent left-wing leader, could persuade conference to swallow the official line, victory had been achieved. If he failed, it was his credibility that would be shattered, leaving the Left leaderless while Labour's elite could escape unscathed.

Although Bevan's 'defection' was a severe shock to his supporters, the assumption that this marked the end of Bevanism, suggested by some contemporary reports and in various studies since, should be treated with caution.<sup>52</sup> In reality, support for left-wing fundamentalism had increased

steadily in the CLPs and trades unions since the early 1950s. With Bevan's departure, those dedicated to this cause not only survived but became increasingly influential in all spheres of the Labour movement. The furore over thermo-nuclear weapons and the dominance of a revisionist leadership propped up by right-wing union barons, convinced the unilateralists that only with the conversion to their cause of the trade unions, would their success be ensured in the future.<sup>53</sup> Gaitskell and the Party leadership may have postponed the battle over the nuclear issue in October 1957, but many of Labour's natural supporters, dismayed by the leadership's adherence to the Bomb, looked elsewhere for ways in which to express their dissatisfaction.

## 2. Challenges and Control: From Brighton to Scarborough, 1958

To some, Brighton represented a 'complete victory' for Gaitskell. With Bevan on board, Labour well ahead in the opinion polls, the nuclear issue settled for the foreseeable future and unity intact, all appeared well.<sup>54</sup> However, as Macmillan astutely observed, the H-bomb was the real test: if this issue could be exploited successfully, Labour unity would evaporate. Macmillan had a point, for within a few weeks of conference the Labour leadership was under pressure once again. According to Michael Gordon, this was precipitated by fears of a future nuclear holocaust, disillusion with the Cold War and frustration over Labour's acceptance of Tory foreign policy.<sup>55</sup>

After conference, Gaitskell had actively discouraged any specific alterations to Labour's nuclear policy beyond the conditional suspension of British tests.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, several events towards the end of 1957 ensured that attention would return to the nuclear issue. The implications of the successful launch of the Soviet 'Sputnik' (which made the West's fixed-wing bombers obsolete) and the doubts raised by George Kennan over Western nuclear strategy (too inflexible as a response) were two examples.<sup>57</sup> On a more local level, concern

grew over revelations that British-based American patrol aircraft regularly carried thermo-nuclear weapons and that NATO had decided to construct American fixed missile bases in Britain. Despite Macmillan's assurance that the latter would be under strict joint Anglo-American control and presented no danger, public apprehension was widespread.<sup>58</sup> In Parliament, and in Gaitskell's absence, George Brown demanded that the Government should guarantee political control over these bases.<sup>59</sup>

The Labour attacks were largely the result of increased public awareness and the need to maintain Party unity.<sup>60</sup> As the Party's lead over the Conservatives in the opinion polls had fallen (from a 16 per cent lead in September to 5 per cent in December), Gaitskell became the target for increased criticism within the Party. While the Left resented the lack of radicalism in defence policy, even Labour's moderate centre pressed for more vigorous opposition.<sup>61</sup>

In some respects, the criticism was valid. Although Labour had criticised the Government, there was little difference in principle of allowing American ballistic missiles to be based in Britain, when American nuclear bombers had been accepted during Attlee's administration. In addition, Labour demands for strict British control over such sites was virtually identical to the Government's stated position. In Gaitskell's defence, he was faced with a difficult dilemma: as a prospective Prime Minister expected to uphold British interests and as Labour leader, anxious to maintain internal unity.<sup>62</sup> In order to retain Labour's commitment to multilateralism and simultaneously prevent a split, Gaitskell and the leadership had to perform a unenviable balancing act. Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that they were anxious to keep nuclear policy off the agenda as much as possible.

Because of this it was the TUC, not the parliamentary leadership, that initiated discussions over the nuclear question with the Government.<sup>63</sup>



Shortly afterwards, at the suggestion of Sir Victor Tewson (General Secretary of the TUC) several meetings took place between the TUC and NEC International sub-committees. The first meeting, on 13 February 1958, was dominated by Crossman, Bevan and of course Gaitskell. Apart from general agreement - that nuclear-armed patrol aircraft were dangerous and unnecessary and that the construction of missile bases should not precede summit talks - progress was limited to the ideas put forward by the Labour leader. These were little different to those Gaitskell had presented to the PLP the previous July.<sup>64</sup>

While the joint TUC / NEC discussions took place, impatience with the lack of action against nuclear weapons led to increased disquiet: disquiet that was soon to have a direct impact on Labour's policy. Within the Movement, Bevan's denunciation of unilateralism had persuaded many left-wingers that Labour's official policy had failed to take the initiative and was wholly inadequate.<sup>65</sup> The apolitical anti-nuclear stance reflected by a large section of public opinion was running parallel to the Left's desire to fill this vacuum. Linked by their common abhorrence of nuclear weapons and their similar aims and objectives, the two strands converged in the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in January 1958.<sup>66</sup> Initially, the Campaign's line resembled Labour's official policy, but almost immediately became more radical and demanded that Britain should 'unconditionally' renounce the use, production or reliance on allies with nuclear weapons.<sup>67</sup>

As CND challenged Labour's claim for political and moral leadership, another group from within the Party, Victory For Socialism (VFS), re-emerged. VFS had first appeared in 1944 and briefly resurfaced at the beginning of Gaitskell's leadership in early 1956. Under the leadership of Ian Mikardo, Hugh Jenkins and Stephen Swinger, and with the organisational skills of Jo Richardson as its secretary, VFS was far more formidable when it was relaunched in February 1958. Concerned that the 'revisionists' had

diverted Labour from its socialist principles, VFS was committed to revive socialism and to organise opposition to the H-bomb.<sup>68</sup> When it announced that it was to operate within the constituency parties, it provoked fears of a Bevanite 'party within a party' and alarmed the leadership.<sup>69</sup>

Apart from CND and VFS, another blow to the Labour leadership came in early 1958 from the normally loyalist Daily Herald. On the eve of the parliamentary debate on the new Defence White Paper (which reaffirmed the commitment to the British deterrent and the doctrine of massive retaliation), the paper savaged Labour's failure to take a clear lead over the nuclear issue. It was appalled at the lack of progress by the joint TUC / NEC meetings and accused the leadership of 'dragging its feet'.<sup>70</sup> The following day, the editorial demanded that Britain cease the testing and manufacture of its H-bombs and rid itself of all existing stocks, in order to break the international deadlock over disarmament. To add insult to injury, the Daily Herald also published a letter from 65 Labour MPs which supported its stand.<sup>71</sup> Although criticism from the newspaper was serious in itself, the fact that so many MPs backed this view, and were prepared to say so publicly, showed that the issue could not be easily dismissed.

The challenges to the official line from CND, VFS and the Daily Herald ensured that nuclear policy dominated the NEC meeting held at the end of February. This had been convened to discuss the latest joint TUC / NEC draft policy document. Nevertheless, Gaitskell's control over policy-making was demonstrated in the way in which he managed to retain Labour's official policy (i.e. multilateral disarmament, suspension of British tests, the cessation of nuclear-armed patrols, and the postponement of American missile base construction prior to summit talks) on track.<sup>72</sup> Although the Labour leader had been concerned over Bevan's reaction (unfounded as it turned out), his preferences were accepted by 25 votes to three. Gaitskell then persuaded the meeting to issue the statement, after TUC approval, without

further reference back to the NEC.<sup>73</sup> Counting on support from the TUC, this was clearly designed to avert further arguments and delays and ensured that Gaitskell's preferences could not be challenged by the NEC.

After this had been endorsed, the NEC turned to the Daily Herald and VFS. It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the newspaper which condemned its 'misleading comments', the support for unilateralism and its 'interference in the private discussions of the Labour Party and TUC'.<sup>74</sup> Over VFS, Gaitskell's determination to stamp out any factional dissent in the constituencies as quickly as possible was clear. VFS had already received a letter from Morgan Phillips which 'reminded' them of the constitutional restrictions imposed on political organisation within the Party.<sup>75</sup> Although there were arguments over what disciplinary measures should be taken, at a meeting with the VFS leaders on 4 March, Gaitskell warned them that the creation of a 'party within a party would not be tolerated'.<sup>76</sup>

While the Daily Herald quickly yielded, VFS were not as compliant as some contemporary and later reports suggest, despite Gaitskell's threats.<sup>77</sup> It is true that VFS had retreated to some extent by March, and this coincided with Gaitskell's warnings. Nevertheless, if their constant condemnation of the leadership and the rapid reaction taken against them is considered, they were obviously assumed to represent a serious threat.<sup>78</sup> The fact that 65 Labour MPs, many of whom were either members or associated with VFS, had supported the comments in the Daily Herald demonstrated the scale of the problem. For those Party members opposed to the leadership's strict adherence to multilateralism, VFS provided a platform. In addition, the overlap in membership of VFS and CND was considerable and ensured that agitation would be widespread and prolonged. Even if the leadership could restrict and counter the operations of VFS within the Parliamentary Party, the elements that supported them in the constituencies and trade unions were much harder to deal with.<sup>79</sup>

Most of the problems that faced the leadership had been due to their sluggish attitude and the reluctance to modify their nuclear policy since October 1957. What little progress had been made was only achieved because of TUC anxiety earlier that year. However, the rapid preparation of the new policy document (6 March 1958) demonstrated the way in which the leadership had been stung into action by CND, VFS and the Daily Herald's criticism. On the day that the NEC met to discuss the nuclear problem, Labour spokesmen debated the Defence White Paper in Parliament. Their performance illustrated the difficulty of mounting an effective attack on Government policy without a coherent alternative strategy, and where the views of their own 'experts' differed sharply.

While Brown and Strachey both criticised the Government's over-reliance on the H-bomb, neither questioned the concept of the British deterrent. Instead, they suggested that improved conventional forces and the use of tactical nuclear weapons were viable alternatives to any acts of aggression.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, Richard Crossman's comments revealed the serious divisions that existed between Labour's front-bench colleagues. Although he began with a scathing attack on the Government, Crossman believed that Brown's suggestion, that Britain could bridge the gap between police action and thermo-nuclear war with tactical nuclear weapons, was nonsense. He argued that Britain and her European allies should halt their reliance on nuclear weapons and instead, improve their conventional forces.<sup>81</sup> Outside Parliament, the row escalated further when Gaitskell publicly defended the British Bomb because it guaranteed a measure of independence from the United States, and Brown warned that unilateralism would cause American isolationism and the break up of NATO. In response, 19 Labour MPs demanded that Britain unilaterally abandon the H-bomb, and that Labour should give its full support to the planned CND London-Aldermaston march at Easter.<sup>82</sup>



At this stage, Labour's nuclear policy was under attack from all sides. The Tories condemned Labour, entirely characteristically, for opposing British national interests. Of more significance, was the way in which internal pressure had forced the leadership onto the defensive in an effort to maintain unity.<sup>83</sup> Gaitskell had previously persuaded his NEC colleagues to accept the joint statement on 26 February, subject to TUC approval. However, when the talks resumed, the draft included a new provision for 'an international declaration banning the use of all nuclear weapons'. The widely different interpretations placed on this caused further disagreement. Bevan, who had accepted the earlier draft, demanded that a future Labour Government would never use nuclear weapons first; a view supported by Castle, Summerskill, Cousins and Willis. Gaitskell argued that such a pledge would be disastrous because, '...if the Russians believe us...the power of deterrence is removed'. Responding to criticism over how Labour's official policy resembled that of the Government, Crossman suggested that Britain should consider abandoning its nuclear weapons entirely if this ensured non-proliferation. When the meeting ended, they had only agreed to defer 'first use' and to organise a national campaign to publicise the new statement.<sup>84</sup>

As Gaitskell pointed out, Labour policy differed from the Government's over the cessation of tests, nuclear patrols and the construction of American missile sites. Nevertheless, the wider issue - the future of the British deterrent - was not discussed and the leadership's commitment to multilateralism remained intact. Disarmament & Nuclear War, seen as an attempt to ward off the challenge from the anti-nuclear lobby, did not settle the dispute.<sup>85</sup> As the leadership were unwilling to make any further concessions, and while the Left remained oblivious to anything less than the total renunciation of the British Bomb, the gulf between the two sides could do little but widen.

Although Gaitskell had maintained control of policy-making through the NEC, he held a series of secret meetings with senior colleagues in March, with the obvious intention of heading off further problems.<sup>86</sup> These discussions concluded that tactical nuclear weapons could counter conventional attacks, rather than an immediate resort to thermo-nuclear retaliation. Although there was no pledge on 'first use' (in case it was misunderstood), H-bombs would only be used against thermo-nuclear attacks. Despite Crossman's misgivings and his argument for a non-nuclear club, he and Bevan accepted the majority's preferences.<sup>87</sup> According to Williams, Gaitskell's objective had been to restore his relationship with Bevan and reach agreement on the nuclear problem, while the balanced membership ensured that the different views would be represented.<sup>88</sup> This may have been the case. Nevertheless, Crossman's recollection that Bevan had been persuaded to support Gaitskell beforehand, is worth considering.<sup>89</sup> With the convinced multilateralist majority and Bevan on board, the meeting had been heavily weighted in Gaitskell's favour before it had even begun.

On 26 March, the NEC discussed the forthcoming Labour Campaign for Disarmament and a draft pamphlet by John Strachey. Entitled Scrap All The H-Bombs, this document argued that Britain must retain thermo-nuclear weapons until multilateral disarmament could be achieved. Strachey warned that any concession to unilateralism would lead to neutralism, as the United States might return to isolation and cause NATO's disintegration. Although Gaitskell and the multilateralists wanted the document published as a clarification of official policy, there were objections from the anti-nuclear lobby.<sup>90</sup> Although it was not actually endorsed, Gaitskell's forceful support for Strachey's pamphlet indicated his determination to win over the waverers. Like his colleague, he had presented them with the stark choice: adherence to Labour's official policy or the consequences of unilateralism.

In the following weeks, while Gaitskell continued to spell out the political dangers of unilateralism, the Labour sponsored disarmament campaign competed with the London to Aldermaston Easter march, organised by CND. Many CND supporters attended the Labour rally in Trafalgar Square which attracted a crowd of nearly 12,000. Labour speakers, including Gaitskell and Bevan, concentrated on the issue of H-bomb tests and appealed for unity within the Labour Movement.<sup>91</sup> While reaction to Disarmament & Nuclear War and Labour's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had provoked outright hostility from CND, the unilateralists within the Party who hoped to use Labour's campaign to radicalise official policy, were disappointed. As Michael Foot wrote, '...in April 1958 the [Labour Party's] appeal jarred hopelessly with the spirit of Aldermaston'.<sup>92</sup>

As long as the leadership remained impervious to their pleas, there was little that the Labour unilateralists could do, other than try to win over the trade unions and rank and file to their cause and thus exert pressure through that avenue. However, two important factors prevented this. The first was Gaitskell's insistence that the only choice was between Labour's official policy and unilateralism. The second was that CND's impact within the trade unions was slight at this stage. Related to both, were the leadership's appeals for unity and the in-built conservatism of most Labour supporters; many of whom believed that possession of the Bomb was as much in Britain's interests as any Government supporter. The trades union conference round of 1958 confirmed this. In April, USDAW set the scene when it approved Labour's official policy and consigned a unilateralist resolution to a heavy defeat. Throughout the rest of the summer, all the other major unions followed suit. In September, the TUC conference also overwhelmingly endorsed the official policy. With the block vote lined up behind them, this meant that the leadership was certain of victory at the forthcoming Scarborough conference.



Three official defence and foreign policy resolutions (the most important of which was Disarmament & Nuclear War) recommended by the NEC were considered at the 1958 Scarborough conference.<sup>93</sup> Official policy was challenged by four composites, notably No.27, an explicit unilateralist resolution, which demanded that the next Labour administration cease the manufacture and testing of nuclear weapons and prohibit their use from British territory.<sup>94</sup> During the debate the leadership, including Bevan, all stressed Labour's differences with government policy, reiterated their case against unilateralism and appealed for unity in the lead up to the general election.

George Brown defended the deterrent because it guaranteed influence in disarmament negotiations. He argued that if it was surrendered, Britain would be wholly dependent on the United States. Brown warned that if all nuclear weapons were abandoned, as the unilateralists wanted, the advantages of tactical nuclear weapons over conventional forces would be diminished. Gaitskell also rejected the unilateralist case, although his speech indicated that disagreement was about means rather than ends. He warned that a unilateral stand by Britain would be ineffective, as it would not persuade the USA and USSR to follow suit, and leave Britain unprotected. He also believed that it was impossible to decide at this stage what a future Labour Government could do. On nuclear proliferation, Gaitskell acknowledged that the idea of a 'non-nuclear club' was a 'powerful argument', but only if it could be policed effectively and included all other countries apart from the USA and USSR. Despite some dissent, the appeal for unity won the day, the NEC recommendations were accepted and all four composite resolutions rejected.<sup>95</sup>

There is no doubt that the 1958 conference provided little more than a rubber stamp for the leadership's preferred policy. Nevertheless, Gaitskell's acknowledgement of the non-nuclear club was interesting. This implied that

non-proliferation might take precedence over political and strategic considerations; if adopted, this would signal a clear departure in Labour's existing policy. However, as it was highly unlikely that either China or France would miss the opportunity to become nuclear powers (well known to defence specialists like Healey and acknowledged by Gaitskell himself earlier in 1958), this tacit acceptance suggests that the idea represented a tactical move to maintain unity rather than a bold gesture. Indeed, any conversion by Gaitskell to this particular alternative and the motives behind it was dismissed by Alastair Hetherington (Editor of the Manchester Guardian) because it appeared 'almost too sudden'. After an 'off the record' conversation with Gaitskell, Hetherington recorded that although the Labour leader expressed some sympathy for the idea, he was actually 'completely against the proposal'.<sup>96</sup>

Although conference success was certain because of the union block vote, Gaitskell and the leadership were well aware that anti-nuclear agitation could cause serious problems. With the challenge from CND and VFS throughout 1958, Labour was indeed in danger of 'leading from behind' and Gaitskell was anxious to reverse this situation and regain the initiative. Under these circumstances it is quite feasible to suggest that the non-nuclear club was used to dampen the left-wing challenge and promote unity, in the safe knowledge that it could never be put into practice.

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In 1957, with Bevan's help, the Labour leadership had extricated themselves from the embarrassment which an equivocal policy statement would have encountered if released. A similar option was not available in 1958 because by then, anti-nuclear agitation had increased dramatically. To many, Labour's official acceptance of the deterrent concept and their rigid adherence to multilateralism had undermined their claim to the moral highground. As a

result, 1958 witnessed the growth of groups wholly committed to the anti-nuclear cause within and outside the Labour movement: VFS and CND.

Although the TUC had recognised this mood, the leadership only reacted when the issue threatened to split Labour altogether. In a belated attempt to ward off the challenge, they had attempted to regain the initiative by attacking Conservative policy. However, the leadership were hampered by their own rigid commitment to the Bomb, and their opposition was restricted to that of detail rather than substance. Labour's policy presentation, whether private or public, was regarded as confused and open to misinterpretation. Divisions, not always restricted to a straight left-right split abounded, whether in the Shadow Cabinet, the PLP, the constituencies or unions. Disarmament and Nuclear War and Labour's Campaign for Disarmament had been introduced in an attempt to reconcile the factions, but while the leadership remained committed to the principle of multilateral disarmament, the gulf remained.

If the leadership had been as anxious to maintain unity as they so often professed, there was little evidence of the authentic compromise needed in order to achieve it. Instead, although alarmed by the divisions that surfaced, they supported a nuclear policy that was bound to exacerbate the differences. The main reason for this, was Gaitskell's determination to present Labour to the British people as a party that could be trusted with Britain's defence. With tight control over the policy-making process, allied to the trades union block vote, Gaitskell was assured of dragging Labour along without the need for compromise.<sup>97</sup> If dissent threatened, appeals for loyalty and solidarity along with cosmetic additions to policy served to maintain control. Similar appeals had worked in 1958, but with increased anti-nuclear agitation, and while Gaitskell's commitment to the deterrent remained solid, Labour was set on the road to collision sooner or later.

### 3. The Fuse is Lit: From Scarborough to the General Election

Like Brighton in 1957, the Scarborough conference appeared to convince the Labour leaders that the nuclear issue had been settled. They had not deviated from their allegiance to multilateralism and only some superficial changes had been necessary in order to fend off the pressure exerted by the unilateralists. Nevertheless, after several months of inactivity, the spread of anti-nuclear feeling in the trade unions forced the leadership to reassess their defence policy. The result, on the surface at least, appeared to represent a significant change, as Labour turned to the non-nuclear club. However, this concept was rejected by the unilateralists because it was too modest and contaminated by the leadership's endorsement.<sup>98</sup> When Frank Cousins persuaded the T&GWU to reject the official defence policy, the leadership faced a serious challenge. If the other unions followed suit, the block vote could be turned against them making an unprecedented conference defeat possible. However, the proposed non-nuclear club and the imminence of a general election worked in the leadership's favour. In the end, Gaitskell and his colleagues were saved by Macmillan's decision to call this in October 1959.

Having defeated the unilateralists at Scarborough, Gaitskell quickly reinforced Labour's official policy. In a statement prepared for the NEC at the end of October, he also attempted to widen the argument between Labour and Tory policy. He reiterated the pledge to suspend British nuclear tests and attacked the Government's 'dangerously one-sided reliance' on nuclear weapons. Despite the harsh words, the statement still conceded little, as it emphasised the link between conventional and nuclear disarmament, the retention of British nuclear weapons and the commitment to NATO.<sup>99</sup> Further evidence that Labour policy still mirrored that of the Government was revealed in February 1959 when the new Defence White Paper was published. In the parliamentary debate, Sandys' admission, that the policy of 'massive retaliation' was too 'inflexible' and that tactical nuclear weapons were of considerable value, was virtually identical to the arguments put by



Brown and Strachey.<sup>100</sup> Although Labour continued to criticise the Tories over strategic weapons, these two instances actually demonstrated closer bi-partisanship. At least one Shadow Cabinet member expressed his horror at this.<sup>101</sup>

If convergence of Labour policy with that of the Tories worried many in the Party, the NEC did not appear to share the same concern when it met to see if it needed revision.<sup>102</sup> At the meeting, Anthony Greenwood proposed that a future Labour Government should end production of the H-bomb and transfer British nuclear stocks to NATO or an alternative specialist authority. This was quickly ruled out, with what Greenwood privately described as a 'witheringly discouraging reaction'.<sup>103</sup> The rejection of Greenwood's motion illustrated the gulf between Labour's elite and unilateralist sentiments in the wider Movement. After CND's second Aldermaston march at Easter 1959, approximately 25,000 people attended the final rally in Trafalgar Square. The presence of Michael Foot, Robert Willis (Chairman of the TUC) and Frank Cousins prompted renewed fears of a split.<sup>104</sup> David Ennals (Secretary of the International Department) warned Gaitskell that the leadership had slipped too far behind the rest of the Movement, and had placed themselves in a dangerous position.<sup>105</sup>

Macmillan's public admission in April, that radio active fall-out levels had doubled in Britain since May 1958, compounded the problem. When the International Sub-Committee met on 12 May, Bevan again insisted that Labour would 'end' British tests which clashed with Gaitskell's preference for 'suspension'.<sup>106</sup> This was exacerbated on 3 June when the NEC approved a TUC memo, which demanded the end of nuclear tests and suggested a non-nuclear club to prevent proliferation. Crossman believed that Gaitskell had not recognised the implications of the memo, and thought that it followed official policy.<sup>107</sup> In fact, the memo had reinforced David Ennals' earlier warning, that the official policy was losing the Party support within the

Movement and the trade unions especially. The day after the NEC approved the TUC document, this was confirmed when the National Union of General and Municipal Workers (NUGMW), one of the big six and of which Gaitskell himself was a member, voted to abandon nuclear weapons unilaterally.<sup>108</sup>

The vote was a sensational reversal and convinced Bevan and some of his colleagues that a change in policy was urgently required if the other trade unions were to be diverted from following the NUGMW lead. When the International Sub-committee met on 9 and 18 June to discuss the issue, although Gaitskell and Bevan agreed on the non-nuclear club, they again argued over whether tests should be suspended or halted. According to Crossman, Gaitskell realised his earlier mistake and tried to alter the TUC statement.<sup>109</sup> After further wrangling, Gaitskell's amendments were accepted and appeared in this form at the joint TUC / NEC meeting the next day.<sup>110</sup>

In one respect at least, the non-nuclear club, the draft marked a departure from Labour's previous policy. This proposed the abandonment of British nuclear weapons if the other (prospective) powers, apart from the USA and USSR, abandoned theirs. Nevertheless, Gaitskell's cautious approach was evident as the draft stressed that any decisions taken would not bind a future Labour administration. In addition, the draft's preamble, which claimed that recent international developments had made clarification of policy necessary, was without doubt a response to the NUGMW vote.<sup>111</sup>

When the NEC and TUC International sub-committees met on 23 June, both Willis and Cousins attacked the draft document. Cousins questioned the ambiguity over the 'suspension' of tests, 'first use' and dismissed the non-nuclear club as China was bound to refuse to join it. Bevan dismissed Cousins' criticism out of hand, ridiculed the policy-making capacity of the TUC and warned them that such objections would bring about Labour's electoral defeat.<sup>112</sup> While the PLP accepted the draft, it provoked another row

at the separate meetings of the NEC and TUC convened to ratify it on 24 June.<sup>113</sup> In the NEC, while the unilateralists had been persuaded to accept the policy, some of the right-wing members (notably Bacon and Watson) opposed the non-nuclear club because they felt it conceded too much to the Left. However, when put to the vote, which the unilateralists had been urged not to force, Gaitskell and Bevan's preference were accepted by 28 votes to 4.<sup>114</sup> At the TUC the ratio against the policy, though slightly higher at 23 to 6, was also defeated.<sup>115</sup>

The new document, Disarmament and Nuclear War: The Next Step was released on 24 June 1959. Reactions to the document's main focus, the non-nuclear club, were mixed. While the Times and Guardian favoured the idea, the left-wing press was generally critical. Tribune, which had endorsed unilateralism early on, was understandably hostile. The New Statesman, which had initially supported the concept as an advance on the previous policy, called it unrealistic. Like the Guardian, it raised reservations over how a Labour administration would persuade other prospective nuclear powers to follow their lead. It felt that the policy left the leadership open to charges of making proposals which they knew would be rejected. The Daily Herald also considered the plan untenable and reverted to its earlier position, that Labour should break the nuclear deadlock by abandoning nuclear weapons altogether.<sup>116</sup>

Within the Party, the document suffered heavy criticism. Some right-wingers had already criticised it, but of course the biggest threat came from the Left. Many Party activists who had hoped for a more radical shift, believed that the new policy was simply a ploy to win their support. Prominent members of VFS such as Sydney Silverman attacked the non-nuclear club as nonsensical, and most remained committed to unilateralism.<sup>117</sup> Richard Crossman, although a long-time advocate of the idea, wrote that 70 per cent of activists were against the policy and that if it



was presented to Conference under these circumstances, the effect would be disastrous.<sup>118</sup>

While the left-wing press, party activists and some members of the PLP had all criticised the new document, the leadership's paramount concern centred on the reaction of the T&GWU's leader, Frank Cousins. He had already opposed the document throughout its consultative stages. With a general election near and the possibility of a dangerous split developing if the T&GWU went over to unilateralism at their July conference, some Labour leaders believed that they needed Cousins' co-operation. According to Goodman, Bevan went out of his way to win the union leader over, but to no avail as Cousins was 'prepared to see the whole thing through...and would not give up'.<sup>119</sup>

Gaitskell did not appear to be as concerned as some of his colleagues. Cousins had written to the Labour leader on 26 June and expressed serious reservations over the non-nuclear club, the nuclear tests and 'first use'. Gaitskell's long reply argued that unilateralism was not an option and he warned Cousins against any commitments that could seriously embarrass a future Labour Government. He also dismissed the idea of a 'first use' pledge, because 'NATO armies are heavily outnumbered in conventional forces' by the Soviet bloc and that such a pledge would 'run...the risk of encouraging them to act first'. According to Williams, Gaitskell's reply was tactful and conciliatory.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, as the Labour leader had actually conceded little, this view lacks credibility.

Gaitskell's lack of concern about Cousins was illustrated in a private conversation with Hetherington, during a discussion on the same day (9 July) that the union leader attacked him at the T&GWU conference. Disparaging the union leader as ambitious, a demagogue and shallow, Gaitskell told Hetherington that while Cousins' motion (published the previous night) had

gone further than he had expected and 'would certainly carry the T&GWU with him', it would not carry the rest of the Party because they would back its leader.<sup>121</sup> No doubt encouraged by the NUM and NUR decisions to reject unilateralism at their annual conferences on 8 July, Gaitskell's attitude, along with Cousins' comments before he left for his union's conference, made a clash inevitable. During the defence debate at the T&GWU conference, Cousins openly challenged Gaitskell. After a fierce condemnation of the Party's official policy, the T&GWU leader concluded that it was not just crucial '...to elect a Labour government. The most important thing is to elect a Labour government determined to carry out a socialist policy'. Despite heated exchanges with loyalists beforehand, the T&GWU unilateralist resolution was carried by 760 votes to 50.<sup>122</sup>

Although Gaitskell and his close colleagues must have realised the threat posed by this, the Labour leader initially played down the differences. The day after Cousins' speech (10 July), Gaitskell admitted that although there were 'disagreements' over policy, they would be settled at the Party's annual conference.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, bolstered by NUR and NUM support and the recognition that the leadership could benefit from meeting the left-wing challenge head-on, Gaitskell responded in a speech at Workington. In this, he defended the proposed non-nuclear club as the only means to halt proliferation. After he had dismissed a declaration over 'first use' and refused to rule out tests completely, he ridiculed the unilateralists. He warned that the logic of their case would result in a British withdrawal from NATO, which would be 'escapist, myopic and positively dangerous to the peace of the world'. Gaitskell then turned to Cousins' T&GWU speech and the question of conference sovereignty,

'...our Party decisions on these matters are not dictated by one man whether he be the Leader...our spokesman on Foreign Affairs, or the General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union. They are made collectively...but it is not right that a future Labour Government should be committed by Conference decisions one way or the other on every matter of detail for all time...A Labour

Government will take into account the views of the Conference, but...annual conference does not mandate a government.<sup>124</sup>

This speech was significant because it confirmed Gaitskell's determination to concede nothing to the unilateralists, and made it explicit that any decision taken at conference in support of unilateralism could be ignored.

The Workington speech received a mixed reception. To those on the centre and right, worried that Cousins and the Left would damage Labour's electoral prospects, Gaitskell had acted in a 'positive manner'.<sup>125</sup> In contrast, earlier left-wing jubilation at Cousins' T&GWU speech was tempered by Gaitskell's response, then smashed by the news that the other union that had swung to unilateralism, the NUGMW, was to reconsider Labour's official policy statement. It had been this union's vote to support unilateralism in June, that convinced many on the Left that the block vote could be turned against the leadership at conference. At a special meeting on 21 August, the NUGMW indeed changed their previous stance. This vote, which supported the official line by 194 to 139, effectively destroyed the Left's confidence of defeating the leadership.<sup>126</sup>

The NUGMW's 'conversion' left Cousins and his support for unilateralism isolated. With the NUM, NUR and (by August) the NUGMW behind the official policy, the T&GWU had little chance of success at the TUC's September conference. Four separate resolutions were debated: one from the AEU which supported the official policy; from the Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, which demanded that the American nuclear missile bases be halted; the T&GWU resolution, which rejected the non-nuclear club and finally, the Fire Brigades Union, which wanted the total abolition of British nuclear weapons. Most of the results were of little surprise: the AEU's resolution was carried overwhelmingly, the T&GWU's and the Fire Brigades defeated. Nevertheless, the Shipbuilders resolution, supported by the NUM, the two Post Office unions and the T&GWU was

passed, albeit with a narrow majority. Despite the success against unilateralism, this left the TUC committed to oppose American missile bases in Britain, a line clearly at odds with official Labour policy.<sup>127</sup>

This vote posed a problem for the Party leadership. Prior to the 1958 conference, Labour's official policy had been endorsed by the trade union block vote on virtually every issue. With the approach of the 1959 annual conference, the resolution on missile sites threatened to become a rallying point for dissent. In addition, over 120 resolutions had been submitted to the NEC, many of which were explicitly unilateralist.<sup>128</sup> While many Labour MPs had refrained from openly criticising the official policy because of the possibility of a general election and the appeals for unity, others, especially those in VFS, were not so reticent. They also argued that Labour should be united, but only in fighting the election on the issue of unilateral disarmament.<sup>129</sup>

With such a large number of trade unionists, constituency parties and MPs opposed to the leadership's policy, it was almost inevitable that a major row over the Bomb at conference would occur. However, as Gaitskell had suspected, Macmillan announced that a general election was to take place on 8 October.<sup>130</sup> Not surprisingly, a strong desire to regain office persuaded the warring factions to unite behind the leadership and, for a while at least, the differences were put to one side. Labour's election pamphlet, Britain Belongs to You, concentrated on domestic matters and foreign policy was relegated to the back page. It is noticeable that the defence section was phrased so as to avoid anything contentious, and ambiguous enough to appeal to all the various factions. This emphasised Labour's commitment to Britain's international leadership and attacked the Tories' 'dangerous' reliance on nuclear weapons. It claimed that Labour 'set the pace', had advocated 'the only concrete proposals' designed to halt nuclear proliferation and left 'the way open to world wide disarmament'.<sup>131</sup> Apart from this, the H-bomb



hardly featured in Labour's election campaign, despite CND's 'special week' in mid-September and their list of 72 Labour candidates who supported unilateralism.<sup>132</sup>

Although the election was fought mainly on domestic issues, Macmillan had already astutely exploited foreign policy issues since the spring of 1959. He had been assisted over the nuclear issue by the temporary suspension of tests by both superpowers and his adoption of popular Labour policies, such as European disengagement and summit talks.<sup>133</sup> In addition, the Prime Minister also benefited from Labour's divisions over nuclear policy and had presented them to the electorate as a party unfit to be trusted with Britain's defences. In the event, Labour was never given the chance to show what its policies for nuclear disarmament could achieve, as the Tories won the general election held on 8 October 1959, and once again increased their parliamentary majority.

\* \* \* \* \*

Until mid-1959, Labour's official defence policy remained firmly committed to the concept of deterrence and multilateral disarmament. Despite differences in emphasis and Gaitskell's claims of a distinct policy, it effectively mirrored that of the Government. This bi-partisanship appeared to end with the release of Disarmament and Nuclear War: The Next Step in June 1959. In many ways the central plank of this new policy, the non-nuclear club, as Michael Gordon caustically observes, was a form of conditional unilateralism which allowed the Labour leadership to regain the moral highground. As Haseler suggests, this maintained 'the overall framework in which multilateralism operated for it rejected any unilateral action by a British government...without the agreement of others'.<sup>134</sup> Whatever its merits in theory, the plan was unlikely to succeed in practice as France and China, both eager to become nuclear powers, would almost certainly have rejected it. Nevertheless, the scheme had temporarily headed

off the unilateralist pressure within the Movement, enabled Labour to present a united front and prevented what might have been a catastrophic split just before a general election.

The evidence certainly suggests that the scheme's principal aim was to fend off the unilateralist challenge and promote unity, rather than any genuine attempt to achieve world disarmament. Although the joint NEC / TUC policy statement had originally been planned for release in July, it was brought forward, ostensibly because of 'recent international developments'. It appears more than likely that it was released early because of the NUGMW's swing to unilateralism, and the knock-on effect that this could have on the other unions. Gaitskell and the leadership only reluctantly adopted the non-nuclear club (proposals for which had been constantly rejected between February 1958 and March 1959) as the most effective option with which to maintain unity, preserve multilateralism and prevent the slide towards unilateralism. In this respect, Anthony Greenwood's contemporary assessment of the non-nuclear club a month after Labour's election defeat is worth noting,

'...I believe that the Party failed to carry conviction about the non-nuclear club because they were not themselves convinced. It was so obviously a compromise policy, reluctantly accepted in order to avoid facing the real issues...but that is off the record.'<sup>135</sup>

### Conclusion

Apart from Bevan's outburst against Attlee over the question of 'first use' in April 1955, the H-bomb did not achieve political prominence until 1957. That it did so then was largely due to increased awareness over: the dangers of radio-active fall-out; the admission that nuclear armed patrols were using British airspace; the announcement that American fixed rocket sites were to be based in Britain; the doctrine of 'massive nuclear retaliation'; and the escalation of the arms race. These issues convinced many that the possibility



of a nuclear catastrophe could not be ignored, and led to the formation of CND at the beginning of 1958.

In political terms, there was little to choose between the Conservative and Labour front benches over the Bomb. The Labour leadership had been as anxious to preserve Britain's influence and prestige as any Tory and assumed that possession of nuclear weapons confirmed this. The Attlee administration had decided, in great secrecy and at high cost, that Britain should manufacture nuclear weapons in the first place. Back in opposition, Labour quite willingly accepted the Tory Government's decision to produce thermo-nuclear weapons. While continually expressing support for disarmament, the Labour leadership believed that the nuclear deterrent was the only way to maintain British defences while the Warsaw Pact had such an advantage in conventional forces. Although they wanted to reduce the arms race, they believed that this could only be achieved through multilateral negotiations which must include conventional and nuclear forces.

There were of course, some differences with the Government. The policy of 'massive retaliation', which raised the spectre of all-out nuclear war even if the West was subjected to a conventional attack, was of concern; as were nuclear tests, nuclear armed patrols and the American missile sites. Nevertheless, the Labour leadership was caught in a dilemma when they tried to establish alternative policies. Economic considerations had been the prime motivation behind Duncan Sandys' adoption of 'massive retaliation', and was intended to reduce expensive conventional armaments and cut manpower. Labour had long pressed for such cuts but could not suggest an effective alternative which preserved Britain's defences, prestige and influence. On nuclear tests they wanted their suspension, but recognised that if they had the Bomb, it had to be tested. The siting of American missile bases was also a problem, for a Labour administration had agreed to British based

American nuclear-bombers in the first place. In principle, there was little difference between this and the proposed missile sites.

In 1959, bi-partisanship appeared to slide as Labour turned to the non-nuclear club: a scheme whereby Britain would renounce her nuclear weapons if the other (prospective) powers, apart from the Soviet Union and United States, renounced theirs. Yet even here, the commitment to multilateralism still remained, as the proposal was conditional on international agreement and the understanding that Britain would not act alone. Even so, Labour had appeared to part company with government policy in detail, if not principle. There is little doubt that there was increased concern over the escalation of the arms race along with a genuine desire for disarmament. It is also conceivable that the Labour leadership wanted a distinctive policy in international affairs and that the nuclear issue provided this, without questioning Britain's overall world role. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the over-riding consideration was defensive, and had been adopted in order to counter the dramatic increase in anti-nuclear agitation.

Like the Labour leadership, the Left had taken little notice of the nuclear issue until 1955. They had been preoccupied with other matters such as Korea and German rearmament. Nevertheless, the escalation of the arms race, exacerbated by the development of thermo-nuclear weapons, increased the profile of this danger in left-wing circles. The attraction of this issue was not simply a desire to rid the world of the horrors of nuclear weapons, although of course many genuinely wanted this. Like the rest of the Party, the Left wanted Britain's world leadership, but on a moral level rather than the political one preferred by Gaitskell and his colleagues. Of more significance, and as with most other issues, the Bomb was also closely bound to the Left's desire to challenge the revisionist leadership.

With the moral crusade coupled to the wish to mould the Party in their own image, the Left took up the cry of 'Ban the Bomb' with a vengeance. The agitation against British nuclear weapons in all sections of the Party and wider Movement caused serious problems for Labour's elite. The formation of CND and re-emergence of VFS in early 1958, the critical left-wing press throughout and the T&GWU's conversion to unilateralism in July 1959, all forced the leadership on to the defensive. Between 1957 and 1959 this was demonstrated by the succession of policy statements and the proposal for the non-nuclear club. Yet, no matter how much the leadership attempted to regain the initiative and plead for unity, the Left rejected their advances. Nevertheless, any notion that the Left dictated the pace is also problematic. The leadership never conceded anything of real substance even though unity was so obviously threatened. Unilateralism was rejected time and again, despite the forlorn compromise formulae devised by Crossman and others.

While the Left's demands had forced the leadership to react, it was Gaitskell's control over policy that held the unilateralists at bay, at least until after the 1959 general election. Philip Williams maintains that between 1957-59 Gaitskell went out of his way to be conciliatory and unite the Party, even over the nuclear issue. Yet, the furore over nuclear tests, American missile bases and the non-nuclear club suggests the contrary: that Gaitskell and his close colleagues were unwilling to concede anything until absolutely forced to do so, even if it threatened unity. Not until the summer of 1959, when they recognised the consequences of the unions turning to unilateralism and causing a conference defeat, did the leadership really respond. Even here, Gaitskell warned that conference decisions might well be ignored. In the event, the leadership was saved from this embarrassment when Macmillan called the general election. This brought the factions together in the interests of presenting a united front to the electorate and a thirst for regaining office.

While Gaitskell was not alone in his commitment to British national interests, it was his close control over the decision-making process that dominated Labour's nuclear policy in this period, and one which demonstrates the strength of the McKenzie - Haseler thesis. With this and the support of the individual trade union 'barons' and their block vote (the Kavanagh thesis), Gaitskell was assured of success. His control over nuclear policy between 1957-59 was only lost when he ignored the attachment of many of his supporters to Clause IV after the October election defeat. With his under-estimation of this sentimental attachment, as we shall see in the next chapter, Gaitskell inadvertently left himself open to defeat over defence in 1960.

### Notes for Chapter Three

1. HDD, End of Dec 1956, p.683.
2. Cmd.124 Defence: Outline of Future Policy, 1957 (London: HMSO, 1957).
3. In the defence debate of 1 & 2 March 1955, Bevan had voiced concern over the Government's threatened use of the H-bomb to meet any eventuality, and criticised both Labour's policy and Clem Attlee in the process. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.537, 2 Mar 1955, Cols.2119-22. For later assessments, see Keohane,D. (1993), p.21; Gowing,M.M. (1974).
4. For Labour views, see the 1955 election manifesto Forward with Labour (London: Labour Party, 1955); Stewart,M. Policy and Weapons in the Nuclear Age Fabian Tract 296 (London: Fabian International Bureau, 1955), p.16; LPCR (1955), pp.24-5; Aneurin Bevan in Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.562, 19 Dec 1956, Cols.1398-1407; Gaitskell,H. (1957), p.43; Strachey,J. Scrap All the H-Bombs London: Transport House, 1958), p.15.  
For later assessments see Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.274; Haseler,S. (1969), p.181; Miliband,R. Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p.334; Foot,M. (1975), p.597; Campbell,J. (1987), pp.332-33.
5. Keohane,D. (1993), p.22; Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.271; Campbell,J. (1987), p.331 & Miliband,R. (1972), p.340.
6. Williams,P,M. (1979), Chs.14-20, esp. p.471; Gordon,M,R. (1969), pp.271, 273.
7. HGD 26 July 1956, pp.557-8. Gaitskell was referring to Labour's decision to support the H-bomb in 1955 as expounded by Attlee, the 1955 election manifesto and Conference. Crossman later admitted that Labour's position was 'evasive'. RCD 27 Sept 1957, p.610.
8. HGD 26 July 1956, p.557.
9. LPCR 1956, p.142.
10. This committee had been suggested by the NEC's International Sub-Committee (IS-C). Labour Party Summary of Proceedings at the First Meeting of the Ad Hoc Disarmament Sub-Committee Ad Hoc Sub-Committee, Feb 1957. For membership, see LPCR 1957, p.25.
11. RCD 3 May 1957, pp.588-91; Macmillan,H. Riding the Storm, 1956-1959 (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.259; Miliband,R. (1972), pp.335-6.
12. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.566, 5 Mar 1957, Cols.178-81 & 6 Mar, Cols.321-25.
13. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.567, 19 Mar 1957, Col.213 (Bevan); Foot,M. (1975), p.550.
14. The Times 1 April 1957.



15. RCD 3 May 1957, p.588.
16. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.568, 1 Apr 1957, Col.45 (Macmillan) and Col.72 (Gaitskell).
17. Manchester Guardian 3 Apr 1957.
18. Macmillan,H. (1971), pp.261-63; Williams,P,M. (1979), p.453.
19. 'Special Meeting of the Parliamentary Committee' PCM 6.00pm 2 Apr 1957. At this meeting, Anthony Greenwood proposed an amendment whereby Britain would suspend its own tests unilaterally. This opposed the official line, that tests would only be stopped when all three nuclear powers agreed to do so. His motion had only two votes supporting it, although it is not clear how many went against it.  
Responding to George Thomas' motion that there should be 'an immediate cessation of H-bomb tests' (supported by around 80 members) at a special meeting of the PLP [PLPM 10.30am 3 Apr 1957] the Parliamentary Committee met again. A compromise was put by Christopher Mayhew and Sir Lynn Ungoed-Thomas. PCM 5.00pm 3Apr. Taken back to another special meeting of the PLP at 7.30pm, the amendment to the original motion read '...meanwhile postponing the tests for a limited period so that the response of those governments to this initiative may...be considered'. This was carried unanimously. PLPM 7.30pm 3 Apr 1957.
20. Letter from Gaitskell to John Murray 10 Apr 1957, quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.454.
21. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.454.
22. Manchester Guardian 4 Apr 1957.
23. The Times 4 Apr 1957.
24. Quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.474.
25. For an instructive analysis of these events, and a refutation of Williams' assertion that Gaitskell's role in these manoeuvres was conciliatory, see Cross,D,R. (1986), pp.110-113.
26. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.568, 16 Apr 1957, Col.1795.
27. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.568, 16 Apr 1957, Col.1774 (Brown), 17 Apr, Cols.2024-37 (Strachey) and 17 Apr, Col.1975-87 (Crossman).
28. Brown acknowledged the differences. He offered his resignation from shadow defence after a television broadcast 'antagonised' many party members, but Gaitskell refused, because it would look like a concession to the Left. See RCD 3 May 1957, p.589. According to Crossman, this debate let HMG off the hook further. RCD 3 May 1957, pp.589-90.
29. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.571, 4 June 1957, Cols.1080-83. According to Campbell, although their positions were essentially the same, whereas



Gaitskell continually stressed the difficulties in reaching agreement on nuclear weapons, Bevan talked and wrote as though he believed that nuclear weapons could and must be abandoned unilaterally. Campbell,J. (1987), p.333.

30. See Minion,J. & Bolsover,P. The CND Story (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), p.13; also, Driver,C. (1964).

31. Tribune 22 & 29 Mar 1957, New Statesman 27 Mar 1957.

32. The Times 6 May 1957. Although Williams' believed that Bevan's speeches in India and Reading came closer than ever before to unilateralism, he recognised that Bevan was not a unilateralist. Williams,P.M. (1979), p.454. Also see Campbell,J. (1987), pp.295-301,33; Foot,M. (1975), p.553 and Duff,P. Left, Left, Left: A Personal Account of Six Protest Campaigns 1945-65 (London: Allison & Busby, 1971).

33. Tribune 7 June 1957.

34. The NEC compiled the composite resolutions presented to conference, which came in as CLP and trade union branch resolutions. The various working parties and sub-committees that discussed nuclear policy were co-ordinated and dominated by the NEC. Even the TUC, who initiated many of the ideas that were later taken up by the NEC, were always confined to a subordinate role: e.g. Disarmament and Nuclear War was initiated by the TUC, involved joint discussions by the TUC/NEC and was published as a joint statement. Even so, it was the Party Secretariat that drafted it and the Party leaders who determined the content of the final statement.

A major reason for the primacy of the leader was the predominance of MPs on the NEC. Although not all of these were Gaitskell supporters, most were. Between 1955-61 the number of MPs on the NEC, representing both CLPs and trades unions varied between 17-19 out of a total of 29 (including the Treasurer). For example, in the period Oct 1956 - Feb 1957, out of 17 MPs, only 5 left-wingers (Driberg, Mikardo, Castle, Greenwood and Silverman), one from the right (Summerskill) and one doubtful (Crossman) opposed Gaitskell's policy. This represented 7 out of 17 MPs and in turn 29 members altogether [taken from NEC list in NECM 1957]. This gave Gaitskell an in-built advantage even before the other NEC members are considered. In addition, loyalty and the ultimate wish to preserve unity could be counted on to persuade the waverers to follow the line. With his well-known fondness for minutiae and taking charge, it was almost inevitable that Gaitskell's preferences, supported by the NEC majority, would prevail. Some contemporaries certainly believed this: e.g. Crossman and David Ennals. See RCD 3 May 1957 & 23 June 1959, pp.583, 591 & 760. For a detailed analysis of nuclear policy-making, see Rowley,D,W.(1991).

35. Amended Draft Preamble for Labour Party Policy Statement on Disarmament Mar 1957: approved by the Ad Hoc Sub-Committee for Disarmament on 25 Mar 1957

36. Labour Party Defence and Disarmament (draft); The members were Brown, Crossman, Strachey, de Freitas and Bottomley; Crossman's policy became the non-nuclear club - highly criticised at the time by both Strachey

(John Strachey - A note on Multi-lateral Disarmament 7 June 1957) and George Brown - June 1957 in Defence S-C Mins & Docs 1956/7.

37. Labour Party Disarmament and Defence July 1957. Joint meeting of Ad Hoc Disarmament Sub-Committee and Defence Sub-Committee, 5 July 1957. Also see Cross,D. (1986), pp.119-25.

38. Manchester Guardian 17 June 1957; Daily Herald 4 July 1957; Times 11 July 1957. See resolution presented LPCR 1957 p.211. Also the Socialist International Congress in Vienna 2-6 July 1957 - The S.I. Resolution was the same as that of the NEC. This was not surprising as it had been drafted by Gaitskell, Bevan, Phillips and Ray Gunter.

39. This was due to meet in September, IS-C NECM 16 July 1957.

40. Goodman,G. The Awkward Warrior, Frank Cousins: His Life and Times (London: Davis-Poynter, 1979), p.145. The T&GWU resolution called for (i) An end to all H-bomb tests and (ii) The total abolition of H-bombs on a universal basis both in manufacture and existing stocks.

41. Manchester Guardian 7 Sept 1957.

42. Tribune 20 & 27 Sept 1957.

43. Minion,J. & Bolsover,P. (1983), p.13.

44. Foot,M. (1975), p.566. For an alternative view see, Driver,C. (1964), p.38.

45. Labour Party Disarmament and Defence Sept 1957 (no exact date); the reasons given were that subsequent tests by the Soviets and their successful launch of an ICBM had changed the circumstances. The first paper, Disarmament had been drafted by Phillips on 13 Sept 1957.GS/DEF/33. Crossman revised this draft on 20 Sept. GS/DEF/35ii, General Secretary's Papers 1945-64. Crossman's redraft was very close to the multilateralist line taken by Gaitskell in July.

46. IS-C NECM 17 Sept 1957.

47. NECM 26 Sept 1957; RCD 20 & 26 Sept 1957 pp.606-9.

48. NECM 27 and 29 Sept 1957. Crossman had suggested that Bevan should present the case on 17 Sept. RCD 20 Sept 1957 p.606.

The 3 Composite Resolutions were,  
No.23 Close to the official policy.

No.24 Called for unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons by Britain.

No.25 Demanded the immediate cessation of H-bomb tests and a unilateral lead by Britain.

The NEC recommended	acceptance	of No.23 - result	= accepted
" "	rejection	" " 24 - "	= rejected
" "	acceptance	" " 25 - "	= accepted

(No.25 on the understanding that 'cessation' meant 'suspension').

Source: LPCR 1957, pp.163-7.

49. For Crossman's contemporary account RCD 30 Sept 1957, pp.612-15. Later, Hunter,L. (1959), Foot,M. (1975) and Campbell,J. (1987). Denis Healey describes Bevan's attempts at a compromise between unilateralism and multilateralism as performing 'prodigious acrobats in a vain attempt to straddle the divide'. Healey,D. (1990), p.241. Miliband believed that this speech unambiguously removed Bevan from the leadership of the Left, accepting his final position as Gaitskell's second-in-command. Miliband,R. (1972), p.337.

50. No.24 was defeated by 5,836,000 to 781,000. LPCR 1957 pp.174-83. Also see Foot,M. (1975), pp.571, 574, Campbell,J. (1987), pp.336-40 and Goodman,G. (1979), p.157.

51. Crossman described it as a 'complete victory for Hugh'. RCD 4 Oct 1957, p.615; Williams,P,M. (1979), p.476; Macmillan was not so sure. Macmillan,H. (1971), p.419.

52. Contemporary reaction to Bevan's conference speech was that it announced the 'End of Bevanism' and the 'End of an Era' New Statesman & Daily Herald 12 Oct 1957. The right-wing press was jubilant, e.g. 'Bevan into Bevin' Daily Telegraph 4 Oct 1957.

More recently, Mervyn Jones has referred to the conference episode as 'The speech that put an end to Bevanism', Jones,M. Michael Foot (London: Gollancz, 1994), p.222. But as John Campbell points out, 'In reality...it had been dead for some years'. Campbell,J. (1987), p.340. For the Left's view, see Foot,M. (1975), p.574 & Duff,P. (1971), pp.71, 119.

53. See Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.264; Miliband,R. (1972), p.340; Duff,P. (1971), p.118 and Jenkins,M. (1979), pp.260-62.

54. RCD 4 Oct 1957, p.615; The Labour lead in the opinion polls was 6 per cent in August 1957, 13 per cent in September, 10 per cent in October, but had fallen to 5 per cent in December. The parties were soon level and by July 1958 Macmillan's popularity had soared, much to the dismay of Labour leaders. Williams believes that during 1958, Gaitskell's leadership was unquestioned in any large section of the Party and his political approach unchallenged. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.471.

55. From Macmillan's diary account for 5 October in Macmillan,H. (1971), p.419; Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.273.

56. In a letter to Arthur Blenkinsop on 24 October, Gaitskell wrote, 'My personal view is that we will do best to leave the matter there. It is really quite impossible in opposition, and on the limited information available, to work out a detailed defence policy'. Quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.492.

57. The success of the Soviet ballistic missile capability was perceived to have made Britain's V-bombers virtually obsolete at a stroke. The USA was anxious to regain the advantage and so the arms race entered a new dimension. Kennan's BBC Reith lecture was later published as Kennan,G,F. Russia, the Atom and the West (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1958).



58. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.578, 28 Nov 1957, Cols.1275-6 (Macmillan); Even the sympathetic press expressed shock at the disclosures; ie.g. Times 29 Nov 1957. Not surprisingly the left-wing press was scathing, and described the rocket base agreement as 'Britain's Suicide Pact', New Statesman 4 Jan 1958.
59. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.580, 20 Dec 1957, Cols.775-6, 845 (Brown).
60. The concern over unity is illustrated by Gaitskell's letter to Crossman, where he commented that '...in the field of foreign policy "unity" is such a delicate plant that a good deal of care is necessary'. In Gaitskell Papers 13-18 Nov 1957, quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.459.
61. See RCD 26 Nov 1957, p.634 and Williams,P,M. (1979), p.474.
62. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.492.
63. On 6 Jan 1958, TUC representatives called for an international agreement to ban the use of nuclear weapons, suspend British tests and the end to nuclear patrol flights. Cross,D. (1986), p.153.
64. Letter from Sir Vincent Tewson to Morgan Phillips (undated) in NECM. TUC 'Summarised Report of Joint Meeting of the TUC International Committee and the Labour Party IS-C' NECM 13 Feb 1958. According to his biographer, Gaitskell welcomed this new initiative and agreed on every issue. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.493.
65. E.g. see Tribune 21 Feb 1958; later Foot,M. (1975), p.598 and Duff,P. (1971), p.118.
66. For CND, see Duff,P. (1971); Minion,J. & Bolsover,P. (1983); Driver,C. (1964); Taylor,R. (1988); Taylor,R. & Pritchard,C. The Protest Makers: The British Nuclear Disarmament Movement of 1958-65. Twenty Years On (London: Pergamon Press, 1980).
67. CND's original policies pressed for: a British initiative to halt the nuclear arms race; top-level negotiations to stop proliferation; stop nuclear tests; to halt the construction of missile sites in Britain and suspend nuclear patrol flights. See Driver,C. (1964), pp.45-47, Duff,P. (1971), pp.122-125 and Foot,M. (1975), p.598. Well known Labour figures in CND were Michael Foot, Hugh Jenkins, Frank Allaun MP, Stephen Swingle MP and Harold Davies MP; in the Shadow Cabinet, Anthony Greenwood. See above texts for membership details.
68. For aims, membership and extent of VFS see Jo Richardson Papers, especially (i) VFS 'Analysis of Geographical Distribution of Membership' July 1958 and (ii) VFS 'Executive Council Ballot' Dec 1958. Also, Section 3, 'Parliamentary Papers' File 3/3 and Section 6, 'Publications' File 6/9 in Hugh Jenkins Papers.
69. RCD 28 Feb 1958, p.668.

70. Daily Herald 25 Feb 1958; Cmd.363 Report on Defence: Britain's Contribution to Peace and Security, 1958 (London: HMSO, 1958). Labour's opposition to various points had been agreed to at the joint NEC / TUC talks on 13 Feb and voiced publicly in Parliament. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.582, 19 Feb 1958, Cols.1235-6 & 20 Feb Col.1412.
71. Daily Herald 26 Feb 1958; RCD 28 Feb 1958 p.668.
72. NECM 26 Feb 1958.
73. NECM 26 Feb 1958; RCD 28 Feb 1958 pp.668-9. Bevan agreed the draft.
74. Letter from Morgan Phillips to Editor and reply Daily Herald 27 Feb 1958.
75. 'Chairman's Sub-Committees Minutes' 25 Feb 1958 in NECM 1957/58.
76. NECM 26 Feb 1958; 'Chairman's Sub-Committees Minutes' NECM 4 Mar 1958. Crossman thought Gaitskell as rigid as ever. RCD 28 Feb 1958, p.669.
77. E.g. The Times between 1 & 10 Mar 1958; Williams,P.M. (1979), p.477.
78. The minutes of VFS meetings reveal their scale of activity before merging into the Tribune Group in 1960.  
Williams maintains that by March 1958 (only two months after its re-emergence) the threat had receded. However, VFS meetings were held regularly throughout 1958 (20). The enthusiasm was especially noticeable as demonstrated by the number of meetings in the spring and early summer; April (4) May (4) and June (5). February 1959 also saw a flurry of activity, 4 meetings taking place. Jo Richardson Papers Manchester.  
The harsh criticism meted out to the leadership by Hugh Jenkins and others at the 1958 VFS Conference was hardly likely to allay these fears. See Jenkins' speech, in File 6/9 Hugh Jenkins Papers. The leadership was obviously perturbed by this and even resorted to sending Secretariat spies to VFS meetings to gauge the threat. 'Victory For Socialism Rallies' General Secretary's Papers gi/vi/162i, 11 March 1958.
79. Prominent members of both included Swingler, Foot, Allaun, Harold Davies and Ben Levy. Members of VFS were to be found in all parts of the Movement. For lists and information see Jo Richardson Papers.
80. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.583, 26 Feb 1958, Cols.407-12 (Brown) and 27 Feb, Cols.656-7 (Strachey).
81. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.583, 27 Feb 1958, Cols.633-41. Crossman's idea of creating 'efficient, small mobile conventional forces' and postponing the abolition of conscription (col.638) did not fit in at all well with earlier Labour demands for an end to conscription and their acceptance by HMG (for economic reasons) announced in 1957. Crossman's ideas eventually became the 'non-nuclear club'; not that the concept was his own by any means. The Manchester Guardian had also advocated the idea in Feb 1958.
82. Daily Herald 4 Mar 1958; The Times 4 Mar 1958.

83. Within the Shadow Cabinet there was dissent. Bevan was inconsistent; Anthony Greenwood was a prominent member of CND from its conception up to the formation of Wilson's government in 1964. The dissent was not restricted to the Left either: Edith Summerskill was also an opponent of the Bomb. Labour's defence spokesmen had also shown divergence of opinion (Crossman was at best only lukewarm to the official policy) and confusion in and outside Parliament.

In the NEC, both LP (e.g. Mikardo and Castle) and TUC (e.g. Cousins and Willis) members were against it. In the PLP, a fluctuating number of MPs were opposed (estimates in this period vary from a hard core of 40 up to at least 85 - a third of the Party). In addition there were the activists in the CLPs and trades unions to consider.

This is not to say the Party was irrevocably split over the issue, or that dissent was something new; far from it. However, the fundamental disagreement was significant compared to the scale of any previous dispute, especially later on in 1960.

84. Labour Party Summary Report of Meeting between the International Committee of the Labour Party NEC and the TUC General Council 6 Mar 1958 NECM 1957/58.

The document under discussion was the final draft of Disarmament and Nuclear Weapons - Declaration by the Labour Party and TUC 3 Mar 1958, GS/DEF/58iii, General Secretary's Papers.

The two-stage draft called for (i) International agreement on the suspension of nuclear tests; that Britain should give a lead at once by suspending thermo-nuclear tests for a limited period and that agreement on testing would lead to a cessation of the production of fissile materials for military purposes (ii) A reduction in stocks of nuclear weapons would be linked with a reduction in conventional forces.

Michael Foot's account of the meeting gives an insight of the heated discussions that took place, and how Bevan had reverted to his 1955 stance. Foot, M. (1975), pp.594-97. Also, see Crossman's account, RCD 10 Mar 1958, pp.672-76.

85. The final draft, Disarmament and Nuclear War was issued on 6 Mar 1958. Contemporary and later reaction was mixed: the Daily Herald 7 Mar 1958 welcomed it, while Tribune 14 Mar 1958 regarded it as too cautious; Crossman thought it would cause more trouble. RCD 10 Mar 1958, pp.674-5. For later assessments, see Gordon, M.R. (1969), p.273 and Miliband, R. (1972), pp.340-41.

86. They met on 17, 19 & 25 March 1958. The 8 members were Brown, Healey, Strachey, Bevan, Crossman, Ungood-Thomas, Griffiths and Gaitskell. For the notes on the meetings written by Gaitskell see Appendix II [1958] 'Defence Questions: Talks among 8 senior Labour M.P.'s on 17, 19 and 25 March'. Doc. No.22 HGD pp.631-34.

87. Crossman's alternative was to leave NATO's nuclear shield to the USA. Gaitskell did not totally rule out the idea, although as it became clear, he would only contemplate the plan in 1959 if all other nations agreed to it; which was highly unlikely. 'Defence Questions' Doc. No.22 HGD c & v, p.634. Also see Brown and Strachey's earlier suggestions in parliament - f/note 80.



88. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.495-6.

89. In effect, Crossman and Ungood-Thomas were outnumbered by 6 to 2.  
RCD 19 Mar 1958, p.677.

90. NECM 26 Mar 1958. Strachey's pamphlet was largely based on his recent speeches and Disarmament and Nuclear War. Many of his ideas over the nuclear deterrent (e.g. independence from the USA) mirrored HMG's. Strachey,J. Scrap All the H-Bombs (London: Transport House, 1958). For Crossman's view, see RCD 10 Apr 1958, pp.681-84.

91. The Times 14 Apr 1958.

92. Foot,M. (1975), pp.599-600.

93. The others were Labour's Foreign Policy, which was a general outline, and Disengagement in Europe (Jan 1958). The latter proposed separating the two rival power-blocs, thus avoiding any incident (e.g. over Germany) which could lead to a catastrophic nuclear exchange.

The theory was discussed first in 1952 and advocated by the former Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul van Zeeland. Eden suggested a similar plan at the 1955 Geneva Conference and this was endorsed by Gaitskell in 1956 and the TUC in 1957. Gaitskell had elaborated on the ideas in Gaitskell,H.

'Disengagement: Why? How?', Foreign Affairs Vol 36(4) July 1958, pp.539.

The fullest exposition came from Denis Healey in Healey,D. 'A Neutral Belt in Europe', Fabian Tract 311 Jan 1958. For further discussion on Healey's view and his later admission that the idea was based on political expediency rather than a credible policy, see Williams,G. & Reed,B. (1971), pp.115-118, esp p.117.

The 'Rapacki Plan' (Foreign Minister of Poland) was similar and George Kennan supported the broad idea in his BBC Reith Lecture. Although an interesting notion, it was never adopted as it was thought to benefit the Warsaw Pact's numerically superior conventional forces.

94. These were Composite Resolutions Nos. 27-30 LPCR 1958, pp.191-8.

95. LPCR 1958, pp.204-13 (Brown), p.222 (Gaitskell), p.189 (Bevan) and p.202 (Healey). The most impassioned plea against was from Peggy Duff p.203.

Composite Resolution.	No.27	Defeated by	5,611,000 - 890,000
"	"	No.28	" " 5,349,000 - 1,926,000
"	"	No.29	" " 5,538,000 - 1,005,000
"	"	No.30	" " 5,705,000 - 840,000

Source: LPCR 1958, p.222.

96. Quoted from 'Note on a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell - 9 July 1959, File 1/11 p.4. in Alastair Hetherington Papers, BLPES

97. See the Observer 5 Oct 1958, quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.478.

98. Crossman's view, quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.507-8.

99. Gaitskell,H. The Age We Live In; Synopsis of Comprehensive Policy Statement NEC (Re.444) 22 Oct 1958, pp.12-14.

100. Hansard H.C. Debs 5s. Vol.600, 26 Feb 1959, Col.1421 (Sandys), Col.1407 (Strachey) and 25 Feb, Col.1154 (Brown). Cmd.662 Report of the Five Year Defence Plan (London: HMSO, 1959).
101. Letter from Anthony Greenwood to E. S. Turpin 16 March 1959. Box file 'Defence and Disarmament' Greenwood Papers Bodleian Library, Oxford.
102. At the meeting, it was agreed that a sub-committee (including Gaitskell, Bevan and Crossman) should be formed to make any revisions before the document was presented to the NEC. IS-CM 10 Feb 1959. Again, this illustrates the control of Gaitskell and his close colleagues.
103. Greenwood's reaction to this rejection was that it was 'particularly annoying as [he'd] put it forward as a compromise between [his] own views in support of unilateralism and the prevalent views of the executive'. Letter from Greenwood to R. Davies 19 June 1959. File 9, Box file 'Biographical Material, Mainly CND' Greenwood Papers. Greenwood had written to Morgan Phillips in early March with his proposed motion and an explanation of his attitude. Phillips had circulated this to all NEC members on 18 March. NECM 18 Mar 1959. It was rejected on the grounds that a similar resolution had been rejected at the 1958 annual conference. NECM 25 Mar 1959.  
Ironically, only nine days before the meeting, Greenwood was confident that his colleagues would adopt a new position on nuclear disarmament. Letter from Greenwood to E. S. Turpin. See f/n 101.
104. Williams,P.M. (1979), pp.496-7.
105. Copy of letter from David Ennals to Gaitskell 23 Mar 1959. In Box file 'Defence & Disarmament' Greenwood Papers
106. IS-CM 12 May 1959; Bevan had pledged that a future Labour government would end all H-bomb tests less than three weeks before. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.600, 27 Apr 1959, Col.915. See RCD 14 May 1959, p.749.
107. NECM 3 June 1959; Int'l-Cttee TUC TUC Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament (Amended) 26 May 1959; See Crossman's account RCD 5 June 1959, p.750. David Cross argues that, '...the memo presented in support of the non-nuclear club...would not have looked out of place in a CND pamphlet' and 'amounted to a complete intellectual rejection of the views of the Party's official defence spokesmen'. Cross,D.R. (1986), pp.213-14.
108. The annual conference of the NUGMW met on 4 June and voted 150 to 126, with 75 votes 'not cast', to pass the unilateralist resolution. For the arguments over whether this vote reflected a unilateral tide, see Williams,P.M. (1979), p.497 and Goodman,G. (1979), p.210.
109. IS-CM 9 & 18 June 1959; According to Crossman, Gaitskell supported the scheme, but without Bevan's enthusiasm. RCD 10 & 18 June 1959, pp.754-6.
110. IS-CM 22 June 1959.

111. 'Draft Document for Consideration by Labour Party and TUC' (undated) DS-CM. See Cross,D. (1986), pp.218-20. This became Disarmament and Nuclear War: The Next Step. For critical assessments, see Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.273 and Miliband,R. (1972), pp.341-2. Questioned over his 'new' stance over the NNC, Gaitskell replied that a test agreement was nearer and that the ability of other nations to make bombs had only recently been grasped. 9 July 1959, File 1/11, p.4, Hetherington Papers.
112. RCD 23 June 1959, p.759.
113. PLPM 23 June 1959; Daily Herald 24 June 1959.
114. NECM 24 June 1959. Gaitskell insisted to Hetherington that 'the joint statement did not represent a compromise to the Left in any way'. 9 July 1959, File 1/11, p.4, Hetherington Papers.
115. The Times 25 June 1959.
116. Labour Party Disarmament and Nuclear War: The Next Step (London: Labour Party, 1959); Manchester Guardian 25 June 1959 (who had advocated the idea in February 1958); The Times 25 June 1959; Tribune 26 June & 3 July 1959; New Statesman 4 July 1959 and the Daily Herald 23 June 1959.
117. The Times 29 June 1959. Bevan was heckled continuously when he tried to explain the policy to an audience in Cardiff.
118. RCD 29 June 1959, p.764. Williams disputes these figures. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.501, 503.
119. Goodman,G. (1979), pp.214-15 & 222. For Williams' view of Cousins see, Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.502-7.
120. Letter from Cousins to Gaitskell, 26 June 1959. For this and text of Gaitskell's reply on 30 June see Goodman,G. (1979), pp.215-20. For Williams' view, see Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.501-3.
121. 9 July 1959, File 1/11, pp.2-3, Hetherington Papers.
122. Goodman,G. (1979), pp.224-5.
123. News Chronicle 11 July 1959.
124. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.503-8. According to Crossman, George Brown had tried to mediate between the two over the issue of first use, but Gaitskell had refused to compromise, telling Brown that it was a concession that he could not make. Brown told Crossman that, 'from the first, Hugh manoeuvred to isolate Cousins. He didn't want an agreement'. RCD 17 July 1959, p.767.
125. RCD 17 July 1959, p.767. Some believed that Gaitskell's personal position and prestige had been immensely strengthened. New Statesman 18 July 1959.

126. The Times 15 July 1959; News Chronicle 22 Aug 1959.
127. The Times 10 September 1959; The official policy was to postpone the construction of American missile bases until a summit was held. See Disarmament & Nuclear War: The Next Step, para.8.
128. Resolutions received, NECM Oct 1959.
129. The Times 24 June 1959; Konni Zilliacus in VFS This Way to Peace in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.507.
130. Gaitskell had expected this from July, and was in the Soviet Union when the announcement was made. He told Hetherington that if Macmillan was shrewd, he would announce an early election before the Labour conference showed a united front, backing its leader! 9 July 1959, File 1/11, p.3, Hetherington Papers.
131. Election Manifesto Britain Belongs to You (London: Labour Party, 1959).
132. See Butler,D,E. & Rose,R. (1960), p.65.
133. Disengagement in Europe was not new, nor restricted to Labour. In February, Macmillan had upstaged Labour's proposed visit to the USSR - which meant they had to wait until August. In addition, the Government was given another boost when President Eisenhower visited Britain in the summer. Macmillan had never expressed confidence in summits, but the trip to Moscow and the American visit showed that he recognised the political advantages, especially near an election.
134. Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.237 and Haseler,S. (1969), p.185. Haseler's comments appear close as the Next Step stressed continued support for NATO and a readiness to accept US missile bases.
135. Letter from Greenwood to H. Usborne 27 Nov 1959. Box file, 'Defence & Disarmament' Greenwood Papers.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Balloon Goes Up! The Bomb 1959-62

The 1959 general election was a disaster for the Labour Party. Not only had the Conservatives won their third successive election victory, they had also increased their overall parliamentary majority. For Labour supporters this was all the more crushing as many of them, including Gaitskell, considered that this had represented their best opportunity of returning to power.<sup>1</sup> After the defeat, the fragile unity that existed up to the election swiftly evaporated and was replaced by a phase of internal warfare that surpassed almost anything in the period 1951-59, and culminated in the 1960 conference defeat.

In the immediate aftermath of the election a split quickly grew over the reasons behind the defeat. To many on the right-wing of the Party, Labour had lost because it no longer reflected the hopes and aspirations of the British electorate. Gaitskell and some of his close colleagues concluded that Labour should reject class-based dogmas and unpopular measures like further nationalisation.<sup>2</sup> At the Party's annual conference, Gaitskell angered the Left and alarmed the moderates when he argued that Labour's continued adherence to Clause IV misrepresented the Party's aims and objectives and caused a negative effect on potential supporters.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, many on the Left believed that the defeat had been caused by the similarities of the 'revisionist' leadership to the Tory Government: that Labour had not lost by being too left-wing, rather that they had not been radical enough. The revisionist's appeal to the electorate and the critique of nationalisation was therefore greeted with hostility, as the Left believed this challenged the very fundamentals of Labourism.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the attack on Clause IV, although unsuccessful, was an error of judgement that proved to have profound consequences for Gaitskell's leadership. Against the advice of even his closest revisionist supporters, he

had left himself vulnerable to attack from his traditional opponents on the Left, but of more significance, he had attracted suspicion from many of his erstwhile supporters amongst the trade union leadership, few of whom were prepared to break with this symbolic commitment.<sup>5</sup> The distrust that Gaitskell's actions caused, inadvertently forced them into an uneasy alliance with the fundamentalist Left. This meant that the union block vote could no longer be guaranteed to support the leadership. Not only had Gaitskell seriously undermined his own position over domestic policy, but he had chosen to do so at the most inopportune moment possible, just as the nuclear dispute escalated.

The Left, usually marginalised by right-wing trades union support for the leadership, were quick to exploit this situation. The rift over nuclear policy, which had widened since 1957, was increasingly superimposed on to this struggle between the warring factions and provided the means with which to challenge the leadership. Disillusion over attempts to change Clause IV and growing unilateralist sentiment in the trades unions forced Gaitskell on to the defensive and worked, albeit briefly, to the Left's advantage. Although the leadership abandoned the principle of a British independent nuclear deterrent in April 1960, they were defeated at the Party's annual conference in October 1960. Samuel Beer, Michael Gordon and Lewis Minkin have used the left-wing success here to demonstrate the limitations of the primacy of the leadership argument put by McKenzie and Haseler.

However, the left-wing victory was smaller than anticipated and short-lived. Despite widespread misgivings with his leadership and opportunistic challenges from some of his senior colleagues, Gaitskell's pledge to fight the conference decision, a strong desire for unity and the retreat from unilateralism all contributed to reversing the Scarborough defeat at Blackpool the following year. With unilateralism on the wane and the leader's position consolidated, the Government's decision to begin negotiations for entry into



the European Common Market helped heal the rift between the Left and Gaitskell. The result, was that the fierce opposition that Labour's nuclear policy had provoked melted away.

Michael Gordon maintains that the main reasons for Gaitskell's victory at Blackpool was because the Labour leadership had already stolen most of the clothes of the original programme of CND.<sup>6</sup> Philip Williams concedes that Gaitskell did accept commitments that he had previously rejected, but had done so as a prospective Prime Minister trying to keep a free hand for unlikely but unforeseeable contingencies. He also suggests that on matters of principle, Gaitskell's actions were laudable.<sup>7</sup> Stephen Haseler feels that there is little doubt that it was Gaitskell's leadership that was at stake in 1960-1961, rather than any particular defence strategy.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter examines the tumultuous period following the 1959 general election to the defusing of the crisis in October 1962. At the time, this was cast as the point where bi-partisanship over the Bomb between the Government and Opposition came to an end.<sup>9</sup> While the Tories had retreated from the 1957 policy of 'massive nuclear retaliation', they clung to the concept of an independent British deterrent. In this sense, Labour's official defence policy had parted from that of the Government, though not without a struggle. Yet overall, the evidence suggests that the breach in bi-partisanship was negligible, as Labour's official adherence to multilateralism and the Atlantic Alliance remained as strong as ever. The result of Labour's reluctance to adopt a more radical stance was reflected in the bitter internal warfare that threatened to tear the party apart during this period.

The chapter also demonstrates that while Gaitskell's position was seriously undermined because of the dispute over public ownership, he consistently refused to countenance the unilateralist demands. Indeed, as the McKenzie - Haseler thesis argues, with control of Labour's elite intact, the Left had little

chance of turning their Scarborough success into long-term victory. It is also clear that far from upholding fundamental principles, the furore over the nuclear issue was actually a struggle between two factions eager for power. The 'rigid' stances taken by both sides were soon forgotten after Blackpool with the recognition that the unpopularity of the Tory Government might well result in Labour's return to power. This chapter is divided into three main sections: the first covers the period from the 1959 General election to the conference defeat in 1960; the second traces the recovery to victory at Blackpool the following year, while the third examines the dilution of the nuclear issue up to the Brighton conference of 1962.

### 1. The Drift to Defeat: The General Election to Scarborough, 1960

The general election defeat in October 1959 threw the Labour Party into a state of turmoil. While the Right advocated widescale revision of aims and objectives, the Left argued that fundamentalism had been vindicated. The arguments took on a new ferocity, and linked to the nuclear question, resulted in the drift to defeat for the leadership at Scarborough in 1960.

Although arguments over defence policy had been cloaked during the election campaign, they re-emerged in February after the release of the Government's Defence White Paper.<sup>10</sup> In the debate that followed, both Labour's official spokesmen, Brown and Strachey, questioned the Government over their decision to proceed with the Blue Streak ballistic missile system. Nevertheless, their concern centred on the operational drawbacks of Blue Streak compared to the advantages of the American Polaris system, rather than any wider reassessment of an independent British system in principle. In contrast, Crossman argued (as he had in 1958-9) that a British deterrent was unnecessary because of its economic, strategic and political disadvantages. Instead, he again suggested that the nuclear umbrella should be left to the Americans, which would allow Britain to concentrate on

building up its conventional forces. Gaitskell accepted the validity of some of Crossman's suggestions but believed, like Strachey, that Britain should retain its independent nuclear status so that 'excessive dependence upon the United States' could be avoided.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Gaitskell's attempt to steer a middle course during the debate, the leadership's implicit acceptance of an independent British deterrent sparked off a revolt. Although a three-line whip had been imposed, 43 Labour MPs abstained from voting for the official amendment which opposed government policy.<sup>12</sup> Of course, left-wing opposition to Labour's official defence policy was not new and had often been on a similar scale. Nevertheless, this particular revolt was significant, because the expected unilateralist and pacifist elements were joined by several of Labour's defence experts: Crossman, Shinwell and George Wigg.

Philip Williams has conceded that on this occasion Gaitskell missed an opportunity to repudiate the independent British deterrent, 'to which he had never given more than tentative support'; that while there was growing evidence that the far Left were not the only ones attacking the independent deterrent - Liberals and some Conservatives were also voicing their doubts - Gaitskell missed these signs, as he believed [mistakenly] that a change of policy would be resisted by Brown and Strachey.<sup>13</sup> By the time Gaitskell realised his mistake in not making his reservations more explicit, it was too late.

On 13 April, Gaitskell told the PLP that Labour's nuclear policy was to be reassessed. In a memo to several prominent TUC leaders, he appeared to accept that Britain 'should be prepared to give up our existing nuclear weapons', and consider other alternatives, including the non-nuclear club and even an American nuclear umbrella.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, this was on the same day that the Government cancelled Blue Streak in favour of the

American Skybolt system. Although George Brown welcomed this decision, it was clear once again that Labour's official policy trailed behind the feeling in the wider Movement. For without a delivery system, any notion of an 'independent' British Bomb appeared absurd and unrealistic.<sup>15</sup> If Gaitskell had publicly revealed the contents of his memo outlining Labour's options on 13 April, he might have averted some of the bitter opposition he soon encountered. Instead, just four days later the Co-operative Party voted against Labour's official policy, while USDAW, against the advice of its leaders, voted to support unilateralism. Outside, but supported by a growing number within the Labour Movement, unilateralism had made further gains as the 1960 CND Easter Aldermaston march demonstrated.

While Gaitskell was away on a trip to Israel, Brown and Harold Wilson decided to act against the swing to unilateralism. When Parliament met to debate the cancellation of Blue Streak on 27 April, they both insisted that this effectively spelt the end of an independent British deterrent; a view that received widespread approval in the PLP.<sup>16</sup> Even Anthony Crosland, one of Gaitskell's staunchest allies, supported the 'snap decision' taken by Brown and Wilson. In a letter to Gaitskell a few days later, he lamented the lack of political intelligence and forward planning that had led to the 'totally unnecessary upward defence battle'. He also criticised his leader for 'not being aware of how rapidly opinion was changing on the H-bomb' in the unions and the Parliamentary Party.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile on 1 May, Gaitskell publicly rejected calls for a fundamental change of policy and accused its advocates of being 'pacifist, neutralist and unilateralist'. Privately, he appeared to support his colleagues' reappraisal up to a point when he considered the four alternatives contained in his earlier memo. Although he indicated that he had no clear preference and that any decision should be settled by joint meetings of the NEC / TUC, he failed to explicitly denounce the independent British Bomb.<sup>18</sup> This had disastrous

consequences because, as Crosland was aware, many Labour members knew nothing of the options contained in the memo and due to Gaitskell's Mayday speech, assumed that he still supported the pre-Blue Streak nuclear policy.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, the attempts by Wilson and Brown to halt the drift to unilateralism failed. On 4 May, the AEU followed the Co-op and USDAW and rejected Labour's official defence policy. As the NUM and NUR conferences were due in July, urgent action was required if the unilateralist sentiment was to be prevented from taking hold in all the major unions.<sup>20</sup> With divisions over nuclear policy so widespread, this was no easy task. During preliminary discussions over the joint NEC / TUC talks, Gaitskell suggested that Shadow Cabinet members should be included, which provoked fierce opposition. Even though he had retreated from his earlier insistence that they should be able to vote, the participation and support of his close supporters made it inevitable that Gaitskell's views would prevail.<sup>21</sup>

The result was a draft document produced by Gaitskell in collaboration with David Ennals. Divided into two parts, some progress appeared to have been made on the question of an independent British deterrent. For instance, the first part of the draft accepted that the West's nuclear shield should be left to the Americans, albeit with consultation over their use. Nevertheless, the latter part supported the retention of the V-bombers until they were obsolete or superseded by a non-nuclear club. Added to Gaitskell's insistence that Britain remain a member of NATO (which would keep nuclear weapons while the Soviet Union had them) it was clear that no substantive change of policy had occurred.<sup>22</sup>

Although the draft was accepted, Gaitskell's behaviour (especially his insistence on Shadow Cabinet representation, lack of consultation and the speed of the draft) was attacked by critics and allies alike: even close supporters like Crosland, Jenkins and Patrick Gordon Walker were losing

patience with the Labour leader. As Dalton's diary records (and Philip Williams admits), many of Gaitskell's former supporters were on the point of abandoning him.<sup>23</sup> Because of the furore over the election defeat and his attempt to change the Party's constitution, it was hardly surprising that Gaitskell was placed in such a precarious position. However, his rigid line was helped when the British, American and Soviet disarmament summit collapsed after an American U2 spy-plane was shot down over the USSR on 1 May. This incident served to harden Cold War attitudes.<sup>24</sup> In particular, his robust defence of NATO ensured his widespread support from most of the PLP and simultaneously weakened the unilateralist case. Nevertheless, the Gaitskell-Ennals draft still had to be passed by the tripartite meeting of the NEC, TUC and Shadow Cabinet, and this led to further trouble.

After further redrafting by Crossman, the document was presented on 31 May and immediately caused arguments between Gaitskell and Cousins, the T&GWU leader. This was because Gaitskell's insistence that NATO must retain nuclear weapons as long as the Soviet Union had them, had been left out of Crossman's draft.<sup>25</sup> Cousins had approved Crossman's draft because of this omission, but when Gaitskell wanted it reintroduced, he concluded that a compromise was impossible.<sup>26</sup> According to Williams, the row arose because Gaitskell realised that Crossman's draft was designed to give as little provocation to the Left as possible, and that the leader was not prepared to compromise on fundamentals. He suggests that it was what was said at the meeting rather than the actual draft that caused the hostility, and that Cousins was provoked by his colleagues in the TUC, not by Gaitskell.<sup>27</sup>

Cousins certainly believed that there were 'fundamental differences' but he was also well aware of Gaitskell's (and the majority of the PLP's) insistence that NATO should retain the Bomb while the Soviet Union still had it.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Williams' admission - that Gaitskell would not concede anything because Crossman's draft might be accepted by the Left -



demonstrated the Labour leader's intransigence and made a clash inevitable. Of course, it can be argued that while the T&GWU leader was an idealist intent on imposing a unilateralist policy on the Labour Party, Gaitskell was the prospective Prime Minister unwilling to make concessions which he believed were against the national interest. Whatever the merits of either argument, both men were set on a collision course that could have been avoided, as subsequent events illustrated.

A revised draft was considered on 21 June. Despite reservations from some of those present, Gaitskell successfully pushed through a number of further amendments.<sup>29</sup> Although the TUC were reluctant to accept it, the NEC were anxious to issue a policy statement before the main trades unions conferences took place in July. Ironically, in view of the previous arguments between Cousins and Gaitskell, this draft omitted the leader's previously intractable view that NATO must retain a nuclear deterrent as long as the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons. There was also a reaffirmation that Britain's independent deterrent would be phased out with its V-bombers and that the West's strategic deterrent would be left to the Americans; albeit with the stipulation that this could not be used without NATO agreement. The draft called for disengagement in Central Europe, strict control over NATO's tactical nuclear weapons and a shift of emphasis from nuclear to conventional defence. It appeared to depart from previous policy, because of its pledge to unilaterally halt further British tests and by its rejection of 'first use'.<sup>30</sup>

The last two points have been cited as proof of Gaitskell's desire for conciliation.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the Labour leader had conceded very little in principle, nor in practice because no time limits had been agreed. In effect, this meant that the V-bombers would remain in service until obsolete, Britain would remain a loyal member of NATO and the American missile bases would remain until no longer necessary. The clear signal was that there was to be no

change from these principles in the foreseeable future and that no immediate action would be taken, even if Labour gained power.

Despite some cautious praise in the left-wing press, these signals were not lost on the unilateralist Left. Misgivings were immediately raised over the document's ambiguity, especially that over the American bases and Britain's stocks of H-bombs.<sup>32</sup> Foreign Policy and Defence had conceded some left-wing demands, such as the end of British tests, 'no first use' of thermo-nuclear weapons, a nuclear free zone and the end of an independent British deterrent. However, the leadership's strict adherence to the NATO alliance meant that American nuclear missile bases would still be sited on British territory and thus remain a target. As such, this made the other concessions meaningless. From the unilateralist point of view, the new policy was the worst possible, because it encouraged American control over all nuclear weapons. In addition, despite any similarity of the document to the original demands of CND and VFS, the Left's demands had moved on.<sup>33</sup>

Up to this point, Gaitskell had managed to retain the overall support of the NEC and the PLP.<sup>34</sup> Yet without the support of the major trades unions and their block vote, the leadership could not take it for granted that their policy document would be accepted at conference. Already, two of the 'big six' (USDAW and the AEU) had drifted into the unilateralist camp. As the T&GWU was certain to support unilateralism, constituency parties expected to support left-wing policies and the smaller union s' actions uncertain, the odds against the official policy looked increasingly doubtful. Indeed, the only crumb of comfort for the leadership was the NUM and NUR decision to support Gaitskell at their annual conferences.

By July, Gaitskell's position was unquestionably in jeopardy. His earlier assault on Clause IV had antagonised many of his old supporters, especially in the trade unions. Still smarting at this, they turned against him over the

defence issue. At first Gaitskell remained belligerent, telling Alastair Hetherington that he did not expect to be defeated on either Clause IV or defence. Yet, almost immediately, he was forced to drop the proposed revisions to the constitution and bitterly complained that if he had 'foreseen the kind of opposition he would encounter on Clause IV, he would never have raised the issue in the first place'.<sup>35</sup>

With his authority seriously undermined by the Clause IV dispute, and unprecedented defeat at conference over defence a probable consequence, the leader needed something to lessen the rout. Under the circumstances, there was little surprise when Gaitskell and his supporters reverted to the position that they had first adopted in 1959. As early as May 1960, Gaitskell had insisted to Patrick Gordon Walker that conference did not have the authority to dictate policy to the PLP, who were bound by Labour's manifesto and responsibility to the electorate. In July and August, Gaitskell had reiterated this view several times. Questioned about this threat, he told Richard Crossman that if he was defeated on defence, he would tell conference explicitly that it could not interfere with the decisions of the PLP.<sup>36</sup> Gaitskell's insistence on the PLP's primacy hardened when the TUC held their conference in September. Despite the efforts of loyalists, the unilateralist line urged by the T&GWU won nearly twice as many votes than the one which supported official defence policy.<sup>37</sup>

As conference defeat appeared unavoidable, Crossman and George Brown proposed that the T&GWU resolution should be accepted alongside the official defence policy.<sup>38</sup> They hoped that if both resolutions were accepted (as in the AEU case), neither would be defeated. Although the wording of the T&GWU resolution had avoided explicit support for unilateralism, there was no doubt about its intent. It rejected any defence policy based on the nuclear deterrent, and therefore implied British withdrawal from NATO. Cousins had not contradicted this view when he told a Daily Herald reporter that his

union's '...resolution is clear...We are not going to have anything to do with nuclear weapons'.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it was not surprising that the Crossman - Brown compromise was seen as incompatible with the official policy, and that they were forced to withdraw it at a meeting of the International Sub-Committee on 21 September.<sup>40</sup> After this rejection, and with the intention of preventing further compromises, Gaitskell quickly sharpened the differences between the two sides. He argued that unilateral nuclear disarmament would logically lead to Britain's withdrawal from a NATO alliance which had these weapons, and lead to neutralism.<sup>41</sup>

By now it was clear that both sides were unwilling to avoid the forthcoming clash, despite last minute efforts to effect a compromise.<sup>42</sup> The nuclear issue had been subordinated to who controlled the Party, and both were determined to win. Since the 1959 general election Gaitskell had been forced to retreat on Clause IV, lost the support of many of his former allies and provoked mistrust over his statements on the role of conference. With defeat over defence looming, he felt that he had no choice but to fight for total victory. For Cousins and his allies, Labour's defence policy presented them with their clearest chance yet to defeat the leadership, take control of the Party and reverse the sway of the revisionist hierarchy.

On the eve of annual conference, Sunday 2 October, three major unions (the T&GWU, NUR and USDAW) decided to back the AEU resolution which demanded the unilateral renunciation of the testing, manufacturing, stockpiling and siting of all nuclear weapons in Britain. Two days later, the AEU voted to oppose the official defence statement, overturned their earlier policy which backed both, and committed themselves against the leadership as well. Apart from defence, the leadership also faced problems over the Party's constitution and Clause IV. Bound together, there was now no doubt that the leadership was going to be defeated over defence.

Less than two weeks before the conference, Gaitskell's mood had been confident. He had told George Strauss on the 22 September that he would not resign as leader even if he was defeated, and Patrick Gordon Walker recorded that his leader had been 'spoiling for a fight'.<sup>43</sup> Subsequent events had obviously shaken his faith to some extent. Reports in the press suggested that he would lose by nearly a million votes.<sup>44</sup> On the eve of the defence debate he told his wife that, 'probably he would lose, retire to the back-benches, and carry on the struggle from there.'<sup>45</sup>

The Labour Party Conference defence debate of 5 October 1960 is too well rehearsed to necessitate further detailed examination here. However, Gaitskell's winding-up speech was significant because it is believed to have diverted a disaster. It is interesting to note that Gaitskell concentrated on two key issues: defence and his leadership. He opened with a forthright attack on the implications that a vote for unilateralism would have: it would result in British withdrawal from NATO, the adoption of a neutralist policy and lead to either the break-up of the alliance, or Britain's replacement as America's principal ally by West Germany. After he had dealt with each specific resolution, Gaitskell turned to the political ramifications. In his view it was the leadership of the Party, rather than the defence issue, that was at stake. As the majority of the PLP were opposed to unilateralism and neutralism, they could not be expected to go back on the pledges that they had made to the electorate. Although he admitted that he might be defeated, he vowed to 'fight and fight again' any unilateralist victory.<sup>46</sup>

Contemporary reaction to Gaitskell's conference performance was mixed. While the Daily Herald called it Gaitskell's 'finest hour' and the Guardian saw it as a moral victory, Tribune applauded it as a 'great and inspiring victory' for the unilateralists.<sup>47</sup> Even the harshest critics of the Labour leader admitted that its impact was 'extra-ordinarily effective'. Certainly, the scale of the defeat was far narrower than expected.<sup>48</sup> The speech had clearly swayed

the uncommitted delegates in the hall, who had been subjected to the consequences of unilateralism and neutralism in the starkest of terms. Gaitskell had also clearly influenced the floor when he linked the dispute over defence to his own leadership and the constitutional position of the PLP. Apart from the trade union votes, a later study revealed that the constituency parties, usually regarded as a bastion of the radical left, had given 67 per cent of their support to the leader.<sup>49</sup>

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If the predictions over the scale of the defeat had been correct it is doubtful whether Gaitskell, considering the Clause IV débâcle and the mistrust over the PLPs constitutional position, would have been able to carry on as leader with any authority. As it turned out, although the leadership had been defeated on all four defence votes, and for the first time ever an official Labour Party / TUC policy statement had been rejected, both sides claimed victory. The unilateralists had won an historic victory, but the narrowness of this made it clear that the battle was not yet over. The swing back to the leadership from the union and CLP votes was one of the biggest surprises. The combination of these factors convinced Gaitskell that he could reverse the conference decisions.<sup>50</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the conference result actually proved indecisive. Although some of the loyalist trades unions had joined with the Left and inflicted a remarkable defeat on the Party leadership, this appeared to be aimed at Gaitskell's attempt to tamper with the Party's constitution, rather than any genuine desire to change defence policy. Once the point had been made, this uneasy alliance was not likely to continue, because most of the union leaders were as anxious to reject left-wing ideas and to preserve Britain's national interests as Gaitskell. Despite the leadership's discomfort, the result therefore represented little more than a hollow victory for the unilateralists, and their success was short-lived.



## 2. No Quarter! From Scarborough to Blackpool

Despite Scarborough and the gloomy forecasts of many of his supporters, Gaitskell quickly recognised the significance of the narrow conference result and immediately planned the counter-attack. This involved sharpening the issue between himself and the unilateralists instead of making any attempt to conceal it.<sup>51</sup> Gaitskell linked the defence issue even closer with his position as leader and the constitutional position of the PLP: in other words, who made party policy? On one hand, this was a high risk strategy because it encouraged prolonged and bitter internecine warfare and could lead to further defeat. On the other hand, Gaitskell believed that any concessions would force unacceptable changes in policy and weaken his position further. By clashing with his opponents head-on and presenting unilateralism as a stark choice between moderation and extremism, the Labour leader hoped that the waverers and uncommitted would return to the fold.<sup>52</sup> It was his widespread support in the power base of the PLP, NEC and TUC General Council that made this strategy possible.

This assault got off to a shaky start. While Gaitskell was determined to promote his case as a straight choice between two clear principles, others disagreed. Long-term jealousies and opportunism surfaced as several senior colleagues made a bid to challenge his leadership. Richard Crossman, the Party Chairman, publicly stated that the divisions were unnecessary because of the fluidity of defence policy, and that the final authority of Labour's decision-making process rested with Conference. In this statement and in a subsequent meeting with Gaitskell, Crossman emphasised that the issue was not over defence, but over the style of leadership.<sup>53</sup> Although Gaitskell's harsh treatment at the hands of his opponents had helped his case in some quarters, the Left remained convinced that he was still committed to an independent British deterrent.<sup>54</sup> Coupled to Crossman's public misgivings over the constitutional issue, this soon resulted in a leadership contest.

Anthony Greenwood, an enthusiastic unilateralist, was the first to stand. In his letter of resignation from the Shadow Cabinet, Greenwood accused Gaitskell of having created disunity in the Party by leading a faction whose views had been rejected by conference.<sup>55</sup> Even though Greenwood stressed that he was not standing over the defence issue, his unilateralist credentials would have attracted support from the left-wing. This, as well as the fact that he withdrew from the challenge in favour of Harold Wilson, a committed multilateralist, demonstrated that unilateralism was subordinated to the question of Gaitskell's leadership. Wilson was altogether a more serious threat, even though he was initially reluctant to stand. As an important Shadow Cabinet member without being close to Gaitskell, Wilson was likely to attract more support from the centre than Greenwood, while his earlier association with the Bevanites also appealed to the Left.<sup>56</sup>

Wilson's challenge was made on two levels: unity and defence. In his statements he made it clear that it was the question of Party unity and Gaitskell's defiance of conference that had made him stand; that the issue was not 'multilateralism versus unilateralism' but 'unity or civil war'. Although Wilson accepted the need for collective security, he rejected the need for a British H-bomb and supported the right to question NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons. He criticised Gaitskell's rigid adherence to an independent deterrent and the American bases, which he felt would soon become obsolete and therefore not worth splitting the Party over. Gaitskell's reply stressed that the PLP should abide by the principles they had been elected on, which in defence terms meant multilateral disarmament and collective security based on the NATO Alliance. In his view, the conference decision had contravened these traditional policies and was likely to be overturned the following year.<sup>57</sup>

In effect, and as he privately admitted to Hetherington, Gaitskell was opposed to any compromise with unilateralism and prepared to accept conflict within the Movement in order to fend off the challenge.<sup>58</sup> In contrast, Wilson

believed that compromise was essential and that he could bridge the gap within the Party. His criticism of the Labour leader implied that Gaitskell lacked judgement, would not implement conference decisions and was not interested in unity. While the divisions between the two appeared to focus on Gaitskell's vision of multilateralism and collective disarmament versus Wilson's concentration on unity, the real issue was over who should lead the Party.

The splits between the two sides widened after 20 leading trade unionists publicly supported Gaitskell, while Richard Crossman backed Wilson.<sup>59</sup> Although Crossman believed that the leader's victory was a foregone conclusion, he believed that the challenge had achieved its goal since it had questioned Gaitskell's leadership. This was a view that many moderates regarded as treacherous. George Brown, who stood as Deputy Leader against Fred Lee, bitterly denounced Crossman's disloyalty as opportunist.<sup>60</sup> In the end, as Crossman had forecast, Wilson's challenge failed. Gaitskell won by 166 votes to Wilson's 81 - while Brown defeated Lee by 146 to 83 votes.

Although he had overcome this hurdle, Gaitskell was soon under more pressure because he was still believed to support an independent British deterrent.<sup>61</sup> In November 1960, the Government announced that an American Polaris base was to be built at Holy Loch in Scotland. Labour's motion questioned the extent of British control over the base, rather than objecting to its actual establishment. Indeed, their spokesmen had supported Polaris during the defence debate back in March 1960, subsequently reinforced by Gaitskell when he argued that,

'Polaris is more effective...less dangerous...less likely to lead to war...more likely to preserve peace than any other nuclear weapon hitherto available.'

*This was a view with which a large majority of the PLP fully agreed.*<sup>62</sup>

Despite this support, fear of another public split developing was confirmed during the defence debate of 13 December. Prior to this, 47 left-wing MPs had supported an amendment by Emrys Hughes which opposed the Polaris base. In the debate itself, Michael Foot and Anthony Greenwood (the latter no longer constrained by Shadow Cabinet responsibility) embarrassed the leadership when they attacked them for having defied the decisions agreed at the Scarborough conference. The result revealed that 68 Labour MPs actually abstained, rather than vote for the official amendment. Three days later, the divisions were displayed further when 48 left-wing MPs supported Harold Davies' private members bill which deplored the establishment of a Polaris base at Holy Loch.<sup>63</sup>

Although defence had once again exposed divisions in Labour's ranks, it is interesting to note the relationship between this and the issue of leadership. As David Cross' study reveals, when Gaitskell's leadership or the rejection of the Scarborough decisions were under question, the strength of opposition was greater. For example, Wilson received 81 votes as the 'unity' candidate in the leadership contest and 68 MPs had abstained in the official defence motion which had contradicted the Scarborough decision. In contrast, only 47 MPs supported Emrys Hughes' amendment to the Address, while 48 MPs had backed Harold Davies' motion which opposed the Polaris base. While the Left's anti-nuclear stance remained constant, the difference suggests that the leadership issue attracted wider support within the PLP than that over defence.<sup>64</sup>

While these attacks on his leadership caused concern, Gaitskell could rely on a strong power base. Support from individual union leaders like Carron, Birch and Watson, added to the general confidence of the TUC General Council, significantly bolstered his position. In addition, the support from the majority of the Parliamentary Party, especially the loyalist trades union sponsored MPs on the NEC, worked heavily in his favour. Overall, the anti-

unilateralist majority in the PLP, NEC and TUC General Council was of considerable importance to Gaitskell's continued leadership.<sup>65</sup> Two groups formed after the Scarborough conference within the Party also helped. These were the Campaign for Democratic Socialism (CDS) and Campaign for Multilateral Disarmament (CMD), whose membership included MPs, constituency activists and trade unionists.

Haseler estimates that between late 1960 and early 1961, a fifth of the PLP supported CDS, whose sole objective by the latter date was to secure Gaitskell's continued leadership. CMD, formed to promote multilateralism and reverse the Scarborough defeat was supported by 40 back-bench MPs. On defence as a whole, approximately two-thirds of the PLP supported the leadership. Although it is far harder to estimate the number of rank and file CDS and CMD supporters in the unions and constituency parties, the fact that most Labour MPs supported the leadership over defence was crucial.<sup>66</sup> As Gaitskell had also managed to obtain agreement that representatives of the Shadow Cabinet should attend the joint NEC / TUC talks back in May and again in October 1960, this strengthened his position even more. Seen in this light, the Left's 'Appeal for Unity' and the 'Scarborough Conference Campaign Committee', though a thorn in the leadership's side, were marginalised in much the same way as VFS had been during 1958-59.

On 8 December 1960 the NEC decided that a new defence statement should be drafted, distinct from the previous July's Foreign Policy and Defence.<sup>67</sup> Gaitskell's position had been strengthened by success in the leadership campaign and his insistence that the Shadow Cabinet should be included in the joint NEC / TUC discussions. This ensured that Cousins and the unilateralists were heavily outnumbered when they discussed defence policy on 24 January 1961. During the meeting, Gaitskell called for a short statement of principles: these included a commitment to multilateral disarmament;

support for NATO; and acceptance that the alliance must retain nuclear weapons as long as the Soviet Union did.<sup>68</sup>

Considering that these points were virtually identical to those contained in Foreign Policy and Defence, and that the whole point of the new statement was to be distinctive from its predecessor, this again demonstrates Gaitskell's determination to resist change. This reluctance was not lost on Cousins, who immediately recognised the similarities between the two, and pointed out that these preferences had been defeated by conference in 1960. Despite efforts to find a compromise, the meeting ended without general agreement and it was decided that a twelve-man drafting committee should be set up (four members each from the Shadow Cabinet, the NEC and the TUC) to draft a new statement and report back.<sup>69</sup>

The composition of the new committee had important implications. The Shadow Cabinet representatives were Gaitskell, Brown, Healey and Callaghan. The NEC's were Crossman, Driberg, Watson and Padley and from the TUC, Cousins, Webber, Hayday and Roberts. Only Cousins and Driberg were unilateralists and two others - Crossman and Padley - wanted a compromise statement. Considering that the multilateralists therefore had an in-built majority ratio of at least three to one, it is clear that Gaitskell's preferences as far as this committee was concerned were never in doubt, nor that the structure of its composition, as Epstein observes, was accidental.<sup>70</sup>

In the first of four meetings on 31 January 1961 (the others were on 8, 9 and 15 February) the committee agreed that Denis Healey would prepare a draft as a basis for discussion. This differed little from that of the previous year: it contained the pledge against thermo-nuclear 'first use', subsequently widened to include tactical nuclear weapons, and called for NATO to reduce its nuclear dependency.<sup>71</sup> Crossman's initial reaction to the draft was that it offered nothing new. He believed that Gaitskell's preferences proved that the Labour



leader was not prepared to compromise with Cousins at all, and therefore decided to prepare his own version.<sup>72</sup> Cousins had simultaneously decided to submit his own draft, but due to illness, this was not presented.<sup>73</sup> At the last meeting of the committee on 15 February, Crossman's draft was defeated by seven votes to four, while Healey's was passed by eight votes to one.

Stephen Haseler has suggested that there was little to choose between the drafts submitted by Healey (supported by Gaitskell) and Crossman, and that even Cousins' draft was very similar.<sup>74</sup> The evidence suggests that as far as the Healey and Crossman versions are concerned, this view has merit, as the later vote at the NEC confirmed. Over 'first use', Healey's document argued that NATO's conventional forces should be strengthened and reliance on nuclear weapons reduced. Crossman's version rejected the strategy which caused the Alliance to rely on nuclear weapons and called for this to be changed. Healey accepted the American bases as part of Britain's obligations under the alliance, although he reserved Britain's right to determine the conditions. Crossman's called for reform that would end the need for such bases.<sup>75</sup> Despite Philip Williams' assertion that Gaitskell was passive at the meetings of the twelve, it does seem that Crossman's draft was rejected because Cousins had approved it beforehand. Because of this, the Labour leader felt it represented a compromise to the Left and was therefore unacceptable.<sup>76</sup>

Regarding Cousins' draft, Haseler's view is slightly more problematic. Although it did not contain an explicit demand for a British withdrawal from NATO, it rejected '...any NATO strategy based upon the threat to use nuclear weapons, and a defence policy which compels NATO to rely on these weapons'.<sup>77</sup> This implied the rejection of nuclear weapons in any circumstances, even as 'retaliatory second strike'. As such, it effectively dismissed the whole concept of deterrence theory. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to see how Cousins' version would have been

acceptable to the majority of Labour's elite, who accepted multilateralism. Therefore, it was not surprising that only Healey's draft was approved consecutively by the NEC, TUC General Council and PLP.<sup>78</sup>

Crossman believed that Healey's draft would be defeated at conference while his own, with Cousins' support, would ensure unity. Because of this, he publicly denounced the Labour leader in a speech at Cardiff, where he stated that it was 'an absolute tragedy that Hugh Gaitskell found it impossible to accept the compromise plan'.<sup>79</sup> This implied that Gaitskell was to blame for the failure of the compromise and that he was therefore responsible for the obstacles to Party unity. This in turn provoked a furious response at a PLP meeting called over defence, which Crossman recorded as being 'the ugliest meeting' he had ever experienced.<sup>80</sup> Considering Crossman's open support for Harold Wilson in the leadership contest and his continuous attacks on Gaitskell since the election, it is not surprising that the 'partiality' of the Party Chairman was 'savaged' by Labour's right-wing.

Philip Williams has justified Gaitskell's opposition to the 'compromise' plan due to its lack of realism and because it was a ruse designed by Crossman and Cousins to undermine the leader's position.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the similarities between the Crossman / Healey drafts raises the suspicion that compromise was achievable, as some of Gaitskell's closest supporters actually wanted. In fact Williams, himself a founding member of CDS, appears to have forgotten that he had written to Crosland on 28 February 1961 stating that, '...all of us [CDS - naming some of the leading members - Bill Rodgers, Tony King and Frank Pickstock] think it would have been wise...to accept Crossman's draft'.<sup>82</sup> Simultaneously, Gaitskell had revealed his intransigence. In a letter to Crosland, he complained about his allies recommendation for the Crossman Plan which '...could easily be misconstrued'. Gaitskell justified his position on the grounds that if it had been adopted 'We would...have surrendered a great deal more than was palatable for no return...'. He added that the

conduct of Crossman and Cousins had been '...more than usually outrageous'.<sup>83</sup>

Despite these complaints, Gaitskell himself appeared to accept that the differences were minuscule in two speeches given at the beginning of March. He conceded that Britain should give up attempts to remain an independent nuclear power and instead, use its influence to bring about NATO reforms. Nevertheless, he also used it as an opportunity to urge the left-wing to accept his position so as to avoid the split within the Party.<sup>84</sup> In other words, Gaitskell blamed the divisions on them, rather than the other way round; this in turn provoked a furious response from one prominent unilateralist.<sup>85</sup> Three weeks later, Gaitskell reassured Crosland that the '...Crossman Plan is not likely to play a very large part in the trade union conferences...' and that he had '...tried to underline the narrowness of the points in which the drafts differ...'<sup>86</sup> Having initially refused to countenance the Crossman compromise and provoked the Left irrecoverably, by March, Gaitskell had suddenly reverted to a position virtually identical to their earlier demands. Of course, as Michael Gordon points out, the Gaitskellites were only too happy to trade on the confusion that arose from the blurred distinctions between the NEC statement and the Crossman compromise.<sup>87</sup>

This was clearly revealed in Labour's official response to government policy in the defence debate of 27 and 28 February 1961. Denis Healey demonstrated Labour's willingness to offer an alternative when he attacked the Government's adherence to the independent nuclear deterrent and their decision to extend the life of the British V-bomber force. He argued that NATO policies should be directed towards the extension of British conventional forces. These could then deal with 'local conflicts', rather than rely on NATO's tactical nuclear weapons which might in turn lead to all-out thermo-nuclear war.<sup>88</sup> Healey's speech, especially where it concerned the use

of tactical nuclear weapons, closely resembled the line advocated earlier by Crossman.

Of course, there are counter arguments. If Gaitskell had accepted the Crossman plan, especially as it had been supported by Cousins, this would have been regarded as a major concession to the Left. Determined to reassert his authority within the Party, Gaitskell appeared to have taken the decision to hold the line for internal political reasons rather than over any absolute principle. In turn, Cousins' acceptance of the Crossman compromise (whatever the truth of the argument that he would only do this as long as Gaitskell would not agree to it) can also be seen as a dilution of principle. The overwhelming feeling that emerges is that principles were of secondary importance to the struggle for power.

Whatever the merits of these particular arguments, Gaitskell had persuaded the PLP, NEC and TUC General Council to accept a draft defence statement that was almost identical to the one rejected by conference just five months before. Having achieved this, the leadership was determined to prevent the issue from being resurrected. In March 1961, they decided that the PLP should abstain in all divisions regarding the defence estimates.<sup>89</sup> In this, the leadership's policy was only partially successful. In the Parliamentary defence debate of 27-28 February, the Left had not embarrassed their leaders as they had the previous December, and all of them voted against the Government. Nevertheless, twenty four Labour MPs voted against the Air Estimates on 8 March and five against the Army Estimates the following week. In July, further trouble followed when the rebels joined with seven others to vote against a plan which proposed that German troops should train in Wales as part of NATO exercises.<sup>90</sup>

Resurgence of anti-nuclear agitation was not restricted to the confines of the PLP. In early March, the International Sub-Committee discussed Macmillan's

Polaris agreement with the Americans, raised at the request of the Scottish Council of the Labour Party.<sup>91</sup> In an attempt to address these concerns, George Brown criticised the Government because certain commitments had not been obtained from the Americans. In particular: that the Polaris missiles would never be used first; that it was unclear whether 'Thor' bases would be removed; whether there was adequate British control over the Polaris submarines; and whether a more suitable site than Holy Loch should have been chosen, considering its close proximity to an urban area.<sup>92</sup> Although Brown's draft had been supported by critics like Crossman and Jennie Lee (because some of their suggestions had been incorporated), a surprisingly large number of NEC members voted against the statement. Tom Driberg led those who objected to Brown's argument that Polaris could not be opposed on the same grounds as Thor, because it was clearly a 'second strike weapon'. In the rebel s' opinion, Brown's statement had contradicted the Scarborough decisions which opposed the establishment of any nuclear missile bases in Britain.<sup>93</sup>

While the Left had earlier supported Crossman's compromise draft, they refused to accept the Polaris statement by Brown. Although this had not rejected Polaris outright, it had contained some concessions as Crossman recognised.<sup>94</sup> This meant that the Left had reverted to their earlier rigid position: that the Scarborough decisions must be observed by the letter. Ironically, whereas the multilateralist majority, who had gained approval for their line in Policy for Peace, were now willing to concede some ground on Polaris, the Left who had initially accepted the compromise, were not. As Crossman observed, by May it appeared that the left-wing were 'only concerned to be anti-Gaitskell'.<sup>95</sup> In this instance, they were just as willing as Gaitskell and the leadership to be 'flexible' with their principles. Again, this suggests that principles were subjugated to the struggle for power.

By May 1961, the unilateralists appeared to have lost ground. This, despite continued opposition and the fact that the CND Aldermaston march at Easter had attracted the largest attendance to date. Although Scarborough had looked like a breakthrough because it presented them with their best opportunity to gain support in the Labour Party, the movement had begun to falter. In April 1961, a Gallup opinion poll survey found unilateralist support had fallen to its lowest level, with only 19 per cent of all and 28 per cent of Labour voters in favour of its policies. In addition, further support drifted away when internal disagreements caused Bertrand Russell to break away from the main body and form the Committee of 100. This alienated much of their support because the Committee advocated direct action and civil disobedience.<sup>96</sup>

Of far more significance to the Labour leadership, unilateralism in the trades unions had begun to fade. The first real test was at the beginning of the 1961 trade union conference round. The Shop workers, USDAW, had voted for unilateralism the year before. In 1961, the union was confronted with three options: motions for unilateralism, multilateralism or the Crossman compromise, the latter backed by their President, Walter Padley. While unilateralism was rejected in favour of Crossman's 'unity' compromise, the multilateral motion was approved as the second choice. The AEU, also unilateralist the year before, was presented with the same three choices at its annual conference. The result was a three to one majority in favour of the 'unity' motion, a narrow defeat for unilateralism, while the multilateralist motion was carried overwhelmingly. The outcome was that the AEU again supported both the official policy and the compromise.<sup>97</sup>

Although Padley's endorsement of Crossman's 'unity' compromise snubbed Gaitskell, it also actually challenged Cousins and the T&GWU. In effect, unilateralism had been defeated and replaced by a motion which appealed for compromise from both sides. Yet the future of the Crossman - Padley plan



was only assured if it won support from the other unions, and Padley himself refused to propose it unless it commanded a majority. As Cousins had decided to reject the 'compromise', this was extremely unlikely.<sup>98</sup> In June, the NUGMW had voted to support the official policy statement. Although several of the smaller unions remained unilateralist, this meant that two of the 'big six' had voted for unity and one for the official policy. More importantly, all three had rejected unilateralism. In mid-June, the unilateralist dream was shattered when Padley announced that USDAW would not submit the compromise resolution to conference after all, because it would not get a majority. This manoeuvre left his union with no alternative other than to vote for their second choice, the official statement.<sup>99</sup> In July, the NUM conference rejected unilateralism and, after some ambivalence, the NUR followed suit. With five out of the six major trade unions firmly set against it, only the T&GWU remained committed to unilateralism.

Further damage to the Left was caused at the TUC's annual conference in September, when the official defence policy was carried, while a unilateralist motion proposed by the T&GWU was defeated. The TUC also rejected a motion which opposed the Polaris base at Holy Loch, even though several of the larger unions (which included USDAW, the AEU, NUR and T&GWU) had supported this at their own conferences. The Left's only success was their opposition to the training of German troops in Wales.

Behind the union leadership's decision to oppose unilateralism, lay the recognition that any continuation of the defence battle would split the Party irrecoverably. In addition, the union leaders felt that the dispute had diverted attention away from the main enemy, the Tory Government. Both Padley and Carron were convinced multilateralists who had advocated the compromise plan in order to make a point to Gaitskell about the need for unity. Once this had been accomplished, they were not prepared to let the rift

widen any further. The dominance they exercised over their respective unions allowed the official policy through, even though there had been little actual movement away from the unilateralist sentiment that had been adopted the previous year.<sup>100</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that CDS agitation in favour of the leadership had some effect on the unions' decisions, even in the T&GWU, although this is harder to qualify.<sup>101</sup>

With the backing of the majority of the large trades unions, Gaitskell's determination to reverse the Scarborough defeat was assured when the Party's annual conference met at Blackpool in October 1961. Nevertheless, his victory at Blackpool was not quite as decisive as later claimed.<sup>102</sup> Before conference, the Left had been careful to separate the resolutions on unilateralism, neutralism, Polaris and the training of German troops in Wales. This precaution was taken in case there was a repetition of earlier instances, whereby separate left-wing resolutions had been merged into composites by the NEC in order to present them as unacceptable. As the first two were certain to be defeated, and while the latter two had some chance of success, this appeared an astute tactic.<sup>103</sup>

In turn, the leadership had recognised these manoeuvres and tried to counter them. Having opened the defence debate with a predictable attack on unilateralism, George Brown emphasised that Britain must accept both the American bases and the training of German troops on British soil as part of her NATO commitments. Gaitskell followed Brown, but appeared to have trimmed the official policy statement in an attempt to maintain unity. He argued that NATO's policy should be adapted so that the alliance would never have to be the first to use nuclear weapons of any kind. He then addressed the specific issues over the Polaris base and the training of German troops. Although he stated that Britain could not oppose either on principle, he recognised the strength of feeling against them.<sup>104</sup>

Gaitskell's speech had conceded that on these two issues the leadership had admitted defeat. This, despite the fact that the demand for the removal of the Polaris base directly contravened Policy for Peace. Philip Williams points out that this was expected, and that Gaitskell was not unduly worried as he had won the main battle against unilateralism.<sup>105</sup> Yet, he makes no reference to the fact that Gaitskell's conference speech, which recognised the need for NATO reform and misgivings over Polaris, had effectively endorsed the Crossman - Padley compromise, so vehemently rejected earlier that year. In addition, Labour had also reaffirmed its commitment to NATO in principle, while rejecting two of its specific policies.<sup>106</sup>

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Despite the reversal for the leadership over Polaris and the German troops, the official statement, Policy for Peace was accepted by a majority of over three to one. The result meant that both the unilateralist and neutralist motions were heavily defeated.<sup>107</sup> Because of this, Blackpool has been cited as a stunning victory for Gaitskell and one which restored his authority.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Gaitskell's speech revealed that he had accepted many elements of the Crossman - Padley plan. While Blackpool is often regarded as a major success for the leadership, they had also conceded two important points to the Left. This suggests that the victory was not quite as clear cut as often claimed. It also demonstrates that compromise could have been achieved, but was relegated in order to allow Gaitskell and Cousins to battle it out.

### 3. Victory and Consolidation: From Blackpool to Brighton

There is little doubt that Gaitskell's success at the Blackpool Conference consolidated his leadership. Of course, this infuriated his opponents who refused to accept defeat at this stage. They claimed that their victory over Polaris and the training of German troops in Wales had demonstrated the

strength of feeling against the leadership. Nevertheless, their position had been dealt a serious blow and it soon became clear that Scarborough had been their highpoint. This was confirmed after Blackpool when Anthony Greenwood unsuccessfully stood against Gaitskell for the leadership.<sup>109</sup>

With this challenge easily repulsed, Gaitskell was able to strengthen his hand after the Shadow Cabinet elections. Harold Wilson was appointed Shadow Foreign Affairs spokesman. Although this move could be regarded as conciliatory, it was more likely that Wilson had been placed in a position that could be controlled, a notion strengthened by his replacement as Shadow Chancellor by James Callaghan, a Gaitskell loyalist. Gaitskell also promoted two other loyalists to further consolidate his position: Patrick Gordon Walker replaced the 'temperamental' George Brown at Defence and Denis Healey took the Colonies post.

After Blackpool and the acceptance of Policy for Peace, the leadership might have believed that the nuclear issue had been side-lined. Ironically, it was the American decision to resume atmospheric thermo-nuclear testing (in response to the Soviet resumption in August 1961) that allowed the nuclear issue to regain prominence. On 21 and 22 December 1961, Macmillan and President Kennedy met in Bermuda to discuss East-West relations and how they should react to the Soviet tests. On 8 February 1962 Macmillan announced that the British would hold an underground test in Nevada, while the Americans would carry out an atmospheric test over Christmas Island, unless the Soviet Union suspended their current test programme.<sup>110</sup> Twelve days later, the publication of the 1962 Defence White Paper reinforced the Government's commitment to the British V-bombers and the American Skybolt missile system.<sup>111</sup>

The issue of thermo-nuclear tests had been one of the most important reasons behind the furore over the Bomb within the Labour Movement in

the first place. In the 1960 and 1961 defence documents, Labour's official policy had demanded that all such tests should be banned. Considering this, Labour's official reaction over the Anglo-American decision to resume tests was conspicuously muted. The NEC criticised the British tests because they demonstrated the Government's commitment to retain an independent nuclear deterrent. Yet, the statement did not strongly condemn the American atmospheric tests, apart from a request that they postponed them pending further negotiations.<sup>112</sup> This matched the line taken by the British Government: that the West could not be expected to suspend its tests while the Soviet Union went ahead with theirs.

As such, the statement was unacceptable to some left-wing members of the PLP and NEC. In December 1961, 52 Labour MPs had supported a CND pamphlet which requested that the Soviet Union halt their tests.<sup>113</sup> At the end of February 1962, Barbara Castle repeated these sentiments in a draft paper prepared for the NEC. While this criticised the Soviet action, it also called on 'all the powers concerned to refrain from any further nuclear tests'. Although her draft was clearly critical of the American decision to resume their tests, its wording was almost identical to the official policy statement that had been accepted at Blackpool. Despite this similarity, it was defeated by eighteen votes to five.<sup>114</sup>

During the defence debate held on 5 and 6 March 1962, the leadership's reluctance to openly criticise the resumption of American tests was again evident. Instead, Labour's attack concentrated on the Government's determination to retain an independent nuclear deterrent. Patrick Gordon Walker expressed regret over the American tests, but his subsequent defence of them clearly contradicted the line taken in Policy for Peace.<sup>115</sup> Of course, the Left's constant criticism towards official defence policy and their clear preferences for unilateralist and neutralist policies invited certain defeat. Nevertheless, the rejection of Barbara Castle's draft (considering its

similarities with Brown's conference resolution) along with the persistent refusal to criticise the resumption of American tests, suggests that the leadership were reluctant, when it came to it, to even stand by policies that they had stubbornly fought for.

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that this provoked further hostility from the Left, especially from those associated with CND. In January 1959, Michael Foot had insisted that the only way to achieve nuclear disarmament was through the election of a Labour administration committed to such an objective.<sup>116</sup> After Blackpool and the refusal of the leadership to even uphold their own policy over the American tests, many CND sympathisers within the Labour Movement finally realised that this position was untenable.<sup>117</sup> This contributed to CND's decision to nominate independent unilateralist candidates to contest by-elections against Labour hopefuls who followed the official line. The strength of the frustration was also demonstrated by anti-nuclear protests whenever Gaitskell made speeches. At a May Day rally in Glasgow, after he had been heckled throughout the meeting, Gaitskell accused the demonstrators of being communists. This claim, despite angry denials, was enthusiastically taken up by other Labour leaders, who denounced CND for having been infiltrated by communist and other extremist left-wing organisations.<sup>118</sup>

The antagonism between the two sides reached new heights when CND leaders decided to sponsor a world disarmament congress in Moscow, arranged by the World Peace Council. As this was a proscribed organisation because of its communist connections, the NEC threatened to expel Collins, Russell and other prominent CND leaders from the Labour Party. Even though this threat was never carried out, the bitter row between Labour and CND proved counter-productive for the peace movement and played into the Labour leadership's hands. Since their zenith in April 1961, CND's initial popularity had begun to recede. The subsequent split between Russell and



Collins, the decision to contest by-elections and the violent demonstrations against Labour leaders all damaged CND's image, and instead won sympathy for Gaitskell's cause.

Gaitskell's increased control over policy was also disguised by the heated confrontation with CND. His disregard for the conference decision on nuclear testing, which he had earlier supported, was one example.<sup>119</sup> Other controversies, such as Polaris and the training of foreign troops, were ignored until July 1962. At a Party meeting to decide whether these issues constituted a basis for a parliamentary debate, the Labour leader used the lack of time left in the session and the fear of another split to avoid them. Due to widespread concern over the latter, the PLP agreed by a large majority to vote for Gaitskell's preference of postponement.<sup>120</sup>

During the summer of 1962, it was clear that the nuclear issue was being pushed to the periphery wherever possible. No new policy statement on defence emerged, nor were there any plans to have a debate on defence and disarmament at the Party's annual conference. This, despite the fact that a new joint committee on disarmament, which consisted of NEC and Shadow Cabinet representatives, had been formed. In September, the TUC overwhelmingly defeated a motion which called on Britain to abandon its nuclear weapons.<sup>121</sup> Just before Labour's annual conference, Frank Cousins made one last attempt to reaffirm the Party's commitment to halt nuclear testing. Considering that the leadership had steadfastly ignored attempts to enforce any demands to this effect in the preceding months, the decision to accept Cousins' resolution and its warm reception at conference, appeared somewhat odd.<sup>122</sup>

Its success owed much to Gaitskell's stand over Britain's application to join the European Common Market. Since Macmillan's cautious approval for this in August 1961, the EEC had threatened another split within the Party. In

simple terms, the minority group of pro-Marketeers (mainly, but not all from the revisionist-right) regarded the EEC as the answer to many of Britain's economic and political problems. The larger group of anti-Marketeers (which included most of the centre and left-wing) dismissed the economic argument, believed that entry would harm the Commonwealth and undermine a British socialist government's freedom of manoeuvre. Gaitskell appeared neutral on the subject until mid-1962, after which doubts surfaced. As his objections increased (alienating many of his revisionist supporters in the process) Gaitskell struck up an alliance with many of his traditional opponents on the Left, even the 'irreconcilables'. This culminated in his speech to the 1962 annual conference, where the defence dispute was relegated to the sidelines and Labour's hostility to British entry into the EEC appeared explicit.<sup>123</sup>

In fact, the Common Market was a way out of the exhaustive defence dispute for both sides. Although many of Gaitskell's revisionist supporters fervently approved entry, others, including some of his most prominent allies, did not. As the next chapter demonstrates, this allowed Gaitskell to reassert himself over any possible challenge from the enthusiasts. He also believed that Blackpool had been decisive and that further intra-party warfare would harm Labour's electoral prospects: an important factor considering the serious economic and political difficulties that confronted Macmillan's administration at this stage. For their part, the Left had also recognised the significance of Blackpool. They too were exhausted by the defence dispute and realised that the EEC and unity were of paramount importance. In addition, they believed that the split within the revisionist camp and their new alliance with Gaitskell would increase their influence: that if they bided their time, the leadership would recognise the merit of their case, even that regarding defence. Although strengthened by Gaitskell's sudden death in January 1963, the subsequent election of Harold Wilson as leader and premier proved to be a big disappointment in this respect.

## Conclusion

The period from the general election of 1959 to the 1962 annual conference was a turbulent one for the Labour Party. In an ill-fated attempt to modernise the Party's constitution, Gaitskell seriously undermined his position and forced his erstwhile trades union allies into an unlikely alliance with the Left. Unilateralist sentiments became inextricably linked to the battle over domestic policy and resulted in the shock defeat at the Scarborough Conference in 1960. This defeat led to a leadership challenge, bitter recriminations and continued internecine warfare. Yet, within a year Gaitskell had regained control and the unilateralist victory had been reversed. By the end of 1962 the furore over the H-bomb, which had split the Party since 1957, had all but vanished.

A number of factors have been suggested to explain this. Michael Gordon believes that the leadership had adopted most of the unilateralist demands by 1962, which made further conflict unnecessary and damaging. Philip Williams has suggested that Gaitskell made some concessions in order to maintain unity, but having recognised that his opponents would never be satisfied, decided that a stand needed to be taken. Stephen Haseler believes that the defence dispute was simply a struggle for power, with Gaitskell's leadership at stake. All agree that a desire for unity within the Labour Movement, the return of the trade unions to the fold and the British application for entry into the Common Market consolidated Gaitskell's position.

On one level, the independent British nuclear deterrent, the evidence suggests that between 1960 and 1962 Labour had distanced itself from the Tory Government over the Bomb. Yet Macmillan's administration had itself accepted this, after the cancellation of Blue Streak in April 1960. Despite repeated denials, the purchase of an American delivery system, whether Skybolt or Polaris and even with a British warhead, could not be considered

as independent. When the issue of national control is added, this makes such a claim ridiculous. Although Labour rhetoric had shifted over 'first use', tactical nuclear weapons and the need for stronger conventional rather than nuclear forces, the Party's commitment to the 'wisdom' of multilateralism remained intact. The V-bombers would remain in service until obsolete, Britain would be a loyal member of a nuclear NATO and American bases would stay until no longer necessary. Gaitskell's ambiguous response to Blue Streak and Thor in 1960, added to his later reluctance to criticise American thermo-nuclear tests or reject Polaris, all demonstrated little deviation from the Government line.

Without doubt, Gaitskell took his role as Opposition Leader seriously and would not commit Labour to policies that he believed might threaten British national interests. However, his perceived adherence to strongly held principles deserves qualification. Between 1960 and 1961 it was clear that unilateralist pressure had forced him to adopt policies he had earlier rejected. The unilateral end to British H-bomb tests, the commitment over 'first use' and the value of tactical nuclear weapons were clear examples. It is also significant that his opposition to the Crossman compromise, ostensibly due to inalienable principles, was eroded to the point where the differences were indistinguishable. At the 1961 conference, two resolutions which Gaitskell had earlier insisted could not be opposed on principle - Polaris and the training of German troops - were passed with little objection.

This is not to say that the unilateralists remained true to all their principles. Their acceptance of the Crossman plan, only when it was clear that the leadership would reject it, and the separation of the composite resolutions for the 1961 conference illustrated their 'flexibility' when needed. After Blackpool, the Left's clear reluctance to push the nuclear issue any further as well as the rapid reconciliation with their former arch-enemies, suggests that

defence had been used as a means with which to challenge the leadership, only to be swiftly abandoned when they recognised that it had not worked.

More than anything else, it was the struggle for the Labour leadership that provoked the nuclear dispute. Since Gaitskell's succession, the struggle between the fundamentalist Left and revisionist Right had increased. After the 1959 election defeat and the abortive attempt to reform the constitution, the Left were given their clearest opportunity of challenging the right-wing leadership. This was because the trade unions, aghast at the threat to Clause IV, deserted the leadership in droves. With them, they took the block vote that had sustained the Party elite for so long. Without this protection, the Left knew the leadership was vulnerable and coupled with the steady rise of unilateralism, convinced themselves that defence was the key to a showdown. At first, their tactics appeared to work, as the leadership retreated over the independent deterrent and 'first use'. Even these concessions did not save them, as many trade unions followed the lead of the T&GWU and turned on them. It was this onslaught that resulted in the 1960 defeat and has been used by Beer, Gordon and Minkin to challenge the primacy of leadership argument. Having achieved an historic victory at conference, some on the Left believed that power was within their grasp.

Nevertheless, this proved a serious miscalculation. Although dealt a blow, Gaitskell's leadership was far more resilient, as the narrowness of the Scarborough vote demonstrated. His conference speech and the appeal for moderation sharpened the issue. Here and afterwards, he emphasised the dangers that the conference decision would entail: withdrawal from NATO, neutralism and the threat to the leadership's constitutional position. Whether true or not, this convinced many that there was no alternative other than to support Gaitskell in a life and death struggle with the unilateralist Left. It was this conviction, along with the recognition of the damage the split had caused the Party, that brought most of the union

leadership back to Gaitskell. Careful management, if not manipulation by some union leaders, led to the reversal of their unilateralist stance of 1960. It was the decision taken by five of the 'big six' unions that led to the leadership's recovery at Blackpool in 1961.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is difficult to see how the Left could have exploited their success to the full. Despite initial setbacks and the challenges from some of his senior colleagues, Gaitskell had overwhelming support in the power-base of the Labour Party. In linking the defence issue to the constitutional position of leadership, he also demonstrated astute political sense. Although a high risk strategy, this ensured widespread sympathy in the country as well as in the wider Labour Movement. In addition, the vast majority of the Labour leadership were just as committed to multilateralism and the need to fend off the Left's challenge as Gaitskell himself. With their continued support, it was most unlikely that internal threats from VFS, 'Appeal for Unity' and the 'Scarborough Conference Campaign Committee' or external ones from CND, could successfully challenge the Party's existing structure.

On balance, the McKenzie - Haseler thesis clearly outweighs that of Beer, Gordon and Minkin, despite the validity of part of their case. Even in the darkest days of 1960, Gaitskell's insistence that Shadow Cabinet colleagues should participate in defence policy formulation alongside the NEC and TUC, illustrated the control that could be exercised by a determined leader. Only five months after Scarborough, Gaitskell's defence preferences had been restored as Party policy. Having consolidated his position at Blackpool, Gaitskell further demonstrated his dominance over conference by refusing to criticise the resumption of American tests (even though he had earlier supported this) and ignoring the Polaris issue. It was only when defence had been replaced by Europe as the primary foreign policy issue, that any reconciliation between the warring factions took place. As the next chapter



demonstrates, this was borne out of a desire to exacerbate the Government's difficulties and present a united front to the electorate, rather than any ideological compromise.

## Notes for Chapter Four

1. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.526 & 529.
2. For contemporary reaction see, Dalton's diary account. HDD 11 October 1959, pp.695-6; PGWD 23 October 1959, pp.257-9; RCD 19 Oct 1959 pp.788-9. For contemporary analysis, see Abrams,M. & Rose,M. Must Labour Lose? (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960); Later, Jay,D. (1980), p.275; Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.538-9; Foot,M. (1975), pp.630-2.
3. LPCR 1959, pp.111-3; RCD 23 Oct 1959, p.795.
4. See Foot,M. Daily Herald 16 Oct 1959; Zilliacus,K. LPCR 1959, p.128; Miliband,R. 'The Sickness of Labourism', New Left Review Vol.1(1) Jan-Feb 1960, pp.5-9.
5. Jay had not mentioned Clause IV in Forward. Jay,D. (1980), p.275; Crosland had advised against it, Crosland,S. Tony Crosland (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982) p.93; Sam Watson and other union leaders had given Gaitskell similar advice. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.549.
6. Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.272.
7. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.646. The previous rejected commitments were: to stop all British tests; to promise no 'first use' of the H-bomb; to abandon the independent nuclear deterrent, if others did so at first, later unconditionally.
8. Haseler,S. (1969), p.208.
9. On specific points, if not principle. In Labour's 1961 statement and during the 1964 election campaign, they stated that Britain should cease its attempt to remain an independent nuclear power. Policy for Peace (London: Labour Party, 1961); Sked,A. & Cook,C. Post-War Britain: A Political History (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp.216-17. Also see McKenzie,R. (1964), p.613 and Calvocoressi,P. The British Experience: 1945-75 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.213.  
In contrast, the 1964 Conservative manifesto Prosperity with a Purpose stressed the need for an independent British deterrent.
10. Cmd.952 Report on Defence: 1960 (London: HMSO, 1960). Since Sandys' paper of 1957, the Government had retreated from the strategy of massive nuclear retaliation as the only way to prevent attack. However, they remained committed to an independent nuclear deterrent.
11. Blue Streak was a liquid fuel missile system, launched from a fixed-site base. As such, it was vulnerable to attack prior to launching. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.618, 29 Feb, Cols.878-80 and 1 Mar 1960, Cols.1033-8 (Brown), Cols.1040-41 (Strachey) Cols.1058-67 (Crossman); Cols.1135-48 (Gaitskell) According to Crossman, this was a deliberate attempt to provoke a row. RCD 28 Apr 1960, pp.833-4. Crossman had resigned from the Shadow Cabinet on 11 March 1960.
12. Times 3 Mar 1960.

13. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.577-8. Characteristically, he blames Brown and Strachey for their commitment to it and Gaitskell's reluctance to contradict them.
14. PLPM 13 Apr 1960. For the future, the memo considered (a) buying from the USA, and adding a British warhead (b) a joint European system and (c) leaving the nuclear shield to the USA. Defence Policy 13 Apr 1960, Box file 4940, George Brown Papers Bodleian Library, Oxford. Also see 'Labour and Defence Policy'. H.G.'s Memorandum on the Deterrent 13 April 1960 (Final Version) Doc. 23. HGD pp.635-41.
15. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.621, 13 Apr 1960, Cols. 1266-7 (Brown); Also see Haseler,S. (1969), p.189 and Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.275.
16. RCD 28 Apr 1960, pp.835-8; Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.622, 27 Apr 1960, Col.228 (Brown) and 329 (Wilson); This move was approved in the PLP, see RCD 28 Apr 1960, p.836; See Wigg,G. (1972), pp.226-7 and Pimlott,B. Harold Wilson (Jonathan Cape,1992), p.238. Gaitskell did not approve. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.581.
17. Letter from Crosland to Gaitskell, 4 May 1960, File 6/1 Crosland Papers BLPES.
18. Times 2 May 1960; See Crossman's comments, RCD 3 May 1960, p.480.
19. Wigg's view was that Gaitskell's May Day message made no reference to the shift in the defence situation, and merely reiterated Labour's pre-Blue Streak nuclear strategy. He suggests that this was intentional. Wigg,G. (1972), p.227.
20. The AEU's 52 member National Committee voted by 38 to 14 (against the advice of its leader) Bill Carron, to support unilateral renunciation of the testing, stockpiling and basing of all nuclear weapons in Britain. Both Dalton and Jenkins agreed that Gaitskell's position had become impossible. HDD 4 & 12 May 1960, pp.698-9.
21. Gaitskell, Brown, Callaghan, Gordon Walker, Healey, Robens and Wilson represented the Shadow Cabinet, although without voting rights. NEC IS-CM 17 May 1960.  
Castle certainly recognised the implications and believed it set a dangerous precedent. See RCD 11 May 1960, pp.842-4. Also NECM 26 Oct 1960.
22. 'Memorandum on Defence Policy for Consideration by the International Sub-Committee of the NEC'. GS/Def/91i-ii and Gaitskell's comments. GS/Def/107ii-iv, 24 May 1960. General Secretary's Papers.
23. See RCD 11 & 20 May 1960, pp.844, 846-9; PGWD 12, 16 & 19 May 1960, pp.259-61; HDD 12 May 1960, p.699; TBD 13 Apr, 5 & 25 May 1960, pp.329-31. Also see Williams,P,M. (1979), p.595.
24. RCD 24 May 1960, p.850.

25. Cousins had approved the first draft with this omission and Gaitskell, not knowing this and to the consternation of Crossman and Brown, had joined those drafting the document. RCD 1 June 1960, pp.855-7; Also see PGWD 31 May and 1 June 1960, pp.264-7.

26. Goodman,G. (1979), p.252.

27. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.589-91.

28. Gaitskell had made this clear at a meeting of the Parliamentary Party just before the meeting of the IS-C on 24 May. PLPM 24 May 1960

29. NECM 21 June 1960; Harry Nicholas, Castle and Greenwood were the main objectors. See RCD 22 June 1960, pp.858-9 and PGWD 22 June 1960, pp.267-8.

30. Labour Party, Foreign Policy and Defence: Declaration by the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress (London, L.P. July 1960). For a detailed analysis, see Cross,D,R. (1986), pp.286-9.

31. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.591.

32. New Statesman 25 June & 16 July 1960 and Tribune 1 July 1960.

33. Gordon,M,R. (1969), pp.275-6.

34. A vote of confidence was passed by 179 votes to 7. PLPM 29 June 1960.

35. 'Note on a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell', 14-15 July 1960, File 2/24, Hetherington Papers.

Although the NEC accepted the 're-statement of aims', only two major unions, USDAW and the NUGMW, supported any amendment to Clause IV. While the statement was approved at the 1960 conference as a contribution, it was not adopted as a constitutional amendment and so effectively thwarted Gaitskell's desire to change the constitution. For the re-statement, see Appendix in Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.572-3

36. Gaitskell had offered this as an alternative to Gordon Walker in May. PGWD 12 May 1960, p.259; Times 30 July 1960; RCD 30 Aug 1960, p868.

37. The T&GWU motion was carried (supported by the AEU who backed this and the official policy) by 4,356,000 votes to 3,213,000 and the joint Labour Party / TUC statement by 4,150,000 votes to 3,460,000.

38. Brown's contribution outraged Sam Watson, who accused him of having reneged on an agreement the week before, that no further compromise would be considered, and that his statement 'that the T&GWU resolution is not necessarily inconsistent with the official document' mocked and endangered Labour's credibility. Letter from Watson to Brown 20 Sept 1960. Box File 4940, Brown Papers.

39. Quoted in Goodman,G. (1979), p.268.

40. RCD 21 Sept 1960, pp. 875-6. A letter to Watson reveals how angry Brown was over Gaitskell's failure to compromise, and livid over the way in which he had been forced to withdraw the memo, complaining that Gaitskell had acted in a high-handed manner and had effectively accused him of being Cousins' stooge. Letter from Brown to Watson, 4 October 1960, in Box File 4940, Brown Papers.

41. NEC IS-CM 21 Sept 1960; Times 26 Sept 1960.

42. NECM 2 Oct 1960; Brown wanted the T&GWU resolution accepted alongside official policy. 'The Road to Trust' New Statesman 1 Oct 1960. According to Gordon Walker, Gaitskell was furious. PGWD 2 October 1960, p.269. Brown's memoirs do not mention this particular incident, but in the view of his biographer, he was deluding himself over any possible compromise. Paterson,P. (1993), p.95.  
Tony Benn also tried to pressurise Gaitskell into accepting compromise. Having failed, he concluded that his leader's actions had driven Cousins into an extremist position. TBD 27-8 Sept & 1 Oct 1960, pp.342-6. In the leadership contest that followed the conference, Benn supported Harold Wilson.

43. PGWD 2 Oct 1960, p.269; Williams,P,M. (1979), p.596.

44. Daily Telegraph 5 Oct 1960.

45. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.610.

46. For text of speech see, LPCR 1960, pp.197-201.

47. Daily Herald 6 Oct 1960; Guardian 7 Oct 1960; Tribune 7 Oct 1960.

48. Duff,P. (1971), p.191.

Foreign Policy and Defence was defeated by 3,339,000 to 3,042,000 votes, a majority of 297,000 (far less than the Daily Telegraph's predictions of nearly a million).

AEU	resolution was carried by 3,303,000 to 2,896,000 a maj of 407,000
TGWU	" " " " 3,282,000 " 3,239,000 " " " 43,000
Woodworkers	" " " " 3,331,000 " 2,999,000 " " " 332,000

LPCR 1960, p.202.

49. Hindell and Williams estimate that in 1960, 67 per cent of CLPs supported the leadership and 63 per cent in 1961. Hindell,K. & Williams,P,M.  
'Scarborough and Blackpool: An Analysis of votes at the Labour Party Conferences of 1960 and 1961', Political Quarterly Vol.33(3), pp.306-20, Jul-Sep 1962, esp. p.311.

50. Times 8 Oct 1960.

51. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.622-3; Epstein,L,D. 'Who Makes Party Policy: British Labour, 1960-61', Midwest Journal of Political Science (Detroit: Wayne State U.P., May 1962, Vol.6(2), pp.165-182, esp. p.176; As Haseler points out, Gaitskell used the neutralist issue to split the left-wing. Haseler,S. (1969), p.207.

52. 'A Note of a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell', 15 Nov 1960, File 2/20, Hetherington Papers.

53. Times 12 Oct 1960. Also see RCD 18 Oct 1960, p.883 and TBD 8 & 11 Oct 1960, pp.349-50. Anthony Howard (Crossman's biographer) believes that from August 1960, Crossman's prime objective was the overthrow of Gaitskell's leadership and this could not 'easily or convincingly be combined with a campaign based on the importance of maintaining the unity of the Party'. Howard, A. Crossman: The Pursuit of Power (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990), pp.231-5.

54. Gaitskell's insistence that the existing V-bombers should only be taken out of service when they were obsolete (they could and indeed did serve for many more years), was one example of this. There was also his reaction to the Thor missiles. Back in May 1960, when Brown had denounced this system, Gaitskell was angry because he was not consulted. PGWD 1 June 1960, p.266. Oddly enough, this had been agreed Party policy for some time.

55. Greenwood announced his resignation on 13 October 1960. Letter from Greenwood to Gaitskell, 13 Oct 1960. Box file; Defence and Nuclear Disarmament 1960s, Greenwood Papers. See Benn's account for Greenwood's reluctance to withdraw in favour of Wilson. TBD 20 Oct 1960, pp.350-1.

56. According to Ben Pimlott, Wilson was initially extremely reluctant to stand, only 'shamed' into action by Greenwood's candidacy. Nevertheless, once he had made up his mind, he 'browbeat Greenwood into submission'. Pimlott, B. (1992), pp.240-41.

57. Guardian 21 - 26 Oct 1960.

58. Questioned by Hetherington about how the breach could possibly seal, Gaitskell hinted that some of the far Left "were bound to be removed within the next two years...[he named Zilliacus]...CND had passed its zenith and would wane as its membership realised its Communist Party and Fellow Travelling influence. The same realisation would extend to the Labour Party". 'A Note of a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell', 15 Nov 1960, File 2/20, Hetherington Papers.

59. Guardian 31 Oct 1960; Tony Benn also supported Wilson, and blamed Gaitskell for having 'plunged' the Party into the defence crisis. Letter from Benn to Crosland, 31 Oct 1960, File 6/1 Crosland Papers.

60. RCD 3 Nov 1960, p.897; It is interesting to note Brown's objections to Crossman's disloyalty. Before Scarborough, Brown was often highly critical of Gaitskell, but claimed in his memoirs that he never intrigued against his leader. Brown, G. (1971), p.83. However, he later told Greenwood that he would have voted for him against Gaitskell in the 1960 leadership contest. Considering Greenwood's support for unilateralism, this appeared somewhat odd. Letter from George Brown to Greenwood, 29 March 1961. Box file; Defence and Nuclear Disarmament 1960s, Greenwood Papers. Also see Howard, A. (1990), p.233.



61. In December 1960, John Strachey had published a paper which appeared to support the independent deterrent. Strachey, J. The Pursuit of Peace, (London: Fabian Tract 329, Fabian Society, Dec 1960).

62. The Scottish TUC had raised the issue in Polaris Submarine Base at Holy Loch 9 Nov 1960. Draft of speech by Gaitskell at Manchester on 5 November 1960, in Box File 4940, Brown Papers; See f/note 11 for earlier parliamentary reaction. At a meeting of the PLP on 7 December, the overwhelming majority supported the official motion. PLPM 7 Dec 1960.

63. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.632, 13 Dec 1960, Col.262 (Foot) and Col.302 (Greenwood) & 16 Dec 1960, Col.839; Daily Herald 15 December 1960.

64. Cross, D.R. (1986), pp.350-51.

65. Epstein, L.D. (May 1962), pp.176-7.

66. For analysis of CDS see Haseler, S. (1969), pp.215-22; He [p.221] considers it almost impossible to estimate the level of rank and file trade union support for CDS.

For a more recent analysis of CDS, see Brivati, B. 'The Campaign for Democratic Socialism', Unpublished PhD thesis, London, 1991.

67. NECM 8 Dec 1960.

68. The meeting took place on 24 January 1961 and included the entire Shadow Cabinet, NEC and TUC General Council. In GS/Def/152i-iii, paras.2 & 5, 24 Jan 1961. General Secretary's Papers.

69. Paras.8 & 9 General Secretary's Papers; Also see RCD 27 Jan 1961, pp.920-22.

70. Epstein, L.D. (May 1962), pp.176-7; Gordon, M.R. (1969), p.277 and Williams, P.M. (1979), p.632;

71. The first draft by Denis Healey was presented on 8 February 1961. The redraft became Labour's official defence document Policy for Peace, presented at the 1961 annual conference. LPCR 1961, p.8.

72. RCD 8 and 13 Feb 1961, pp.924-5.

73. 'Draft submitted by Mr. Frank Cousins.', NEC DS-C Feb 1961.

74. Haseler, S. (1969), p.198.

75. 'Mr. Crossman's Amendment.', NEC DS-C Feb 1961. See f/note 78 for results.

76. RCD 13 Feb 1961, pp.926-7; Williams, P.M. (1979), pp.365-6.

77. See f/note 73: F.Cousins, Feb 1961.

78. NECM 22 Feb 1961; Guardian 23 & 24 Feb 1961.

At the NEC, Healey's draft was carried by 16 to 10, Cousins's rejected by 18 to 7 and Crossman's by 15 to 13 [the latter supporting Haseler's case].

At the TUC General Council there was a straight choice between Healey and Cousins. Healey's was carried by 26 to 6 and Cousins' rejected by 25 to 6.

In the PLP, Healey's draft was carried by 133 to 61, Crossman's rejected by 133 to 69 and Cousins' by 141 to 36.

For a detailed analysis, see Cross,D. (1986), pp.363-73.

79. Daily Herald 27 Feb 1961.

80. RCD 3 Mar 1961, pp.937-8.

81. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.634-8.

82. Letter from Philip Williams to Crosland, 28 Feb & 2 March 1961. File 6/1 Crosland Papers.

83. Letter from Gaitskell to Crosland, 28 Feb 1961. File 6/1 Crosland Papers.

84. Daily Telegraph 6 Mar 1961.

85. In Anthony Greenwood's opinion, it was the unilateralists that had made all the concessions in order to accept the Crossman Plan. As these had been rejected, it was 'now time to fulfil the Scarborough policy and leave the decision to annual conference'. Speech to Annual Dinner of Coventry Labour Party by Anthony Greenwood, 10 March 1961. Box file: Anthony Greenwood Speeches (Notes 1940s-60s), Greenwood Papers.

86. Gaitskell was acting on what Bill Carron and Sid Greene (NUR) had told him. Letter from Gaitskell to Crosland, 28 Feb 1961. File 6/1 Crosland Papers.

87. Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.277.

88. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.635, 27 Feb 1961, Cols.1217-31 (Healey).

89. Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.277.

90. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.636, 8 Mar 1961, Cols.639-40; Despite warnings, the five, Emrys Hughes, William Baxter, Michael Foot, Sydney Silverman and Stephen Owen Davies, openly defied the leadership and had the whip withdrawn. Hansard H.C. Debs 5s. Vol.644, 19 July 1961, Cols.1407-8.

91. This had been at the insistence of the Scottish TUC which had opposed the designated Polaris site since November 1960.

92. Draft for Consideration by the NEC presented by George Brown. NECM 22 Mar 1961.

93. NECM 22 Mar 1961. The rebels were defeated by 14 votes to 8.

94. RCD 8 Mar 1961, p.941.

95. RCD 11 May 1961, p.942. Somewhat ironic considering Crossman's antics.

96. See Duff,P. (1971), pp.165-83 and Driver,C. (1964), p.64.

97. The votes were two to one in favour of the compromise; a rejection of unilateralism by 46,000 votes (compared with 19,000 the year before) and approval for multilateralism by under 5,000 votes.

Out of 52 delegates, the compromise was passed by 37 to 12 votes, unilateralism rejected by 28 to 23 and support for multilateralism by 48 to 4. Both USDAW and the AEU opposed the Holy Loch Polaris base. See Cross,D. (1986), pp.388-92.

98. Williams,P,M. 1979, p.645. Surprisingly, Cousins' refusal to accept the compromise at this stage wins the praise of Williams.

99. Guardian 14 June 1961; See RCD 14 June 1961, pp.950-51. For a later assessment, see Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.277.

100. Parkin,B. Middle Class Radicalism (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1968), p.129 and Minkin,L. (1980), p.191.

101. Cousins took the threat seriously. See Tribune 21 July 1961 and Haseler,S. (1969), pp.221-2.

102. Gordon uses the scale of the votes against Polaris and the training of foreign troops to demonstrate this. Gordon,M,R. (1969), p.277. See f/note 107 below.

103. Minkin,L. (1980), pp.144-5; Cross,D. (1986), pp.399-400.

104. LPCR 1961, pp.162-6 (Brown), p.189-92 (Gaitskell).

105. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.653.

106. Gordon,M,R. (1969), pp.277-8.

107. Policy for Peace was carried by 4,526,000 votes to 1,756,000. Composite No.20 (Polaris) was defeated 3,611,000 to 2,379,000 votes; Composite No.278 (Foreign troops) was defeated 3,519,000 to 2,733,000 votes. LPCR 1961, p.194.

108. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.652-3, 664; Nevertheless, Cousins remained defiant and commented that the Blackpool decision meant as much, or as little, as the one taken the year before. LPCR 1961, p.173.

109. Gaitskell received 171 votes to Greenwood's 59, and Brown 169 to Castle's 56 votes for the deputy leadership.

110. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.653, 8 Feb 1962, Cols.626-8 (Macmillan).

111. Cmd.1693 Statement on Defence 1962. The Next Five Years (London: HMSO, 1962).

112. NECM 28 Feb 1962.

113. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament This Way To Peace (London: CND, 1961).
114. NECM 28 Feb 1962; LPCR 1961, p.162.
115. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.655, 5 Mar 1962, Cols.64, 68, 70-1 (Gordon Walker).
116. Quoted in Duff,P. (1971), p.166.
117. Duff,P. (1971), pp.183, 193-5.
118. Guardian 7 & 8 May 1962.
119. In June, a letter to Khrushchev from 65 Labour MPs calling on the Soviet leader to cancel their tests was not censured by the leadership, probably because it made no reference to Western tests. Copy of letter, 17 June 1962, with Greenwood's comments. Box file; Defence & Disarmament 1960s. Greenwood Papers
120. PLPM 12 July 1962; Guardian 13 July 1961.
121. Guardian 14 Sept 1962.
122. Cousins' resolution (No.276) called for an end to nuclear testing. LPCR 1962, p.233.
123. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.736.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Wait and See! Europe 1955-63

On 27 July 1961 Harold Macmillan's Cabinet agreed that a formal application to join the European Economic Community (EEC) should be made, prompted by a belated recognition that Britain's future lay in Europe. Even before the Treaty of Rome in 1957, unease over Britain's political and economic position in the world had increased, fuelled by the Suez Crisis and the subsequent cooling of the 'special relationship' with the United States and large parts of the Commonwealth. The decision represented a major change in British foreign policy because, despite co-operation over some economic and defence questions, Europe had remained subordinate in British thinking to the Atlantic Alliance and the Commonwealth since the end of World War Two.

Since 1945, different shades of political opinion had believed that Britain might emerge as the head of a united Europe. This concept appealed to Churchill during the war, and in opposition between 1945-51. Some on the Left were also attracted, and briefly saw Europe as the ideal means of creating a 'Third Force', independent of the extreme capitalist USA and communist USSR.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, Attlee's Government was decidedly unsympathetic, believing that this was incompatible with the Anglo-American 'special relationship', the leadership of a multi-racial commonwealth and interfered with the ability to introduce socialism. Although co-operation was sought in economic and defence terms, Bevin carefully left Europe on the periphery. When the Schuman Plan to pool Franco-German coal resources was announced in April 1951, Britain did not participate because a supranational administrative authority was a pre-condition.

After the Conservative election victory in 1951, Churchill's 'vision' was quietly forgotten. The failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) in

August 1954 convinced many policy-makers that closer European co-operation was unlikely to succeed, a view reinforced during Eden's premiership. Yet, it soon became clear that Britain would have to reassess its position after the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) approved moves towards further European unity at Messina in June 1955. The British responded in mid-1956 and pressed for an industrial free trade area which covered Britain, the ECSC and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) nations. The formation of the Common Market in 1957 halted this and led to the rival European Free Trade Area (EFTA) in November 1959. However, its limitations and a drastic reassessment of British policy persuaded the Government to apply for EEC membership in August 1961.

After 1951, Labour's attitude to Europe remained lukewarm and clouded by anti-German sentiments. Attlee and most of the leadership remained distinctly unenthusiastic, and even the 'Third Force' advocates had become disillusioned while Labour were still in office. This changed little when Gaitskell became leader in 1955, although proposals for an industrial free trade area were initially welcomed. Suez, European economic success and Britain's relative decline prompted some Labour support for the EEC towards the end of the 1950s, although it did not become a major issue until 1960. While the pro-EEC lobby was strongest amongst Labour's revisionist wing, this was not universal. Compared to other foreign policy issues, it has been argued that the predictable clear cut 'Left versus Right' ideological split was noticeable by its absence.<sup>2</sup>

It has been widely assumed that Gaitskell was neutral on the issue until his forceful rejection of Britain's application at Brighton in October 1962. This was the moment when an unlikely alliance was forged between the leader and many former opponents on the Left, and where a breach opened with some of his closest supporters on the Right. In the year before Brighton,



many believed that Gaitskell had moved towards Europe and this made his speech and the breach all the more surprising. Seen in the context of Gaitskell's well known tendency to lead from the front on any issue, it is little wonder that his motives have been a matter of debate ever since and have attracted criticism and sympathy in equal measure. To date, four main viewpoints have attempted to answer these related questions.

Philip Williams argues that Gaitskell's attitude to Europe was consistent and that he never regarded it as an issue of principle. He explains that the fierce opposition in 1962 was provoked by the Government's intention to enter the EEC on any terms, which abandoned the original conditions and the safeguards for the Commonwealth. Robert Leiber believes that Gaitskell took a highly principled stand over the conditions of entry, regarding the economic case for joining the EEC as balanced and the political one advantageous, until the Commonwealth socialist leaders' meeting of September 1962. Nevertheless, Leiber also concedes that party unity pushed Gaitskell into an anti-EEC direction, as conciliation with the Left was needed after the exhaustive fighting over defence. Robins regards these explanations as inadequate and argues that Gaitskell's primary motivation was to prevent another damaging split, which was both successful and fully justified. P. S. Gupta has dismissed the importance attached to Commonwealth and third world links as excuses. He believes that these were marginalised by other issues including: national sovereignty; the 'capitalist' character of the EEC; effects on domestic prices; the intensification of the Cold War and the division of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines Labour attitudes towards Europe between 1956 and 1963 and focuses on Gaitskell's consistency and motives. The evidence suggests that the leader's actions were prompted mainly by electoral considerations and the necessity to maintain internal unity. Gaitskell remained committed to a 'wait and see' policy and changed, earlier than

generally assumed, due to the Government's unpopularity and their close identification with the Common Market. While many of Gaitskell's close allies supported the European cause, their influence was limited, in marked contrast to the anti-Market lobby who dominated the relevant policy-making bodies. Although an accommodation with the Left was important, Gaitskell also acted to forestall a possible challenge from the pro-European right. While he could rely on the Left's desire to attack the Government and revisionists, he simultaneously reassured the enthusiasts that he would not rule out an application if Labour's conditions were met.

On Europe, this chapter demonstrates that Gaitskell displayed a greater degree of political awareness than hitherto: in his response to public opinion and improving Labour's electoral prospects, as well as successful party management and preventing another split. While again presenting the case for the primacy of the leadership, the chapter also illustrates the validity of Kavanagh's thesis: the importance of individuals in key posts. The chapter is divided into five sections, the first two examining the evolution of policy and the diversity of opinion up to Macmillan's decision to apply. The third examines the reaction to the application, the widening internal rifts and Gaitskell's determination to remain uncommitted. The fourth and fifth consider the scale of opposition and demonstrate that Brighton was a tactical ploy, used to play on anti-Market prejudices, only to be swiftly dropped afterwards.

#### 1. On the Sidelines: Labour and Europe 1956-59

In the summer of 1956, the British Government decided to negotiate an industrial free trade area which would include Britain, the six members of the ECSC and any other OEEC nation that wished to participate. Up to this point, the British had remained aloof from Europe, but the threat of increased tariffs from a European customs union forced a reassessment of

policy. By that October Harold Macmillan, the Chancellor, had issued statements on economic association with Europe, although he took care to rule out Britain becoming a member of the European Common Market and Customs Union, which was under discussion by the ECSC.

Distracted by Suez, the Labour Party did not respond until prompted by the TUC General Council. TUC and government officials had met to discuss the European issue in October. They agreed that an European Industrial Free Trade Area (EIFTA) was needed, provided it had certain safeguards. Anxious to discuss the matter with the Labour Party before they issued a statement to this effect, TUC representatives met a PLP delegation led by Harold Wilson at the end of the month.<sup>4</sup> In public, Wilson appeared to have concurred with the TUC's approach, as he advised the Government that it had Labour support to enter negotiations.<sup>5</sup> Yet a discussion paper prepared for the Shadow Cabinet revealed his hostility to British involvement with EIFTA and European moves towards a Common Market. Like many of his colleagues, Wilson saw both institutions as anti-socialist and government interest as negative; based on what might happen if Britain was left out. In his paper, Wilson argued that Britain's economic problems were caused by lack of state intervention and insufficient investment. He added that if these trends were reversed, there would be little for Britain to fear from European competition.<sup>6</sup>

Up to the end of 1956 Gaitskell's position was unclear, as the Labour leader had been preoccupied with the Suez Crisis. Nevertheless, his lack of enthusiasm was demonstrated when the President of the UK Council of the European Movement asked him to address a meeting with European socialists at the Royal Albert Hall in April 1957: not only was the request refused, but none of Labour's Shadow Cabinet would even attend.<sup>7</sup> The indifference displayed by the leader and his colleagues was nevertheless consistent. Like many others, Gaitskell's views on Europe were shaped by

the traditional 'three inter-connected circles' approach, and reinforced by an emotional attachment to the United States and the Commonwealth. In an earlier meeting with American State Department officials in May 1956, Gaitskell emphasised that British policy was determined by the importance of the Atlantic alliance; that while there should be close relations between Britain and the Continent, there was no possibility of joining any kind of European political federation.<sup>8</sup>

Gaitskell elaborated on his preferences in the Godkin lectures at Harvard in early 1957. Although he conceded that a strong consensus of opinion in Britain favoured the proposed EIFTA, this did not extend to the formation of the embryonic Common Market. He felt that Britain could not contemplate joining a European political federation as it was still the centre of the Commonwealth, and with which it had strong political and economic ties. The second main reason Gaitskell gave against closer European integration, was the possible effects it might have on the 'special relationship' between Britain and the United States. He believed that this might be weakened, and cited examples of Anglo-European military co-operation to demonstrate that the American commitment was more important. Gaitskell argued that the 'third force' concept, aired since the war in some left-wing circles and adopted by some on the right after Suez, was impossible because Europe's different political systems made them incompatible. He predicted that closer ties with Europe would develop in the economic field, but that political ties were unlikely, unless America followed that course or if the Commonwealth disintegrated.<sup>9</sup>

These examples demonstrate that between May 1956 and March 1957, Gaitskell had accepted that closer European economic co-operation (in the form of EIFTA, not the EEC) was inevitable, but ruled out any closer political ties. It is interesting to note that his views were almost identical to the Government's at this stage; also, that as the Americans were encouraging

Britain to have closer links with Europe, Gaitskell was not playing to a particularly receptive audience. In addition, while the Labour leader had accepted some elements of closer European economic co-operation, Harold Wilson had strongly argued against this, on the grounds that all that was needed was increased domestic state intervention and more investment. This was significant, as Wilson was later to assume responsibility for many of the Labour committees that dealt with the European issue.

EFTA was the subject of a joint discussion paper prepared by the NEC European Co-operation and Economic Sub-Committees in September 1957. Although the document acknowledged the conditional support of the TUC and PLP, the NEC made it clear that it was not yet committed either way. The paper expressed concern that the scheme might threaten the British and Commonwealth textile and agricultural industries, and supported the Government's refusal to negotiate on this. It also argued that 'for a variety of political and economic reasons' Britain could not join the new Common Market. Nevertheless, it concluded that the economic and political advantages of a free trade area outweighed the disadvantages, as long as adequate safeguards for Britain's standard of living and state planning were included.<sup>10</sup>

In this and two subsequent meetings, the NEC decided that no decision could be made until further research on the proposals had been carried out. Yet, the very fact that they had not dismissed the proposals out of hand provoked a fierce response from the Left. Aneurin Bevan wrote that any Labour support for EFTA was flawed and full of contradictions: that socialists could not call for economic planning and simultaneously accept a dogmatic free market economy, the policy followed by the British Government.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), the only positive support for further British moves towards Europe within the Party came from the revisionist supporters of Socialist Commentary. In marked contrast

to the left-wing criticism, they believed that EIFTA was a step in the right direction towards increased planning and a united socialist Europe.<sup>12</sup>

In general, the lack of interest in the European question was reflected by the NEC's response. It made no effort to bring any motion on the proposed industrial free trade area to the 1957 or 1958 annual conferences. That Europe received scant attention is of little surprise. Towards the end of 1957 and especially the beginning of 1958, most of Labour's energy was occupied by the furore over the Bomb and the threat posed by CND and the re-emergence of VFS. In addition, increased agitation in the Commonwealth, with trouble in Cyprus, Malta, east Africa and southern Rhodesia diverted attention. It was not until July 1958 that the NEC met again to discuss EIFTA, and this was only prompted by the news that the Anglo-French negotiations were in difficulty.<sup>13</sup>

In November 1958, the EIFTA negotiations collapsed. Macmillan responded by approaching the six OEEC countries outside the Common Market, with the aim of establishing a rival European Free Trade Area (EFTA). Although bi-partisanship continued, it was increasingly clear that a change of emphasis was detectable between the front benches. At first, this was influenced by Labour's general mistrust towards the right-wing ascendancy that had developed in Europe, especially after the French general election of November 1958 returned General de Gaulle to office. Later, it was because Labour believed that the British Government had mishandled the original negotiations.

In December, Wilson led the NEC delegation at the Socialist International Congress in Brussels and the differences became explicit. Wilson made it clear that any new treaty must include guarantees of full employment and control over cartels.<sup>14</sup> He expanded on these points at a joint-meeting of the European Co-operation and Finance & Economic Sub-Committees on 22



January 1959. Here, Gaitskell also demonstrated more impatience with Tory policy than before. He believed that the Government's failure to compromise over the industrial free trade area earlier in the negotiations had weakened Britain's position and led to the French intransigence.<sup>15</sup> However, any desire to adopt a more partisan position was difficult as Labour had supported EIFTA in principle, if not detail. This reluctance was evident by the absence of any plans to table any amendments or divisions for the parliamentary debate on 12 February 1959.<sup>16</sup> Instead, Labour accused the Government of having weakened the Commonwealth trade links (the Sterling area) before the outcome of the negotiations were known, and for their failure to recognise that the proposed industrial free trade system was unacceptable to the French.<sup>17</sup>

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As in the previous year, Labour virtually ignored Europe until the summer of 1959, despite the Government's reassessment of policy and the acceleration of negotiations to create the European Free Trade Area. When Labour Party representatives attended the 6th Congress of the Socialist International at Hamburg (14-17 July 1959), scant attention was paid to EFTA. Instead, the debates were dominated by nuclear weapons and the crisis in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> The general lack of interest was also evident in the lead up to the October 1959 general election. There was no mention of the proposed European Free Trade Area in the Labour manifesto.

## 2. The Divisions Emerge: The General Election to Macmillan's Application

After the 1959 general election, Europe was again relegated by the internal controversies over Clause IV and the H-bomb. Despite this, some interest was renewed by the EFTA negotiations, which were near completion. It was also clear that divisions had opened within the Party itself. While one sceptical faction believed that only wider economic expansion was acceptable,

the pro-European lobby emphasised the advantages of closer political co-operation. In the December debate, both groups attacked the Tories, but from different angles. Wilson advised the Government to pursue closer economic co-operation between EFTA and the EEC, but felt that more effort should have been made to create a free trade area for the Commonwealth, which would have left Britain in a far stronger position. In contrast, the pro-European group, notably George Brown and Roy Jenkins, believed that the Government was wrong to place so much emphasis on the economic advantages at the expense of political considerations. In their view, the establishment of EFTA would widen the gap between this organisation and the EEC, rather than narrow it, the declared intention.<sup>19</sup>

These divisions, along with a desire to clarify Labour's European policy, appeared to be the principle motivation behind the NEC's decision to replace the European Co-operation Sub-Committee with a working party in January 1960. The proposed new body, actively encouraged by Sam Watson of the International Sub-Committee, was to be dominated by pro-Europeans. Both Jenkins and John Hynd (from the European Sub-Committee) were to join other enthusiasts, including Fred Mulley and Shirley Williams.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the working party was never activated, largely on the advice of Wilson and Denis Healey. They insisted that as Europe was primarily an economic issue, it should be controlled by the home affairs group, rather than the International Committee as originally envisaged. Their persuasion resulted in the formation of a new body ten months later, the European Economic Sub-Committee under the aegis of the NEC Home Policy Sub-Committee. In effect, the European issue was to be dealt with by two groups (the other was the Finance & Economic committee), both directly responsible to the Home Policy committee. As this was dominated by Wilson and other Euro-critics like Douglas Jay, the balance actually swung away from the enthusiasts.<sup>21</sup>

In May 1960, Harold Wilson and John Clark (of the International Department) were invited to an EEC socialist meeting as observers, where they offered a distinctly negative view. When questioned on the British view of EFTA, Wilson explained that while Labour had no fixed policy, it was not an ideal solution and that the present treaty meant that there could be no separate deal with the EEC. He argued that if EFTA was to become permanent it could be greatly strengthened by bringing in the nations of the Commonwealth. Questioned about the EEC afterwards, Wilson replied that he was certain that France would be against a British application; also that it was most unlikely that any British administration could accept the political and economic implications.<sup>22</sup>

Although NEC meetings were dominated by debates over Clause IV and defence, several MPs suggested that Europe should be debated. In response, and at Gaitskell's request, Wilson presented a report on the current position. This attacked government policy for its failure to recognise that the prime motivation behind the Common Market was political rather than economic. In addition, that European progress towards integration meant little chance of bringing the EEC and EFTA together. Although Wilson conceded that an application to join the Common Market held some advantages, these largely rested on the negative consequences of being left out. The disadvantages were: that an application could be refused; that the conditions would be unacceptable; that Britain had obligations to the EFTA nations; and that British horticulture would be threatened. Denis Healey followed Wilson and concentrated on the political drawbacks: that Britain would lose influence in international affairs; that membership would have a damaging effect on Anglo-Afro-Asian relations; and that it could seriously weaken British influence over the USA. Healey finished by insisting that, 'On balance, the arguments against...joining the "six"...were decisive'. Outside the confines of the PLP, Gaitskell appeared slightly more positive, privately

telling Alastair Hetherington that 'the groundswell [was] towards going in...despite the objections'.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, Wilson's stance against Europe was strengthened during a meeting of EEC and EFTA socialists in July 1960. The Swedish representative told him that EFTA needed more forthright support from the Labour Party, and that any British attempt to join the EEC would destroy it. He added that France would refuse the application anyway and Britain would become isolated.<sup>24</sup> In the parliamentary debate on the Common Market two days later, Wilson questioned the Government over its intentions and outlined the difficulties that such a decision would present to the Commonwealth. Having conceded that the economic advantages were 'formidable', Wilson rejected the EEC because it might limit Britain's economic and social objectives. He also argued that closer identification with the foreign policies of some of the Community's nations (a thinly veiled reference to de Gaulle of France and Adenauer of Germany) would lessen Britain's chance of bridging the gulf between the Superpowers.<sup>25</sup> Despite some wishful thinking over the degree of British influence, Wilson's speech was astute because its references to France and Germany (especially in the light of the recent Berlin Crisis) appealed to the deep mistrust felt by MPs on both sides of the House.

Because of the summer recess, Europe received little further attention from Transport House until September, when Wilson's report of 23 July 1960 was discussed.<sup>26</sup> In the lead up to the 1960 Scarborough Conference - with the odds stacked heavily against the leadership over defence - it was not surprising that it was marginalised. The European issue only briefly surfaced at conference during a fringe meeting arranged by Socialist Commentary supporters. When Gaitskell was questioned about Labour's ambivalence, he replied that the lukewarm support for Europe was because public opinion

was against any form of political federation and due to widespread concern over the Commonwealth.<sup>27</sup>

By December, the proposed European working party had been shelved and its remit passed to the alternative NEC committees, after further persuasion by the Secretary of the International Department. David Ennals called for a reassessment of Britain's world role in the light of the new European institutions, and felt that the International Sub-Committee was over-stretched by the defence issue. Due to this, and the fact that it was primarily an economic question, Ennals argued that Europe should be left to the Home Policy Sub-Committee.<sup>28</sup> Of course, Ennals' admirable concern for the International Committee's heavy workload could be interpreted in a quite different light. While there is no doubt that he was eager to clarify the issue, Ennals was also highly sceptical of further British moves towards Europe and agreed with Wilson, Healey and Jay on this. His support for their preference - to leave the issue to the PLP and the NEC Home Policy Sub-Committee (chaired by Wilson) and its satellites - took it away from the International Sub-Committee and its pro-European chairman, Sam Watson. Apart from Gaitskell, the critics therefore constituted the most powerful force in controlling European policy.

Between January and July 1961, renewed interest in Europe was reflected by the number of papers produced by Labour's Research Department.<sup>29</sup> By May, after Edward Heath had tentatively laid out the advantages for joining the Common Market in the parliamentary foreign affairs debate, seven Research Department papers had been submitted to the NEC and Shadow Cabinet. Although the NEC delayed discussion until June, when the Shadow Cabinet met before Heath's speech, it demonstrated the divergence of views within Labour's elite. Wilson pursued his familiar theme: that Labour's attitude towards any application should be more cautious than the Government. Again, he concentrated on the negative effects that the Common Market

could have on British agriculture, the Commonwealth, EFTA and the neutral nations. Others, notably Brown, Gunter and Houghton, insisted that Labour should edge in front of the Government, by showing willingness to join.<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that both sides of the Labour divide were eager to take a partisan line against the Government. While the critics maintained that the Tories were rushing headlong into an application, the enthusiasts insisted that the Government was not positive enough.

Nevertheless, concern increased that a strong line one way or the other was premature, as any government application and its terms were still uncertain. Simultaneously, Europe threatened to create another damaging split, just as the leadership was regaining the support it had lost at Scarborough. The evidence suggests that the latter reason was the most important, because even the harshest of Labour's European critics remained remarkably neutral. In the Finance & Economic Sub-Committee, chaired by Ian Mikardo (a fierce opponent), it was agreed that Labour should avoid any firm commitment either way; a policy followed the next day by the Commonwealth Sub-Committee, led by James Callaghan (non-committal at this stage).<sup>31</sup> This extended to the Parliamentary Party, where Gaitskell cracked down on both factions. He and Brown urged that the Shadow Cabinet should not commit themselves publicly one way or the other and that the same should apply to the PLP. In a meeting on 15 June, Gaitskell had drawn attention to a number of pro-Market EDM's that had appeared on the order papers. He reminded MPs that as the Party had not made up its mind, these motions were a severe embarrassment and should be withdrawn. A week later, it was the anti-Marketeers who earned his disapproval when Sydney Silverman, a left-wing critic, put down a private members bill which attacked the Common Market.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the repeated attempts to keep the options open, the anti-EEC bias gained momentum in two lengthy reports released that July. The

International Department warned that the Commonwealth would be damaged economically and politically if Britain joined. This was supported by a report from the Research Department which concentrated on the dangers of weakened national control.<sup>33</sup> The first paper was discussed at the Home Policy Sub-Committee on 10 July. According to Philip Williams, Gaitskell regarded it as a 'gross exaggeration' of the anti-Market case and was furious at the critical line taken.<sup>34</sup> Before the joint NEC / TUC talks took place, Crossman and Barbara Castle agreed that the basic conditions for Labour support should be: 'full satisfaction of the Commonwealth claims; a clear understanding that we [Britain] were not committed to federal union; and meeting the requirements of EFTA and British agriculture'. When Crossman suggested that a general election should be called before any treaty was signed, Gaitskell,

'...weighed in and said he disagreed with everything I [Crossman] had said...it was foolish and irresponsible. He was as determined as ever to say absolutely nothing either way. Any kind of attempt to lay down conditions would split the Movement from top to bottom...Hugh was terribly nettled, rough, hasty and back in his old form of plunging too far'.<sup>35</sup>

When the NEC / TUC talks opened on 14 July, Wilson repeated that until the Government's intentions were known, no decision could be taken. Gaitskell asked the TUC representatives, who had consistently favoured closer economic association with Europe, to remain silent until the position was clarified. Although the Wilson - Gaitskell line was accepted, the minutes of the meeting show that Crossman, Castle and Jennie Lee argued for a firmer policy, especially over Commonwealth safeguards and freedom of economic planning.<sup>36</sup> It is also worth noting that out of the fifteen NEC representatives at the meeting, Castle, Crossman, Alice Bacon, Lee, Mikardo, Wilson, Ennals and Shore were all critics and that Mulley and Gunter, two of the pro-European minority, were absent.



The rumours that the Government intended to make a formal application finally came to an end on 31 July 1961, when Macmillan announced the decision. The Labour leadership's reaction demonstrated their anxiety to preserve unity. On 1 August, Gaitskell told a meeting that he wanted to keep Labour united on Europe to '...avoid a major doctrinal quarrel'. For this reason a free vote or a binding majority decision was ruled out; instead, Labour would table an amendment and abstain in the division. This read,

'...that HMG will be conducting...negotiations from a position of grave economic weakness...that Britain should enter the EEC only if the conditions...are acceptable to a Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference and accord with our obligations and pledges to other members of the European Free Trade Area.'<sup>37</sup>

This was an astute tactic, for the amendment was acceptable to both Labour factions and only two MPs (Woodrow Wyatt and John Winterbottom) defied the whip and voted against. The enthusiasts believed it was flexible and depended on the conditions, while the critics felt that the conditions would not be met and could be opposed later on.

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Up to this point, the leadership's clear preference was to 'wait and see' before they committed themselves. Although there was a great deal of scepticism about a British application to enter the Common Market, especially in the relevant committees and large sections of the Shadow Cabinet and PLP, the need to avoid a split was the dominant feature. With the furore over defence, it was not surprising that the Labour leadership was anxious to avoid a repeat performance, especially as a reversal of the Scarborough defeat was on the cards during the summer of 1961. In order to counter any threat, strident views by either side continued to be actively discouraged.

### 3. Wait and See: The Application to the Brussels Meeting

Macmillan's speech to Parliament on 2 August emphasised the economic case for joining the Common Market. Gaitskell opposed any terms that

would be unacceptable to the Commonwealth and urged that a special conference should be held to discuss the issue. On the political implications, Gaitskell stated that while, '...there is no question of Britain entering into a federal Europe...British opinion is not ripe for this...', he indicated that the situation might change in the future. While Gaitskell had balanced his argument, Wilson was openly hostile. He started in a moderate enough vein, and laid out Labour's conditions for entry. However, his concern over the effects that the EEC would have on the Commonwealth soon turned into a bitter attack, and concluded with the notorious phrase,

'We are not entitled to sell our friends and kinsmen down the river for a problematic and marginal advantage in selling washing machines in Dusseldorf.'<sup>38</sup>

Although Gaitskell's speech was comparatively neutral, it was completely overshadowed by Wilson's contribution and attracted criticism from some pro-Marketeers. Against the accusation that his speech was too negative, Gaitskell replied that he had adhered to the compromise agreed in July.<sup>39</sup>

Technically, Gaitskell's defence was justified as the Shadow Cabinet, PLP and the NEC committees had all accepted this. Nevertheless, it was also evident that each of these were dominated by the anti-EEC lobby, and Wilson's speech in particular had clearly departed from the agreed policy of non-commitment. Robert Leiber has argued that at this stage, 'It was by no means obvious in advance what position the Labour Party would adopt on the Common Market'.<sup>40</sup> This view has some merit, as Labour's public response to the Government's EEC proposals after the debate were vague and cautious. Yet, more recent documentation, unavailable to Leiber, makes it is equally clear that the bias against the Common Market was widespread and dominant within Labour's policy-making bodies. The 'vague and cautious' reaction that he cites, signalled that the leadership were anxious to avoid a damaging split rather than balance the arguments objectively. Leiber also misses the way that the anti-EEC bias was resented by the pro-Marketeers:

Wilson's actions resulted in the resignation of Roy Jenkins as a front-bench spokesman.

The Government's application for EEC membership meant that the issue received far greater prominence. Up to this point, discussion of the Common Market had been confined largely to Labour's elite, whether in the TUC General Council, NEC, Shadow Cabinet or PLP. Afterwards, the wider Movement began to express an interest. Constituency parties and rank-and-file trades unionists urged the NEC to issue pamphlets and information which explained the implications of membership. While some had already made a decision one way or the other, these were in a small minority at this stage. In the months leading up to Labour's 1961 annual conference only eleven resolutions which opposed entry and two which supported it, were submitted to the NEC. Many others either asked for more information, or were prepared to follow the leadership's preference. On the eve of conference, the NEC considered three composite resolutions on the issue: one against, one for, and one which accepted the leadership's conditions.<sup>41</sup> Although Gaitskell did not take part in the actual debate, he had given an interview on 2 October that mirrored the Government's statement: that British agriculture, the Commonwealth and Britain's partners in EFTA 'must be taken care of'.<sup>42</sup>

When the debate opened on 5 October, the alternative views appeared to receive equal airing. John Stonehouse moved the NEC choice (Composite Resolution No.4) which approved entry only if British agriculture, horticulture, EFTA and the Commonwealth obtained guarantees, and if Britain retained control of domestic public ownership and planning. Of the individual resolutions moved or debated, four openly supported entry while five definitely opposed. The remainder supported the NEC composite resolution. George Brown endorsed this line - that no decision should be taken - and urged conference to remit the pro and anti-Market resolutions.

The outcome was that this was passed without a card vote; resolution No.321 (anti) was remitted; and after objections over the same fate, the pro-European resolution (No.314) was overwhelmingly defeated. Despite Brown's vote, his lack of enthusiasm for the NEC option, then and later, made it clear that he was disappointed it was not more positive.<sup>43</sup>

According to Philip Williams, Gaitskell had taken care to keep to the 'agreed compromise', as unconditional entry might destroy the Commonwealth. However, the Labour leader also believed that an abject refusal underestimated the importance of the EEC and the economic dangers of staying out.<sup>44</sup> Although Brown's memoirs demonstrate that he believed that Labour had edged towards entry if their terms were met, Gaitskell's clear reluctance to commit himself was understandable on two counts. Firstly, any agitation to take a partisan line presented difficulties because the final terms of entry were as yet unknown. Secondly, many of the Party's concerns regarding the Commonwealth had been covered by Edward Heath in October. These were: overseas association for the Asian and African nations; continued access to British markets for those Commonwealth countries who were not offered or could not accept association; and 'comparable outlets' (the Morocco Agreements) in the enlarged Community for temperate foodstuffs exported by New Zealand, Australia and Canada. In addition, Heath had also stressed the need for protecting domestic agriculture and reiterated Britain's obligations to EFTA.

Divergence was more apparent over the political implications. Macmillan's speech on 2 August (as well as Heath's statement to the 'six' on 10 October) had made it clear that the Government intended to take an active role in the political, not just economic, structure of the EEC once Britain had joined. This admission (Heath's statement was not originally meant for publication) and the Government's apparent support for the Bonn Declaration - which committed the 'six' to closer political ties - was an area where Labour could

take issue.<sup>45</sup> In November 1961, Wilson's anti-European rhetoric sharpened when he warned that the Common Market had hardened cold war attitudes. He attacked any attempt towards further integration with Europe, because it would create, 'an arid, sterile and tight trading and defensive block against the East'.<sup>46</sup>

Another major problem was intra-party management. Although Gaitskell was supported by most of Labour's elite and could rely on collective responsibility to quell dissent, he was also confronted with two fluid and vociferous factions with widely differing approaches to Europe. This presented him with an unenviable dilemma. The 1961 Blackpool Conference had overturned the Scarborough defeat of the previous year, and was assisted by many of the leader's pro-Market revisionist sympathisers. Gaitskell could not afford to antagonise this hard-core of support, as his position was still vulnerable and he needed them to consolidate his leadership. This also applied to a large group within the trade union leadership, who were also sympathetic to the Common Market application. Simultaneously, he could not afford to antagonise those holding the opposite view - many of whom were returning to the fold, whether from the trade unions, the CLP's or the soft left - by accepting unconditional entry. Faced with the need to satisfy both sides, it is not surprising that Gaitskell remained distinctly cautious over Europe and freely admitted that he did '...not want another internal Party row about this'.<sup>47</sup>

The problem of unity and the anxiety to avoid any firm commitment was demonstrated again at the end of the year. William Blyton, an anti-Marketeer, complained that pro-EEC motions were still being placed, in contravention of an agreement reached the previous August. Gaitskell replied that those concerned would be asked to withdraw them at the next Party meeting. When this took place at the end of January, Brown reiterated the position that the Party could not reach any definite conclusions until the

conditions were known. Despite this plea for patience, Blyton's repeated demand - that the motions should be withdrawn - caused heated exchanges between the two sides. Although Jenkins eventually withdrew, Gaitskell banned any motions and meetings that undermined the leadership's policy. The anti-Market case received the same treatment. When Barbara Castle argued that Europe presented Labour with a clear opportunity to seize the initiative from the Tories, Harold Wilson, backed by Gaitskell, quickly rejected it.<sup>48</sup>

While the PLP was kept on a tight rein during this period, the Research Department and NEC sub-committees continued to argue against entry. Peter Shore was highly sceptical about the Government's 'over-enthusiasm' for the Bonn Declaration which, he argued, meant closer political union. He also criticised their apparent willingness to end Commonwealth preferences, the adoption of common commercial, agricultural and transport policies and the free movement of capital and Labour. On agriculture, Shore lamented the delay in negotiations over overseas association for Commonwealth nations as well as the effects it would have on British and EFTA agriculture. He concluded that the voting strength and formula in respect of qualified majority voting was crucial to British entry.<sup>49</sup> Another report, submitted by Tom Balogh, went even further. This supported association with the EEC, but believed that 'full membership' destroyed Commonwealth safeguards and meant that the organisation would not survive British entry. Balogh believed that the common tariff and the elimination of trade barriers was a surrender to French pressure, and warned that a Labour administration would be severely restricted from any form of socialist planning. His report concluded that these threats decisively tilted the argument against the EEC. Like Wilson, Balogh suggested that a strong British socialist government could transform the economy; a view supported by the other papers released in early 1962.<sup>50</sup>

All the reports were highly critical of British entry into the EEC. Considering that they had been prepared by anti-Marketeers for the Home Policy Sub-Committee, chaired by Wilson (an arch-critic and since the autumn of 1961 the Shadow Foreign Secretary), this was not surprising. Gaitskell's initial reaction was that they concentrated too much on the Commonwealth's economic problems and that more information, alternatives and possible solutions were needed. Nevertheless, Wilson's anti-Market hand was strengthened significantly when he visited the USA in February to gauge American reaction. On his return, he reported that although Kennedy's 'administration was still very keen for the UK to join the Common Market on political grounds, it was now worried about the possible economic implications of the external tariff, both for the USA and the south American countries'.<sup>51</sup>

Gaitskell also visited the United States in February 1962. He told his audience that Britain must be careful before it committed itself to an 'inward looking community' and a 'tightly knit political unit'. Gaitskell argued that some of the EEC member s' colonial past, as well as the high external tariffs, could adversely affect the West's relations with the third world. He also drew attention to the Government's three conditions for entry and Labour's two additions: the safeguards for an independent foreign policy and economic planning.<sup>52</sup> Although Williams admits that Gaitskell pursued a critical line during his visit, he denies that he had made up his mind at this stage and, like other commentators, believed that this began in July 1962. Indeed, up to mid-summer many assumed, on both sides of the divide, that Gaitskell still followed a pro-European line.<sup>53</sup>

At this stage it is worth considering the effect that the American attitude might have had. Up to early 1962, Kennedy's administration had favoured Britain joining the EEC because they believed it would strengthen Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. Gaitskell was a fervent Atlanticist, but he had



previously insisted that closer British ties with Europe, with hardliners such as Adenauer and de Gaulle dictating policy, could adversely affect the relationship. The fact that both Wilson and Gaitskell had visited the USA appeared to be more significant than recognised at the time, because it suggested that American opinion (especially in light of Wilson's report) was a key factor in shaping Labour policy. At the same time and in marked contrast, a meeting organised by Roy Jenkins between Labour leaders and Jean Monnet in early April compounded the negative view of Europe.<sup>54</sup>

Without doubt, the paramount concern was still to prevent any firm Labour commitment until the results of the EEC negotiations were known. In March, the NEC agreed to defer the matter until further work had been completed on how the EEC would affect the Commonwealth. The following month, Gaitskell instructed the PLP that only front bench spokesmen would speak on the subject and reaffirmed that motions and meetings on the issue were banned.<sup>55</sup> Although Gaitskell successfully fended off any decision until after the Easter recess, anti-Market feeling had increased. This was reflected in the papers submitted by the Research Department, especially in relation to the negotiations between Edward Heath and the Council of Ministers which met on 22 February 1962. Denis Healey also lent his weight to the argument when he pointed out the difficulties that EEC agricultural policies would have on the 'old' and, more importantly, 'new' Commonwealth nations.<sup>56</sup>

One method used to promote unity was increased pressure on the Government. In a speech to Fulham Labour Party on 14 April Gaitskell criticised their reluctance to keep the public informed on the negotiations and issues involved.<sup>57</sup> Another, was to let members of the Shadow Cabinet air their views for and against British entry in discussion papers. Barbara Castle argued that the laissez-faire nature of the EEC undermined and ruled out any national planning measures that 'upset the free play of the market'. Although she conceded that some state intervention would be possible, she

believed that membership would affect industrial distribution, the nationalised industries and that the EEC's social fund and investment bank would not help create employment. In contrast, Fred Mulley argued that the EEC permitted much greater scope than Castle allowed for, and that British membership would lessen the right-wing Franco-German ascendancy.<sup>58</sup>

Despite this apparent freedom of expression, Gaitskell carefully avoided any firm policy one way or the other. In early May Fred Hayday, of the pro-EEC NUGMW, asked the leader how to respond to trade union resolutions on the Common Market. Gaitskell replied that Labour should not commit itself at this stage, but set out the five conditions for membership: i.e. that the interests of (1) British agriculture (2) the Commonwealth and (3) EFTA must be safeguarded; (4) that Britain must remain free to introduce whatever social and economic planning was necessary and (5) retain the freedom to conduct an independent foreign policy. At the end of the memorandum, Gaitskell again demonstrated his determination to keep the options open, stressing that the ultimate decision rested on the terms of entry. He added that,

'...although there are undoubtedly circumstances in which we should not go in if our conditions are not fulfilled, nevertheless, if they are...there is little or nothing to fear and great benefits may well result'.<sup>59</sup>

Also in May, Gaitskell delivered a televised party political broadcast, where he emphasised the importance of the Common Market issue and laid out Labour's conditions. He explained that although the economic case for membership was about fifty-fifty and that there could be a slight advantage in the long run, it would be 'silly' to say yes or no until the conditions of entry were known. On the political side, Gaitskell dismissed the view that British independence would be destroyed as 'rubbish', but added that safeguards were needed. He emphasised the importance of the Commonwealth in maintaining continued British world influence. In Gaitskell's opinion, the

Commonwealth did not prevent British entry and could actually stop Europe from becoming more insular, reactionary, and nationalistic. Nevertheless, he warned that further political integration could threaten this and result in a disastrous economic settlement. Gaitskell concluded that the Government had given the false impression that the issue was settled even as negotiations were still in progress and that,

'...To go in on good terms, would...be the best solution...Not to go in would be a pity, but it would not be a catastrophe. To go in on bad terms which...meant the end of the Commonwealth would be a step which I think we would regret all our lives, and for which history would never forgive us.'<sup>60</sup>

Some commentators believed that the events of early May showed that Gaitskell was taking a more positive attitude to Europe.<sup>61</sup> On closer examination, the message appeared to be purposefully even-handed. To the public, the speech was intended to present both sides of the argument and leave them to make up their own minds. To the Government, it could be interpreted as tacit acceptance as long as the conditions were met, and a warning if not. To Labour supporters, and as Gaitskell probably intended, it contained sentiments that both opponents and enthusiasts alike could agree with. As such, it was an astute speech and let Labour remain 'on the fence'.

During the rest of May, the Common Market attracted further scrutiny. In the Shadow Cabinet, Fred Peart presented a paper which examined the effect the EEC could have on British agriculture. He concluded that higher prices for the consumer would be offset by a reduction of price guarantees to British farmers. A week later, this was followed by a report on the legal implications of the Treaty of Rome by Sir Frank Soskice. This expressed concern over the majority voting arrangements and the right of veto in the EEC.<sup>62</sup> However, it was in the PLP that the fullest discussion on Europe took place when Gaitskell opened the first of four special meetings. He explained that although no decisions would be taken, the purpose was to prepare the Party for the time when it should. After Gaitskell had outlined the proposed

government safeguards and Labour additions, Healey and Wilson took a much more strident line against the EEC. Healey warned that the Treaty of Rome spelt the end of the Commonwealth as an economic unit because of its effects on foodstuffs, raw materials and manufactured goods. Wilson pursued this theme and insisted that Britain would have to choose between Europe and the Commonwealth.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the meetings, all sides were given the opportunity to air their views. However, it is worth noting that of the active participants, the EEC's opponents were in a majority over the enthusiasts and neutrals respectively by a ratio of 4:2:1.<sup>64</sup> In the last meeting, Gaitskell again outlined the two cases and insisted that it 'was absolutely essential to secure reasonable conditions', while the Shadow Cabinet unanimously agreed that no commitment should be given.<sup>65</sup> In some respects, the debate appeared to show intra-party democracy and freedom of expression. Yet discussion was limited to the PLP, and from the start it had been stressed that no decisions would be binding. In addition, apart from Gaitskell, all the meetings were dominated by the anti-Marketeers: Wilson (the Shadow Foreign Secretary), Healey (the Shadow Colonies spokesman) and Jay (Shadow Board of Trade). As they were the key figures who would deal with the issue in any future Labour administration, their views carried considerable weight within the PLP, especially from the neutrals who were likely to follow their lead. The evidence suggests that the meetings were inspired to give the impression of debate and placate the pro-Marketeers.

Up to this point, discussion had concentrated on the political and economic implications contained in the five conditions. In June, another factor came into the equation: electoral considerations. Peter Shore submitted a paper to the Home Policy Sub-Committee, which argued that while a federal Europe was not an immediate prospect and therefore could not be used by socialist opponents in other countries wishing to join, it posed a 'much more serious

problem for those, like ourselves, who stand at the threshold of state power'.<sup>66</sup> Shore's comments reflected two related questions: an increase in anti-Market public opinion and a fall in the Conservative Government's popularity.

Until mid-1961, public opinion had been largely indifferent to the EEC. In July 1960, polls demonstrated that 49 per cent approved of a decision to join, 13 per cent disapproved and 38 per cent were undecided. Macmillan's application showed an initial rise in pro-entry sentiment, which reached 52 per cent approval with only 13 per cent against in September 1961. From this peak, approval fell to 36 as against 30 per cent in June 1962. Simultaneously, by mid-1961, Labour's lead over the Tories had steadily increased. In 1961 Labour voters' approval for the EEC was 52 against 20 per cent, but by April 1962 this margin had dropped to 38 against 33 per cent. This contrasted sharply with Conservative pro-Market sentiment which approved by 58 against 22 per cent. Leiber concludes that the Prime Minister's close identification with the Common Market meant that when Conservative popularity fell, so did that of the EEC.<sup>67</sup> It is also likely that the floating voters provided Labour with a large potential target area. Unlike most foreign policy issues which make little impact, the EEC was regarded primarily as an economic issue which affected prices and the standard of living. This perception drew attention away from the political implications to a large extent, although the emotional appeals over the Commonwealth and Britain's world influence had some resonance.

How much effect public opinion had on Gaitskell at this point is difficult to judge, but as Williams admits, the Labour leader was often more influenced by this than party strategists or the progressive liberal intelligentsia. This is shown by the way he paid scant attention to the concerns of the Labour Common Market Committee (LCMC) or even CDS, the organisation his close supporters had formed to back his leadership in the fight over defence.

The LCMC, set up to promote British entry, was led by one of Gaitskell's closest revisionist supporters and a fervent pro-European, Roy Jenkins. Although it contained some left-wing sympathisers, the LCMC was dominated by the revisionist Right. Similarly, from its foundation CDS had been pro-Market and Campaign, its mouthpiece, had welcomed Macmillan's announcement to apply for membership in July 1961. Between then and May 1962, many articles appeared from leading Labour figures who favoured membership and insisted that Britain could only benefit from joining. They attacked the scepticism of the anti-Marketeers and dismissed their claims that the Commonwealth was an effective world force.<sup>68</sup>

Even the fact that most of the liberal and progressive publications, such as the Observer and the Guardian and highly respected periodicals like the Economist, were pro-Market appeared to have had little effect on Gaitskell. Neither did the mass circulation pro-Market Labour press, the Daily Mirror and Daily Herald, whose combined daily readership was around six million. The smaller left-wing tomes such as Tribune, the Daily Worker and the New Statesman were all opposed to entry, although they had never supported Gaitskell anyway. Although most of the right-wing press backed the Government's application, ironically, the Daily Express and its sister publication the Evening Standard opposed it, and drew the names of many former prominent Labour figures, including Clem Attlee, who objected to British membership.<sup>69</sup>

One of the main bastions of support for the Labour leadership, the trade unions, could not be relied on to support non-commitment either. Close allies of Gaitskell like Sam Watson, Bill Carron and Alan Birch were all pro-European. Generally, the TUC were influenced by the economic case and, with the exception of left-wingers like Frank Cousins and Ted Hill, had been sympathetic to Macmillan's announcement. Despite opposition from some left-wing unions over the political implications, the General Council

accepted Edward Heath's offer for talks on a British application. In June 1962, the TUC issued a statement demonstrating that economic expansion was their main criteria for entry, but that the Government should retain its power over price controls, aid to nationalised industries and the control of capital movements. While it expressed concern over the provisions for employment, free movement of labour and various other socio-economic matters, it was significant that the TUC concentrated on the aspects which directly affected its own sectional interests. Wider questions - including Commonwealth trade and support for British agriculture - were largely ignored, and the TUC showed little interest in the political implications of membership. Apart from guarantees for full employment, the TUC's Economic Committee appeared satisfied on most points.<sup>70</sup>

By June 1962 the tacit approval of the TUC, pro-Market agitation from CDS, the LCMC and most of the Labour press, combined with Gaitskell's 'wait and see' attitude, had convinced some that Labour was taking a pro-Market stance.<sup>71</sup> However, this optimistic view did not consider the scale of internal opposition. While prominent members of the Shadow Cabinet such as Brown, Mulley, Houghton, Strachey and Gunter supported the EEC, they were outnumbered and restricted by collective responsibility. In addition, they were opposed by the group who would gain control of European policy if Labour assumed power: Wilson, Jay, Healey and Callaghan. In the PLP, it was estimated that 75 MPs favoured entry, 80 were against and the rest would follow the leader's line.<sup>72</sup> Within the NEC, the pro-Market group had lost most of its influence since 1961, when the matter had been transferred to the Home Policy Sub-Committee and its satellites. The domination of the anti-EEC lobby was also reflected in the Research and International departments, while in the wider Movement the resolutions submitted by trade unions and constituency parties had also swung against Europe.<sup>73</sup>



If internal opposition was insufficient to convince Gaitskell, other factors might have been. In June, anti-EEC public opinion had risen dramatically, coinciding with a sharp slump in Macmillan's popularity and a 10 per cent poll swing against the Tories. According to Philip Williams, Gaitskell did not consider the electoral implications of the Common Market issue until mid-July, when Macmillan's dismissal of a third of his Cabinet hardly helped the situation.<sup>74</sup> However, Gaitskell's speech during the parliamentary debate in early June, demonstrates a flaw in Williams' argument. Instead, this appeared to show that public opinion and anti-Market sentiments within the Party were beginning to have more effect, because Gaitskell took a firmer line against the Government.

In Parliament, Gaitskell outlined the options. He accepted that the Commonwealth was not a viable alternative to the EEC and could leave Britain isolated in the future. Nevertheless, he could not accept the threat posed by the EEC's 'pretty intolerable' Common Agricultural Policy, and failed to see why the 'six' could not treat the Commonwealth as favourably as the former French colonies. Gaitskell then turned to the problems of the Scandinavian countries and called on the EEC to admit 'neutrals' (meaning Sweden) as associates. He argued that failure to do this would alienate Norway and Denmark because of their reluctance to erect tariffs against their neighbour, Sweden. This in turn would be detrimental to British interests as the Scandinavians were 'our most likely allies' in the EEC; without their inclusion, EFTA would remain a competitive trading block.<sup>75</sup> While Philip Williams has suggested that the speech proved Gaitskell's willingness to pressurise the Government, others have argued that it showed pro-Market sentiments.<sup>76</sup> It appears more likely that the speech publicly laid the foundations for Labour's move into opposition if their conditions were not met.

The same line was repeated at a meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in early July. In his speech and answers to the questions that followed, Gaitskell reiterated that the position rested on the negotiations. He felt that some of the objections to entry were 'grossly exaggerated' - that the EEC could not be ignored and did not have to threaten the Commonwealth - and that their concern added to Labour's, would prevent the Government entering on unacceptable terms. Nevertheless, he refuted the suggestion that there was an overwhelming case for joining and warned that if the Commonwealth felt that it was being abandoned by Britain, this '...would be disastrous'. Gaitskell had been careful to balance the arguments, and some believed that he was still positive towards entry.<sup>77</sup> However, his scepticism over the economic case and the strident tone towards the end, combined with his recent parliamentary speech, demonstrated that Labour support for British entry should not be taken for granted. Just three days later the cautious moves to opposition accelerated dramatically, even though the outcome of the negotiations between the Government and the EEC were not revealed for another month.

#### 4. Towards Opposition: From Brussels to Brighton, July - October 1962

In July, Labour leaders met European Socialists in Brussels to discuss the Common Market. Just six weeks before, Gaitskell had attended a Socialist International Congress in Oslo where the delegates had warmly welcomed Britain's application to join the EEC. They hoped that the Common Market would be progressive, radical and internationalist; sentiments which Gaitskell fully supported.<sup>78</sup> In contrast, the July meeting exposed the fundamental differences between British Labour and the continental socialists. Gaitskell repeated the obligations to the Commonwealth and EFTA, and argued that the British electorate was firmly against joining a European federation. Although he had often disagreed with federalism, Gaitskell's emphasis on the importance of British public opinion angered the

Europeans, particularly Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Foreign Minister. In Spaak's view, Gaitskell had proposed unacceptable conditions and expected the 'six' to beg Britain to join. While the Labour Party delegation opposed federalism, the Belgian's 'biting response' held that European unification was the 'most essential function of the Treaty of Rome' and must not be blocked.<sup>79</sup>

According to his biographer, Gaitskell was surprised at Spaak's 'outburst', but felt that the Belgian had 'contrived' to put him at a disadvantage, had been arrogant over the British case against federalism, unsympathetic towards the Commonwealth and contemptuous of the neutral nations.<sup>80</sup> Considering the different interpretation of the European vision offered by both sides, it is not surprising that such a clash occurred. Nevertheless, it is significant because it has been widely regarded as the point where Gaitskell came 'off the fence'.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the meeting's portrayal as the crucial moment, the evidence suggests that other factors were involved. Conservative unpopularity had risen dramatically and was compounded when Macmillan sacked seven of his Cabinet and nine junior ministers between 13 and 16 July 1962. The Tory disarray was extremely advantageous to Labour, and the Common Market provided an ideal opportunity to launch an attack. In addition, the Government's 'over-enthusiasm' had cast doubts over whether their earlier pledges to the Commonwealth, British agriculture and EFTA would be upheld. This uncertainty had prompted 40 Tory MPs to rebel against their leadership. Iain Macleod (chairman of organisation) also inadvertently helped Labour when he decided that the EEC was a potential vote-winner. This had the effect of identifying the Government even more closely with the EEC and reinforced the Tory - Labour divide. As the Liberal Party was even more pro-European, there was no course to take other than opposition if Labour wanted to pursue an effective partisan attack.<sup>82</sup>

By early August, Gaitskell was well aware of the benefits that Labour could reap if negotiations between the Government and the EEC were unacceptable or broke down.<sup>83</sup> Although the Anglo-European talks were not actually suspended until October, Gaitskell's other hope - that the negotiations would prove unacceptable - was realised. On 5 August, the French laid down strict conditions for import levies against all external foodstuffs entering the EEC. In effect, this meant that if no new proposals had been agreed by 1970, the Commonwealth preferences would be abolished. As the Government had constantly insisted that the Commonwealth had to be protected and that the negotiations would not threaten this, the French action caused considerable embarrassment (though not admitted of course). After the details were published on 10 August 1962, Labour lost little time in presenting the Government's predicament as a betrayal.<sup>84</sup>

Although parliament had broken for the summer recess and Gaitskell was away on holiday, the Research Department quickly capitalised on the implications of Heath's setback. In a ten page document, it expressed 'grave disappointment' at the proposed settlement, listed Heath's original 1961 safeguards for the Commonwealth and castigated the Government for their surrender. The document stated that the White Paper: denied overseas association for over 500 million Commonwealth citizens in the underdeveloped countries; that with one possible exception they had not accepted any 'Morocco type agreements; and that the basic principle of 'comparable outlets' had been replaced by the derisory 'reasonable opportunities' clause. The paper concluded that ever since the issue had arisen, Commonwealth interests had been crucial and that any opposition to the conditions by their leaders ruled out membership. Finally, it warned that 'The Commonwealth attitude...would be a major factor in deciding the policy of the Labour Party itself'.<sup>85</sup>

Further anti-Market tracts, from right-wing opponents such as Douglas Jay to left-wing critics like Barbara Castle, were also published in August. Jay, as Shadow Secretary of the Board of Trade and a close ally of Gaitskell, was highly influential. He had consistently argued that British entry would mean the abandonment of an age-old policy of cheap food and undermine British national sovereignty. He now warned that a protective European barrier, which restricted imports of food and raw materials, would damage the British economy and raise prices. In addition, British industry would be unable to compete against the other members of the EEC in certain areas of the domestic market and so suffer accordingly.<sup>86</sup> While Jay's views were well known, the warning over price rises was useful ammunition for the anti-Market case as the cost of living influenced public opinion against membership of the EEC.

Further change had also taken place in the trades unions. Representatives from the TUC, concerned over the question of full employment, had met Heath on 23 July and concluded that the terms were generally acceptable. Nevertheless, not all the individual unions followed this lead, and their conference round had demonstrated a wide divergence of views on EEC membership. Although the NUGMW and the Clerical & Administrative Workers remained enthusiastic, others who had strongly favoured the EEC in 1960, (e.g. the AEU and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Union) had since adopted Labour's 'conditional' approach. While some national unions like the NUM were divided by area, others were vehemently opposed. The Cine & TV Technicians, the Draughtsmen's (DATA) and the NUR all opposed entry, as did the Scottish TUC and a number of smaller unions. By September the balance was fairly even, with one of the 'Big six' (NGMWU) keen on entry and another (NUR), firmly against. The rest adopted the 'wait and see' approach at the TUC conference by a majority of three to one.<sup>87</sup> Although the unions had not come out explicitly on either side, this was to prove significant for the Labour

leadership as it meant that their policy, when it came, was assured of a large majority.

To many, the Government's August White Paper had constituted a major retreat from the commitments made in 1961. The greatest concern centred on the tacit acceptance that unless circumstances changed, Commonwealth preferences would be abolished by 1970. From this moment, out of the five conditions (Commonwealth, British agriculture, EFTA, Economic planning and Foreign policy) the first received most prominence and provided Labour with the clearest means with which to oppose the application and the Government. Before the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference, Gaitskell and his colleagues met Commonwealth and European socialist leaders to discuss the EEC. The result was a highly critical communiqué, which attacked Macmillan for having reneged on his pledges and warned that,

'...if Britain were to enter the Common Market on the basis of what has so far been agreed, great damage would inevitably be done to many countries in the Commonwealth and therefore to the unity of the Commonwealth itself.'

Listing the four other main areas of disagreement with Government policy, the statement continued that Britain should not enter until these issues were settled as they were all too 'vague or damaging to be acceptable'.<sup>88</sup>

Gaitskell's contemporary view of the talks was that the Commonwealth Labour leaders had been 'very hostile' to the present terms, whereas the European socialists had remained indifferent and failed to realise the importance of the underdeveloped countries. Although Gaitskell denied that he had changed his mind and that there were still important advantages for entry, he believed that if the conditions as a whole were not improved, 'then undoubtedly we should ask for a general election'.<sup>89</sup> On television he was more explicit,

'...as things are, we are giving everything away. We are completely disrupting our previous trading system. We are being

asked to discriminate against our friends in the Commonwealth in favour of Europe. What do you give us in exchange? Nothing but promises.'<sup>90</sup>

Gaitskell had used the interview over the communiqué to warn that the issue was now a partisan one and that there should be, 'a clear division of opinion between the two major parties'. While this and his call for a general election delighted Labour's anti-Market lobby, it enraged the enthusiasts and sparked off furious exchanges between Wilson and Jenkins.<sup>91</sup>

Two months later, Gaitskell told a reporter that he had decided to oppose the British application at this point.<sup>92</sup> Since then, others have taken a similar view. According to Williams, the talks with the Commonwealth Labour leaders had been the precedent, and the communiqué would have been even more strident if Gaitskell had had his way.<sup>93</sup> While it has been argued above that this point had actually been reached earlier - even before the Brussels meeting - Gaitskell's call for a general election certainly demonstrated his determination to promote it as a partisan issue. At a meeting of the Home Policy Sub-Committee on 10 September, Gaitskell reported on the meetings and justified his press statement. It was agreed that copies of this, along with the Research Department discussion paper prepared for the meeting, should be circulated to all members of the NEC and that a draft paper combining these points should be released at conference.<sup>94</sup> As both were hostile to entry and emphasised the plight of the Commonwealth, it was this issue that dominated discussion.

On the day of the NEC meeting, the Commonwealth Prime Minister's conference opened. A week later, they released an official statement which accepted the Government's position and agreed that Britain should continue negotiations with the EEC. Considering that Holyoake of New Zealand, Menzies of Australia and Deifenbaker of Canada were all reluctant to criticise British policy in public, it was not surprising that they kept their reservations to themselves. Privately, Gaitskell was disappointed because he



felt that Macmillan had 'bull-dozed' the Commonwealth leaders into accepting the British terms for entry.<sup>95</sup> In a press interview immediately afterwards, he insisted,

'I have always said that British entry must depend on the conditions...We do not think the terms are good enough. They are damaging to the Commonwealth, and they do not match up to the solemn pledges given by the Government...We must get better terms or stay out.'<sup>96</sup>

Five days later, Gaitskell appeared in a televised party political broadcast in response to one by Macmillan the night before. Gaitskell concentrated on the problems that faced the Commonwealth and rebutted the Tory claim that the application would have little effect on this,

'Let's be clear what it means. It means the end of Britain as an independent nation...It means the end of a thousand years of history, it means the end of the Commonwealth...'

He then proceeded to chastise the Government for abandoning its pledges and entering '...a system which imposes taxes on Commonwealth goods, keeps them out and lets in European goods free'. This, Gaitskell argued, would not be so bad if proper compensatory measures were taken, but instead there had only been 'vague assurances and nothing more'. He accused the Tories of rushing the negotiations in order to have '...everything sealed, signed and delivered before the next election'. In his view, a decision of this importance should not be taken without the chance of the electorate to have their say, and he demanded a general election before any commitment was made. Gaitskell dismissed the Government's economic case as '...not proven...It's not more than fifty-fifty'. On the political side, he accepted that the EEC could be beneficial if 'a bridge between the Commonwealth and Western Europe' could be created; if the policies of Western Europe would be 'internationalist...less reactionary, more progressive'. Nonetheless, this could not be achieved unless all the Commonwealth interests were fully safeguarded, which the present terms did not do. Gaitskell concluded,

'I don't want to see a choice between Europe and the Common-

wealth and I don't think it's inevitable...But the present terms do confront us with this choice. Make no mistake about it...I don't think the British people...will in a moment of folly, throw away the tremendous heritage of history'.<sup>97</sup>

Since his meetings with the European and Commonwealth socialists, Gaitskell had publicly moved closer to opposition on the known terms. As Williams notes, the broadcast received praise from anti-Market Tories and the Beaverbrook press, but earned scorn from Macmillan, the Liberal leader Jo Grimond and dismayed much of the press, even the Daily Mirror and Daily Herald.<sup>98</sup> It also upset the Labour pro-Marketeers, and according to one of the most prominent enthusiasts, 'dashed all hopes'.<sup>99</sup>

Until this broadcast, Gaitskell's perceived neutrality had presented few problems to the Party's EEC enthusiasts. Only the day before, Labour's Common Market Committee had demonstrated their continued commitment to the EEC and welcomed the Commonwealth Prime Minister's communique.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, Jenkins and Anthony Crosland both concluded that Gaitskell had 'drifted away' from them.<sup>101</sup> Although Jenkins, Strachey and others doubted if it could be achieved (and even considered replacing him as leader) they decided to try and persuade Gaitskell to readopt a 'neutral line'.<sup>102</sup> Subsequently, the Executive Committee of CDS wrote to the Labour leader on the day of his broadcast. Gaitskell replied that he would not take an out and out anti-EEC line, but that Britain should only go in on the best possible terms and if certain safeguards, especially those regarding the Commonwealth, were met.<sup>103</sup> William Rodgers was certainly not convinced by Gaitskell's assurances; he wrote,

'It is not simply a question of insisting on adequate terms...The danger is in saying that the Commonwealth is the supreme consideration and implying that Britain really has little in common with Europe...Gaitskell has expressed no positive sympathies at all...Everyone believes that he has come down off the fence against the Common Market...everything must be done to persuade the leadership of the Party that...a firm commitment

against entry..is a disaster [and] we must redress the balance...'104

While some recognised that the tide was against entry, others believed that they were still in with a chance, despite increased evidence to the contrary. Prior to conference, 39 resolutions opposed EEC entry, only three approved and the remainder were either undecided or waited to follow the leadership line. Amongst Labour's elite, the TUC General Council remained uncommitted, the Shadow Cabinet was dominated by anti-Marketeters and the PLP had moved firmly against entry. Robins estimates that 155 MPs opposed entry, 40 favoured it and 40 could be counted on to rally behind the leadership's decision.<sup>105</sup> Gaitskell had already indicated which line he was likely to follow in his response to the Commonwealth Prime Minister's communiqué. This was reinforced in a Shadow Cabinet meeting on 25 September when he told his colleagues that although the Party was not against joining the EEC indefinitely, they '...could not accept it since...the Government now repudiated all the past pledges to the Commonwealth, and had ignored all...the safeguards'.<sup>106</sup> Privately, Gaitskell told Hetherington that he considered a fight between Labour's factions a 'good thing' because it meant that his approach would be accepted.<sup>107</sup>

Although the minutes of the Shadow Cabinet meeting on 25 September showed that the enthusiasts were heavily outnumbered by the anti-Market group, Gaitskell's comment, that the application could still be supported on the right terms, offered some comfort. This was reflected in the pro-Marketeters' eventual support for the official policy statement 'Labour and the Commonwealth', which was approved by the NEC prior to conference.<sup>108</sup> The first draft, by Peter Shore, was strongly anti-Market and won left-wing support. However, after objections that it was too negative and invited deadlock, it was agreed that Brown, Watson, Gaitskell and Crossman would redraft it. Somewhat naively, the enthusiasts allowed the latter to draft the pro-Market amendments.<sup>109</sup> On this occasion Crossman, a fervent anti-Marketeer, was Gaitskell's ally against Watson and Brown, who

believed that the main threat to the draft was from Wilson. Brown's conference address demonstrated some optimism that Labour might yet be persuaded, when he called the policy, '...a firm statement of the arguments for going in on good terms'. Later, he wrote that although it '...was too cautious and too hedged around for my liking, it did favour a policy of trying to get in'.<sup>110</sup>

In fact, the statement had synthesised Labour's views on the Common Market since the 1961 decision. It reiterated the conditions, emphasised the dangers of the federalist structure intended by the 'six', laid out the economic and political aspects and demanded precise agreements protecting the Commonwealth countries. Although explicit that entry was unacceptable on the present terms, it did not rule out this eventuality altogether if the conditions were met.<sup>111</sup> Most importantly, the statement bore a heavy resemblance to the compromise issued in March, which allowed both sides to place their own interpretation on it. As Robins has observed, Labour's five conditions proved acceptable to both sides: while the critics believed them to be unattainable and tantamount to outright opposition, the enthusiasts were heartened by the absence of any election threat to decide the issue, and because it offered the prospect that further negotiations could make the decision go their way.<sup>112</sup> As such, the document's ambivalence was masterful as it avoided the danger of a split in the run up to conference.

Nevertheless, it is clear that some pro-Marketeers were still doubtful and anxious to clarify Gaitskell's intentions. In a fringe meeting the day before Gaitskell's conference speech, Rita Hinden questioned the leader's position and warned against any prolongation of the divisions. Gaitskell replied that the differences '...lay in the sphere of means, and not ends' but gave no indication of the line he was to take.<sup>113</sup> That evening George Brown, concerned over what his leader would say and anxious to avoid being embarrassed, asked Gaitskell to see the text of his speech as he [Brown] was to

wind up the debate. Suspicious about Gaitskell's reluctance to let him see it, Brown only left after he had been assured that the line taken in the NEC statement would not be changed.<sup>114</sup>

Gaitskell's Conference speech on 3 October 1962 needs little rehearsal here. Although he initially appealed for toleration to be shown about the divergent views, and that he was only opposed to entry on the latest terms and not principle, Gaitskell soon turned this on its head. He dismissed the Tory economic case for joining a 'dynamic Europe', claiming that it would not only harm the Commonwealth, but that Britain would '...gain in markets where we sell less than one-fifth of our exports and lose in markets where we sell about half our exports'. Gaitskell then attacked the political implications which might reduce Britain to,

'...no more than a state in the United States of Europe' [and meant] '...the end of Britain as an independent European state ...the end of a thousand years of history'.

The effect on the Commonwealth was again vividly brought to the fore, with emotional references to the sacrifices made at 'Vimy Ridge and Gallipoli' on Britain's behalf. Gaitskell argued that the Tory claim that they had got 'very good terms' for the underdeveloped Commonwealth was false, as the loss of the existing preferences and the proposed European replacement would mean 'it was all over'. After concluding with a summary of the differences between Labour and Tory policy, he stressed that while the Government had been backed into a corner and abandoned its pledges, to stay out would not be disastrous, because Britain could increase its trade with EFTA and the Commonwealth.<sup>115</sup>

Although Gaitskell's speech did not rule out closer co-operation with Europe or even joining on better terms, the overwhelming impression was that it opposed entry. It was not so much the arguments, but the emotional references that went far beyond the context of the NEC statement, and provoked delight and horror in equal measure. Gaitskell had used the

phrase, 'the end of a thousand years of history' before, but not with the same passion, and the references to the Commonwealth's help at Vimy Ridge and Gallipoli were guaranteed to stir the emotions.<sup>116</sup> According to Douglas Jay, the speech,

'...was unique among all the political speeches I ever heard; not merely the finest, but in a class apart...It can only be described as an intellectual massacre'.<sup>117</sup>

As Jay had consistently argued against the EEC and was one of Gaitskell's most fanatical followers, this accolade is not unexpected. While other anti-Market Gaitskell supporters such as Gordon Walker, Michael Stewart and Denis Healey applauded, critics such as Shinwell and Wilson were also delighted by their leader's 'historic speech'.<sup>118</sup> Even so, the most enthusiastic response came from the Labour Left: Crossman, Driberg, Mikardo, Cousins and Foot could hardly contain their jubilation, prompting Dora Gaitskell to remark that '...all the wrong people are cheering'.<sup>119</sup>

Others did not see Gaitskell's speech in quite the same light. Obviously shocked, some pro-Marketeers reluctantly applauded, whereas others including Rodgers, Diamond and Gunter remained seated. Roy Jenkins, who opened the general debate did not suppress his disappointment, while Bill Carron of the AEU warned against the 'disastrous' dangers that calls for a general election would have on party unity. Against the tide, the pro-Market Jack Diamond reminded conference that if the terms of the NEC statement were, '...obtained, we do go into the Common Market'. Winding up the debate, George Brown presented the case for joining, stressed the importance of the NEC statement and argued against any demands for a general election before the final terms were known.<sup>120</sup> Despite the anger and shock from the enthusiasts, conference accepted the NEC statement.<sup>121</sup>

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As most commentators have observed, Gaitskell's Conference speech went far beyond the remit of the NEC statement on the Common Market. While

many of his closest supporters were devastated by his actions, Gaitskell had not only won support from his milder critics, but also from many of the 'irreconcilables'. If that had been the objective, it had succeeded admirably. Since the 1960 Scarborough Conference defeat, Gaitskell had been careful to re-establish his leadership. At Blackpool the following year, his position had been consolidated, apart from the setbacks over Polaris and the training of German troops in Wales. At the 1962 Conference there was no new NEC statement on defence or disarmament and no plans to hold a debate. Instead, the Common Market had come to the fore and dominated the agenda.

##### 5. Back on the Fence: After Brighton

Yet, any notion that Gaitskell's speech had put Labour on an exclusively anti-Market course is exaggerated. For example, the NEC's statement - though ambiguous - was accepted, while both DATA's anti-Market resolution and ASSET's call for a general election were rejected. It was recognised that the latter was designed to hamper the negotiations, because it would make the 'six' wary of British intentions and would also provoke a split from the Labour enthusiasts who had consistently ruled this option out. Even the anti-Market T&GWU had backed the NEC statement, (Cousins had promised to sponsor printing Gaitskell's speech and somewhat more reluctantly, Brown's) which led to some suspicion that a deal had been reached between them. It is also worth noting that Gaitskell almost immediately played down the speech, pledged support for the NEC statement and admitted that he had not intended to be as 'emotional as the strict logic of the case warranted'.<sup>122</sup>

These events - including the refusal to let Brown read the text of the speech beforehand, the blow felt by his supporters and the willingness to print Brown's contribution along with his own - suggest that Gaitskell's speech was a tactic intended to unite Labour and bring his former opponents back to the fold, rather than herald any significant change of direction. Although he



had laid himself open to charges of 'little Englander' mentality and possibly threatened the relationship with some of his closest allies, with the Left back on side after so many years of antagonism, Gaitskell probably calculated that he could also soon win his friends back over and thus avoid another damaging split.

As Philip Williams has noted, having dismayed many of his old allies at Brighton, Gaitskell immediately attempted to clear up the differences.<sup>123</sup> Some, like William Rodgers, felt betrayed and many believed that, 'CDS will never feel the same personal loyalty to Gaitskell again'. Although there was some talk about replacing him, the Euro-sceptic and realist wings of the organisation felt that they should not be deflected from supporting his leadership, as this had been the reason behind the group's formation.<sup>124</sup> Gaitskell himself acknowledged the serious misgivings that his action had caused, and pursued a policy of damage limitation. At a meeting with CDS leaders on 21 October he pointed out that the Common Market had nothing to do with the principles for which CDS stood, and that he regarded the matter as a 'bore and a nuisance'. He stressed that

'... the present terms were not good enough [that]...As late as July he anticipated having to deal with the Left...and bring the Party round to support for entry...[but that] the Government's White Paper...totally changed the situation'.<sup>125</sup>

Afterwards, he told Alastair Hetherington that this meeting had met most of the Right's objectives, although he conceded that some like Gunter would not accept his assurances.<sup>126</sup> A few days later, Gaitskell stressed that Britain's relationship with the EEC would be 'even closer and friendlier than at present'.<sup>127</sup>

It is worth considering the motives behind Gaitskell's 'betrayal' of his supporters. Since the low point of Scarborough, Labour's right-wing had recovered its strength and organisation. With CDS, the LCMC and prominent right-wing enthusiast colleagues gaining influence, it is quite

conceivable that Gaitskell felt that this posed a threat to his position, especially as they frequently questioned his views over Europe and latterly, even his leadership. As the EEC attracted most support from the revisionist wing, it was this issue that provided the opportunity to pull them to heel. This was certainly the view of some commentators at the time: Anthony Howard wrote that it was a 'ruthless power struggle' and that Gaitskell, 'unable to win his friends over, decided that they must be destroyed'.<sup>128</sup> At Brighton, he had not only won support from the Left and centre, he had also weakened the possibility of a right-wing challenge.

In a similar way, Gaitskell appeared to have won over large sections of the Left because of the Brighton speech. Here, the evidence suggests that this was a tactical move rather than any fundamental shift. It is true that there was a reconciliation of sorts between Gaitskell and his chief antagonist, Frank Cousins. To some, the way Gaitskell had turned on some of his closest political friends at Brighton, as ruthlessly as he had dealt with his left-wing critics in the past, was more important than the actual issue itself.<sup>129</sup> The Left had only reluctantly reconciled themselves to his continued leadership, and there was little question of a realignment within the Party even if, as one senior figure believed, Cousins was destined to become a Minister in a Gaitskell Cabinet.<sup>130</sup> Of course, some believed that they had achieved more influence over the leader than they had had since the general election campaign of 1959. In addition, they were just as exhausted by the prolonged internecine warfare, and as eager for a respite from this as the leadership. Both factors were linked to the slide in Conservative popularity and the prospect of a Labour administration gaining power. If nothing else, this was guaranteed to have a galvanising effect.

Having reached an accommodation with the Left and attempted to heal the breach with the pro-Marketeers, Gaitskell reverted to the position taken prior to conference. It was noticeable that the European issue was dealt with in a

similar manner to the defence debate of 1960. Prior to the parliamentary debate on the EEC, Gaitskell told his colleagues that although conference had overwhelmingly supported the NEC statement, the PLP was an autonomous body and would make its own decision.<sup>131</sup> The recent Tory conference had followed Macmillan's lead and voted for a total commitment to join the EEC. This helped Gaitskell, as it allowed Labour to concentrate on the terms rather than the principle of entry. In turn, these actions offered some tentative encouragement to the enthusiasts, because the leadership had appeared to move away from a policy of outright opposition.

In fact, Labour's amendment simply reverted to the position taken in August, namely that they regretted the existing provisions which did not fulfil the Government's 'binding pledges': that Labour would,

'...support entry...provided that guarantees safeguarding British agriculture...the Commonwealth and the EFTA countries are obtained and that Great Britain retains her present freedom to conduct her own foreign policy and to use public ownership and planning to ensure social progress...'<sup>132</sup>

On 7 and 8 November, Gaitskell and Brown attacked the Government on these lines in the House, argued that the Tories had reneged on their pledges and that their 'commitment to enter on any terms' had persuaded the European negotiators against making any concessions.<sup>133</sup>

In December, Gaitskell again demonstrated his determination not to be committed to a position of outright hostility. At a PLP meeting, William Warbey had urged that a censure motion be taken against the Government. Gaitskell replied that this was not a 'sensible tactical move' as it would divide the Party. In his opinion, Labour should only continue to expose the Government's failure to secure the conditions that they demanded.<sup>134</sup> A few days later, Gaitskell wrote a long memorandum to President Kennedy, which explained Labour's attitude to the EEC application since 1961. This letter condemned the Government's provisional agreements of August and emphasised that a final decision was impossible until the negotiations were

over. Gaitskell concluded that while Labour considered that going in on the right terms would be the best solution, they did not consider a breakdown to be 'disastrous'.<sup>135</sup>

Five days after this memo was sent, Gaitskell entered hospital with suspected influenza and although discharged just before Christmas, returned almost immediately afterwards. Negotiations on the EEC had resumed, but on 17 January 1963 the French suspended the talks, despite protests, on the grounds that Britain could not meet the conditions necessary for entry. Meanwhile, Gaitskell's condition had deteriorated gravely and he died on 18 January 1963. Ten days later, Edward Heath was told by French officials that no further agreement could be reached and that the EEC negotiations were at an end. Ironically, they were unsuccessfully resurrected over three years later by that arch-critic and scourge of the Common Market, Harold Wilson.

### Conclusion

Gaitskell's speech at Brighton in 1962 provoked a mixed response in and outside the Labour movement. Prior to this, many believed that Labour would support Britain's application for membership as long as some of their concerns were met. When this did not happen, they received accolades from the anti-Marketeers and bitter disappointment from the enthusiasts. Pro-entry opinion outside the Labour Party attacked Gaitskell in a manner reminiscent of the Suez Crisis of 1956: he was charged with having adopted a cynical manoeuvre to save his leadership; reacting to internal Party pressure; exploiting the Government's difficulties; and destroying British interests for partisan gain. In fact, three main factors accounted for Gaitskell's approaches to Europe. First, there was genuine concern that Labour's five conditions should be met. Secondly, partisanship and electoral considerations played an important part, although they did not assume prominence until 1962. Finally, and most important, there is overwhelming evidence to show that

Gaitskell handled the Common Market so as to avoid another damaging split within the Labour Movement.

It is not surprising that the Government and its supporters accused Labour of having damaged Britain's application; indeed there is an element of truth in this. Labour's stance, especially in the autumn of 1962, hardly placated European fears that a future Labour administration would take a much tougher stand than the Conservatives. On the other hand, Labour's position was supported by approximately half the electorate, and it was Macmillan and Macleod who had 'upped the stakes' when they identified themselves and the Conservative Party so closely with the application. In the event, it was French jealousy over the Anglo-American relationship that resulted in the 1963 veto.

In policy terms, Labour had originally given a cautious welcome to the proposals for the European Free Trade Area. They had even tacitly approved the three original conditions for the application to the EEC in July 1961, namely the safeguards for British agriculture, Commonwealth interests and obligations to EFTA. To these, Labour added two of their own: that Britain must retain its own independent foreign policy and its freedom of economic and social planning. In reality, there was little in these additions that the Government disagreed with. It was only after August 1962 - when the Government accepted French plans that denied overseas association to large parts of the Commonwealth, ruled out the 'Morocco Agreements' and threatened to end the Commonwealth preferences by 1970 - that Labour moved decisively against them. Even here, and despite anger at a Tory 'sell-out', it was stressed that Labour might reconsider its position, if better terms could be obtained.

P .S. Gupta has implied that Labour concern towards the Commonwealth was shallow and concentrated on the 'old' dominions rather than the 'new'

Asian and African nations. The evidence cited above indicates that although Labour's public statements and Gaitskell's Brighton speech were not wholly dedicated to the new Commonwealth, many party research documents and internal discussion papers were. Gaitskell's affection for the Indian Subcontinent was also well known, and his concern over the effect that the Government's reversal of overseas association would have on the Asian and African Commonwealth was far from slight. While Gupta's interpretation concedes a positive change towards the new Commonwealth after Gaitskell took over in 1955, it is also clear that he does not think that Labour had strayed far from its early Fabian paternalist imperialism.

Electoral considerations were an important factor in determining Labour policy. Although foreign affairs are usually subservient to domestic matters, the EEC was presented and seen primarily as an economic issue. By 1962 the British economy had stagnated and Conservative support had dipped sharply. The Labour Party was thus presented with an opportunity to capitalise on the European debate, because it was so closely linked to the Government's economic policy. In the summer of 1962 there is little doubt that Gaitskell was influenced by this and took full advantage of Macmillan's difficulties. Although the cost of living influenced public opinion more than the appeals for Britain to honour its former imperial commitments, Gaitskell could also rely on widespread sympathy to the wartime sacrifices and a genuine affection for the Commonwealth.

Within the Labour Movement itself, opinion was divided. The TUC was more sympathetic to the EEC because they viewed it in sectional economic terms. In contrast, the bulk of the PLP were more concerned with the political implications, the concept of internationalism, distrust of German dominance, dislike of European colonial policies, as well as a firm emotional allegiance to the Commonwealth. There was a strong element in the Party - mostly but not entirely from the revisionist wing - that believed the EEC

would be Britain's salvation and dismissed the rival claim, that the Commonwealth provided an alternative. Opposite them, was a vociferous left-wing who saw the Common Market as a capitalist club which would have unacceptable control over the British economy, restrict any attempt to implement a socialist programme and who believed that the reactionary regimes within the EEC reinforced Cold War attitudes.

Between these elements, the majority were initially content to follow the leadership's direction, whichever line they took. However, it was clear during 1962 that the Party had moved towards opposition. Although prompted by the need for unity, public opinion, the Government's perceived betrayal and a desire for partisanship, it was also heavily influenced by the dominant anti-Market forces in Labour's policy-making elite: the Shadow Cabinet, the various NEC sub-committees, the Research and International Departments. The influence of the individuals who were involved in one or more of these groups should not be under-estimated and serves to demonstrate the validity of the Kavanagh thesis.

In the final analysis, Gaitskell faced the dilemma that while many of his closest allies wanted his support in their struggle against the anti-Marketeers, many of his strongest critics shared the same sceptical view as his policy advisers, the majority of the Shadow Cabinet and the PLP. Gaitskell had been defeated in 1960, had recovered and consolidated his position, only to see another damaging split loom over Europe, an issue that he had dismissed in the past as an irrelevance. In this context, Gaitskell calculated that he could win back his allies' support relatively quickly and simultaneously head off any threat from the minority pro-European Right. By contrast the Left, anxious to isolate the revisionist Right and eager to reach an accommodation with the broad anti-Market Centre, leaned towards the leadership. Gaitskell therefore adopted a strategy that appealed to both sides, (the five conditions) until he was strong enough to head off any



potential challenge. Having dismayed many of his allies at conference and won support from the Left, he immediately reverted to the 'wait and see' position and let the Government take the strain. If nothing else, the Common Market debate demonstrated Gaitskell's ability to recognise that confronting the issue head-on was not always the best tactic.

## Notes for Chapter Five

1. See Schneer, J. (1988), pp.52-78.
2. According to Haseler, S. (1969), pp.227-36. This is rather simplistic as not all revisionists / Gaitskellites were Euro-enthusiasts, e.g. Healey, Stewart, Jay and Gordon Walker were all entrenched opponents at the time. For a better assessment, see Robins, L.J. (1979), pp.4-5 & 16-24.  
It is also noticeable how anti-German sentiments were a feature. In the 1950s, German rearmament had provoked disquiet from all sections of the Party. By the 1960s, West Germany's closeness to the USA and the decision to train their troops in Wales brought outright hostility from the Left, while the fear of German economic power and influence within the EEC was widespread, even in the top echelons.
3. Williams, P.M. (1979), pp.702, 746-9; Leiber, R.J. (1970), pp.175-7; Robins, L.J. (1979), pp.41-2; Gupta, P.S. (1975), pp.380-4.
4. The safeguards included: the right to retain certain import restrictions; control over internal policies; prevention of unfair competition; full employment policies; action against international cartels; continuation of trade and commodity agreements with other countries. Meeting of TUC General Council and Labour Party Representatives 30 Oct 1956, TUC(5) 4/1 'The TUC & Economic Association with Europe', 2 Nov 1956. PCM 1956-7.
5. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.561, 26 Nov 1956, Cols.61-70 (Wilson).
6. PCM 14 Nov 1956; Harold Wilson 'The Proposed Free Trade Area in Western Europe; Mr Wilson's Notes on European Common Market'. PCM 7 Nov 1956.
7. PCM 20 Mar 1957.
8. Quoted in Williams, P.M. (1979) p.703.
9. In the Godkin lectures, published later as Gaitskell, H. (1957), pp.59-62.
10. NEC Int'l Dept. European Free Trade Area 24 Sept 1957.
11. NECM 24 Sept, 23 Oct 1957 & 22 Jan 1958; Bevan in Tribune 14 Oct 1957.
12. Observer 1 Sept 1957.
13. NECM 21 July 1958.
14. NEC IS-C Socialist International Conference on the European Free Trade Area: Brussels 17-18 Dec 1958 NEC Int/1958-9/12.
15. NECM 22 Jan 1959.
16. PLPM 11 Feb 1959.

17. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.599, 12 Feb 1959, Cols.1471-8 (Wilson); See Frankel,J. British Foreign Policy 1945-1973 (London: OUP, 1975), p.240.
18. Representatives included Gaitskell, Bevan, David Ennals and Sam Watson.
19. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.615, 14 Dec 1959, Cols.1151-62 (Wilson) & Cols. 1072-81 (Jenkins).
20. See NEC IS-CM 7(c) 12 Jan 1960; for membership, NECM IS-C 9 Feb 1960.
21. See NEC IS-CM 21 Dec 1960, Int/1960-61/7; also report by D.Ennals 1 Dec 1960, Int/1960-61/5 p.2.
22. NEC IS-C Informal Discussions among Socialist Parties of the Six and Seven at Strasbourg. 8 May 1960; Report of the Rt. Hon H.Wilson, M.P. and Report by Mr J.Clark 10 May 1960, Int'l Dept. Int/1959-60/28.
23. PLPM 7, 14 & 20 July 1960. During the discussions only Hynd, Jenkins, Mulley, Strachey and Pagett offered a positive view of the EEC. Also see 'Note of a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell', 14 July 1960, File 2/24, Hetherington Papers.
24. Wilson,H. Report on the Socialist International Contact Committee 23 July 1960, Int/1959-60/39. According to Pimlott, Wilson's position was still not definite at this stage. Pimlott,B. (1992) p.246.
25. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.627, 25 Jul 1960, Col.117 (Wilson).
26. NECM 29 Sept 1960.
27. The Guardian 5 Oct 1960.
28. See f/note 21.
29. 12 Research Department papers were submitted between January-July 1961 (RD.106, 112-14, 119, 126, 146, 150-52 & 162). Three were heavily influenced by Peter Shore (head of the RD since 1959) and other authors included Jay, Tom Balogh, Healey, Nicholas Kaldor, Robert Nield and Roy Jenkins. Apart from the last two, the rest were all negative.
30. PCM 10 May 1961.
31. RCD 14 June 1961, p.951; NEC Home Policy Sub-Committee, F&ES-C Mins & Docs., 12 June 1961 (with attached doc. 'Britain & Europe'); NEC CWS-C Mins & Docs. No.16, 13 June 1961.
32. PCM 21 June 1961; PLPM 15 & 22 June 1961.
33. Int'l Dept, 'The Political Implications of the Treaty of Rome' The Common Market: Background Paper No.2 3 July 1961; RD.162 The European Commitment (July) 1961 HPS-CM 10 July 1961.

34. Williams,P,M. (1979) p.709.
35. RCD 13 July, pp.595-6.
36. NECM 26 July 1961. The joint talks centred on the TUC / NEC draft document, Economic Association with Europe, 14 July 1961.
37. PCM 31 July 1961; PLPM 1 Aug 1961.
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39. Letter from Gaitskell to Austen Albu, 10 Aug 1961. Quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), p.706.
40. Leiber,L,J. (1970), p.170.
41. NECM Resolutions received from 1 June - 1 Oct 1961. For Composite Resolutions, see LPCR 1961, pp.211-3.
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43. LPCR 1961, pp.211, 224-7 & 227 and Brown,G. (1971), p.216.
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46. Pimlott,B. (1992), p.247.
47. Observer 10 Dec 1961.
48. PLPM 14 Dec 1961, 31 Jan, 9 Mar, 12 Apr 1962; IS-C NECM 20 Dec 1961.
49. Research Department Common Market - Review of Recent Developments RD.192, Jan 1962.
50. Balogh,T. The Common Market RD.196. Balogh was strongly supported by Wilson. Three further papers, compiled between February and March 1962 (RD.206, 218 & 236) by various 'experts', supported his view.
51. HPS-C NECM 8 Jan & 12 Feb 1962.
52. McDermott,G. (1972), p.232.
53. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.708,712; Brown,G. (1971), pp.216-7; Shore,P. (1993), p.80; Camps,M. (1964), p.424 and Robins,L,J. (1979), pp.27-8. At the time: Tribune 8 June 1962; Christopher Lawton believed that Gaitskell was neutral. Lawton,C. 'Labour and Europe', Political Quarterly Vol.33(1)

Jan-Mar 1962, pp.41-47. Roy Jenkins had his doubts. See Rodgers,W,T. (1964), p.130 and Jenkins,R. A Life at the Centre (London: Macmillan, 1991), p.144.

54. Jenkins,R. (1991), p.145.

55. PLPM 12 Apr 1962; The need for unity was discussed in the NEC too, HPS-CM 12 Mar 1962.

56. NECM 3 Apr 1962; RD.206 and in the Shadow Cabinet Healey,D. 'The Common Market & the Coloured Commonwealth', PCM 18 Apr 1962.

57. The concerns were (1) Would the Government ensure that the Commonwealth nations enjoy the same tariff preferences as former French colonies (2) Would manufactured goods from the CW be discriminated in favour of European ones (3) should GB have to abandon agricultural subsidies, with the consequences this meant for British and CW agriculture (4) Was British parliamentary power to be transferred to an elected European assembly or was GB to retain a veto (5) obligations to EFTA. Quoted from McDermott,G. (1972), p.236.

58. NECM 3 Apr 1962. Barbara Castle had already written an article, 'Planning and the Common Market: The Anti-Socialist Community', New Statesman 13 March 1962, (submitted as RD.245) which was highly critical of the EEC, and Mulley replied at the NEC (as RD.252). NECM 7 May 1962.

59. HGD Appendix III Documents on the Common Market: 'Brief for Trade Union Leaders' Doc.No.24, pp.642-50. Also, Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.710-11.

60. Televised Party Political Broadcast 8 May 1962. Text in NECM 1961/62.

61. At the time, Daily Telegraph 9 May 1962; Later, Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.710-11; Robins,L,J. (1979), p.27; McDermott,G. (1972), p.236; Brivati,B. (1991), p.254; Camps,M. (1964), p.449.

62. PCM 7 May 1962 with attached paper, F.Peart, 'Agricultural implications of Entry into the Common Market' and PCM 15 May 1962 with attached paper, Sir F.Soskice, 'Legal Implications of the Common Market'.

63. PLPM 16 May 1962.

64. Figures compiled from PLPM of 16, 22, 29 & 30 May 1962 (figures do not include Gaitskell).

65. PLPM 30 May and PCM 28 May 1962.

66. HPS-CM 4 June 1962; Shore,P. Planning & the Common Market RD.268, May 1962.

67. Leiber,R,J. (1970), pp.227-33; Blondel,J. Voters, Parties and Leaders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.80.

68. The LCMC was founded in September 1961 and was headed by Jenkins; Campaign dates and titles are in Brivati,B. (1991), p.256-7 [authors included Anthony King, Herbert Morris, Bill Carron, Alan Birch and Roy Jenkins].
69. E.g. Daily Express 4 May 1962.
70. See Leiber,R,J. (1970), pp.109-11.
71. And mistakenly, by some since, i.e. Camps, Robins & Brivati, see F/N 61.
72. Economist 16 June 1962.
73. 1961 - 11 resolutions opposed EEC entry and 2 favoured it.  
1962 - 39 resolutions opposed EEC entry and 3 favoured it.  
Source: 'Resolutions submitted' NECM 1960-62.
74. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.720.
75. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.661, 6 Jun 1962, Cols. 513-27 (Gaitskell).
76. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.720; Tribune 8 June 1962; Camps,M. (1964), p.449.
77. For text, see HGD Appendix III Documents on the Common Market: 'Hugh Gaitskell's Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Speech on the Common Market' 12 Jul 1962, Doc.No.25, pp.645-61; Economist 14 July 1962.
78. 'The Common Market' Resolution adopted by the Socialist International, Oslo, 1-4 Jun 1962, in NECM 4 Jun 1962.
79. Financial Times 16 July 1962.
80. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.725.
81. Robins,L,J. (1979) pp.27-8; Shore,P. (1993), pp.80-81; Camps, M. (1964), pp.424 & 450; Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.722-5; In 1964, Roy Jenkins claimed that this had been evident for a year. Rodgers,W,T. (1964), p.130. 27 years on, he had not changed his mind. Jenkins,R. (1991), p.144.
82. Camps,M. (1964), p.450.
83. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.723-4.
84. Cmd.1805 The United Kingdom & the European Economic Community (London: HMSO, 10 Aug 1962).
85. These were (1) overseas association for Asian and African commonwealth nations (2) continued access to UK markets for those who were not associated [Morroco type agreements] and (3) 'comparable outlets' in the enlarged community for exports from Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Research Dept. Commonwealth & the Common Market RD.325, Aug 1962.

86. Jay,D. The Truth about the Common Market (London: Forward Britain, Aug 1962); See RD.112, Feb 1961 and 'The Red Choice', New Statesman 25 May 1962.
87. See memo for and reply from Heath TUCR 1962 pp.261-67 & 474; Not all the TUC General Council agreed: Cousins (TGWU) and Ted Hill (Boilermakers) objected, despite the 3:1 majority. TUCR 1962, pp.479-80; It can be argued that the TUC's resolution did not reveal their real sympathies, but was careful not to embarrass the Labour leadership.
88. Labour Party News Release 8 Sept 1962.
89. Observer 9 Sept 1962; Times 10, 11 Sept 1962.
90. On ITV programme 13 Sept 1962. Quoted in McDermott,G. (1972), p.254.
91. Harold Wilson wrote an article for the Sunday Express under the heading 'Macmillan MUST call an election now' while Jenkins replied that '...we do not...wish Britain's entry...to be put in the forefront of party politics and made the issue at a general election'. Quoted from Robins,L,J. (1979), p.37.
92. The Guardian 1 Nov 1962.
93. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.726; David Wood also regards the meetings as decisive, 'The Inheritance', in Rodgers,W,T. (1964), pp.156; Robins,L,J, (1979), p.28.
94. The Research paper was RD.325; HPS-C NECM 10 Sept 1962.
95. Letter to Arthur Calwell 26 Sept 1962. Quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.727-8; See Macmillan,H. (1973), pp.131-37.
96. Sunday Pictorial 16 Sept 1962. Quoted in Robins,L,J. (1979), p.28.
97. Party Political Broadcast, 21 Sept 1962. Transcript in PCM 1961/62.
98. Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.729-30.
99. Jenkins,R. (1991), p.145.
100. Times 21 Sept 1962.
101. Although a founding member of CDS, Crosland was not as enthusiastic about the EEC as other colleagues in the Campaign such as Roy Jenkins, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams. In the draft of a speech intended for the Common Market debate, Crosland conceded that the alternative to not going in would be detrimental and leave Britain isolated; he also dismissed the Commonwealth as an alternative. Nevertheless, he was sceptical of much of the hype put by the enthusiasts and concerned over restrictions to planning and social welfare that membership might entail. Paper marked 'Politics of EEC' 1962, File Europe 4/9 and File 'CDS Labour Party' 6/1, Crosland Papers.



102. From the EEC diary of Austen Albu, 18-19 Sept 1962. Quoted in Williams,P,M. (1979) p.731; Also see Jenkins in Rodgers,W,T. (1964), p.130.
103. Letter from Frank Pickstock to Gaitskell, 21 Sept 1962 and reply [undated]. Both quoted in Brivati,B. (1991), pp.257-8; Gaitskell also met CDS leaders on 27 Sept to reassure them. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.732.
104. William Rodgers 'Common Market Correspondence' in CDS Papers. Quoted in Brivati,B. (1991), p.259.
105. Robins,L,J. (1979), p.33.
106. PCM 25 Sept 1962: According to Williams, Gaitskell was 'tough and angry' with his old allies who opposed this line. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.732. He also uses Albu's diary to record that Soskice and Fred Willey were against this, which is not mentioned in the detailed minutes.
107. 'Note of a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell', 27 Sept 1962, File 3/14, Hetherington Papers.
108. NECM 29 Sept; Text in Appendix 1 of LPCR 1962, pp.245-51. In a letter to John Strachey, (copies of which were sent to Jenkins and Brown) Gaitskell regretted the divisions with the enthusiasts, but stressed that the Brussels negotiations had left him little choice but to oppose the pro-entry line he had originally expected to encourage. Letter from Gaitskell to Strachey, 27 Sept 1962, in Box File 4946 of Brown Papers.
109. Oddly enough, at Watson's suggestion! See Pakenham,F. Five Lives (London: Hutchinson, 1964), pp.223-4.
110. George Brown's statement at conference, LPCR 1962, p.189; From his memoirs, Brown,G. (1971), pp. 217-8; This was not quite his reaction at the time when, according to a journalist, Brown had been furious. Even the final statement was regarded by Albu as 'still hostile'. From Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.732-3.
111. NEC statement, 'Labour & the Common Market' LPCR 1962, pp.245-51.
112. Robins,L,J. (1979), p.33.
113. Pakenham,F. (1964), pp.233-4.
114. Brown had already been severely embarrassed over a speech he had made at Strasbourg (on the Commonwealth leaders communique), and was determined not to let this happen again, unsuccessfully! Brown,G. (1971), pp.217-218.
115. LPCR 1962, pp.154-62.
116. See Longford's account, Pakenham,F. (1964), pp.235-6.
117. Jay,D. (1980) p.286.

118. LPCR 1962, p.173.
119. Williams,P,M. (1979), p.736; For Michael Foot's reaction, see Pakenham,F. (1964), p.229.
120. LPCR pp.173-4, 188, 189-93. Close supporters of both Gaitskell and Europe later described the speech as heartbreaking, and that the enthusiasts were speechless with anger and resentment. Pakenham,F. (1964), pp.231, 236; Brown,G. (1971), pp.218-9; McDermott,G. (1972), p.252; and Jenkins,R. (1991), pp.145-6.
121. Of the resolutions submitted, the anti-Market resolution from DATA (No.140) was defeated, a milder one from Bristol South CLP (No.177) was remitted as was the pro-Market one from Birmingham, Stechford CLP (No.181). The other, from ASSET (Composite No.15) which called for a general election over the issue, was defeated on a card vote by 4,482,000 to 1,943,000
122. Pakenham,F. (1964), p.241.
123. Williams,P,M. (1979) p.738.
124. See Brivati,B. (1991), pp.262-4; Roy Jenkins in Rodgers,W,T. (1964), pp.130-31.
125. Typed report marked 'Meeting of Hugh Gaitskell with C.D.S., post-Brighton, Oct 62' [no author], File 6/1, Crosland Papers. Also see Williams,P,M. (1979), pp.712 & 728 and Crosland,S. (1982), p.111.
126. 'Note of a Meeting with Mr. Gaitskell', 23 Oct 1962, File 3/12, Hetherington Papers.
127. Labour Party Press Release 25 Oct 1962.
128. Anthony Howard in New Statesman 5 Oct 1962
129. Babara Castle in New Statesman 12 Oct 1962.
130. Stewart,M. Life & Labour: An Autobiography (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1968), p.113.
131. PLPM 31 Oct 1962.
132. Labour Party Amendment PCM 5 Nov 1962.
133. Hansard H.C. Debs. 5s. Vol.666, 6 Nov 1962, Cols.1002-23 (Gaitskell) and 7 Nov 1962, Col.1176 (Brown).
134. PLPM 6 Dec 1962.
135. HGD Appendix III Documents on the Common Market: 'Gaitskell's Memorandum to President Kennedy', 11 Dec 1962, Doc. No.26, pp.661-77, esp. p.677.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the Labour Party's views on foreign and defence policy under Gaitskell's leadership between December 1955, through to his sudden death in January 1963. In particular, it has concentrated on the three main controversies in international affairs that affected Gaitskell's career as leader: Suez, the H-bomb and Britain's application to join the European Economic Community. This approach was adopted in order to assess Gaitskell's contribution to international affairs, as well as the limitations and advantages associated with it. It also explored the inter-related questions concerning the nature and extent of Labour's opposition to government policy; the Labour Movement's policy formulation; internal divisions over policy and the power struggle between Left and Right. In this context, the thesis also considered the structure of the Labour Party and identified the control exercised by Labour's elite.

Despite some reservations, Gaitskell's accession to the leadership of the Party was widely welcomed within the Labour Movement. Elected over Morrison and Bevan, the vote for Gaitskell reflected a clear desire for an end to the internecine warfare that had plagued the Party since defeat in the 1951 general election, which was at least partly due to the faltering leadership of Clement Attlee. Yet in his time as leader, the Party was plunged into a period of internal strife that surpassed anything that had happened between 1951 and 1955, and which culminated in the unprecedented conference defeat of 1960. Although an economist by training and notwithstanding the Clause IV controversy, most of the battles fought during his leadership focussed on foreign and defence policy. In view of this, it appears somewhat surprising that this has remained a neglected area of research: even more so when the arguments over Gaitskell's career generally have remained so sharply divided.

As leader, Gaitskell was a complete contrast to Attlee. Eager to be involved in all the minutiae, it has been observed that his personality suited him to the role of an administrator rather than that of a politician. Full of restless energy, he was never content to sit back and let others take decisions, especially if he doubted their ability in any way. This, and his meteoric rise to the leadership, only becoming an MP in 1945, raised widespread resentment from many of the traditionalists within the Party, especially amongst those whose careers his ascendancy had eclipsed. Nevertheless, his capacity for hard work, clarity of thought, and a deep sense of patriotism impressed many within the centre-right bloc of the Party, and more importantly the trade union barons. What flawed this otherwise admirable character, however, was his determination to mould the Party in his own image and the way in which he never fully grasped that the Labour Movement could hold and support such a diverse variety of views and opinions. This meant that once Gaitskell had made his mind up on an issue he saw it through to its conclusion, steadfastly discounting alternative views and with a scant, sometimes reckless, regard for the consequences. Although this trait sometimes achieved its purpose, a different approach and more willingness to compromise would have averted some of the disastrous and needless confrontations which he and Labour encountered during his time as leader.

Before his rise to the top, Gaitskell had concentrated on Labour's domestic programme and had only indirectly influenced international policy. After succeeding Attlee, he was immediately thrust into an area where he was not an acknowledged expert and where his active, often very unwelcome, participation in policy-making was characterised by a blend of finesse and blunder. Early excursions, such as the 'tanks scandal' and the 'Crabbe affair' were ill-conceived mistakes, but Gaitskell benefited from his response to British policy in the Middle East and for his forthright views on the Soviet Union. It was the Suez Crisis that raised his profile. Despite the fact that

many of Labour's natural supporters backed the Government and that he was never forgiven for his condemnation of Eden by many on the right, Gaitskell's resolute response to protect Britain's reputation received overwhelming support within the Party and from progressive opinion outside. Over the H-bomb, it was a different matter. Naturally, Gaitskell's support for deterrence and multilateral disarmament was supported by much of the Labour Movement, and in the country as a whole. Yet, there were numerous instances where simple and non-binding compromises could have averted the near catastrophic splits that plagued Labour between 1958 and 1961. Europe was again different, in that Gaitskell displayed an astute awareness of what was needed to simultaneously voice widespread concern over the economic and political implications of the EEC, boost Labour's electoral chances and successfully manage the Party.

The question of bi-partisanship during Gaitskell's leadership is an area that also deserves qualification. It has generally been accepted that up to 1956, and ever since Attlee and his Labour colleagues had joined Churchill in the wartime coalition, a remarkable degree of bi-partisanship existed in British foreign policy. This only appeared to falter with the advent of the Suez Crisis, a break subsequently widened by the dispute over the British independent nuclear deterrent and the application to join the Common Market. On one level, this assumption has some merit, as in all three cases the official policies of both major parties diverged. Yet, as this thesis has argued, the claim that Gaitskell's tenure as leader marked the end of bi-partisanship needs to be treated with caution. When he became leader, Gaitskell was determined to establish his authority and emphasise Labour's differences with the Conservative Government wherever possible, and foreign affairs was no exception. Nevertheless, his initial efforts were largely thwarted due to a combination of tactical mistakes, the self-imposed constraints of responsibility, and the Government's advantage in taking Labour's most popular ideas and claiming them as their own.

Over Suez, while there is little doubt that Labour hoped to benefit from the Government's difficulties, it was Eden who defied international law, strained the Anglo-American Alliance and threatened Commonwealth unity, whereas Labour remained committed to the accepted orthodoxy that had been laid down and accepted since 1945, and supported up to that point by the Prime Minister himself. With the H-bomb, the difference with Government policy was more one of emphasis than of substance, as the Labour leadership also viewed the retention of the Bomb as crucial to the preservation of Britain's international prestige and influence. Like Macmillan's administration, and to the distress of many of their own supporters, the majority of Labour's elite remained firmly committed to the theory of deterrence and believed that disarmament could only be achieved through multilateral negotiations. Britain's application to join the Common Market and Labour's belated opposition is probably the clearest example where bi-partisanship can be claimed to have ended. Yet even here, it can be convincingly argued that while Labour had not strayed from the traditional British suspicion towards Europe, Macmillan and the Tories had.

While overall the Labour leadership displayed little inclination to countenance a radical break with the Conservatives, this did little to endear them to their own left-wing. Since 1951 the loose grouping of the left had focussed on one individual, Aneurin Bevan. His defeat in the leadership contest in 1955 had raised the spectre of a prolongation of the internecine strife so prevalent since Labour had left office. Yet, Bevan's surprise appointment as Shadow for Colonies by Gaitskell early on - later bolstered by posts as Treasurer, Shadow Foreign Secretary and sealed by his 1957 conference speech - robbed the Left of one of their most powerful exponents. Gaitskell had demonstrated a distinct shrewdness in Bevan's rehabilitation after so many years of antagonism, as it ensured that the 'darling' of the Left was bound by a degree of collective responsibility in a way that he had not been before. For his part, Bevan appeared to have accepted that while he

could not assume the leadership, the best way to temper the new leader's excesses and remain influential was on the inside. He must also have acknowledged that many of his former associates on the centre-left, including such key figures as Wilson, Crossman and Castle had already nestled themselves within Gaitskell's new administration.

Even before they were deprived by the loss of such a prominent spokesman, the irreconcilable Left remained highly suspicious of the new leadership's domestic and international policy. Although dissent had increased during the early stages of the Suez Crisis - swiftly abandoned in the interests of unity against the Government - the furore over nuclear weapons revived the Left's confidence. Notwithstanding Bevan's defection, the anti-nuclear agitation from CND, VFS and within the trade unions convinced many on the radical wing of the Party that their time had come. After the general election defeat they were undeniably aided by Gaitskell's ill-judged attack on Clause IV. The swing against the leadership from the hitherto loyalist trade unions, prompted the Left to adopt unilateralism as the instrument with which to inflict an unprecedented defeat on the leadership at Scarborough in 1960. However, Gaitskell's assault on the consequences of unilateralism and widespread fear of the Party's disintegration within the wider Movement, ensured that left-wing success was narrower than expected and short-lived. Although challenged immediately after the conference defeat by some senior figures, as the trade unions and other waverers returned to the fold, Gaitskell reversed unilateralism at Blackpool in 1961 and consolidated his position thereafter. With the recognition that their position had been dealt a serious blow and eager to restore a measure of influence, the Left used the opportunity afforded by the Government's application to join the EEC to re-establish an uneasy alliance with the leadership.

Despite the Scarborough defeat, there is little doubt that between 1955 and 1963 the structure of the Labour Party benefited the leadership, and in



particular, Gaitskell. The evidence cited throughout this thesis shows the personal control exercised by the leader during his term of office, whether within the Shadow Cabinet, the Parliamentary Party or through the various committees of the National Executive. It is worth noting that out of all the internal disputes within the Party over foreign and defence policy, the leadership only suffered one major defeat. Up to and immediately after that point, they could rely on the majority of the trade union barons for support, with their all important block vote. This support extended into the rest of the Movement, even into those bastions of the radical Left, the constituency parties. Even when much of this support was briefly withdrawn in 1960, Gaitskell and his close allies made it clear that they would ignore the conference decision and insist on the primacy of the Parliamentary Party.

This is not to say that arguments supporting the importance of Labour's pluralism can be ignored, or that the influence of the rank and file should be under-estimated. The growth of active dissent and the seriousness with which this was treated, whether within the trade unions, CLPs, or from groups such as VFS, is a testament to their effect. It is also clear that the leadership was forced into making some initial and unpalatable concessions, especially during the defence dispute: for example on thermo-nuclear tests, the proposals for a non-nuclear club, the training of German troops in Wales and the Polaris base at Holy Loch. Equally though, it cannot be denied that once the leadership had consolidated its position in the year after Blackpool, these were either pushed to the periphery or quietly forgotten. Ultimately the preferences of the leadership, and above all Gaitskell's control, remained virtually intact.

It appears fair to conclude that the official policies taken by Labour in this period demonstrate the extent to which Gaitskell and much of the Labour Movement excluded left-wing radicalism from foreign affairs and remained faithful to the British social democratic tradition. When Gaitskell died

suddenly in early 1963, the leadership battle was won by the reputedly left-inclined, but in reality more centrist Wilson. Any hope that his leadership would usher in a more radical approach to foreign and defence policy was swiftly dashed. Indeed, as well as most of the Centre-Left group he represented, Wilson had been as committed as Gaitskell to the Atlantic Alliance, the nuclear deterrent and multilateralism.

As Premier from 1964, Wilson quickly assumed the mantle bequeathed by Gaitskell as far as Britain's world influence was concerned. He effectively reneged on the pledge to renegotiate the Nassau agreement, kept the V-bombers and only very reluctantly reduced overseas defence commitments towards the end of the 1960s when devaluation and the cost of Labour's social programme forced him to do so. Like his predecessor, his close attachment to the Anglo-American Alliance earned him the wrath of the Left, most notably in his failure to act forcefully against American policy in Vietnam. Despite his vociferous campaign against the EEC from the mid-1950s on, he applied for membership less than three years after heaping scorn on 'that capitalist club'. Apart from minor deviations, many of the Gaitskellites' initial misgivings over Wilson were soon proved to be ill-founded as he virtually followed the dead leader's policies to the letter. Despite the problems that he encountered later, possibly Wilson's clearest asset over Gaitskell was that he managed intra-party conflict in a far less abrasive manner, and thus sensibly avoided many of the schisms his predecessor had faced.

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