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CONFLICT AND DISCORD

THE LABOUR PARTY, EUROPE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS 1960 - 1975

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M.A. Thesis
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March 2000

17 JAN 2001

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CONFLICT AND DISCORD: THE LABOUR PARTY, EUROPE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS 1960 - 1975

This thesis concerns the Labour Party and British European Policy. While Labour, historically, has had a pluralistic structure and has been prone to internal division, in Government the Party felt compelled by the external environment within which it was operating, to maintain the 'consensus' view. It was able to do this because the post-war consensus was strong enough to cement it into the governmental process.¹ Out of office, however, Labour opposed the same policies it had proposed in Government. By doing so the Party performed its constitutional role of opposition and was, more importantly, also able to maintain a semblance of Party unity. So before elections and while the Party is in power, the tendency is usually towards an ideological compromise around which the Party can unite, if only temporarily. In opposition, however, the ideological differences become more acute, there is more ideological debate and those on the extreme ends of either wing of the Party stand a better chance of influencing policy. Compromises made while in government may heighten ideological disputes once the Party loses an election, since a genuine compromise is almost impossible.² Applying these insights to the seemingly perennial issue of Britain's relationship with Europe, our

¹ Nairn T. New Left Review No. 75 Sept. - Oct. London 1972 pp. 1-2.

² Bilski R. op cit. p. 308

story is fundamentally about how Labour simultaneously dealt with the emerging consensus about Common Market membership in the 1960's and early 1970's, whilst also dealing with the abiding problem of party unity. In this thesis we examine how unity in the Labour Party was so difficult to achieve for the Party leadership during a period in which British governments were persistently confronted with the need to accommodate significant changes in Britain's global role.

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INTRODUCTION

CONFLICT AND DISCORD: THE LABOUR PARTY, EUROPE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS 1960 to 1975

There can be no other political party in Western Europe that has as closely analysed as the British Labour Party. Since its birth Labour has suffered from a history chequered with both factionalism and disunity. So any arena that can furnish the elements of controversy and conflict so readily is clearly going to provide a suitable framework for an academic piece of research. Yet for a student of politics today, the very idea of linking New Labour with controversy and conflict may seem humorous, even less to attempt to undertake academic research. For unity and loyalty to the party leadership is now seen as more or less as all encompassing, with nearly all areas of party machinery having now had their responsibilities and functions truncated. Indeed ever since the early 1980's Labour has gradually undergone a transformation in both its structure and policies. A comparative study of the Labour Party in 1975 as opposed to today will reveal distinct differences. Why then choose the subject of British membership of the Common Market in which to place our discussions about party unity? Firstly, in the same way as the subject of Europe came to dominate the internal politics of the Conservative Party under John Major, so the issue of Europe brought similar pain and

anguish to the party as well. Beginning quietly following the first negotiations in 1961 and then speeding up during the second attempt in 1967 to finally running out of control in the early to mid 1970's, the issue of Common Market entry divided and antagonised the party as no other issue. This established, we then should see how this story fits into the wider issue of the post-war consensus on British foreign policy.

With a distinct Whitehall policy of refashioning Britain's role in world affairs to Europe, we shall see how Labour contributed to sustaining that position. Yet with its pluralistic structures, how could it actually help in maintaining the British view on European affairs? The answer is simple. When in Government and freed from the 'handcuffs' of party democracy, it felt compelled by political reality to maintain an attractive set of conditions for the policy to continue. The post-war consensus was strong enough to 'cement' Labour into the processes of government. In opposition, freed from the responsibilities of office, Labour was able to adopt a more hostile line to the Conservative Government's terms for entry. By adopting such an approach it found itself able to successfully appease both anti and pro-Marketeers with party unity therefore being maintained. While there had been an acceptance of Britain having a world power role in international affairs, the main reason for such a reappraisal was the declining state of the British economy. Common Market entry was more a recognition of this than of any positive reasons for joining.

The Labour Party too recognised the newly emerging analysis of Britain's economic position. Under Gaitskell the Party combined nationalist rhetoric with a sense of party advantage in condemning the Conservative Government's proposals, seeing no reason to jeopardise party unity.³ Yet under Wilson, while initially hostile,⁴ the Party again led Britain into negotiations for similar reasons to those of Macmillan before.⁵ In particular, Labour played a crucial role in sustaining the consensus through two actions. Firstly, 68 Labour MPs broke the whip and supported Heath - thus saving him from defeat.⁶ Second, by proposing that a referendum be held over the issue in 1975. The decision to hold a referendum was taken for reasons of party unity and owed very little to any pro Market feeling. And in doing so allowed the Party to secure at least a semblance of unity. We shall conclude that it was possible for Labour to play a full role in maintaining the consensus, despite its structural and ideological difficulties, because Wilson's party managerial skills were flexible enough to keep the party together as well as ensure that the wider national need be accommodated.

3 Robins L.J. The Reluctant Party: Labour and the EEC, 1961-1975 Hesketh & Sons Ormskirk 1979 p.52

4 The Daily Express Sept. 23 1963

5 George S. An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community OUP Oxford 1994 p. 37

6 Kitzinger U. Diplomacy and Persuasion: how Britain joined the Common Market Thames & Hudson London 1973 p.388

CHAPTER ONE

CONFLICT AND DISCORD: THE LABOUR PARTY, EUROPE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS 1960 - 1975

1. Factionalism In The Labour Party

The Labour Party has frequently been subject to some form of factional dispute since its birth a hundred years ago. Sharp disagreements have persisted over future 'leadership, doctrine and tactics.'⁷ Its whole purpose as a political organisation has been questioned, with bitter debates taking place between competing Party organs.⁸ Indeed, Labour has never really been a unitary organisation anyway.⁹ Historically, it is has been an 'ad hoc alliance'¹⁰ held together by a desire to break the 'parliamentary monopoly of a traditional ruling class'.¹¹ This was true early in its history, when the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) chose to reject Marxism in favour of parliamentary socialism. Since 1945 dissent over ideology has only served to sustain Labour's image as a party suffering

7 Mackintosh J.P. 'Socialism or Social Democracy? The Choice For The Labour Party' The Political Quarterly Vol. 43 No. 4 Oct. - Dec. 1972 p. 470 Byrd P. 'The Labour Party And The European Community 1970-1975' The Journal of Common Market Studies Vol. 13 1975 pp. 469-470

8 Shaw E. Discipline And Discord In The Labour Party The politics of managerial control in the Labour Party 1951 - 1987 MUP Manchester 1988 p. 3

9 Bilski R. 'The Common Market and the Growing Strength of Labour's Left Wing' Government and Opposition 12 1977 p. 307

10 Minkin L. The Labour Party Conference – A Study in the Politics of Intra Party Democracy Manchester University Press 1980 p. 3

11 Aitken I. 'The Structure of the Labour Party' in Kaufman G. (ed.) The Left-symposium Anthony Blond London 1966 p. 9

from perpetual disunity. The best it was ever able to achieve was an uneasy discipline within the Parliamentary Party.¹² Both the trade unions and constituency parties were continual reminders of Labour's federal character and the divisions that this uneasy organisational form had persistently produced since the Party's earliest years. The debates over Europe and the Common Market were a clear example of this inherent factionalism.

I) Ideological Factionalism

Some argue that the famous compromise policy position reached between both 'Marxist' and 'Labourist' following the first meeting of the LRC.¹³ only mirrors the whole Party's history, showing how the Labour Left has consistently been defeated in policy making. Miliband argued that a centrist faction whose main purpose was to keep Labour within the bounds of a 'Labourist' policy also joined the Labour Right and Labour Left. Both Miliband and Coates argue that any appearance of a genuine compromise between left and right can only be expected to yield the continued predominance of Labour Right policies.¹⁴ Left – Right alignments have remained the main feature of Labour politics dominating all areas of both policy thought and policy making.¹⁵

12 Piper JR. *Backbench Rebellion, Party Government And Consensus Politics: The Case Of The Parliamentary Labour Party, 1966 - 1970* Parliamentary Affairs 27 Autumn 1974 Vol. XXVII No. 4 Hansard Society London. p. 454

13 Pelling H. The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880 - 1900 OUP 2nd Edn. London 1965 pp. 119 -123

14 Miliband R. Parliamentary Socialism Allen & Unwin London 1961 pp. 344 – 355 See also Coates D. The Labour Party & The Struggle for Socialism CUP Cambridge 1974

15 Minkin L. The Labour Party Conference MUP Manchester 1980 pp. 10-11

Labour's attitude to the notion of class has also left its mark as well. While both the left and right were content to see the Party as a vehicle for working class expression, for the latter it was seen as a road to 'classlessness', whereas to the former it was seen as a way of achieving a working class victory over the capitalist system. In short, the question was whether the Party was to be concerned with attempts at managing society along capitalist lines or whether it was 'to adapt itself to the task of creating a socialist one.'¹⁶

II) Structural

The Party Constitution was a source of dissension as well, with its allocation of power between the unions and the CLPs, and between the Annual Conference and the NEC. While its main aim was undoubtedly to create a stable party machine, it assumed a consensus that really never existed. And until the late 1960's, the Labour Right was usually able to dominate most of segments of the Party machinery through the use of the union 'bloc vote' exercised at Annual Conference.¹⁷ During Labour's early years, divisions between the unions and other federated organisations were also considerable. Not only did the unions have the votes to overcome any internal opposition, but also until the end of the Second World War, the unions consistently adopted a more cautious attitude

¹⁶ Milliband R. op cit. p. 344

¹⁷ Seyd P. & Whiteley P. Labours Grass Roots – The Politics of Party Membership Clarendon Press London 1992 p. 19

towards party policy than could be said of any other section.¹⁸ However, the idea that a persistent antagonism characterised the relationship between trade unions and CLPs can be challenged in two directions. Union support for NEC policies had not always been monolithic. Opposition to NEC Conference resolutions on unilateralism in 1960 saw the leadership defeated twice.¹⁹ In this instance there was an identifiable group of unions which could be linked with the Labour Left (although not, of course, on every issue).²⁰ These debates as well as those over Clause Four showed that the political battle was usually won by the section that stood closest to the Party's traditional values. It also showed Labour's failure to lure a significant section away from as Drucker has called, 'the old defensive working class ethos.'²¹

III) Party Unity

Party unity has not always been regarded as always electorally important.²² It has been viewed as important enough for others to be an appropriate subject for discussion. One survey asked working class supporters to rank in importance sixteen statements describing the party. The characteristic 'has a united team of top leaders' was placed in eighth place by Labour respondents, with twenty per cent rating this as the most important party characteristic. While seeing disputes as acceptable, the

18 Panitch V. 'Ideology and Integration' Political Studies 19 1971 Vol.19 Clarendon Press Oxford p. 219

19 McKenzie R.T. British Political Parties 2nd edn. revised Heineman London 1964 pp. 612-617

20 Harrison M. Trade Unions and the Labour Party Since 1945 Allen & Unwin London 1960 pp.211-213.

21 Drucker H.M. Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party Allen & Unwin London 1979 p. 108

Labour Right notes that the Party should 'seek to bring (disputes) to a conclusion so that voters could know precisely where Labour stood.'²³ In contrast, the Labour Left views party unity as involving the approval of the status quo in terms of power and policy. The Party Leadership is also unacceptable to them for it merely symbolises the power of the Labour Right over the party structures. Instead they prefer to stress the value of divergent political opinions as well as the importance of 'ginger groups' within the Party.²⁴

Labour's inability to remain consistently in office also constituted another cause of friction. Electoral defeats not only deprive the leadership of prestige and authority;²⁵ they also afford the wider Party the opportunity to indulge in internecine warfare over who exactly is to blame for electoral failure. Disillusionment swept the party, with defeats in 1951, 1955 and 1959 only serving to compound the move towards factionalism which electoral disappointment had unleashed. The onset of the 1964 Election only imposed some restraints on factionalism, as did its eventual narrow victory.²⁶

22 Abrams M. & Rose R. Must Labour Lose? Penguin Harmondsworth 1960 pp. 13

23 Crosland C.A.R. op cit. pp. 149 & 156

24 Janosik E. Constituency Labour Parties in Britain Pall Mall Press London 1968 pp. 35 - 41

25 Rose R. op cit. pp. 145 - 146

26 Janosik E. op cit. pp. 85 - 97

Factional disputes typified Labour's internal politics throughout the Party's debates over Britain's entry into the Common Market. These debates should be seen from two overlapping perspectives: conflict amongst key party institutions and conflict between the Labour Right and Labour Left. While the issue of entry created neither mode of conflict, Europe highlighted and exacerbated the capacity for political tension that already existed.²⁷ It was almost inevitable that the Party would experience difficulties in maintaining unity as the debate polarised between pro- and anti-Market lobbies.

Having now established that Labour was prone to internal divisions, it is necessary to demonstrate that despite the disunity Labour was still able to play a significant part in maintaining the consensus view held amongst British foreign policy makers – centrally that British economic decline necessitated entry into the Common Market. Yet to illustrate this one first must establish whether a political consensus actually existed during this period.

2. Post War Consensus Politics?

There is a difficulty about using the term 'consensus' as a synonym for cross party agreement. After all, disagreement about 'ends and means' is

27 Daniels P and Ritchie E. The Poison'd Chalice – The European issue in British party politics in Jones P. (ed) Party, Parliament & Personality – Essays presented to Hugh Berrington Routledge London 1995 p.86

the 'life blood of politics'. Political discourse arises inevitably from human interaction and the clash of individual and group interests. Politics is the activity of reconciling those interests and establishing a common set of goals for society. By doing so an obvious problem will then follow as the idea of 'consensus' is usually going to be at odds with any political activity. In other words, was nothing at stake in general elections? It is possible, therefore, to suggest that a 'consensus' in post-war British politics never existed.²⁸

Academics such as Pimlott argue that 'consensus' 'is a mirage, an illusion that rapidly fades the closer one gets to it,'²⁹ seeing the idea used by those who wish to look nostalgically to a 'golden era',³⁰ High levels of party identification and class-based voting are supposed to show the sharp differences between the political parties.³¹ In similar vein, others argue that party disagreement had been alive during wartime and that the differing interpretations given to coalition policy after 1943 make it difficult to endorse the idea that shared common beliefs ever existed. It is argued that while both main parties accepted the mixed economy, its ultimate

28 Kavanagh D. & Morris P. Consensus Politics From Attlee to Major Institute of Contemporary British History Blackwell Oxford 1994 p. 10

29 Pimlott B. in Jones H. & Kandiah M. The Myth of Consensus Macmillan London 1996 p.140. Taylor Gooby P. Public Opinion, Ideology and State Welfare Routledge Paul 1985 pp. 55 - 59

30 Ellison N. 'Consensus Here, Consensus There...but not Consensus Everywhere: The Labour Party, Equality and Social Policy in the 1950's' in Jones H. & Kandiah M. op cit. p.17

31 Kavanagh D. & Morris P. op cit. p.10.

purpose remained a subject of intense disagreement.³² One historian notes that the 'Second World War was not the crucible of lasting political consensus'³³ as the parties were as far apart on social issues as they had been before 1939.³⁴ It is also suggested that Labour's post-war reforms were set firmly in the party's own 'labourist' tradition.³⁵ The assumptions the Labour Government brought to power in 1945 were different in important respects from the 'Whitehall consensus', with Labour's attitude revealing a determination to achieve the social and economic reform programme which had been extensively discussed during the 1930's and early 1940's.³⁶ The War was, therefore, certainly not the 'Crucible of lasting political consensus.'³⁷

If consensus means elite agreement about the legitimacy of political institutions, then perhaps it has always existed, as revolutionary politics has yet to succeed in destroying our accepted constitutional arrangements.³⁸ Moreover, It is unhelpful to understand 'consensus' as only meaning the absence of disagreement. Rather it is more appropriate to think of consensus as a set of generally accepted parameters in which

32 Jeffreys K. The Churchill coalition and wartime politics, 1940-1945 MUP Manchester 1991 p.196-197.

33 Brooke S. Labour's War OUP Oxford 1992 p.342

34 Jeffreys K. 'British Politics and Social Policy During The Second World War' in Historical Journal Vol.30 No.1 p.143

35 Lowe R. op cit. p.340

36 Durbin E. New Jerusalem's The Labour Party and the Economics of Democratic Socialism Routledge & Kegan Paul London 1985 p.87

37 Ibid. p342

38 Kavanagh D. & Morris P. op cit. pp. 1 - 4

certain 'key assumptions were shared and in which policy options were consequently limited.'³⁹ The Second World War played a significant role in creating a shared set of assumptions between the two main political parties about future political action. The War acted as a catalyst for the implementation of ideas that had been developed before 1939 and which now gave birth to a post-war policy consensus. Addison argues that a range of policy areas saw the emergence of a broad consensus about the need for a 'fairer society – especially one which boasted higher levels of welfare as well as full employment.'⁴⁰ While the rhetorical debate between state socialism and laissez-faire capitalism may have continued, in practice both Conservative and Labour parties by-passed 'most of it in favour of pragmatic reform in a mixed economy.'⁴¹ The War produced the new middle ground upon which the parties could compete.⁴² Smith suggests that a set of common 'beliefs about the priorities of a National Health Service' were being 'widely shared'.⁴³ So central was social policy to this post-war agreement that some simply refer to it as 'the welfare state consensus'.⁴⁴ Dicey once said that the Conservative and Liberal Parties divided on differences that are important but not fundamental. Indeed, According to studies of party manifestos, the parties steadily

39 Dutton D. op cit. p.7

40 Dutton D. British Politics Since 1945-The Rise and Fall of Consensus Basil Blackwell Oxford 1991 pp. 9-10.

41 Addison P. The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War Jonathan Cape London 1975 p.14

42 Ibid. pp. 275 - 278

43 Fox D.M. 'The National Health Service and the Second World War: the elaboration of consensus' in Smith H.L. (ed.) War and Social change - British society in the Second World War MUP Manchester 1986 p.135 - 136

44 Pierson C. op cit. p. 139

moved towards each other during the 1950's and 1960's.⁴⁵ Addison probably has this characterisation in mind when he talks of a 'post war settlement' on policy between both Conservative and Labour Parties.⁴⁶ Disputes were less about absolutes and more about questions of 'more or less'. Consensus, therefore, is not meant to imply total agreement, but rather that the Conservative Left and Labour Right dominated their respective parties, converging towards the centre ground of politics.⁴⁷

Similarly we should not just see the post-war consensus as being about two political parties whether in government or in opposition, but also as a period of substantive agreement within the machinery of Government itself⁴⁸ As such, Ellison points out that political agreement was sustained by a Whitehall system whose commitment to Keynesian macro-economic policy begun to gradually permeate economic policy making in the last two years of the war. It is significant that in the early years of Churchill's government, advocates of Keynesianism such as Sir Edwin Plowden and Sir Robert Hall continued to flourish within the Treasury. Both were Keynesian economists and thought 'in macro-economic terms about full employment and balance of payments' stability.⁴⁹ A central foundation, therefore, for the creation of a consensus lay in part in the key area of

45 Thomas J.C. 'The Changing Nature of Partisan Divisions in the West European Journal of Political Research 7/4 1979

46 Kavanagh D. & Morris P. op cit. p.13

47 Bogdanor V. & Skidelsky R. (eds.) The Age of Affluence Macmillan 1970 p.11

48 Dutton D. op cit. pp. 7-8

Whitehall. And, as the 1950's unfolded, we can certainly see the trend of a foreign policy consensus continuing through the commitment of another leading Whitehall mandarin, Sir Frank Lee. Convinced that Britain's economic future lay in Europe, Lee persuaded the then Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan in the late 1950's, of the necessity of Britain entering the Common Market ⁵⁰ Hennessy notes that Lee could be 'very persuasive'. At the Board of Trade in the early 1950's, he convinced his President, Peter Thorneycroft, away from imperial preference and converting him instead into a free trader. Thorneycroft, primed by Lee, persuaded the Cabinet and finally, with much greater difficulty, the Conservative Party Conference. It is significant that Britain's first application to join was primarily based on a report Sir Frank Lee compiled.⁵¹ Usually when an issue reached ministerial level, a small range of options would have been selected with the information far less detailed.⁵² Through such an approach, civil servants were able to establish the parameters or 'governmental ethos' in which decisions were made.⁵³

Having established that a consensus did indeed exist, it is now important to see how it related to Britain's policy towards Europe. It will be shown that by the 1950's British foreign policy gave support for the US and the

49 Seldon A. Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government 1951 -1955 Hodder & Stoughton London 1981 p.165

50 Roll E. Crowded Hours Faber and Faber London 1985 p. 106

51 In Hennessy P. Whitehall Secker & Warburg London 1989 p. 160

52 See Jenkins R.J. Sunday Times 17. 1. 1971

Commonwealth, as well as the beginnings of a European stance. By the early 1960s, with relationships with both the US and Commonwealth no longer helping the British economy, Britain began to realign itself towards Europe and, in particular, with membership of the Common Market.

4. The European Policy Consensus

While early economic results after the War looked encouraging, a US led new global economic system was created that began to test British economic competitiveness. After the Korean War boom, commodity prices sagged while industrial economies saw sustained expansion - especially within the newly formed Common Market. The position of Sterling also began to be affected as well. Whereas in 1900 Sterling was a leading currency, by the early 1950s, with the Commonwealth becoming ever more independent so the status of Sterling was further reduced to that of only a 'negotiated' currency. The trade gap, therefore, widened as Britain faced renewed world competition as well as a number of balance of payments deficits. The Suez Crisis merely provided a stimulus for major shifts in policy within the three circles of power towards Europe, not least towards the US.

I) Redefining Britain's Role

A significant factor to explain the shift in British policy making about Europe was the support of Washington who had long since favoured moves towards European unity. The US clearly perceived the extent of Britain's economic decline and was conscious that, if Britain remained outside Europe, America's diplomatic tasks in Europe would be much harder to fulfil. When Macmillan visited the US in 1961, he found US foreign policy makers enthusiastic about a British application for entry.⁵⁴ Yet the debate in Britain tended to fall between the immediate problems arising from occupation and the vaguer aspiration to prevent a German military revival. Not only were long-term solutions such as European integration deemed less urgent, it was still felt that entry would have a deleterious effect on agricultural markets, the Commonwealth and the 'special relationship'. On the other hand, London noted that Europe could constitute a 'third force' capable of exerting international leverage, leaving Britain as an 'insignificant "has been"'.⁵⁵ Entry provided, therefore, a framework within which Britain could engage with problems which it alone lacked the cohesion to tackle.⁵⁶ When talks began in September 1961, Britain made it clear that it accepted the Rome Treaty in broad principle, whilst also seeking special provisions for the Commonwealth, domestic agriculture and EFTA.

54 Camps M. Britain and the European Communities, 1955 - 63 OUP Oxford 1964 pp. 336 - 337

55 Ibid. p.338

56 Holland R. The Pursuit of Greatness Britain And The World, 1900-1970 Fontana Press London 1991 p.290

This partial acceptance of a European vocation, however, proved insufficient for General de Gaulle who, in delivering his veto, claimed that Britain's economic and political orientation was still too different from that of other member States. The Nassau agreement between Britain and the US had demonstrated to the French Britain's preference for a transatlantic relationship over a European one.⁵⁷ Not only had Britain moved too late it had also moved for largely negative reasons - the fear that the Common Market would become the European pillar of the Atlantic alliance.⁵⁸ Britain's attitude was one of a 'fearful agnosticism about the future of Europe and Britain's future in it.'⁵⁹ Thus Britain proved unable to square the circles - to strengthen its links with the US whilst also engineer British entry.

However, in the early 1960's, links were also weakening rapidly with the Commonwealth.⁶⁰ The British policy shift towards de-colonisation by the mid 1950s partly reflected the changing international setting, and partly changes in the British economy. Currency convertibility, Europe's industrial boom and Britain's growing interest in Europe conspired to refashion attitudes to traditional patterns of trade. The Commonwealth's economic importance to Britain lessened as British commerce failed to

57 Clarke P. Hope and Glory Britain 1900 - 1990 Penguin London p. 281 .

58 Butler L.J. 'Winds of change: Britain, Europe and the Commonwealth 1959-1961' op cit. pp. 159 - 160

59 Denman R. op cit. p.225

60 Tomlinson J. Public Policy And The Economy Since 1900 Clarendon Press London 1990 p.243

adjust itself to changing trading conditions.⁶¹ This meant that Britain was now 'facing the wrong way, with its back turned' on the expanding markets it most needed if it was to keep pace with the growth of internal trade.⁶² Whitehall's faith in the Commonwealth was also damaged by the exclusion of South Africa over apartheid in 1961, which showed the Commonwealth's growing independence of UK wishes,⁶³ for whom the continued presence of such a regime was unacceptable.⁶⁴ With these policy shifts occurring, why did the Labour Party play such a significant role in maintaining this European policy consensus?

5. Labour's European Policy

To explain Labour's European policy between 1960 and 1975, one first needs to look at the Party both in opposition and in Government. In doing so we need to introduce the term 'internal' and 'governmental' policy-making. The former relates to policy-making in opposition and shows that wider political considerations are perceived to be weak enough to allow issues such as party unity some degree of resonance. It will be shown that a major objective was to achieve unity by adopting classical opposition behaviour, for example, by showing the Party to be competent

61 Owen N. De-colonisation and Consensus quoted in Jones H. & Kandiah M. op cit. p. 176

62 Clarke P. op cit. p. 279

63 Beloff Lord Britain And European Union - Dialogue Of The Deaf Macmillan London 1996 p.59

64 Saunders D. Losing an Empire Finding a Role British Foreign Policy Since 1945 Macmillan London 1990 p.148

and thus fit to govern in the eventuality of electoral success.⁶⁵ “Governmental’ policy making, on the other hand, involves the government having to formulate realistic and practical policies. While issues relevant in opposition remained pertinent, it is here that government leaders needed to take a more balanced view between both the party and national interests. Labour’s policy decisions over Europe during this period closely mirror both ‘internal’ and ‘governmental’ positions.

However, in order to demonstrate this, we first have to establish that the debates that took place during this period were merely a continuum of those that had occurred straight after the War. While the enthusiasm of victory in war and victory for the first majority Labour Government appeared to offer a chance for Britain to continue as a great power, the spirit of party unity soon ceased with both left and right resuming more entrenched, exhibiting attitudes more typical of the 1930s. As Drucker notes, ‘That holiday came to an abrupt end with the electoral victory of 1945’.

While in the two previous periods, conflicts could always be explained away by the fact of being either in a minority government or in opposition, after 1945 that excuse was no longer available - the Government had to

⁶⁵ Brazier R. Constitutional Practice 2nd Edn Clarendon Press Oxford 1994 p.163

begin to explain to its supporters why it was making 'non-socialist' choices.⁶⁶ Whereas in opposition the party could theoretically adopt whatever position it like, in government the Party had no choice but to consider the national interest more closely. This is a crucial period if we want to look at divisions over Europe in these years. Europe became embroiled in clashes between the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and his many leftwing critics, and can be seen as an issue where hopeful pre-war declarations failed to be realised. While there had been calls for Britain to help produce European unity in order to create a post-war peace, the Party's (and indeed the nation's) mood over Europe at this time was changing rapidly, with many now losing interest in the whole concept of federalism.⁶⁷ Dalton, for example, argued that as Labour had fought so hard to win power for socialism, it should not now throw it away to allow Europe to decree that Britain should return to the inter-war years of trade depression⁶⁸ Instead, the Party had to think 'first of all of the Commonwealth,⁶⁹ and that initiatives to create European unity should not be allowed to interfere with the newly established welfare state.⁷⁰

66 Drucker H.M. op cit. p. 107

67 Francois Bondy quoted in Ibid. p. 161

68 LPACR 1950 p. 179

69 Newman M. Socialism and European Unity: The Dilemma of the Left in Britain and France Junction Books, London 1983 p. 137

70 Pimlott B. Hugh Dalton Jonathan Cape London 1985 p. 566

A deeply ingrained belief in the greatness of Britain led the Party to cast aside any real move towards integration. Indeed, in the same manner as Dalton, Bevin 'sensed instinctively that the Schuman Plan raised again the spectre of federalism, rather than the gradualist, functionalist method favoured by Britain'.⁷¹ Yet many believed that the European Union was an issue in which a strong British lead might well have produced positive results. The lead was not given although statements by leaders of the Labour movement created hopes that it would be. For more than thirty years many on the Labour Left had promoted the idea of a supra-national authority to control the vested interests of the capitalist nation states. When the Labour Government finally came to office, it found that workers had a vested interest in the idea of national sovereignty instead

The reasons behind the various political stands taken by Labour during this period cannot then be detached from a set of beliefs, which characterised British society in general. Though Britain had once been a great world power, by the late 1950's it was becoming increasingly clear that this was no longer the case. While the public now concluded that Britain, having been a grade one world power, was now a grade two world power, in global politics there is, of course, no such thing as a 'grade two global power'. It was this contradiction that managed to delay for a generation the British withdrawal from 'distant theatres, the abnegation of

⁷¹ Morgan K.O. Labour in Power 1945 - 1951 Clarendon Press Oxford 1984 p. 419

the role of international financier and adjustment to the realities of what was...still a powerful position.⁷² What had happened to federalist cause within the Party then was but a mirror, where the wider image of Britain's self consciousness as a great power was reflected.

Debates between the pro- and anti-Market factions were as much to do with the direction of socialism as they were to do with aspirations about Europe, with Europe being only 'the tip of the iceberg'. One Labour Left MP argues that those who divide over Europe, also divide on the 'basic issues of public ownership, relations with the Trade Unions, Party Democracy'⁷³ The position can be described as follows. Anti-Marketees' suggested that entry would frustrate the progress towards socialism and would interfere with Parliament's legislative powers.⁷⁴ Second, with a declining military capacity as well as fading special relationship, Britain should be regarded as possessing a moral authority both within the Commonwealth and the Common Market as well. It was argued that British Governments should legislate as they wished and that the maintenance of UK sovereignty in the international sphere was dependent upon this very fact. Therefore, the questions of sovereignty, the preservation of Britain's world role, and political ethos of European organisations were all core strands of opposition.

72 Calvocoressi P. The British Experience 1945 - 1975 Pelican Harmondsworth 1979 p. 199

73 Heffer E. 'Labour's Future' The Political Quarterly Vol. 43 No. 4 Oct. - Dec. 1972 p. 384

Pro-Marketeers, on the other hand, argued that Britain had to reassess its imperial role and turn its sights on the Common Market. By 1957 some argued that, as Europe was the home of socialism then the failure or success of socialism in Britain would be decisive for the movement in Europe. 'If it fails British socialists would stand isolated.'⁷⁵ European reconstruction had highlighted even further the disintegrating economic links with the Commonwealth and insubstantial basis of the 'special relationship'. Roy Jenkins argued that the special relationship was ludicrous when the US actually wanted Britain to enter.⁷⁶ Britain's political and economic decline was well understood - Britain was uncompetitive and needed a more stimulating set of trading links.⁷⁷ Arguments against the loss of sovereignty, for pro-Marketeers, seemed 'nationalistic',⁷⁸ seeing Europe as offering the prospect of modernisation.⁷⁹

It seems clear, therefore, that the ability to maintain some degree of unity amongst Labour's two ideological wings was going to be crucial, as events were later to show. After the defeats over Clause Four and defence policy, Labour now found unity under Gaitskell as 'the Commonwealth' party. The Labour leaders speech to the 1962 Annual Conference

⁷⁴ Tribune 19. 1. 1962.'

⁷⁵ Socialist Commentary Sept. 1957 pp. 4 -5

⁷⁶ Jenkins R.J. and Neild R. 'Dissenting Note' in 'Britain and Europe' Second Draft of Report submitted the Home Policy Sub Committee 12 June 1961', in Newmann M. op cit. p166

⁷⁷ Jenkins R.J.. 'From London To Rome' Encounter Vol. XVII No. 3 Sept. 1961 p.8

⁷⁸Jenkins R.J. and Neild R. op cit. p166

⁷⁹ Desai R. Intellectuals and Socialism - Social Democrats and the Labour Party Lawrence and Wishart London p143

appeared to gain the support of many sections of Labour Left anti-Marketeers into supporting his increasingly hostile approach to Common Market entry. All this from an issue that was ultimately to come to nothing. Had the Conservative Governments negotiations produced any agreement, the party could have split, with the Labour suffering yet another crisis. Thus Europe provided Labour with a 'healing potion', providing that it did not develop into an issue demanding a clear choice. Unfortunately victory for Labour in the 1964 General Election changed all that.

In stark contrast to Gaitskell, who presided over 'domestic' foreign policy, Wilson had to produce a policy that worked in Government. As far as he was concerned, if Britain's application to join in 1967 had been successful, then his subsequent during this period behaviour would have been judged as purposeful. Failure, on the other hand, would at least limit criticism because at least he could justifiably claim that the option of entry had been explored. The advantage of not making a greater commitment was that any failure in the Governments negotiations would result in a policy vacuum. Indeed, after losing the 1970 Election, political opponents attacked Labour and the media for having no European policy, with the Party's position had been one of no decision. This strategy was, of course, completely rational for a major political party that suffered from endemic conflict, with leaders seeing advantages in avoiding disunity until

a real choice need be made. This plain fact epitomises the choices that faced Labour leaderships during this period. Similarly, Labour's decision on the principle of entry was to be made simultaneously with a decision that found any negotiated terms acceptable. Until such time why antagonise anyone until a real decision had to be made? By 1975 the party ceased feuding, returned to Government promising unity on the platform of re-negotiated terms with the couplet of a referendum.

6. Conclusions

This thesis concerns the Labour Party and its contribution to the evolution of post-war British foreign policy towards Europe. While Labour historically, has had a pluralistic structure and been repeatedly prone to internal factionalism, in Government it has felt more compelled by external governmental factors to maintain the Whitehall consensus view of what British foreign policy towards Europe should be. While out of office enabled the party to concentrate almost solely on maintaining Party unity (whether this meant Labour opposing the same policies it had previously pursued or not), in government the post-war consensus was strong enough to cement the Party towards accepting the perceived wisdom in Whitehall.⁸⁰ Whether in government or in opposition, the Party's policy on Europe usually drifted towards some ideological compromise around which the Party could unite. In opposition, however, the ideological

differences became more acute, with there being far greater interest in ideology. The result being that those on the extreme ends of either ideological wing stood a better chance of influencing policies. Conversely any compromises made while the Party was in government were always likely to heighten any ideological disputes once the Party lost an election - since a genuine compromise between the Party's different component parts almost impossible. Although a compromise was necessary to enable the Government to function, once Labour was out of office, the ideological differences came to the surface.⁸¹ In 1962 Gaitskell condemned the terms for entry, seeing no reason to jeopardise newly found Party unity⁸² or to support a tired looking government. Though Wilson was just as hostile, he too applied for entry seeing it as a possible solution to the country's economic problems.⁸³ In the passage of the 1973 Bill, 68 Labour MPs by defying the Whip saved the government from defeat.⁸⁴ In 1975 Wilson supported the Yes vote in the referendum, thus preserving the wider consensus view.⁸⁵

In the following chapters we will look in detail at Labour's divisions and how unity was so difficult to achieve. We will establish that there was a

80 Nairn T. New Left Review No. 75 Sept -Oct. London 1972 pp. 1-2.

81 Bilski R. op cit. p. 308

82 Robins L.J. op cit. p.52

83 George S. op cit. p.37

84 Kitzinger U. op cit. p.388

85 Kavanagh D. and Morris P. op cit. pp. 105-107

consensus and detail its crucial relationship to British European policy. Here we will show that up to the 1950s Britain still saw itself as a world power seeing its interests lying with the US, the Empire and only loosely with Europe. However, with an ever-worsening economy, a change of policy was clearly going to be inevitable, with Britain now seeing Common Market entry as a possible solution. We develop how the Labour Party managed to deal with this position as it continued to unfold. We shall conclude by arguing that, despite its internal divisions, was able to counter balance the needs of the nation against those of party concern so that the newly evolving consensus view of how Britain related to the rest of the world could be maintained.

GAITSKELL AND THE NEED FOR UNITY

1. Introduction

From 1960 to 1963 the Labour Party opposed the Government's position over the Common Market and thus was able to maintain internal unity. In 1962 Gaitskell condemned the terms for entry, seeing no reason to either jeopardise newly found unity⁸⁶ nor support a tired looking government.⁸⁷ After internal battles over Clause Four and defence policy, Europe was going to provide Labour with a healing ointment, so long as it did not develop into an issue demanding a clear choice. Realising the Conservative Governments negotiations would fail, Gaitskell's actions were a clear attempt to garner any electoral benefits that might accrue from such a policy failure. Fully aware that his references to the Atlantic Alliance would certainly provoke angry reaction amongst member states, Gaitskell's move, therefore, from passive supporter to that of anti-Marketeer was a tactical one to win internal unity in anticipation of a

⁸⁶ Robins L.J. op cit. p.52

⁸⁷ Williams P.M. Hugh Gaitskell - A Biography Jonathan Cape London 1979 p.746

forthcoming election. We need to place, therefore, this subject in its appropriate international and domestic political context, by showing how debates in Whitehall over Europe were mirrored in the Labour Party and further, that the Party confronted the issue of Europe at a time when it was most heavily divided. The leadership's main concern was to find an issue that could be used as a vehicle to heal the lingering wounds both of the Clause Four and defence debates. It is this desire for party unity that drove Gaitskell and as such dictates the course of this section.

2. Antecedents For Disunity

The Conservative Government's announcement in 1961 to apply for Common Market entry represented a major shift in foreign policy. Until that point policy had been rooted in the 'three spheres of influence' with Europe subservient to the dictates of both the Commonwealth and US. Experiences during the late 1950s created a dynamic; however, the logic of which was to re-evaluate Britain's world role. The Suez fiasco, fears of the US engaging in dialogue with Europe over Britain as well as Commonwealth's economic fragility can all be seen as marking this move. The major political parties were slow, however, to recognise these consequences. Labour responded to these issues at a time when it was both ideologically and structurally divided, in opposition and seemingly

with little chance of entering government in the near future.⁸⁸ The Party appeared unable to respond to the growing economic prosperity and social mobility that was being harnessed by the Conservative Government,⁸⁹ with some wondering whether it would ever be elected again.⁹⁰ Clarke notes that it was hard to accept that the Party's 'own self-inflicted wounds were unimportant in denying it office.' Party splits appeared endemic and seemingly impossible to conceal.⁹¹

After 'the trauma of election defeat'⁹² in 1959, it was argued that Labour had to adopt more modern policies and not simply wait for the conversion of society to socialism to happen if it ever wished to govern Britain again.⁹³ The spectacular 1963 Liberal by-election win in the Conservative stronghold of Orpington merely confirmed Labour's failure to attract middle class voters.⁹⁴ And while Gaitskell argued for internal 'modernisation'⁹⁵, he was forced to back down in the attempt to abandon Clause IV with many still believing this would mean the end of socialism. In fact, many believed that he had underestimated the notion of public ownership as a dominant

88 Beer S. H. 'Democratic one-party government for Britain', Political Quarterly Vol. 32 pp. 114 -123

89 Tiratsoo N. Popular Politics, affluence and the Labour Party in the 1950's in Gorst A. Johnman L. and Scott Lucas W. op cit. 1991 p.56

90 Abrams M. & Rose R. op cit. p. 58

91 Clarke P. op cit. p. 256

92 Minkin L. *ibid.* p.274

93 Abrams M. & Rose R. op cit. pp. 121

94 Young K. 'Orpington and the 'Liberal Revival' in Cook C. & Ramsden J.(eds) By-Elections in British Politics UCL London 1973 p.199

95 Gaitskell H. Socialism And Nationalisation Fabian Tract 300 Fabian Society London 1956 pp.29 -36

idea within the party's 'socialist myth' and the appeal of Clause IV as the formal expression of that myth.⁹⁶ Others believed the venture to be tactically ill conceived, arguing that as the Party had existed amicably with an ambiguous policy of a mixed economy why then change now?⁹⁷ The real question was how long could Labour afford this policy ambiguity to continue?

3. Labour And The Common Market

I. Overview

Europe's place in Labour's internal politics was not straightforward and fitted poorly into any Left and Right divide.⁹⁸ Though the issue related to the changing nature of Britain's world role, it involved no clear-cut question of moral versus political leadership. If the Government were successful in future entry negotiations, then Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth and the US would need to be reconsidered. This did not immediately rule out entry for those who believed that Britain could provide political leadership. Moreover, while moral leadership would have little role to play in such an economic association, many on the left still favoured entry if only on the grounds of international co-operation. There

96 Jones.T.P.'Labour Revisionism and Public Ownership' Contemporary Record Vol.5 No.3 1991 p.443

97 Howell D. British Social Democracy-A Study in Development and Decay Croon Helm London 1976 p.223

98 Haseler S.The Gaitskellites:Revisionism in the British Labour Party,1951-1964 Jonathan Cape

London 1969 p.227

was another layer of complexity as well. While the Bevanite disputes of the 1950s had often centred on defence matters, there was still the broader debate concerning Britain's post-imperial role. The Labour Left's attitude tended to be coloured by an anti-American perspective, while the Labour Right nurtured a strong Atlanticist bias. It was this that led Gaitskell to place his leadership on the line over defence,⁹⁹ by successfully reversing the policy over unilateralism at the 1961 Conference. He was understandably unwilling, therefore, to squander this newly found unity in pursuit of yet another internal squabble – this time over Europe.¹⁰⁰ He realized that Europe was an issue that could be used to create a unified and electorally credible political party.¹⁰¹ Gaitskell 'would judge the issue when it arose by the approach which would ensure the maximum electoral advantage.' This point should not be over looked. The position looked favourable - he had a loyal Right wing and an issue that was finely balanced.¹⁰² The ultimate solution, therefore, would be to put forward a mildly anti-Market line in order to carry both wings of the Party. Here was oppositionist politics in operation with the need to maintain Party unity taking priority over Europe itself.

99 Foote G. The Labour Party's Political Thought A History (3rd Edn.) Macmillan London 1997 p.223

100 Desai R. op cit. p112

101 Williams P.M. op cit. pp.742-745

102 Bill Rodgers quoted in *ibid.* p.703

In a sense Gaitskell viewed the possibility of closer Western European integration simply in terms of wider Cold War security implications. Both he and Bevan shared a residual belief in Britain's global responsibilities, especially where the Commonwealth was concerned,¹⁰³ and to this extent they regarded the Common Market as something of an irrelevance. On the other hand, many on the Labour Right argued that Britain needed to develop a more realistic world role within Europe. For the first time since 1945 a powerful lobby in the Party was proposing a strategic readjustment 'cutting the international cloth to fit the domestic economic reality.'¹⁰⁴ These divisions highlighted the problems caused for Britain by European integration. Britain's post war position comprising the sterling area as an economic unit, the Commonwealth and the 'special relationship' had to be balanced with its new role as a European power. This conflict, in turn, created other difficulties. Given the other roles Britain was called on to play, what would be its commitment to Europe? There was a suspicion on the Continent that Britain would not be able to make a positive contribution. On the other hand, the economic dynamic being created in Europe forced Britain to realise that entry was essential. This led naturally to a second problem - what form the association of nations would take. Many in the Party saw the Rome Treaty as a 'capitalist club' that might prevent any sort of internal planning and progressive social policy by a

103 Foot M. Aneurau Bevan 1945 - 1960 Vol. II p.575 quoted in Brivati B. Hugh Gaitskell Richard Cohen Books London p.405
footnote 1

104 Brivati B. op cit p.406

future Labour Government.¹⁰⁵ The counter argument was that only if a Labour Government was working actively within the Common Market could Europe develop along democratic socialist lines. There was also disagreement over the effect that entry would have on existing trading patterns. Pro-Marketeers maintained that entry would open up new markets and that closer ties would not adversely affect the Commonwealth. Anti-Marketeers, on the other hand, believed that entry would not offset the losses in the Commonwealth. There was, however, no certain way of predicting on which side of the European debate the protagonists in the other debates would fall. Those on the Labour Left tended to be anti-Market, with those on the Labour Right being pro-Market. By 1960 with the first serious Shadow Cabinet studies taking place on Europe, Party opinion began to move against entry.¹⁰⁶

II. Gaitskell's 'Balancing Act' Begins

While Britain may have abandoned military and economic independence, the formal merger of decision making seemed for many in the Party to go against the grain even of many 'who on most other grounds would like to see Britain join the Community.'¹⁰⁷ Three out of four respondents, in one survey, were opposed in some way to entry, while less than one

105 Berrington H in Daniels P & Ritchie E *ibid*, p.86

106 Brivati B. *op cit*. pp.406-407

107 Kitzinger U. The Challenge of the Common Market Blackwell Oxford 1961 pp. 150 - 151

respondent in five gave any support.¹⁰⁸ The reasons mirrored the wider debate - the Rome Treaty was a capitalist 'device' that would make achieving socialism in Britain even more difficult.¹⁰⁹ Gaitskell opposed giving any public declaration on Common Market entry, believing it was unlikely to become an electoral issue whilst also fearing that a strong line from him would result in further factionalism.¹¹⁰ Once negotiations had begun in 1961, Europe came to the front of the political stage, endangering the very basis of Labour's fragile unity. And while Gaitskell's initial handling of the issue caused few problems,¹¹¹ signs of unrest were soon becoming apparent. In response to Labour's agreed conditions for entry one pro-Marketeer, Roy Jenkins, resigned from the front bench. The Government's conditions of entry seemed to Gaitskell to undermine the position of the Commonwealth. He did fear, however, the prospect of yet another split, with all the electoral problems that brought. The ultimate consequence, as we shall see, was an address to the 1962 Annual Conference that clearly marked the Party out on a distinctly anti-Market course.¹¹²

108 Janosik E.G. quoted in Brivati B. p.407

109 Haseler S. quoted in Brivati B. p. 407.

110 Foot M. 'The Rank And File Must Give The Lead' Tribune 8.6.1962

111 Safeguards for Commonwealth trade interests, freedom of the UK to pursue her own foreign policy, looking after the interests of EFTA, the right to plan the economy and safeguards for UK agriculture.

112 Brivati B. op cit.pp.404-405

In contrast to the defence issue, if Gaitskell had supported entry he would have faced a battle with virtually all sections of the Party. On the other hand, if he came out against entry he risked alienating the Labour Right. One leading Gaitskellite, Denis Howell, maintained that the Leader's position was designed to unify the Party and in this respect he was probably right. Gaitskell accepted the aspirations of the European cause whilst also having a deep suspicion for the implications if Britain joined. In a letter to Kennedy he noted that the arguments were evenly balanced,¹¹³ that the balance would only tilt in favour of entry if Labour's conditions were met and that if he was to urge either unconditional entry or total opposition the Party would have divided. He also felt that the chances of the French agreeing to entry were remote.¹¹⁴ By relating his arguments to the terms of entry, it would be possible to offend neither lobby. With these aims in mind, he played the 'waiting game'. He thought that the prospects of a Europe developing in the way he wanted depended on the terms and that if these proved unsatisfactory, the loss would not be very great. He also believed that Conservative division would be too great for Macmillan to proceed anyway. Terms good enough for Macmillan to carry his own party would also be good enough for Gaitskell to carry his; and without such terms the talks would collapse with only Labour benefiting.¹¹⁵ Gaitskell was walking a tight rope because if he supported either lobby then the balancing act that kept both sides together would have been

113 Diary of Hugh Gaitskell 1945 – 1956 quoted in Brivati B. op cit. 408-409

114 Brivati B. op cit. p 409

endangered. This was going to be difficult as the various party pressure groups were intensifying their campaigning. The Forward Britain Movement advocated alternative policies to entry, such as to 'oppose nuclear tests in any part of the world.'¹¹⁶ One pro-Market group, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism believed Britain's destinies were 'inextricably bound up with those of a resurgent and united Europe.'¹¹⁷ Entry was seen as a way of making the economy more dynamic, believing that it would be a betrayal of the Party's internationalist beliefs for Britain to remain outside.¹¹⁸ If this was an organisation, composed primarily of Gaitskell's own supporters, why then did he not join them on Europe? The answer was that he realised the need to achieve unity a year before an Election, and not least so to maintain his own position.

Labour also tabled a Commons motion in August 1961 noting that Britain should only enter if the negotiated terms were acceptable to the Commonwealth and EFTA. Gaitskell's careful opening speech was, as Duncan Sandys said winding up, 'a notable balancing act, ably stating the case on both sides.' To pro-Marketeers, it seemed that he was hedging bets around conditions he knew would never be accepted. Yet ardent anti-Marketeers felt he had sold out to those who would betray national

115 Williams P.M. op cit. pp. 705-706

116 Robins L.J. op cit. p.35

117 CDS Inaugural Manifesto. in Haseler S. quoted in Brivati B. op cit. p. 407

118 Campaign (18) July 1962, Ibid. pp. 209-214

sovereignty. And with the 1961 Annual Conference accepting the leadership's line,¹¹⁹ it was agreed to continue play a 'waiting game'. Gaitskell told a party meeting in December that the waiting attitude was right stating 'I do not want another internal party row about this.'¹²⁰ He further sought to reduce the tension by discouraging rival groups from submitting motions and by persuading the PLP that a vote on the issue might put him at a disadvantage against Macmillan. Gaitskell had learned to time his moves cautiously with the lessons of 1960 having 'left their mark.'¹²¹ Therefore, with opinion polls showing a drop in support for entry and with the fate of the negotiations becoming tied to that of the Government,¹²² he alluded to the possibility of calling an election on the issue. Not only would it have been electorally unwise to endorse what was believed to be a major platform of a weak Government, with an election approaching Party activists would also expect him to attack the Government on all issues - including Europe.¹²³

A second variable of Gaitskell's party management concerned the manoeuvring of other senior party men. Jenkins had left the front bench in order to speak in favour of entry, and Wilson's scepticism over entry

119 LPACR 1961 p.227

120 The Observer 10. 12. 1961.

121 Williams P.M. op cit. pp. 706 - 708

122 Lieber R. British politics and European Unity: Parties, Elites and Pressure Groups Berkeley, University of California Press 1970 p.229

123 Robins L. J. op cit. pp. 37-38

was well known, the Shadow Chancellor commenting that Britain was not entitled to sell our 'kinsmen down the river for a problematical and marginal advantage in selling washing machines in Dusseldorf.'¹²⁴ Indeed, having challenged for the leadership by Wilson in 1960, Gaitskell no doubt felt that neither he nor the Party could afford the risk of criticism that another Wilson challenge would imply. So long as Europe maintained a low salience, Gaitskell would be politically secure. There was an indication, however, during 1962 that entry might yet become electorally significant, and he would have felt that, in terms of strengthening his leadership, he was obliged to adopt an equally strong opposing position. Meetings with foreign politicians in the autumn provided the opportunity.

III. Gaitskell's Anti-Market Move

On two occasions in 1962 Gaitskell appeared to be taking a more critical European line. On one occasion he told a meeting in New York that a Europe with high external tariffs might harm the NATO alliance - both in its cohesion and in its relations with the 'Third World'.¹²⁵ The second occasion was a private dinner hosted by Jenkins that also included Jean Monnet, the founder of the original European Coal and Steel Community. While Monnet tried to dispel Gaitskell's doubts, the Labour leader felt that if Monnet could not put up a better case than just saying 'one must have

¹²⁴ 645 H.C. Deb. 3.8.1961 col. 1665

¹²⁵ The Times 19. 2. 1962

faith',¹²⁶ then the balance had to be tilted against entry.¹²⁷ In public, however, he continued giving no commitment, contriving to sound sympathetic to both sides. Once the terms were announced, however, we see this position beginning to change. Gaitskell, angered by the seemingly poor economic arguments being put forward, became convinced that the problem was the Common Agricultural Policy,¹²⁸ arguing that this was protectionism for European agriculture. For him, the protection of the Commonwealth was paramount. He also thought it was unacceptable that the Common Market had been given so much constitutional powers under the Rome Treaty.¹²⁹ He was worried, however, that anti-Marketeers would exploit any criticisms he might make. So while we clearly see his concerns over the terms negotiated, we also see an anxiety to that an aggressive anti Market response might unbalance the unity. The private clash with Monnet also had a public echo in a bitter exchange with the Belgian Prime Minister Henri Spaak,¹³⁰ with Gaitskell rejecting Spaak's federalist views on both constitutional and Commonwealth grounds.¹³¹ In contrast, a meeting with Commonwealth socialist leaders in September 1962 was marked by harmony and responsiveness, with it becoming clear that entry would damage

126 Brivati B. op cit. p.412

127 Jenkins R. A. A Life At The Centre Macmillan London 1994 p.145

128 Williams P.M. op cit. p.714

129 Williams P.M. op cit. pp. 714-717

130 A co signatory of 1958 Rome Treaty.

131 Donnelly D. Gaderene '68 William Kimber London 1968 p.78.

Commonwealth unity itself.¹³² The policy reversal was, therefore, beginning to take shape. In a party political broadcast in September 1962 Gaitskell argued that while membership would make it easier to sell within Common Market states, a loss of any trading advantages would make it harder to sell to either the rest of Europe or Commonwealth.¹³³ He also believed that any future federal super-state would spur 'the end of a thousand years of history.'¹³⁴ He knew he had the opportunity for reconciliation with the Labour Left by manufacturing some sort of anti-Market line. As far as the pro-Marketees were concerned, again the need to create an internal consensus to achieve Party unity seems paramount.¹³⁵ So we can see the concerns of party dynamics, the chance of gaining Labour Left approval,¹³⁶ were of greater importance than the concerns of the national issue of entry itself, as events at the 1962 Conference were to prove.

IV. Discovering A New Unity

Gaitskell's new determination was evident a week before the Conference when, at a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet, he displayed a very tough line with his old allies on the Labour Right. The finalise NEC document,

¹³² The Times 21.9.1962

¹³³ Brivati B. op cit. p.410

¹³⁴ The Railway Review 5.10.1962.

¹³⁵ Williams P.M. op cit. pp. 731-732

¹³⁶ Tribune 14.9.1962.

Labour and the Common Market, argued that if entry allowed Britain to mobilise Europe's economies to promote world peace then the case for entry would be strong, if it weakened Commonwealth trade then the case against entry would be decisive. It concluded that the issue was always a matter of balance.¹³⁷ As Gaitskell prepared for Conference, agnosticism mingled with political calculation: his faith in the Commonwealth and belief in Britain's global role conflicted with both his loyalty to his old Labour Right supporters and an instinct that a British bid would almost certainly fail.¹³⁸ In beginning his address, Gaitskell posed three questions. Was the Common Market an aggressive one? Was it damaging to others? And what exactly was involved in the concept of political union? Apart from the customs aspects, he argued that a fully developed Common Market might mean a federal Europe with national governments being handed over instead to a centralised European Super-State.¹³⁹ This would result, he thought, in Britain being no more than a state in the United States of Europe and also mean the abandonment of the Commonwealth. 'We do not propose to forget Vimy Ridge and Gallipoli.'¹⁴⁰ The speech's effect on the audience was devastating¹⁴¹ and gained an ovation that was unparalleled,¹⁴² with Jay believing it to have been 'an intellectual

137 Beloff Lord op cit. p.68

138 Brivati B. op cit. p.413

139 Gaitskell H. The Challenge of Coexistence Methuen London 1957 pp. 59 - 62.

140 Williams P.M. op cit. p.733-736

141 Tribune 5. 10. 1962

142 LPACR 1962 p.155

massacre.¹⁴³ Michael Foot was delighted to see Labour taking clear opposition to the Tories on a major issue.¹⁴⁴ And when Frank Cousins indicated willingness to finance the printing of the speech, it seemed as if the wounds caused by previous divisions were beginning to heal.¹⁴⁵ It was of great advantage to Gaitskell to end the rift with the Labour movement's most powerful trade unionist.¹⁴⁶

His speech unified private passion and public vision,¹⁴⁷ with Gaitskell mastering his private capacity for emotion and moulding it into a political weapon which 'left his political opponents and friends floundering in his wake'. It was timed perfectly, with its message unifying the party. Labour Right pro-Marketees were not impressed,¹⁴⁸ but were effectively tied to Gaitskell by the prospect of a Labour Government and by threads of loyalty that even the Conference speech could not sever. Unlike those on the Labour Left, they could not threaten Gaitskell with future trouble for in many ways they must have felt their position within the party depended upon his leadership.¹⁴⁹ The speech delighted those who believed a united party could more effectively take on the Tories and silenced those who remained opposed to Gaitskell but had been denied grounds for

143 Jay D. Change and Fortune : A Political Record Hutchinson London 1980 p.286

144 Jones M. Michael Foot Victor Gollancz London 1994 p. 266

145 Pelling H. A Short History of the Labour Party Macmillan London 1978 p.128

146 Williams P. M. op cit. p.738

147 Haseler S. quoted in Brivati B. op cit. p.415

148 Jeffreys K. Anthony Crosland Richard Cohen Books London 1999 p.80-81

continuing the assault. It was also a policy that had popular potential and, if his hunch proved correct, the political cost would be zero as the French were about to reject the British bid anyway.¹⁵⁰ As for Gaitskell himself, following the battles over Clause IV and defence,¹⁵¹ he was determined to avoid the same thing happening again over Europe.

The experience of the leadership in formulating European policy cannot be divorced from experiences in other fields of policy making. The contextual situation of this debate was not one that suddenly materialised, but was made up from a web of shared past experiences.¹⁵² Helped by the fact that Europe was not something he felt passionate about, Gaitskell was able to see the pragmatic benefits of adopting a decidedly anti-Market stance. In this sense Gaitskell's behaviour is completely consistent with the view expressed here, that Labour leaders in opposition see the maintenance of party unity as their first priority. Indeed, after the Conference he urged leading pro-Market union leaders to concentrate instead on pressing the Government to gain better terms for entry. From Gaitskell's viewpoint, the pro-Market's insistence on emphasising improved conditions of entry would weaken their case for rebelling when the debate over the principle of entry finally came. His advice to them

149 Ibid. p.36

150 Brivati B. op cit. p.414

151 Morgan K.O. Hugh Gaitskell And International Affairs in Contemporary Record The Journal of Contemporary British History Vol. 7 Aut. 1993 No.2 Frank Cass London p.319

152 Robins L.J. op cit. p.31

would protect them now but would neutralise them later - both to his advantage. Within the Party as a whole, he exploited the opportunity given by his speech to consolidate its unity and, by consequence, his own leadership position as well.¹⁵³ For the first time he had won the total approval of the 'left wing' constituencies in 'talking their kind of language'. Gaitskell's siding with the Labour Left on a major policy issue established him, in their eyes, as something more than 'a tool of a handful of revisionist intellectuals.'¹⁵⁴ By opposing his own 'natural' constituency, he avoided any fresh divisions that might jeopardise Labour's electoral prospects.¹⁵⁵ Leaving Ellison to conclude that 'By the end of 1962 Labour seemed on the verge of new found unity.'¹⁵⁶

The issue of entry was part of the on-going party political discourse, both inside the Party and between government and opposition. Gaitskell partly accepted the view that it was a matter that transcended party politics, but only partly as it was clearly also a matter on which he could unite the party in opposition to the Conservative Government. Secondly, his approach was at best grudging, and at worst agnostic as the key passage in his Brighton speech was a series of 'ifs': for example, if the Commonwealth could be safeguarded, if the EFTA countries could be brought in and

153 Campbell J. Roy Jenkins A Biography Weidenfeld & Nicholson London 1983 p72

154 Haseler S. op cit. 1969 p.237

155 Williams P.M. op cit. pp. 738-741

156 Ellison N. Egalitarian Thought and Labour Politics : Retreating Visions Routledge London 1994 p.70

implicitly if it could be an inter - governmental organisation. By the same token his objection was based not on the principle of entry but on the particular terms secured. It was, therefore, a political choice, made to unite the party midway through a Parliament against a government that was in trouble and had staked much of its reputation on gaining entry.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, by the end of 1962 Gaitskell's position was apparently strong with the Party well ahead in the polls. A new domestic programme also began to emerge, combining social egalitarianism with planning, and a public relations campaign launched to improve Labour's image among the aspiring classes.¹⁵⁸ There were real hopes, therefore, that a Labour Government under Gaitskell might follow the next election.¹⁵⁹ At 56 he was at the height of his powers. The long and bitter struggles were now over, with many both inside the Party and out, seeing him as a future Prime Minister in waiting.¹⁶⁰ He was not, however, to be the beneficiary of the Party's improving fortunes, dying from a rare blood disease in early 1963.¹⁶¹

157 Brivati B. op cit. p.417

158 Jeffreys K. Retreat from New Jerusalem - British Politics, 1951 - 1964 Macmillan London 1997 p.94

159 Thorpe A. A History of the British Labour Party Macmillan London 1997 p.152

4. Conclusions

After battles over nationalisation and defence, Labour was now able to find unity as 'the Commonwealth' party. Had the Conservative Government's negotiations produced agreement, the party may well have split suffering yet another crisis. Thus Europe acted as a unifying agent, providing it did not develop into an issue demanding a clear choice. From de Gaulle's veto, Gaitskell calculated that the negotiations would fail and his subsequent behaviour can be interpreted as efforts to ensure that this would be the case and that Labour would garner any electoral benefits following from such a failure. He would have been aware that his references to the Atlantic Alliance would have provoked the French and of the significance his remarks would be given. Indeed it is possible to argue Gaitskell made it easier for the Six to oppose the Government's efforts 'as it appeared that half of Britain was solidly against entry.' In this sense, the failed application in 1962 was aided by the actions of Labour. Gaitskell's move from being uncommitted to 'emotional' opposition was in reality a tactical move to win internal party unity. He correctly calculated that his inconsistencies would not catch up with him since the issue was unlikely ever require a clear decision to be made.

160 Minkin L. op cit. pp. 288-289

161 Jeffreys K. The Labour Party Since 1945 Macmillan London 1996p.54

CHAPTER THREE

WILSON AND THE PUSH TOWARDS ENTRY

1. Introduction

Labour's European policy from 1964 to 1970 supported British entry into the Common Market. There was neither any real conversion to the ideal of European federalism, nor any abandonment of a British national identity or of ending the *special relationship* for that matter.¹⁶² The policy consensus only changed when London was forced to think of new ways of correcting its ailing economy. Wilson was now able to move to a position of support without any Cabinet resignations, through avoiding a debate on the principle - thus making it difficult for anti-Marketees to respond. His position also prevented the pro-European Conservative leader, Edward Heath, from exploiting the situation. And if the negotiations did succeed he would then be able to take the full credit. Conversely if they failed he could not then be accused of not trying. In short, he was setting up a situation in which he could not lose.¹⁶³

¹⁶² George S. op cit. p.40

¹⁶³ Ponting C. A Breach of Promise: Labour in Power 1964-1970 Hamilton London 1989 pp.213-214

It is essential to see how Britain's economic position played a part in defining Britain's 'world view'. Wilson gradually became constrained by foreign economic pressure so that by 1966 the imperatives to join became irresistible. Commonwealth trade had not provided the answer; the US seemed less friendly, with the new parliamentary intake more inclined towards a pro European path.¹⁶⁴ So with this in mind, he set off on a path to gain both Cabinet and wider European support. At the same time, he was not prepared to allow this 'new idea' to harm Party unity. He devised, therefore, an alternative avenue should matters not move in the desired direction.

2. The Economic Context

The policy shift towards Europe centred around the held view¹⁶⁵ that answers were needed to cure Britain's economic decline – a fact reinforced by Washington's support for a greater British European involvement. And since Britain relied on US nuclear armoury this was no small fact. By 1960, with economy decline and Commonwealth links weakening,¹⁶⁶ Britain concluded to adopt a European role.¹⁶⁷ Electoral

164 Young J.W. Foreign, Defence and European affairs in Brivati B. & Bale T. New Labour in power: precedents and prospects Routledge London 1997 p.150

165 Schenk C.R. 'Britain and the Common Market' in Coopey R. and Woodward N. (eds.) Britain in the 1970's - The troubled economy UCL Press London 1996 p.192

166 Tomlinson J. Public Policy And The Economy Since 1900 Clarendon Press London 1990 p.243

167 Macmillan H. At The End Of The Day : Memoirs, 1961-1963 Macmillan London 1973 p.22

concerns still dominated Labour thinking at this point. By 1963 failure to enter the Common Market, economy decline, Cabinet sackings and Profumo Affair served to tarnish the image of the Conservative Government.¹⁶⁸ Wilson had also been able to unite a Party that had been deeply divided. with the NEC was conscious not to do anything which would 'undermine or embarrass it'¹⁶⁹ Labour conveyed an image as both modern and united, with Wilson talking 'of the scientific revolution'.¹⁷⁰ On Europe, however, he failed to show any interest in reviving the issue before an election, lest it broke party unity.¹⁷¹ With the breakdown of the negotiations and onset of an election, there seemed no reason to go beyond the five conditions set by Gaitskell.¹⁷² Like his predecessor, he too was not prepared to do anything that might upset this party unity nor those who had just voted into the leadership.¹⁷³ The political adage that 'Oppositions don't win elections, Governments lose them' seems to have been at the forefront of his mind.

168 Jeffreys K. pp. 54-55

169 Minkin L. *ibid* p.293

170 Wilson H. The Relevance of British Socialism Weidenfeld & Nicholson London 1964 pp.41-55

171 Ziegler P. Harold Wilson : The Authorized Life of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1993 p.130

172 Dutton D. *op cit.* p.55

3. The Labour Government 1964 - 1966

From 1964 and 1966 Britain still regarded itself as a potential global actor,¹⁷⁴ Indeed, Wilson was strongly critical of those who 'warned that Britain's independent role on the world stage was "about played out."¹⁷⁵ Washington was not only eager to maintain the value of sterling as the first line of defence for the dollar; it also wanted Britain to maintain military commitments east of Suez. During 1965 Britain agreed to avoid devaluation and maintain forces east of Suez in return for financial support for sterling. This was done probably for two reasons. First, with only a small majority Wilson had to nurse the Government along until it seemed electorally opportune to seek a second election. Loans bought him that time.¹⁷⁶ He also felt vulnerable to the jibes that through a policy of devaluing the Government could not be trusted to maintain Britain's global position.¹⁷⁷ Pursuing such a policy before an election, he thought, would be a disaster. Second, there were sound economic reasons for not devaluing. Sterling's position as a reserve currency meant that the US did not want devaluation as this would mean making the dollar a front line currency, with the Bank of England believing that it could lead to a decline

173 Donnelly D. Gadarewne'68 The Crimes, Follies and Misfortunes of the Wilson Government William Kimber London 1968 p.83

174 Crossman R.H.S. 'British Labor Looks at Europe' op cit. p. 742.

175 Stone L. 'Britain and the World' in McKie & Cook C (eds.) The Decade of Disillusion: British Politics in the Sixties Macmillan London 1972 p.123

176 Wrigley C. Now You see it, now you don't: Harold Wilson and Labour's Foreign Policy 1964-1970 in Coopey R., Fielding S & Tiratsoo N. Pinter The Wilson Governments 1964-1970 London 1993 p.130

177 Tomlinson J. op cit. p.243

in world trade.¹⁷⁸ This meant that there were both pressures and the means by which not to devalue. Instead Wilson believed that sterling's overvaluation could be corrected by both increased productivity and effective prices and incomes policy. These aims were at the heart of the 1965 National Plan, whose aim was to increase national output by a quarter between 1964 and 1970. However, the 'July measures' seemed to undermine the credibility of these targets;¹⁷⁹ while at the same time reducing plan related government expenditure.¹⁸⁰ All this only served to further disillusion Wilson about the role of the Commonwealth.¹⁸¹ So we now begin to see the first signs of the need to look towards Europe for economy prosperity.

While a number of factors began to push Britain towards Europe in the same way as in 1961, the balance of the argument had shifted in two respects. Whereas the Conservative Government's had tried to ensure British exports had an equal footing in continental markets, by the mid 1960s European Governments realised that high technology industries were going to depend on large markets and also large injections of government funds.¹⁸² With no single government being able to afford to

178 Graham A. & Beckerman W. 'Introduction: Economic performance and the foreign balance' in Beckerman W (ed) The Labour Government's Economic Record 1964 -1970 Duckworth London 1972 pp.13-14

179 Opie R. Economic planning and growth in Beckerman op cit .p.171

180 Woodward N. Labour's economic performance 1964 - 10970 in Coopey R. Fielding S. & Tiratsoo N op cit. p.86

181 Lapping B. The Labour Government 1964-1970 Penguin Books London 1970 p.97

182 Cairncross A. The Wilson Years A Treasury Diary 1964-1969 Historians Press London 1997 p.174

finance the projects, Europe would have to work more closely together¹⁸³ if high technology was not to become a US monopoly. Second, with the Commonwealth in disarray and the US administration pre-occupied in Vietnam, Britain could gain greatly by being associated with Europe.¹⁸⁴ During the 1966 Election campaign Wilson began to argue that Britain should make another bid for entry provided British and Commonwealth interests were safeguarded'.¹⁸⁵ By posing as a 'sceptic' during the campaign in contrast to the more enthusiastic Heath,¹⁸⁶ he was able to satisfy both the pro-and anti-Market lobbies. His position seems more designed for internal consumption than for the electorate. As Wilson said 'Given a fair wind we will negotiate our way, head held high, not crawl in.'¹⁸⁷ By making a *'fair wind'* a condition, he was satisfying the anti-Marketeers and by doubting the Conservatives commitment during the first bid he was keeping the pro-Marketeers happy as well.¹⁸⁸ So at this stage Labour's position was no different from that of Gaitskell's - the grounds for entry were equally balanced and the right terms would finally tilt the scales. Like Gaitskell before him, he was not suddenly going to opt for one position lest it upset internal party unity. Just as Gaitskell had shadowed the moves of Macmillan, so Wilson scrutinised Heath's actions for any attempt to gain partisan advantage. Two central issues, British

183 Hart N. & Wistrich E. 'Europe: out of the impasse' Fabian Tract 398 Fabian Society London 1969 p.3

184 Camps M. op cit. pp. 158 -161

185 Shlaim A., Jones P. & Sainsbury K. British Foreign Secretaries Since 1945 Newton Abbott David Charles 1977 p.196

186 Ponting C. op cit. p.206

187 Wilson H. The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record Weidenfeld London 1971 p.283

moves towards Europe and the need for Labour to maintain internal unity continued to work alongside each other. In the event, Labour was returned to office with a large majority, a Cabinet that was now more strongly pro-Market than before¹⁸⁹ and thus in a position to carry out its commitments without too much worry. The central question was whether Labour would gain Common Market entry.

4. The Labour Government 1966 - 1970

Shortly after the Election, a Cabinet working party was set up to re-examine the whole issue of entry. This momentum increased following the July economic crisis. Brown failed to mobilise support for devaluation with a new de-flationary package imposed instead, with Wilson seemingly trapped into putting the status symbols of world power above those of economic regeneration. During 1967 his position further shifted, as not only was unemployment at its highest for a generation, the cost of further de-flationary measures seemed almost unbearable. So by finally devaluing the Government hoped to eliminate the need for further deflationary measures.¹⁹⁰ Treasury pressure, though, eventually forced

188 Butler D. & King A. The 1966 General Election Macmillan London pp. 112-113

189 Foot. P. The Politics of Harold Wilson Penguin London 1968 p. 231

190 Ponting C. op cit. p.295

the withdrawal from east of Suez.¹⁹¹ This trimming heralded a more fundamental reorientation of priorities towards Europe.¹⁹² Britain now needed new economic and international connections to prevent it appearing ever less the US's partner and more its 'European factotum.' Hopes of increased Commonwealth trade had also proved unrealistic; ideas about developing Commonwealth political links had been frustrated by the African-attitudes over British policy in Rhodesia.¹⁹³ Bitterness over Rhodesia helped diminish Britain's enthusiasm for the Commonwealth.¹⁹⁴ Yet if Britain could no longer exert influence in the Commonwealth, then the historic role as the main US ally was in jeopardy. The whole crisis was not lost on Wilson. There could be no question of coming down on one side of the argument and dismissing the other. While his own reservations after the 'July crisis' were no longer so strong,¹⁹⁵ he still had to take into account sharp internal divisions. He continued, therefore, to remain cautious at a weekend Cabinet meeting in October 1966 by suggesting a series of visits to the six member states. While Wilson made every effort to suggest he was anti-Market Barbara Castle was certain that he had already 'sold out' to the supporters of entry.¹⁹⁶ Yet while the pro-Marketees could count this as a step forward, they were still suspicious that the whole exercise was just some 'Wilsonian' ploy to show

191 Blackaby F.T. (ed.) British Economic Policy 1960 -1974 CUP Cambridge 1978 pp. 44-52

192 Donnelly D. op cit. P.87

193 Denman R. op cit. p.227

194 Pimlott B. op cit. p.434-435

195 Pimlott B. op cit. p.435

that entry could not succeed.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, in November 1967, Wilson and Brown did embark on their tour of the European capitals.

While both the Italians and Germans were supportive,¹⁹⁸ the French seemed disturbed by Wilson's exposition of Britain's problems¹⁹⁹ regarding the US still as 'Britain's place'. Yet with de Gaulle still sufficiently non-committal,²⁰⁰ there can be no doubt that Wilson returned to London a more committed advocate of entry.²⁰¹ And in obtaining Cabinet support in April, he succeeded in guiding discussions onto matters of the detail which, as Castle noted, was 'more effective than anything else in making principles look less important.'²⁰² Anti-Marketeters like Castle and Healey were convinced that whatever the British tried to do, France would certainly veto any application.²⁰³ Wilson's main problem, however, was to get agreement without any resignations. Convinced that a delay would exacerbate existing differences, he wanted a swift decision to be taken after the latest round' of world trade talks. The success of his tactics can be shown when the policy was unanimously supported.²⁰⁴ Wilson clearly

196 Castle B. The Castle Diaries 1964 - 1970 Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1984 p.91

197 Pimlott B. op cit. p.438

198 Wilson H. op cit. p.368

199 Donnelly D. op cit. p.90

200 Wilson H. op cit. pp. 430 - 437

201 Ziegler P. op cit. p. 333

202 Castle B. op cit. p.215

203 Crossman R.H.S. op cit. p.285

204 Ziegler P. op cit. p.334 - 335

wished to explore the same possibilities as Macmillan had done before, whilst also avoiding any impression of bi-partisanship. When the issue reached Parliament, Brown reiterated the themes surrounding Britain's position in the world whilst promising to safeguard Commonwealth interests²⁰⁵. A three-line whip was imposed for the final vote with the Government winning a majority of 426. How far then can this be understood in terms of the variables of party management?

Labour's approach to Europe was marked by a number of policies, each with an ambiguity that represented a deliberate effort to avoid specific goals. Its policy consisted of negative, neutral and positive strands interwoven into one ambiguous approach that served to absorb tensions and thus minimise conflict. While in opposition it had plans to remedy Britain's misfortunes at home and abroad, in office the Commonwealth alternative failed to develop and a serious balance of payments' problem had frustrated the National Plan. Labour was experiencing the realities of Government, with entry providing an alternative role for Britain both politically and economically. When faced with a situation demanding decisions, the Government defined the national interest and acted in a totally different manner to its time in opposition. To a greater extent Labour was successful in disguising new policy goals by presenting them to the party as mere reinterpretations of orthodox goals. Its success could

205 Gordon Walker P. Political Diaries 1932-1971 Historians Press London 1991 pp. 312-313.

be explained by the fact that leading anti-Marketeters were inside the Cabinet and so were in a difficult position to openly criticise policy.²⁰⁶ With growing discontent on defence, the Incomes Policy and Vietnam War, Wilson was also concerned at presenting yet another controversial issue - the Common Market - on an already volatile PLP.

Wilson using two devices subdued both the Cabinet and PLP. The first involved the re-imposition of stricter discipline. In March 1967 Wilson delivered his 'dog licence' speech to the party, giving a warning to potential rebels that-"every dog is allowed one bite, but if biting becomes too much a habit its owner tends to have doubts about renewing the licence when it comes up"²⁰⁷ The second device concerned the way in which the actual Cabinet decision taken. No collective decision was ever taken on entry,²⁰⁸ with all shades of opinion being allowed to believe that their view held sway. Even so, Wilson still knew that the key to entry lay in Paris. When he returned to Paris in June he found de Gaulle in a gloomy mood, pre-occupied by UK subservience to Washington and convinced that an enlarged Europe would follow the same course. So while Wilson assured the Cabinet upon his return that his visit had made entry more likely,²⁰⁹ some did not find his arguments convincing.²¹⁰ Their scepticism

206 Cook C. & Steed A. Post-War Britain Penguin London 1979 p.236

207 Robins L.J. op cit. p.63

208 The New Statesman 12.2.1971

209 Ziegler P. op cit. pp. 335 - 336

was justified as in November 1967 when de Gaulle vetoed British entry. As Stewart noted 'If applying to join the Common Market was a game of snakes and ladders, Britain was once again back at square one.'²¹¹ It now seemed clear that there would be no real progress until de Gaulle left office.²¹² Though Wilson had chosen temporarily to espouse the Common Market, he did not feel himself committed to any such liaison if the balance of advantage suddenly switched. So while this decision was a set back, there were also some minor political benefits to be gleaned. The pro-Marketeers were satisfied that Wilson had shown himself to be serious about entry, while the anti- Marketeers felt their position had been vindicated.²¹³

Three basic European policies, therefore, emerged from the tour of Europe, as well as Cabinet and PLP discussions. There was disagreement not only over matters of degree and emphasis but also over policy direction, since two of the policies were seemingly contradictory. The first strand took the form of positive support for entry; the second of restrained support and the final strand opposed entry outright. They only subscribed to the application because they intended to reject whatever terms became available, believing that the Cabinet, PLP and electorate

210 Crossman R.H.S. The Diaries of a Cabinet minister Vol.2 Jonathan Cape London 1976 p.392.

211 Stewart M. The Jekyll and Hyde Years Politics And Economic Policy Since 1964 Dent London 1977 p.78

212 Ziegler P. op cit. p.336

213 Pimlott B. op cit. p.442

would arrive at the same view too. These contradictions did not open up into conflict during 1966 and 1967, as entry looked increasingly unlikely. However, with De Gaulle retirement in 1969, the way now seemed clear for a fresh British bid.²¹⁴ De Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, gave early indications that he was not against British entry in principle. Indeed, at a Common Market summit conference in 1969 it was agreed that negotiations for British entry should begin by 1970.²¹⁵ Wilson still concluded that entry should be supported so long as 'acceptable terms for Britain'²¹⁶ could be produced. Publicly he continued to contrast his own strategy of negotiation only on the right terms, with Heath's supposed readiness to enter on any terms.²¹⁷ While Labour's 1970 election manifesto emphasised that British and Commonwealth interests needed to be safeguarded, it did assert that the forthcoming negotiations would be 'pressed with determination.'²¹⁸ Again electoral dynamics were in play. By not proposing any radical ideas, he was unlikely to offend a sufficiently large electoral base and thus make the issue of Common Market entry a largely non-partisan matter.

214 Lapping B. op cit. p.104

215 King A. op cit. p.17

216 Wilson H. op cit. p.763

217 Johnman L. The Conservative Party in Opposition 1964 - 1970 in The Wilson Governments 1964 - 1970 op cit. pp. 184 -203

218 'Now Britain's strong let's make it great to live in' Labour Party London 1970 p.28

7. Conclusions

The European policy consensus until the late 1950s consisted of Britain viewing itself as a world power, seeing its interests lying with the US, the Commonwealth and to a lesser extent with Europe. However, as Britain moved into the 1960s, the declining position of the economy necessitated a policy shift, with both the Commonwealth and US seemingly only exacerbating the situation. Britain now looked to the Common Market as the solution to its economic problems. In assessing the relationship of the two Wilson Governments we need to clarify a number of points. First, we have shown that it was able to achieve a certain degree of internal unity over entry. Perhaps then the issue of maintaining party unity is a question of balance? When in Opposition the balance between the policy and party management shifts towards the latter because it will lack of the constraints of being in office and will have more flexibility in how it conducts policy. In Government, however, the balance shifts the other way as the Government party has a responsibility to initiate legislation. Yet the issue of party unity is still pertinent, as a Government that is disunited will find it much harder to implement its policy commitments than an administration that has some degree of unity. However, as we shall see, from the early 1970's there began a growing disenchantment about the manner in which

Labour seemed to be abusing the party machinery - most notable that of annual conference.²¹⁹

While Wilson moved from criticism of Macmillan's bid, to masterminding a rush to apply, it is a little more difficult to pin down his motives for doing so. Even some Cabinet members seemed unable to decipher what they were. However, Wilson's method of handling the issue suggests that he did genuinely want to obtain entry. And perhaps it was a measure of his political skills that he was able to obtain such a decision without a single Cabinet resignation. By only ever addressing issues of detail, he was able to guide the Cabinet, PLP and wider Party along a direction he knew they would find difficulty from reversing from.²²⁰ Aware that the French would use their veto, why then why did he press so strongly for entry? While the actual process of negotiation gave him plenty of opportunities to indulge in personal diplomacy with its attendant publicity, the main reason was that he realised there was nothing to lose from making an application. As with previous governments, he too needed a policy that might provide a new opportunity to break out from successive economic policy failures. He also knew that Heath was strongly pro-European and would want to make this an issue in a General Election. Wilson's tactics served a dual purpose - if negotiations succeeded he could claim the credit, if they failed

219 Minkin L. *ibid* pp.293-314

220 *ibid*. p. 130

no one could accuse him of not trying.²²¹ Although the negotiations did fail, he achieved his object of making the EEC a largely bi-partisan issue and not a matter of controversy in 1970.²²²

221 Denman R. op cit. p. 232

222 Ponting C. op cit. pp. 213-214

WILSON AND THE NEEDS OF OPPOSITION

1. Introduction

The Labour Party in 1970 was both in Parliament and in the constituencies committed to Common Market entry. Had Wilson won the 1970 election he would have pursued entry, with the pro-Marketeer, Roy Jenkins, leading negotiations.²²³ However, Labour unexpectedly lost the election and Wilson, while in favour of entry, needed to discredit Heath's contribution to the European debate. He wanted Britain to enter Europe with a united Party accepting the decision. If this did not work then he wanted Britain out of Europe but with a united Party. Wilson pursued this strategy with skill and tenacity,²²⁴ staving off the Party's 'own bankruptcy and decline.'²²⁵ However, between June 1970 and 1972 the Party was, while never rejecting entry outright, still opposed to entry.²²⁶ With factions competing for recognition, Wilson strove to forge unity, through the

223 Pimlott B. op cit. p. 581

224 Ziegler P. op cit. p. 381

225 Nairn T. New Left Review No.75 Sept - Oct 1972 p. 119

226 King A. op cit. p. 40

combination of a compromise policy, disciplinary measures, voting pact, and finally a referendum. In contrast to the 1960s, Britain was now in a stronger economic position to pursue entry with sterling having improved since devaluation. Heath's 'Europeanism' had distanced Britain from the US, with few seeing the Commonwealth as a barrier to entry. Heath introduced his White Paper, citing arguments used in 1967, that entry would improve economic performance with no loss of sovereignty.²²⁷ Yet with sixty Conservative anti-Marketees, Heath was concerned that Labour could defeat his plans.²²⁸ We need to show how Wilson retreated from a more pro-Market position whilst still attempting to placate the anti-Market lobby. We will see how his efforts came to nothing - a major contributing factor being Labour's move to the left. We see how the European debate became a 'pawn' in the battles between the Labour Left and the Labour Right, with Wilson proposing a referendum in order to ease party tensions. We conclude that the fact Labour had not terminally split was due to his efforts in party management.

227 Young J.W ibid p. 150

228 Young J.W. Op cit. pp. 107-115

2. Labour And The Common Market

1) The Four Different Strands

The gulf within Labour over Europe became so wide that it looked as if permanent damage would accrue with opinion splitting four ways. First, there were the pro-Marketeers that were prepared to vote for entry almost on any terms. By this time pro-Market MPs were almost entirely on the Labour Right under the leadership of Roy Jenkins. The group was bound together by agreement over a Keynesian agenda as well as support for Common Market entry.²²⁹ The group furthest removed from the pro-Marketeers was the Labour Left, organised in Parliament by the Tribune Group. Their philosophy was state socialism with their strength lying largely in the trade unions. However, if the Labour Left were all anti-Marketeers, by no means all anti-Marketeers were of the Labour Left. So a third group emerged, with their presence (they accounted for over half the PLP and probably over half the Party as a whole) affording the Labour Left the opportunity to claim that the issue of Europe was not just another Left versus Right struggle. A fourth group was made up of MPs who may have been either mildly in favour or, mildly against entry, but were chiefly concerned with maintaining party unity.²³⁰ These were most prone to follow a pro-Market lead of a Labour Government, most prone to be hostile if in Opposition. They were to be crucial in holding the balance of

²²⁹ Ellison N. op cit. p. 188 – 189

power in the Party, and most notable among its members were Wilson and Callaghan.

However, it's one thing to identify these groups, but its quite another to explain why they held the views they did. Left leaning anti-Marketeers, saw the Six as a 'capitalist club.' Labour Right anti-Marketeers were more swayed on constitutional issues, believing the thought of foreigners making decisions affecting Britain was abhorrent. They often had close ties with the Commonwealth and the US. For many, 'Mannheim and Milan were much further away than Delhi or even Des Moines.'²³¹ So while anti-Marketeers resisted change, pro-Marketeers not surprisingly accepted it. They supported the mixed economy, the division of Europe, and the fact of Britain's economic decline, believing that outside Europe this decline would only accelerate. The divisions were thus not just divisions over policy, they were also divisions over ideology. It was not certain whether Labour could survive these divisions.²³²

II) The Beginnings Of Wilson's Repositioning

Soon after Parliament reassembled following the 1970 General Election, the trade unions began to take a much clearer anti-Market line. With

230 Crosland S. Tony Crosland Jonathan Cape London 1982 p. 218

231 King A. op cit. p.52

Annual Conference shortly to meet, the NEC felt that the most it could realistically obtain was a reaffirmation of the cautious pro-Market decision taken the previous year. And while they narrowly won the vote, anti-Marketeers soon began to recover further ground.²³³ The Party was, therefore, heading for a difficult summer.²³⁴ With this trend continuing, it was reasonable to expect that Labour would take a strongly anti-Market line. In such an event the Shadow Cabinet would be in a much-weakened position, not only because of the election defeat and the but because the power of Conference had increased substantially as well.²³⁵ Wilson was not a pro-European by instinct,²³⁶ deeply regretting Britain's decline as a world power. 'He was not at all happy to have climbed to the top of the greasy pole only to discover that it no longer afforded a view as it once had done.'²³⁷ While he prided himself on being able to construct compromises, Europe was not proving to be an issue upon which a suitable solution to could be found. He was also facing growing internal disillusionment over Labour's record in office,²³⁸ as well as mounting PLP criticism over his own Commons performance. The difficulty for him was that it seemed increasingly likely that Heath was going to be offered terms

232 Ibid. pp. 33 - 40

233 Bilski R. op cit. p. 316

234 A.W. Benn op cit³⁴⁵

235 Bilski R. op cit. p. 316

236 Donoghue B. Harold Wilson and the renegotiation of the EEC terms of membership, 1974-1975: a witness account. in Brivati B. & Jones H. (eds.) From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe since 1945 Leicester University Press London 1993 p. 204

237 King A. op cit. p. 49

238 Thorpe A. op cit. p. 180

acceptable to the Tories, but which the Party looked like dividing on. The question was how could Wilson resolve this dilemma? And though Benn's idea of a referendum was scotched as early as November 1970, it was not forgotten. With Labour becoming deeply divided, the idea was later to gain momentum.²³⁹

If a split occurs when a party is in opposition it is usually less dangerous. A split can be avoided when the parties 'agree to disagree' and a balance exists between competing factions. If one emerges as victorious the leaders of the other groups may have to resign with party unity thereby threatened. In order not to drive the pro-Marketeers into a corner and force a split, the NEC decided that a forthcoming Special Conference on the subject should offer no opinion. The decision also shows that although the Conference's resolutions were not binding on the PLP, the Conference was nevertheless strong enough to make Wilson anxious to avoid a Conference decision.²⁴⁰ The debate was a vigorous one with pro-Marketeers reminding delegates that the economic failings necessitated British entry²⁴¹ with anti Marketeers suggesting that the terms were appalling.²⁴² Though wanted the debate to continue until Annual Conference, Wilson was soon to make up his mind with the NEC passing

239 Pimlott B. op cit. p. 581

240 Bilski R. op cit. p. 318-319

241 Mackintosh JP. 'The Sovereign Issue' Tribune 9.7.1971

242 Whitehead P. The Writing On The Wall: Britain in the Seventies Michael Joseph London 1986 p. 66

a resolution invited the PLP 'to unite wholeheartedly in voting against the government's policy.'²⁴³ And with Annual Conference overwhelmingly passing this recommendation, the issue of party unity now came into the open. On the night of the result many pro-Marketeters let it be known that they would vote with Heath in the Commons. It was in such circumstances that Wilson gave his annual address, indicating that a rebellion would be tolerated providing all dissenters rejoined the fold to vote on all consequential legislation. He could not imagine a single Labour MP who will not be in the lobbies against the Government.²⁴⁴ In other words, a pact seemed to be on offer. What factors lay behind this?

Wilson had to ensure that no one could usurp his position. Not only would such a posture help him achieve this, it might also appeal successfully to both lobbies in exercising a level of restraint. While under different circumstances, he might have been tempted to join the anti-Market lobby, that option was not open. Had he done so he would have been as having changed his view for no other purpose than to save his leadership. His political credibility would have been destroyed. He also knew that, however much he disliked the prospect, Britain's future lay within Europe. And with pro-Marketeters including some of the Party's most respected politicians, he recognised that if they were somehow driven out, Labour's electoral standing would have declined. So in attempting to ensure the

243 Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 308

pro-Marketeers plight was not rendered intolerable, his appeals for unity, while including an anti-Market theme, were also a restatement of a positive European commitment. There can be little doubt that in private he warned the anti -Marketeers of what the consequences would be if they tried to force the Party into opposing entry in principle.²⁴⁵ He was playing for time. If matters were forced to a head, the anti-Marketeers would win with Labour most probably splitting. Matters had to remain hypothetical. Out of office the task was not government decisions but forms of words - conference resolutions and NEC statements. And he was not going to take mere words seriously. After all, it might be years before a Labour Government was returned to power. Why tear the Party apart now over something it certainly could not control?

III) Labour Disunity And The Move To The Left

By offering a hint of a pact,²⁴⁶ Wilson was presenting pro-Marketeers with a dilemma. How could self-proclaimed 'men of principle' vote against measures without which entry would be impossible? Yet how could they vote for them repeatedly without isolating themselves from the party? However, Jenkins continuing to repeat that the terms were satisfactory largely halted this tactic. In response, anti-Marketeers challenged Jenkins

244 LPACR 1971 p.167

245 Butler D. and Kitzinger U. The 1975 Referendum MacMillan London 2nd Edn 1996 pp. 12 - 13

246 Whitehead P. op cit. p. 67.

to be honest 'enough to admit that, as far as they are concerned, the terms have never mattered.'²⁴⁷ In a sense, the attack revealed the inherent contradiction in Labour's approach to Europe: when the time arrived for a decision the pro-Marketeers were as disposed towards finding the terms acceptable as the anti-Marketeers were disposed towards viewing them unacceptable.

With Heath experiencing internal problems of his own, he astutely offered his Party a free vote, calculating that Labour pro-Marketeers would cancel out any Tory defections and thus provide him with a majority. What would Wilson do? Would he also offer a free vote? This was important to the 'Jenkinsites', who would be in danger of victimisation if they defied the whip, than if a whip was not imposed. While Wilson had signalled that if the Party opposed entry, the pro-Marketeers would be able to vote for it, party opinion in the country was now making this option less attractive. Jenkins claims Wilson deliberately broke the 'pact' by calling a three-line whip, and by holding a Shadow Cabinet meeting at such short notice that Jenkins could not attend to register his dissent.²⁴⁸ So a whip was imposed with sixty-nine Labour MPs joining the Government, producing a Commons majority of 112.²⁴⁹ The Labour rebellion was of a scale unprecedented in its history. Jenkins' influence proved to be crucial.

247 The Guardian 17. 9. 1971

248 Jenkins R.J. op cit p.329

249 Pimlott B. op cit. pp. 589-599

There is little doubt that most pro-Market Labour MPs would have abstained on his instruction. Indeed, Crosland argued that a stand could be made without voting with Heath, believing that in the long run it might damage both Jenkins and the Party. Jenkins believed that was nothing to the damage Crosland was doing to himself by his 'indecisiveness'²⁵⁰ They could rebel once, however, but they could not safely go on rebelling. In the passage of the consequential legislation, most rebels joined the opposition lobbies. In defying the whip, however, many 'rebels' had put their careers at risk - the Labour MP, Dick Taverne, was ousted by his CLP as a direct result. So the rebellion could have been even greater but for the deterrent of deselection,²⁵¹ for in the loyalist 'culture of the Labour Party there could be few graver misdemeanours.'²⁵² Disunity could not be disguised.²⁵³ The Labour Left complained about the rebels' behaviour,²⁵⁴ with Castle talking of 'this treachery causing immense bitterness.'²⁵⁵ So perhaps the word 'rebellion' is too weak a word for what took place during the vote. This was tantamount to 'civil war'. Wilson's 'pact' had clearly failed, with the Party continuing to adopt policies that it had previously striven to avoid. This slide from Europe considerably embarrassed Wilson who was at pains to claim that he had not shifted his position. He devoted five minutes of his speech to the 1971 Special Conference in refuting the

250 Crosland S. op cit. p. 221

251 Kitzinger U. 'An anatomy of rebellion' New Society 4.5.1972 Vol. 20 No. 501 p. 232-233

252 Desai R. op cit. p. 145

253 Byrd P. op cit. p. 473

254 Shaw E. op cit. p. 167

charge that the Party had been inconsistent on Europe.²⁵⁶ Why then was there an anti-Market shift?

A large question mark evidently hangs over how precipitous Labour's shift from Europe really was. There had always been a great deal of opposition to Europe. Indeed it was significant that the 1967 Conference, while endorsing the Labour Government's European initiative, also cast more than 2,500, 000 votes for a motion which, had it been passed, would have sought to impose on the Government a quite intolerable anti-market position.²⁵⁷ Wilson's success in 'carrying his Party for Europe' in 1967 owed much to the fact that Labour was in power and that entry was still hypothetical. De Gaulle was still in power and negotiations had not yet begun. A Labour MP in 1967 could quite consistently vote in favour of an application being made, while at the same time reserve his position with regard to the final outcome. By late 1971, however, all that had changed. Labour was in Opposition and the terms of the Treaty were now known. Moreover, the Heath Government was proving more unpopular than any previous Conservative administration since the 1930s, introducing measures that deeply offended the sensibilities of Labour supporters. It was going to be extremely difficult for the Labour movement, opposed to Heath on everything else, to suddenly offer support Europe. Pro-

255 Benn A.W. Diaries 1968 - 1972 op cit. p. 381

256 LPACR pp. 354 - 355

257 *ibid* p. 269

Marketeers were placed in a particularly difficult position because if they supported Heath they would be regarded as traitors. Their position was made no easier by the fact that Heath had a small majority and so could face defeat at any time – thus exposing the ‘treachery’ and the part played by the ‘Jenkinsites’. Small wonder that pro-Market sentiment lost ground in the Party. Indeed, their position had reached a crisis, with many wanting to widen the issue to the future of social democracy against what they saw as the growing tide of leftism.²⁵⁸

Disillusionment with the Wilson Governments,²⁵⁹ especially over the incomes policy and ‘In Place of Strife’ was a main cause of rank and file militancy.²⁶⁰ By the early 1970’s this had become even more acute.²⁶¹ The slowdown in economic growth in the late 1960s had resulted in a new kind of union militancy which increasingly by-passed the national union leadership to arrive at higher wage settlements while at the same time change union voting patterns at annual, conference. It is significant that this period also saw the leaderships of two of the largest unions, the TGWU and AUEW, now being led by recognised members of the left.²⁶²

258 Desai R. op cit. p. 151

259 Kogan D. & Kogan M. The Battle for the Labour Party Fontana London 1982 p. 19

260 Thorpe A. op cit. p. 181

261 Smith M. Neil Kinnock and the Modernisation of the Labour Party pp.556 to 557 in Contemporary Record The Journal of Contemporary British History Vol.8 Winter 1994 No.3 Frank Cass London

262 Williams P.M. The Labour Party: The Rise of The Left in Change in British Politics Berrington H. (ed) Frank Cass London 1984 p.31

It also changed the basis of the relationship between the working class and the Labour Party. Attachment to Labour was no longer based on traditional working class culture, but on a rational calculation of their collective interests. One journal argued that a successful partnership between the Party and the unions would only be possible if there were 'no more serious ruptures' between them.²⁶³ The feeling that the poor performances of many of those in the last Labour Cabinet²⁶⁴ as well as the Conservatives apparent shift towards 'a more market based doctrine'²⁶⁵ showed how a greater union say in party policy-making was now needed.

In stark contrast to the past, Conference decisions after the 1970 defeat now had a more visible impact on party policy,²⁶⁶ Policy committees were up graded,²⁶⁷ with the dominant impulse being leftward, both in terms of policy terms,²⁶⁸ and in terms of ensuring that in future elections the leadership would be bound to policies reflecting the concerns of ordinary members.²⁶⁹ Only on this basis could their compliance in any incomes policy be secured by a future Labour Government. Labour's Programme for Britain: 1972 signalled the erosion of the Labour Right's 'hegemony

263 Tribune 28.5.1971

264 Minkin L. *ibid* p. 336

265 Seyd P. The Rise & Fall Of The Labour Left MacMillan London 1987 p. 21

266 Pimlott B. *op cit.* p. 574 See E. Heffer The Political Quarterly Vol. 43 No. 4 Oct-Dec. 1972 p. 381

267 Hatfield M. The House the Left Built: Inside Labour Policy Making 1970-1975 Victor Gollancz London 1978 pp. 41-42

268 Jones T. Remaking the Labour Party - From Gaitskell to Blair Routledge London 1996 p.88

269 Desai R. *op cit.* pp. 131 -136 pp. 131 - 136

over the formulation of party policy.²⁷⁰ The policy-making process was now more politicised, reflecting the shifting balance of power.²⁷¹ With pro-Marketeers now looking ideologically out of place. The old Labour Left from the NEC, was represented by Bevanites like Mikardo and Hart whose status and credibility in the policy sub-committees was enhanced in the new left-wing climate. From the PLP came MPs associated with the Labour Left like Castle, Foot and the Labour Left's most celebrated figure - Tony Benn who believed that the policies of the last Government had proved a failure.²⁷² The once youthful technocrat and pro-European,²⁷³ of the first Wilson era, was 'now a born again socialist radicalised by his experience of workers in struggle.'²⁷⁴ So while it would be incorrect to say that they were now the dominant players in the party structures²⁷⁵ the balance had inextricably been turned.

Doctrinal disagreement exacerbated by personal rivalry between the leading figures of the post Gaitskell generation, Jenkins and Crosland,²⁷⁶ ensured that, instead of focusing efforts on refashioning Keynesian socialism,²⁷⁷ the Labour Right remained in 'total disarray' until the late

270 Hatfield M. op cit. p. 17

271 Desai R. op cit. p. 153

272 Williams P. op cit. P.39

273 Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 384

274 Whitehead P. 'The Labour Government 1974 - 79 ' in Hennessy P. & Seldon A. (eds) op cit. p. 243

275 Minkin L. ibid p. 335

276 Jeffreys K. Anthony Crosland op cit p.153

277 Ellison N. op cit. pp. 187 - 188

1970's.²⁷⁸ Europe had reinforced the personal and intellectual divisions between both Jenkins and Crosland that had developed during the 1960's.²⁷⁹ Jenkins felt Crosland's to be 'less than firm' on Europe,²⁸⁰ with Crosland irritated by attempts to suggest his attitudes were to do with opportunism than anxiety about party unity - he had abstained on the October vote. This had not endeared him to pro-Marketeters, and his decision to stand for Deputy leader resulted in the Jenkinsites voting for Short and so ensuring his defeat.

And efforts to repair the rift between the two men proved to no avail²⁸¹ as Jenkins' resignation as Deputy Leader over the Party's decision to hold a referendum prove terminal for hopes of revitalising the Labour Right. It meant that Jenkins was cut off from policy-making at a time when the 'Bennites' were consolidating their position. It was partly the result of the Party's move to the Left and partly Labour's concentration on the issue of Europe that resulted in the Labour Right gaining little ground.²⁸² Jenkins resignation also encouraged his allies to follow suit - so collectively depriving them of direct influence as well. The Labour Right pressure group 'Campaign for Labour Victory' became increasingly divided over its

278 Williams P. op cit p.33

279 Crosland S. p. 187

280 Jenkins R.A. op cit. p. 318

281 Ellison N. op cit. pp. 191 - 192

282 Ellison N. op cit. p. 190

aims, programme and leadership.²⁸³ The general lack of organisational work was widespread. Indeed another Labour Right ginger group, the Campaign for Democratic Socialism, was unable to sustain an active base in the constituencies that could have counterbalanced any leftward rise.²⁸⁴ Right up to the late 1970's their inability to tackle this issue only served to exacerbate the problem. This fragmentation meant the Labour Left was able to make the running in a way that had not been possible before. And we need to remember that the Party's management style also allowed for a much more lenient approach to be taken to left leaning ginger groups that had previously been proscribed. The left could now call upon new sections in future political battles.²⁸⁵ Labour's slide from Europe was thus part of a slide towards more the left and from which the Labour Right did not recover for over a decade.²⁸⁶ Some doubted whether Labour could win an election in such a position.²⁸⁷

By failing to give a strong enough lead, Wilson was now saddled with a policy in which he had little faith and which permitted Labour Left activities to go unchecked. Could he have prevented any slide from Europe if he had really wanted to? It is just possible that he could have. But it is

283 Daly G. The Campaign for Labour Victory and the Origins of the SDP in Contemporary Record – The Journal of Contemporary British History Vol. 7 Autumn 1993 No. 2 Frank Cass London p.282

284 Brivati B. The Campaign for Democratic Socialism 1960-1964 in Contemporary Record op cit. p.365

285 Shaw E. Discipline And Discord In The Labour Party MUP Manchester 1988 p. 297

286 Whitehead P. op cit. p. 68

287 Callaghan J. Time And Chance Collins London 1987 p. 281

certainly doubtful whether any strategy could have actually prevented a strong anti-Market line being adopted. In any case, his preference for playing a waiting game ultimately proved successful in terms of recovering party unity. He also knew that Britain's future lay in Europe and would not have wanted a future Labour Government tied to a policy of withdrawal. He also seemed to have overlooked the idea that the final decision on Europe might be shifted out of the party completely and placed in the hands of the electorate. From the spring of 1972 onwards, the question of the referendum, up to now only briefly mentioned, and the question of Labour's European policy were intertwined. The decision to hold a referendum was a direct outcome of Labour's internal struggles, with neither the Conservatives nor public opinion playing a part in that decision.

V) Greater Unity? - Moves Towards A Referendum

The first possible semblance of an official Party response came as early as September 1971 with Callaghan warning the Conservatives that should Labour win the next election it would be 'its intention to re-negotiate...those terms which at the time will have been found objectionable and harmful to the interests of the British people.' The key word was 're-negotiate'.²⁸⁸ However, the idea of re-negotiation was slow to gain currency within the Party. Why then the delay? For anti-

Marketeers, the best outcome would be for the party to commit itself wholly against entry and then for the party to win a future election as a result. The Government would withdraw Britain from the Common Market and there could be no question either of the Cabinet's going back on a pledge so categorically worded. However, most anti-Marketeers realised by 1972 that this was an unrealistic outcome. Wilson's refusal to support them as well as the behaviour of pro-Marketeers would have meant they would have captured a Party of little worth. So instead they were prepared to settle for a referendum. Though having reservations, Wilson finally came to accept the idea,²⁸⁹ as a way of avoiding party disunity.²⁹⁰ It would also buy him time since he knew the need not come to a final decision until after an Election, where party dynamics would become less important.²⁹¹ Resistance to entry was further weakened when President Pompidou announced a referendum on Community enlargement. While his decision was taken for domestic political reasons,²⁹² it did provide anti-Marketeers with the chance to persuade both the NEC and Shadow Cabinet to reverse their previous decisions. Now both the wider Party and PLP were committed to holding a referendum - the consequences of which were momentous. With the subsequent resignations of a number of

288 King A. op cit. pp. 43 - 44

289 The Times 17. 4. 1972

290 Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 397

291 Pimlott B. op cit. p. 592

292 Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 391

pro-Marketeers,²⁹³ indicating that any further slide away from Europe would split the Party, Wilson became even more determined to not permit the Party to come out openly against entry. The NEC's statement, linking the policy of re-negotiation to the policy of consulting the people,²⁹⁴ was overwhelmingly carried at the 1972 Annual Conference and written verbatim into a general policy statement the following year.²⁹⁵ What had emerged was a policy that least divided the Party. Callaghan had been right when he observed, that the idea of a referendum was 'a life - raft into which the whole party (might) one day have to climb.'²⁹⁶ Even Jenkins eventually agreed to climb on board, standing successfully for re-election to the shadow cabinet in 1973.²⁹⁷

4. Conclusions

Labour showed they were never convinced Europeans, adopting instead a policy of 'no decision'. From the outset Wilson believed that any decision on principle had to be made simultaneously with a decision on the terms of entry. Until such time, there was no case for antagonising the wider Party with a decision that could result in nothing. One of his strengths was in maintaining party unity through high levels of intra-party tension.

293 Jenkins R.J. in The Times 11.4.72

294 LPACR p. 383

295 Labour's Programme for Britain The Labour Party London 1973 p. 41

296 Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 296

297 King A. op cit. pp. 57 - 65

One aide notes that -'his tolerance and flexibility prevented a fatal rupture...made it possible for the Party to fight the 1974 elections reasonably united.²⁹⁸ Upon entering office in February 1974 Labour, therefore, called for there to be fundamental renegotiations of British entry. If the renegotiations yielded a satisfactory result, then Labour was determined to let the electorate make the final decision through a referendum. While Wilson was ultimately successful in creating a party consensus in favour of entry, the means of actually achieving this goal were often 'painfully difficult, and exasperating.'²⁹⁹ It was with such a division of opinion within the Party, that questions about the apparent ease with which anti-Marketeters accommodated themselves to the reality of 'Labour in Europe' need now to be answered.³⁰⁰

Can Wilson's behaviour be linked to efforts to fend off possible leadership challenges? This argument is generally doubted. As Deputy Leader, Jenkins made a number of speeches that were critical of Wilson, alluding to the dangers if he continued to follow public opinion. The press lionising Jenkins as a man of principle followed each of Wilson's addresses on Europe.³⁰¹ The culmination being an unsigned editorial in one political

298 Donoghue B. 1993 op cit. p. 192

299 Pimlott B. op cit. p. 654

300 Robins L.J. op cit. pp. 123 - 124

301 Desai R. op cit. 150 - 151

journal stating that 'Mr. Wilson has proved himself unfit to be Leader.'³⁰² Such criticisms naturally led to expectations that a challenge was imminent. Swift denials of any challenge then predictably followed. This was a realistic assessment. For over one third of the signatures on the letter to Jenkins requesting him to obey the whip were from centrist MPs. Indeed, his reputation had also suffered by voting in the Opposition lobbies on second reading. Many who previously admired him were now calling into question his actual devotion to European cause. By accepting the pact, Jenkins was always going to receive criticism. Had he refused the pact he would have maintained his reputation as a man of principle. By accepting it, he angered those who saw a missed chance to inflict a deathblow to Heath. Assessed against this context, Jenkins' challenge can be seen as an effort to re-establish him with pro-Marketeters rather than as a serious threat to Wilson. Could then Callaghan have been the real danger as he had allowed himself to be identified as a 'neutral' in the debate? The idea of a leadership bid was certainly fostered by telling a reporter 'Well, if you want to hear the next leader of the Labour Party, you'd better arrange to be there.'³⁰³ It was not surprising that Wilson began to fear Callaghan³⁰⁴ and thus be squeezed by a pincer movement between him and the Labour Left.³⁰⁵ That a leadership bid was imminent was lent further weight by the support Callaghan drew from the Labour

302 Political Quarterly Vol. 42 1971 p. 354

303 Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 300

304 Jenkins R.A.. op cit. p.319. See Jeffreys K. Anthony Crosland op cit p.154

305 Benn A.W. Diaries op cit.1968 -1972 pp. 315-316.

Left, the wing, of course, which had been the bulwark for Wilson. But closer examination shows that Callaghan was acting as a Party unifier. Callaghan told a fellow Labour MP, that he was 'not interested in the leadership unless Harold decided to retire'.³⁰⁶ When one looks at the timing of his speeches, it is clear that rather than taking the initiative away from Wilson, he was actually endorsing Wilson's growing anti-Market line.³⁰⁷ Having established that Wilson's position was never really threatened, we need to discuss Labour's approach both in principle and over the actual terms.

306 Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 382

307 Aitken I. op cit. p. 10

CHAPTER FIVE

PARTY UNITY & THE REFERENDUM: WILSON'S TRIUMPH

1. Introduction

The 1973 Yom Kippur War brought to many western nations rises in energy costs, higher food prices and spiralling inflation. Wilson was also concerned by the need to develop a sustainable industrial relations policy. Yet with the unions demanding above inflation wage rises to counteract high inflation, this was never going to be easy.³⁰⁸ He responded with a combination of borrowing, price controls and 'social contract'. While this could not be afforded, the hope was that North Sea oil production would be able to stabilise the balance of payments' position. So Wilson was trying to buy time.³⁰⁹ So it was from this position that he had to operate, with Europe only one issue among many.

308 Copey R. & Woodward N. 'The British Economy in the 1970's: an overview.' in *ibid.* (eds.) Britain in the 1970's: The Troubled Economy UCL Press London 1996 pp. 11 - 12

309 George S. *op cit.* pp. 71 - 76

2. First Moves

With some rather anti-Market Labour pronouncements during the 1974 election campaign, speculation grew as to whether Wilson could escape from the 'policy prison' inherited earlier. From the outset, both he and Callaghan worked hard³¹⁰ to display all the skills in party management that had been so well rehearsed in opposition. When Callaghan adopted a softer tone towards re-negotiations, Wilson reassured anti-Marketeers that his resolve was as strong as ever.³¹¹ It was this ambivalence that allowed a discernible change in emphasis to be achieved in such a relatively short time.³¹² Wilson's Cabinet after the February Election was anti-Market in composition, with prominent pro-Marketeers being given departments that were seen to have least bearing on Europe.³¹³ Yet it was during these first few weeks that certain decisions were taken from which wider consequences flowed. Had the anti-Marketeers persuaded the Cabinet to insist on changes to Common Market treaties, the course of events might have been different. The Government could show, however, that as Labour was committed to re-negotiation, they would not ask for any Treaty changes. Wilson was well aware that it would have been almost impossible to obtain the consent to treaty revisions from all the other members. Equally Britain was not some outside body with which the

310 Donoghue B. *Prime Minister - The Conduct of Policy Under Harold Wilson and James Callaghan* Jonathan Cape London 1987 p. 57 See Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 409

311 *The Guardian* 7. 6. 1974

312 Robins L.J. op cit. p. 124

Community was negotiating - it was in the Community and had been for eighteen months. So while the bargaining went on so did the work of the Community.³¹⁴ Anti-Marketeers were also in a weak position. With another election looming and with an insecure parliamentary position, any attempt to sabotage policy was likely to prove counter-productive. Instead, Labour Left Cabinet members became more absorbed in their departments and in keeping the party to the left on a range of issues of which Europe was only one. The Labour Left outside Parliament mirrored this too. The unions were far more interested in getting the Industrial Relations Act repealed than they were in taking Britain out of the Community. They would not have countenanced moves that might have jeopardised their industrial goals, by threatening the survival of the Government.³¹⁵

Callaghan's tone at the beginning was reassuring to the Community, stressing that Britain would attempt to adapt and reshape the talks. For the Cabinet the tone was too mild and the influence of officials too apparent. So during a Council of Ministers meeting shortly after, Callaghan adopted a much tougher line, underlining the fact that 'a fundamental re-negotiation of the terms of entry' was sought.³¹⁶ While

313 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 27

314 King A. op cit. p. 75

315 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. pp. 29 - 30

316 Denman R. op cit. p. 247

there was some shock among other foreign ministers³¹⁷ with the 'vehemence' that Callaghan sailed into the attack,³¹⁸ they understood that his tone had been determined by domestic political reasons. However, two incidents enabled pro-Market forces to gain momentum. First, the delay following Pompidou's death allowed Callaghan time to master his subject and allow several anti-Market Ministers to experience the flexibility of the Community. The appointment of Helmut Schmidt as West German Chancellor also helped because not only did he share Britain's impatience for Community rhetoric, he was also prepared to help in getting the terms accepted by the Party.³¹⁹ Morgan argues that Schmidt was 'the dominant intellectual influence' on Callaghan's perceptions of international relations for the next five years³²⁰ During the next two months there was a 'sea change' in Callaghan's attitude as he began to see membership not just as a political device but as desirable in itself. By June 1974, therefore, he reassured the Community that Britain 'would not require changes in the treaties.'³²¹ The tide now seemed to be flowing in a pro-Market direction. Callaghan had been able to deny the anti-Marketeers their chosen battleground. To argue against entry would have been to depart from the manifesto commitment to judge membership on the terms, and not on the

317 Hitchens C. & Kellner P. Callaghan : The Road To Number 10 pp. 152 - 153

318 Morgan K.O. Callaghan : A Life OUP 1997 t. p. 416

319 George S. op cit. pp. 79 - 81

320 Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 415

321 Whitehead P. op cit. pp. 134 - 135

principle.³²² In the event, Labour gained a majority of three in the 1974 October Election. As in 1964 Wilson realised that his majority meant he could fight only one policy battle at a time, and that had to be over Europe.³²³ The result also meant Callaghan had to 'throw himself into bringing the European renegotiating process to a conclusion.'³²⁴ While at first anti-Marketeers supported the idea of a referendum, once opinion polls began to support membership,³²⁵ they tried to control the Party machine to force pro-Marketeers into opposing party policy. Their first push was at Annual Conference.

It was remarkable that the return to office did not mark a new phase in the European debate within the Party, with the central arguments focusing on the effects on inflation, wages and employment. But if anything did distinguish this period it was the emergence of parliamentary sovereignty, with many seeing entry as an impediment to the freedom to move in a socialist direction³²⁶ So the debate had little to do with terms of entry and more to do with the conceptual themes surrounding the Community. It was in this context that delegates made their way down to Annual Conference.

322 Hitchens C. & Kellner P. op cit. pp. 153 - 156

323 Donoghue B. op cit. p. 55

324 Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 420

325 The Economist 16. 11. 1974

3. The 1974 Labour Party Conference

A Conference fringe meeting indicated opposition to entry with Clive Jenkins declaring that every minister should 'campaign against continued membership or resign from the Cabinet.'³²⁷ The fact that Conference passed an anti-Market motion served as a reminder of the strength of Party feeling.³²⁸ However, on the final day there was a change of mood³²⁹ with Helmut Schmidt addressing delegates. His role in 'shepherding' Labour through its European troubles at this time should not be underestimated.³³⁰ While there was speculation whether anti-Marketeers would orchestrate opposition to the speech, the West German Chancellor was warmly received,³³¹ speaking flatteringly about Labour's contribution to the welfare state.³³² What was more significant was that he persuaded Wilson to support a YES vote in any future referendum.³³³ Yet at the same time there was a feeling of inevitability about the renegotiations.³³⁴ The policy shift continued where Wilson made it clear that real progress was being made.³³⁵ However, while anti-Marketeers now argued that talk of a 'European Union' revealed the threat to national sovereignty, Wilson

326 Kinnock N. Tribune 2. 5. 1975

327 The Economist 30. 11. 1974

328 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. pp. 36 - 37

329 George S. op cit. pp. 88 - 90

330 Donoghue B. op cit. p. 195

331 Callaghan J. op cit. pp. 311 - 312

332 LPACR London 1974 pp. 317 - 318

333 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 37

334 Morgan K.O. op cit. p. 421

insisted that the Government was still loyal to its manifesto pledge, whilst reverting to 'reducing everything to a boring...low key.'³³⁶ For the most part he was successful in that the doctrine of collective responsibility continued to be observed.³³⁷ With early divisions now beginning to emerge, most notably between Benn and Hattersley,³³⁸ there now seemed little prospect of maintaining unity whatever the result of the re-negotiations. Wilson seeing no other option told the Cabinet that they may 'agree to differ'³³⁹ in public.

As the re-negotiations proceeded, many manifesto commitments were either subsumed by the Community's own agenda or simply overtaken by events. Widespread fears that the CAP would lead to increased food prices were largely dissipated by world food price rises. Fears of interference in fiscal policies proved equally groundless. On the contrary, when Brussels established its new Regional Fund, it was decided that Britain should be a major beneficiary. So far as the Third World was concerned, the Community turned out to be far more outward looking than the British had ever imagined. The one item that might have caused difficulties was the size of Britain's contribution to the Community budget. Both Labour and Conservative Governments had felt that Britain was

335 Wilson H. op cit. pp. 251 - 255

336 Castle B. The Diaries op cit. p.101

337 King A. op cit. p. 81

338 The Economist 11. 1. 1975

paying too much.³⁴⁰ So at the Dublin summit in March 1975, agreement was reached both on the details of a 'correcting mechanism' and on the access of New Zealand produces to British markets. In claiming to have relatives there,³⁴¹ Wilson was identifying himself with British people, many of whom had relatives there. It was a typically populist touch - one made presumably with the forthcoming referendum campaign in mind. While budget agreement had already been reached in private, Wilson kept the issue on the table for a little longer, so as to portray him as a defender of British interests.³⁴² Then, satisfied with what had been achieved, a two-day Cabinet meeting was held. The views that were expressed followed fairly predictable lines, with Benn talking of the sacrifice of sovereignty and condemning the Common Market as a capitalist club.³⁴³ Wilson and Callaghan both argued that membership was now less costly than expected and that Britain's international role was actually now strengthened by it. However, with the more mildly anti-Market Ministers, now swinging behind Wilson, it was no surprise that Cabinet supported the agreed terms.³⁴⁴ Wilson had achieved his main aim of pushing through the renegotiations without harming party unity.³⁴⁵ Failure of anti-Marketeers to insist on the Treaties being amended, meant that re-

339 Jeffreys K. Anthony Crosland op cit. p.180

340 Butler D. and Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 39

341 King A. op cit. pp. 75 - 77

342 Wilson H. op cit. pp. 101 - 103

343 Castle B. Castle Diaries, 1974-76 op cit. pp. 340-1.

344 Benn A.W. Against the Tide op cit. pp. 341 - 349

345 Whitehead P. op cit. p. 136

negotiations became merely a cosmetic exercise. With Britain having persuaded the Community to revise budgetary policy, the process demonstrated that London could exercise leverage through membership. And the longer Britain was a member the more those who favoured the status quo would feel more comfortable. If Ministers became used to working within the framework of the Community, then the idea of membership might become more popular with them.³⁴⁶ While in Opposition Wilson found it easy to view entry in terms of domestic political manoeuvring, in Government his position had to be operable with all that implied for the internal politics of the party.³⁴⁷ So with the Cabinet now recommending a YES vote, wider party reaction came to an immediate head.³⁴⁸ at the NEC's EEC Liaison Committee in March 1975.

With the argument being waged paragraph by paragraph, the most serious conflict concerned North Sea oil. Would Britain retain control over pricing policy by selling oil in Britain below world prices if the Government thought it necessary? Benn argued no country could supply oil to one country more cheaply than it supplied it to EEC countries. But these were not grounds Callaghan wished to fight on. For him, membership was important for the part Britain could play in international affairs.³⁴⁹

346 Pimlott B. op cit. pp. 635 - 636

347 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. pp. 45 - 48

348 Pimlott B. op cit. p. 656

349 Callaghan J. op cit. p. 305

However, the Committee's rejection of the terms warned him that an organised Party campaign could make life very uncomfortable. And indeed, a motion was tabled at the following NEC, calling for outright condemnation of the re-negotiated terms. It was clear; therefore, that an anti-Market party run campaign would split the party even more deeply and possibly embarrass the Government on other issues as well.³⁵⁰ However, both Wilson and Callaghan let it be known that they would resign if the Party campaigned openly against the Government.³⁵¹ Why had Wilson threatened this? By making his support for membership unambiguous he had exposed himself to the wrath of the Labour Left - his tribal base, leading one commentator to note that he now depended for survival on the Labour Right - those for whom he had suspected for years.³⁵² The NEC and Conference were both against him as were Transport House. The PLP had, of course, already deserted him on the October Commons Vote. Indeed, it did look perilously close to a 1931 situation with a Labour Government at odds with its own supporters being kept in office with opposition support. Wilson also feared that he would find himself without any protection against the clinical hostility of the Labour Right which would cut his bloody throat' once he had served his purpose over Europe.³⁵³

350 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. pp. 49 - 50

351 Wilson H. op cit. p. 108

352 Margach J. The Sunday Times 6. 4. 1975

Yet in the short term, the threat of resignation seemed to work. When the NEC voted to recommend withdrawal, two crucial riders were added - that there would be no finances for a campaign and that 'the right to differ' should apply to party members who opposed the NEC's line just as it applied to the Government.³⁵⁴ In short, the Party's voice would be muted.³⁵⁵ While Conference could repudiate the terms, Wilson was convinced that the 'sting' had been taken out of the issue.³⁵⁶ While conference voted in favour of withdrawal,³⁵⁷ it was agreed that the Party would remain neutral. The fact still remained that the Government found most of its own supporters against it. In these circumstances, Wilson's mood might have been one of gloom. Instead, it was one of optimism as public opinion had by now swung around. It also seemed probable that those with anti-Market views were more likely to change their minds or not vote than those of a pro-Market predisposition.³⁵⁸ It was crucially against this background that Wilson took the decision to hold a referendum. The advantage of a referendum now was that it largely externalised the issue with there being no accusation of betrayal since the conflict was being conducted with both lobbies collaborating with the opposition parties. So it was now the anti-Europeans who wondered whether the referendum was such a good idea after all.

353 Pimlott B. op cit. pp. 657 - 658

354 George S. op cit. p. 93

355 Hitchens C. & Kellner P. op cit. pp. 160 - 164

356 Robins L.J. op cit. p. 126

357 Labour Weekly 23. 5. 1975



4. The Referendum Campaign

It was self-evident to everyone involved that the referendum could not be run along partisan lines with pro- and anti-Marketeers to be found in both major parties. It followed that what was required was two umbrella organisations to function as single-issue political parties.³⁵⁹ Both the YES organisation, Britain in Europe, and NO organisation, the National Referendum Campaign, were keen not to identify itself with either major political party. As for the campaign itself, Wilson tried not excite anybody,³⁶⁰ intending to play it down throughout.³⁶¹ The final result showed a landslide for the pro-Marketeers,³⁶² with one daily newspaper referring to the result as 'a tonic for Britain and a tonic for Europe.'³⁶³ The electorate appeared to have voted Yes on the basis of the support given by Wilson and Callaghan.³⁶⁴ Yet while the verdict was not necessarily a vote of confidence, it may have been an expression of fear that things would be worse outside the Community.³⁶⁵ There is also no doubt that some appearance of unity was promoted because many in the PLP were not prepared to engage in public controversy, believing that the new terms

358 NOP Political Bulletin Nov. 1974 p. 5

359 King A. op cit. pp. 86 - 104

360 Ziegler P. op cit. pp. 431 -432

361 Castle B. op cit. p. 379

362 Wilson H. op cit. p.108. See Bristow S.L. 'Partisanship, Participation and Legitimacy in Britain's EEC Referendum' in *Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. XIV No. 4 June 1976 pp. 297 - 310

363 *The Guardian* 7. 6. 1975

364 Pierce R.Valen H. & Listhaug O.' Referendum Voting Behaviour;The Norwegian and British Referenda on membership in the European Community' in *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 27 1983 pp. 43 - 63

365 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 280

were certainly an improvement. This seemed to be the case with some Labour members who were known to be committed on the issue but who were no longer prepared to give it top priority. In addition, some centrist leaning anti-Marketeters limited their campaigning, fearing a victory would strengthen the Labour Left.³⁶⁶ And so with all the manoeuvring, it is worth wondering what would have happened if the vote had been 'NO'.

Moreover, it is unlikely that the Government could have carried out such a policy, as Williams and Jenkins had said that a NO vote would result in their resignations. Had they done so a number of other Cabinet members would have resigned as well. With these Ministers holding much support among the pro-Marketeters on the backbenches, it is doubtful whether Wilson could have survived. A No vote would have weakened the positions of both Wilson and Callaghan in the wider party and strengthened the positions of figures like Benn. Taken together, the election of either Foot or Benn as Party leader and the resignations of Jenkins, Williams and others could have precipitated a split, with the consequence of the Party remaining in opposition for a generation. Indeed, for anti-Marketeters like Benn the referendum had backfired,³⁶⁷ with him becoming 'marginalised'³⁶⁸ accepting demotion to the Department of Energy. While they had clearly been humiliated, this did not mean that

³⁶⁶ Robins L.J. op cit. pp. 127 - 128

³⁶⁷ See The Observer 1. 6. 1975

³⁶⁸ Clarke P. op cit. p. 349

the Labour Left lost seats on the executives of powerful trade unions or their seats on the NEC or, for that matter, their popular support at Conference.

5. Conclusions

The most decisive act in preserving Common Market membership was the Referendum. The decision to hold one, taken for reasons of party unity, enabled a decisive endorsement of membership to be agreed if not the party. There could hardly be a clearer example of the consensus being maintained.³⁶⁹ The decision to conduct a referendum was an 'act of genius' as it enabled Labour to remain united,³⁷⁰ and enabled Wilson to project himself in Europe as an international statesman.³⁷¹ The Labour Party supported a governmental consensus about the future role of Britain in Europe. While in Opposition it was more concerned with sustaining party unity and opposing the Tory Government, in Government it adopted a clear pro-Market line. While there was always the possibility of a split, for 45 years they had always managed to sustain unity. However, the European issue had succeeded in dividing Labour in that, while it never entirely coincided with the basic division between right and left, it had helped to crystallise the normal conflicts of ideology for power. In the

³⁶⁹ Kavanagh D. & Morris P. *op cit.* pp. 106 - 107

³⁷⁰ Morgan K.O. *op cit.* p. 427

³⁷¹ Morgan A. *Harold Wilson* Pluto Press London 1992 p. 469 See Clarke P. *op cit.* p. 346

1970s, schism was seen as a growing hazard and Europe as the issue that could easily precipitate a split. So as Party leader, Wilson saw a referendum as the best way to hold the Party together - while the antis would not leave the Party over Europe, the pros most probably would.³⁷² The Referendum thus removed a threat to Labour's future.³⁷³ It was a way of maintaining the 'normal' British Government pro-European stance. The wider implications of Britain's relations with any kind of Europe were swept to one side.³⁷⁴ Most of those two years had been spent in pursuing a policy towards the Community that was driven by the imperatives of domestic politics. The need to hold the Party and the country together had dictated the sometimes-aggressive tone of the renegotiations. Some further damage had been done to the reputation of Britain with its Community partners, but there had been general relief when the referendum result went in favour of continued membership.³⁷⁵

372 Donoghue B. op cit. 1993 p. 205

373 Butler D. & Kitzinger U. op cit. p. 282

374 Morgan K.O. The Peoples Peace British History 1945 - 1989 Oxford OUP 1990 p367

375 George S. op cit. pp. 104 - 105

CONCLUSIONS

CONFLICT AND DISCORD: THE LABOUR PARTY, EUROPE AND CONSENSUS POLITICS 1960 – 1975

Throughout the many debates that took place over Common Market entry, the issue of retaining party unity remained constant throughout. Under Gaitskell's reign the party was able to find unity as the 'Commonwealth Party'. From the time of the French veto, he was able to calculate the negotiations would probably fail and that his subsequent repositioning to that of fervent anti Marketeer can, therefore, be interpreted as an attempt to reinforce French concerns and bring about a defeat for the Government with any electoral spin off that may accrue.

With regard to Wilson's leadership, a number of points need to be addressed. We have shown that despite being an endemically divided party, Labour was able to achieve and then sustain a fairly high degree of unity on Common Market membership. His management style suggests he genuinely wanted negotiations with the Six to be successful. It was a measure of his political acumen that he was able to gain tacit Cabinet support in principle for entry without a single resignation. He did this by never addressing the wider picture but by merely exploring the many

details linked to possible membership. When Labour found itself in Opposition Wilson decided that in the interests of preserving party unity no firm decision should be taken. With a decision on principle clearly linked to the quality of available terms, he saw very little case for antagonising the party at large with making a decision that seemed to have no finality at that stage to it. This position was to change of course by 1975 as Labour was again in government. He could now control events. And perhaps one of his greatest strengths as leader was to still maintain party unity on this still highly sensitive issue through the use of a referendum. By utilising such a device he was able to take the debate outside the party machinery and so almost deanaestise party feeling. The debate was therefore no longer merely an internal party battle it was a national debate. His ability to nurture the negotiations so that a commanding Yes vote was achieved also shows his skill maintaining the European policy consensus. Yet immediately following his sudden departure from office in 1976, divisions over Europe began to resurface once again and to an extent that it looked as if the Party would finally implode. With the Party moving to the left after the 1979 General Election it similarly moved to a position of outright opposition to EEC entry. In fact withdrawal became one of the central planks in the civil war that begun to engulf the party and was a contributing factor in the creation of the SDP some years later. Its probable that the referendum campaign drove home to the Labour Right the realisation of the huge gulf that now separated them on the important issue of Europe. The leadership election following Wilson's resignation

only revealed too vividly the weak strategic position of the Labour Right on the party in general. Linked to this point was of course the advance of the Labour left in broad policy making, having the effect of reducing the recruiting power of the Labour Right. So by 1979, therefore, the Labour Right were in a very poor organisational position with certain leading members now holding the view that a new more centralist party need be created. The 1980 Wembley Conference only served to exacerbate this view. So in many ways the unity built by Wilson can be viewed as having been built on foundations of sand. A breakaway had now occurred the like of which had not been seen in the Party for over 40 years. Having said this, we do need to set this against a wider historical framework. While it is true that a split took place, one still needs to remember that throughout the haemorrhaging that took place still remained in tact. Despite being often pushed to the very limits it found itself able to fight the following 1983 election as one party. So perhaps given the high levels of division that had occurred, especially in the early 1970's, it was perhaps Wilson's ability to prevent an even more everlasting split that should ultimately be remembered. This point is crucial. Without the unifying actions of Wilson it is quite possible to argue that not only would the Labour Party not have survived as a major political force but also that the British Governments policy consensus over Europe may have been halted or at best interrupted.

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