

THE ATTITUDE OF THE
BRITISH LABOUR GOVERNMENT
TOWARDS
GERMAN REARMAMENT 1949-51

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by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree. It is the result of my own independent investigation, and all authorities and sources which have been consulted are acknowledged in the bibliography.

JONAH J. MOSES

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J.J. MOSES

PREFACE

Aneurin Bevan's decision to base his challenge to the Labour Party leadership at the 1954 Annual Conference upon the German rearmament issue has led political commentators to concentrate their attention in these matters upon the 1954 debates. However, the origins of both the Bevanite split and the German rearmament controversy lie in the last years of the Labour Government. The decisions taken by the Cabinet in the years 1949 - 51 were to determine Party policy throughout the long and bitter controversy; yet little serious attention has been paid to the decision-making in these formative years.

This thesis is an account of how the British Government reacted to the various proposals and pressures for the rearmament of West Germany in the years 1949 - 51. The persistence of a hostile image of Germany is explained and its influence, direct and indirect, upon Government policy is analysed. The various pressures upon the Government, from the military, public opinion, Labour Party activists, Government backbenchers, western allies and continental Socialists; the conflicting advice received by the Government; from the press, the Opposition and the Royal Institute of International Affairs; and the dissension within the Government itself are all traced, and an attempt is made to estimate their relative importance in the determination of policy and their position in the decision-making process.

In addition, the various policies of the Government as a result of these conflicting pressures are outlined, and the processes by which the Government was reluctantly forced to make a firm decision on the German rearmament issue are analysed.

IMAGE AND REALITY IN BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS GERMANY

British policy towards Germany since the last war has been the resultant of the interaction between the emotionally hostile attitude of public opinion and the traditional realism of the political, diplomatic and military leadership. The persistence of an image of Germany formed out of the experience of the two world wars permeates and conditions every level of British society, elite and mass.

At the mass level, the feeling of having been deceived, of suppressed guilt for the betrayal of the Czechs, and, above all, the particular horror brought to the prosecution of war by the German enemy; the terror tactics of the Luftwaffe, the concentration camps, the Gestapo, and all the other nauseating apparatus of the Nazi war effort, have led the British to confuse Nazis with all Germans. The British public, for example, have consistently remained unable to believe that the mass of Germans were ignorant of Nazi atrocities. This identification of all Germans with Nazis, which was of course further encouraged by British war propaganda, remained imprinted upon the British political mentality after 1945.

Furthermore, British intellectual opinion, remembering the consequences of its own volte-face towards Germany immediately

after the First World War, had hardened itself in the latter days of the Second against any pro-German sentiments.* On the Left in Britain, distrust, even hatred, of Germany was particularly marked. The contacts of Labour Party leaders with the exiled Socialist opponents of Hitler, Left-wing anti-Fascist publications of the 1930's and the Left-wing belief that Hitler was the enemy of radical international Socialism produced the image of Germany held by the Socialist generation of the 1930's in Britain. To the Labour movement, all German nationalism was thus identified with Fascism and militarism. Even the German Social Democrats were not immune from the charge of chauvinism and even of Fascism as Ernest Bevin showed in the House of Commons debates of 28th March 1950.* The following extract from Hugh Dalton's diary expresses, in a particularly vivid form, the pathological hatred of Germany held not only in Labour Party circles but throughout British society.*

"The Germans, in my estimation of events, of all the nations in Europe had by far the blackest and most bloodstained crime sheet. They were responsible for the slaughter of two world wars and for particularly heinous war crimes. Sometimes I dreamed (sic) of an immense parade in another world, and of a great voice calling - 'Poles, Russians, Jews, and all the rest of you, stand up in your millions and testify!'

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- * See, for example, R.B. McCallum : Public Opinion and the Lost Peace.
 - * Hansard : House of Commons Debates : 5th Series Vol. 473 Col. 325.
 - * H. Dalton : Diary July 1951 (Unpublished).

The Germans despite their stupendous crimes seemed to be getting off pretty lightly, so that when, through the broken ruin of hopes, it began to be whispered that the Germans, whom at such a terrible cost, we had defeated and disarmed should now be armed again, I revolted in sheer horror."

It was in such an atmosphere as this that the dominant passions of the war gave way to a deep and enduring antipathy towards the Germans.

The British hopes of 1945 that, with the defeat, disarmament and occupation of Germany, the era of universal peace would be ushered in, soon evaporated. Nevertheless, the will o' the wisp of Four-Power agreement was an objective greatly desired and sought after by the British people and their Government.

The basis of this Four-Power agreement had been the Potsdam decisions on the demilitarisation of Germany; a policy which thus appealed to the British for the two reasons of maintaining agreement with the Russians, and taking revenge upon the Germans. Accordingly, this policy of German demilitarisation and the dismantlement of heavy, and, in particular, of war, industries became the most consistent British policy of the post-war period. As late as October 1949, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, adamantly opposed any reduction of the lists of German industry to be dismantled in order to reduce the German war potential, stating that dismantlement would continue until he was satisfied that "security is put right".*

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 468 Col. 539.

Only as a result of intense American pressure did Bevin eventually agree to a deceleration of dismantlement, and then only on condition that the German Federal Government agreed to participate in the Military Security Board and the International Ruhr Authority, which were to supervise German industry and ensure the extirpation of militarism, and hence, provide Britain and Western Europe with adequate guarantees of security against a potential German resurgence. In the Cabinet discussions of 20th November 1949 on the reduction of dismantlement, Bevin summed up his whole attitude towards Germany in the sentence: "Stalin's policy is just stupid, but the Germans are really dangerous".*

However, the European policy of the Soviet Union in the immediate post-war years led inevitably to the failure of Four Power control and the disintegration of the wartime alliance. The failure of the Foreign Ministers' Conference on Germany in December 1947 was the turning point after which the western powers "felt obliged to go ahead with their own plans for Western Germany - while always trying to keep open the door for eventual agreement on the unification of Germany".*

The events of 1948, however, irrevocably widened the gulf between East and West, for 1948 witnessed not only the blockade of Berlin, but also the increasing Soviet pressure upon the satellite states which led to Communist domination of Czechoslovakia

* H. Dalton: op cit 20th November 1949.

* K. Younger: German Rearmament - For and Against.

and to the breach between Yugoslavia and the Cominform. Kenneth Younger, later to become a Minister of State at the Foreign Office, testifies to the vital importance of these events:*

"These concrete proofs of Soviet determination to impose her will upon her allies and upon the Germans, even at the risk of serious international crisis, have greatly influenced the thinking both of the allies and of the West Germans ever since that time".

Hence it was the inevitable consequence of the Cold War that the emphasis of Western policy shifted from the liquidation of Nazism and of the Nazi war machine to the problem of the defence of Western Europe. The central importance of Western Germany in the Cold War confrontation, in which Germany was both the prize and the battleground, and in the defence of Western Europe, gave rise to some speculation in Western military circles about the possible future role of the Western Zones of Germany in the emerging anti-Communist front.

This speculation by the military was further encouraged by the increasing attention given in autumn 1948 to the build-up of the Soviet Zone People's Police force (the Volkspolizei), armed and organised as a military body. Despite these disturbing developments, General Robertson, the British Military Governor in Germany re-affirmed the demilitarisation policy and stated that there would be no moves to establish similar forces in the Western Zones.*

* K. Younger: The German Problem.

* Manchester Guardian: 28th October 1948

II

MILITARY PRESSURE AND FALSE ALARMS

The smouldering discussion erupted on 24th November 1948 when Eugen Kogon, the radical Catholic editor of the 'Frankfurter Hefte', alleged that a new German army was in the process of being created in the Western zones. Despite prompt denials by allied officials, who described the allegations as untrue and incomprehensible, the discussion continued unabated. For the British Government, General Robertson described the rumours as "silly and unfounded" adding that "after all that has been done in the matter of disarmament, it would be naive to imagine that the resurgence of German armed forces in the guise of a police force would be tolerated".*

The Kogon episode, however, revealed several notable factors. It showed that the Western allies were not even prepared to allow the formation of a centralised police force in their determination to uphold the demilitarisation policy; in fact they announced the establishment of a Military Security Board to supervise the demilitarisation of Germany and to detect and prevent any military revival. Nevertheless "the extent and sensitivity of the reaction to Kogon's statement was in itself an indication of how acute the issue had become" in military circles.*

What Kogon had misread were certain contingency planning in Western European Union staff circles. It is clear that at the end

* Times : 22nd December 1948

* M. Michel : German Rearmament as a Factor in Anglo-Germans Relations 1949-55 p. 37 (Unpublished thesis)

of 1948 Western military planners were acutely aware of Western weakness relative to Russia, and that the use of German troops was considered as one of the ways to redress this imbalance. However, their advice was rejected by the political leaders as Leslie Hunter's account of a contemporary discussion of the issue at the Royal Institute of International Affairs indicates *

"Sir Ian (Jacob) brought a couple of senior General Staff officers along for the discussion on Defence. The soldiers told us that the General Staff could see no way of Britain's meeting her commitments without the help of twelve German divisions in Europe. Maurice Webb immediately said the labour party could not agree to the Germans being rearmed in any circumstances whatsoever. Butler for the Conservatives concurred, and so too did Lloyd-George (sic) for his branch of the Liberals. The soldiers were quite unperturbed. Their task, they said, was merely to advise what they thought could be done with the men and materials put at their disposal by the politicians. If it were politically impossible to give them the help of the Germans, the alternative was to cut some of our commitments ... it would be for the politicians to choose".

The foremost military advocate of German rearmament at this early stage was Field-Marshal Montgomery, then Western Union Commander-in-Chief, who, from his headquarters at Fontainebleau was all too well aware of the Western strategic weakness. After only a few months in this post, Montgomery concluded that the forces available were insufficient for any sort of organised defence in Western Europe. Accordingly, in January 1949, he asked Ernest Bevin to set in motion measures which would aim at bringing Western Germany into the Western Union.

* L. Hunter : The Road to Brighton Pier pgs. 72-73

Montgomery pointed out that the Western Union countries had neither the manpower nor the resources to build up the necessary military forces; and, as Western strategy was still based on conventional forces, the addition of German military strength was essential for the implementation of Western strategy. "Bevin was somewhat startled" and rejected all consideration of such heretical ideas.*

The establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in April 1949 did not fundamentally reduce the Soviet military superiority in central Europe, nor did it invalidate the strategic logic of German rearmament. Indeed the early plans for the military future of the Organisation obviated the possibility of a negotiated demilitarisation of Germany, since about as soon as the actual effort to rebuild the Western military strength began, the project of a conventional defence for Europe which would contemplate any future for West Germany other than its complete integration, militarily, politically and economically, with the West was necessarily discarded. *

Western leaders had to bear in mind not only the deficit in the division count, and the possible political effects in the nascent German Federal Republic of its exclusion from Western military planning; but also the political and military disincentive effects in the rest of Europe of creating a defensive system which would seem geared to the protection of West Germany without requiring any contribution of German manpower.

* Viscount Montgomery : Memoirs page 510

* For early NATO plans see : C. Bell : Negotiation from Strength

Therefore, the almost simultaneous establishment of the German Federal Government at Bonn in May 1949 revived interest in German rearmament. However, that the three Western occupying powers were still solidly opposed to any such measures is apparent from the formulation of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic; Article 26, paragraph 1 of which declared all preparation for war to be unconstitutional, and Article 4, paragraph 3 that no German could be compelled to perform military service.* The formation of the Federal Republic was a deliberate attempt by the West to bind West Germany firmly, but politically not militarily, to the Western cause in the Cold War, and hence prevent any attempt at the much feared Rapallo-politik.

These unambiguous statements of Western policy dampened press speculation concerning rearmament throughout the summer of 1949, and the new Federal Republic was able to establish itself as a feature on the international scene. However, in autumn 1949, the British Government took the initiative in proposing to France and America that a three-power conference be held to clarify Western policy on the future of Germany. This conference opened in Paris on 9th November 1949. The results of the Paris Conference were communicated to Bonn and embodied with little change in the Petersburg Protocol of November 1949. This Protocol defined the international position of the German Federal Republic. Article 3 of the Protocol read: *

* K. Adenauer : Memoirs pgs 299-300

* B.R. Von Open (ed) : Documents on Germany under Occupation p. 440

"The Federal Government further declares its earnest determination to maintain the demilitarisation of the Federal territory and to endeavour by all means in its power to prevent the re-creation of armed forces of any kind".

However, despite this emphatic prohibition, the subject of German rearmament had once again begun to be actively debated in the press on both sides of the Atlantic. Although the only immediate outcome of this speculation was to be further reiteration of the former policy on the part of the Western powers, they are nevertheless interesting as providing the first signs of a change in informed public opinion in Britain in regard to the arming of Germany. Public interest was of course aroused by the Paris meeting of Foreign Ministers but it "moved on to a new level" * after a report on 16th November by Drew Middleton, the Bonn correspondent of the New York Times, that:

"Staff officers of a number of Western European armies have been discussing the difference that the raising of even five German divisions would make to the defence of Western Europe against a possible attack from the East.

Since German rearmament was not considered at the meeting last week in Paris of Big Three Western Foreign Ministers, and since it is repugnant to the peoples of their respective nations, these soldiers emphasise they are not presenting a plan for German rearmament.

What they seek, they say, is to explain how limited German rearmament would help adjust the manpower balance in any conflict with the Soviet Union.

* M. Michel : op. cit. p. 48

* New York Times : 16th November 1949

Officers emphasised that any new German army must be integrated into a European force... The basis of such discussions ... in the premise that without German divisions there just are not enough troops in the West to hold the Russians.

It may not be politically wise for them to discuss German rearmament, but I think that, in view of their job, it is entirely natural."

In response to these revelations both Acheson and Truman asserted that "from a political or diplomatic viewpoint, it presently is an impossible consideration."* The nervous state of British opinion concerning the prospect of German rearmament in the light of the British image of Germany at this time is amply illustrated by two minor, but informative, incidents.

The first occurred in the House of Commons in November 17th when, in the foreign affairs debate, as Churchill was proposing the admission of West Germany to the Council of Europe, Harold Davies, a Labour backbencher, interrupted to seek assurance that the Leader of the Opposition was not advocating German rearmament.*

The second incident was the dissatisfaction expressed by no less a journal than the Times of 21st November at the "apparent denials" of Acheson and Truman concerning German rearmament.*

"These limited denials have done nothing to dispel the rumours, and there are some here who are willing to assert that there will be five German divisions within a year. Words like 'gendarmerie' and 'internal security', and phrases like 'forces adequate to hold the Rhine' are beginning to be heard in the land. So are homilies about the low state of German morale, the German fondness for uniforms and the desirability of giving them some to keep them happy.'

* Christian Science Monitor : 16th November 1949

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 469 Col. 2224

* Times : 21st November 1949

As a result of the outcry in the British press against reports of German rearmament, the Foreign Office was forced to calm suspicions by the unusual step of issuing a formal statement that: *

"The British Government have not contemplated, and do not now contemplate any such development. That the President and Mr. Acheson refused to say definitely whether they were or were not in favour of giving Western Germany an army causes no great concern here. The British Government have been given no reason to suppose that the United States Government are now contemplating any such development ... there have been no discussions between the British and United States Governments on the subject, and it was not mentioned at the recent meeting of British, French and American Foreign Ministers. No one can say that at some later stage ... it will not be generally felt advisable that German manpower should take part in the defence of the whole community. The strength of British and French opinion against rearming Germany is well known to the United States Government."

The General opinion in British Government circles appears to have been that Acheson's and Truman's 'evasive' replies were less a foreshadowing of an early change in American policy than a means of reserving America's freedom of decision for the time when circumstances may have changed.* When the matter was raised in the House of Commons on 28th November, Christopher Mayhew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, gave a similar denial of any intention to rearm West Germany.*

* Times : 21st November 1949

* Ibid

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 470 Cols. 774-775.

These official statements however failed to appease the concern about the possibility of Western encouragement for some form of German rearmament widely felt in international Socialist circles. The bitter inter-war experience of how German big business had used the internationally limited Reichswehr to oppress the German trade unions and finally to suppress the German Social Democratic Party was widespread on the continent, and was the starting-point for any consideration of German rearmament by international Socialists. To reassure French Socialist leaders regarding the intentions of the British Labour Party and Government with respect to German rearmament, Mr. Morgan Phillips, Secretary of the British Labour Party, went to Paris on 28th November for personal talks with Guy Mollet and other prominent French Socialists. The intense opposition of the French was communicated by Morgan Phillips to the Cabinet and hence served to reinforce their own disapproval of German rearmament.

This general atmosphere of disapproval, opposition, and even downright horror, led to a dampening of speculation until it erupted spectacularly once again with the publication of Dr. Adenauer's interview with the Cleveland Plain Dealer on 4th December in which the German Chancellor announced his support for German participation in a European Army.*

* Cleveland Plain Dealer : 4th December 1949

While there was a general feeling in Britain that Dr. Adenauer had talked out of turn, a leading article in the Times, though stressing the danger of German rearmament, thought that Soviet policy in general and the build-up of the Volkespolizei in particular "will make some degree of rearmament in West Germany necessary".* The NewsChronicle* and the Scotsman* also thought that the Germany of 1949 was not the same as that of 1919, and looked with approval on Adenauer's ideas. Nevertheless the daily press was almost unanimous in rejecting such a development as rearmament, the tone of rejection varying from the violently emotional expressions of the mass circulation papers to the reasoned opposition of the quality press.

An entirely different picture, however, was presented by the political weeklies, whose importance as opinion-forming agents can hardly be exaggerated. The Economist,* Spectator* and Time and Tide* came out in favour of a German contribution to a European Army as proposed by Adenauer. Similar advocaties were made by the Sunday Times* and the Observer.*

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- * Times : 19th December 1949
 - * News Chronicle : 6th December 1949
 - * Scotsman : 7th December 1949
 - * Economist : 26th November 1949
 - * Spectator : 26th November 1949
 - * Time and Tide : 26th November 1949
 - * Sunday Times : 27th November 1949
 - * Observer : 27th November 1949

They were based on an evaluation of Communist expansion as a threatening reality and the resulting strategic necessity of German support for Western defence, and the political desirability of integrating the new Germany firmly into the Western community of nations. The Labour weeklies, however, vigorously opposed any form of German rearmament since it would "precipitate the danger of war" by encouraging a Soviet preventive attack or by leading to a German attack to recover lost territories; would finalise the division of Germany and of Europe and would wreck all remaining possibilities of Four-Power agreement which alone could solve outstanding world problems.*

"In the politically interested and informed sections of the British public ... the topic of Germany was fairly widely debated." * The dilemma of the moral obligation to defend Western Germany against attack and the obvious military inability to do so led, in some circles, to reluctant acceptance of the eventual inevitability of some form of German rearmament. Nevertheless the greater part by far of the opinion-forming and opinion-leading elements of the population remained opposed to German rearmament. Moreover, public opinion as a whole, being dominated by emotional factors rather than by rational considerations in its general outlook, fully endorsed the elite's revulsion against the idea. The broad consensus of opinion found eloquent expression in the conclusion of a leading article

* Tribune : 2nd December 1949. See also New Statesman ; 27th November 1949
* M. Michel : op. cit. p.54.

in the Manchester Guardian: *

"It is a development absolutely to be opposed for the reason that Eastern Europe is exceptionally sensitive and reacts to any such move in what often seems to us a provocative manner ... (1) Nothing ties the Czechs and the Poles so firmly to Russia as the fear of an increasingly powerful Western Germany ... There may be strategic advantages for us in the possibility of a rearmed Germany, but they are not worth the loss of confidence involved."

Official reaction to Adenauer's suggestion reflected the disapproval of public opinion and British spokesman reiterated their opposition to any sort of German rearmament." By informal agreement, the Allied High Commissioners decided on 8th December to squash public speculation by remaining silent on the subject, and advised Adenauer of the wisdom of observing the same policy, rather than carpet the German Chancellor for his indiscreet remarks.* Indeed, the British High Commissioner actually favoured a public rebuke.*

Moreover, various concrete measures bore witness to the fact that there had been no reversal of the Allied policy to effect and to perpetuate the demilitarisation of Germany. The British High Commissioner re-affirmed his opposition to mergers of Land police forces;* and in December 1949 the ageing General Marstein was finally brought to trial and sentenced to eighteen years' imprisonment.

* Manchester Guardian : 26th November 1949

* Neve Zeitung : 6th December 1949

* New York Times : 9th December 1949

* New York Herald Tribune : 6th December 1949

* M. Michel : op. cit. p. 50

Above all, on 16th December, the Allied Military Government Law Number Sixteen was published which codified all previous legislation for the elimination of militarism. *

"Any activity which teaches, directly or indirectly, the theory, principles or techniques of war, or is intended to prepare for any warlike activity or to foster the resurgence of militarism is prohibited ... All ... military organisations ... are prohibited."

However, Adenauer decided not to take the hint from the High Commissions, and reiterated for the third time that : "it would be difficult (for him) to refuse to recruit a full German contingent for participation in the defence of Western Europe." * Foreign Secretary Bevin was "displeased with these continual references to a German army by Dr. Adenauer",* and, accordingly, he approved a Foreign Office statement on 16th December to the effect that : "The British Government are categorically opposed to the recruitment of any German armed forces",*

The most perceptive summation of the reasons motivating the British Government to oppose any form of German rearmament at this stage was that contained in an editorial of the Scotsman for the following day :*

* Ibid

* Scotsman : 17th December 1949

* Yorkshire Post : 17th December 1949

* cf. Scotsman : 17th December 1949

* Ibid

"One of the principal ones is the implacable opposition of the French ... But among other considerations ... is the feeling that it would be naive to believe that once you had a German contingent in a Western international force, it would not lead, at a very early stage, to a national German army. The contingent would have to have its headquarters in Germany, its organisation in Germany, and its recruitment from Germany.

Moreover, a small German force in the Western international army would make little difference to the military balance ... the Russians could easily raise another six divisions merely by lengthening by a few weeks the conscript service ... A large German army would make Germany a predominant power in Western Union ... and place that country in a strong bargaining position as between East and West; and the British Government cannot.. rule out the possibility of a bargain being struck between Russia and Germany ... A substantial West German force would make it extremely difficult for the West German Government to resist popular demands for some attempt to regain the Eastern territories by force. It must be borne in mind that the re-creation of West German armed forces, however small, would lead to the inflaming of public opinion of all shades both in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Another effect of the re-establishment of a West German armed force would be a clamour in Germany for the withdrawal of the Western Allied forces."

One of the few military arguments produced at this time in an attempt to rebut the strategic logic of German rearmament was that the chronic shortage of defence equipment in the West, which hampered the rearmaments efforts of loyal allies like France, left nothing over to equip the dubiously loyal West Germans. *

* cf. Daily Telegraph : 24th November 1949

To the argument that Germany was profiting economically from her disarmed status at the expense of her industrial competitors, of whom Britain was of course the foremost, the Times retorted: *

"Certainly it seems unreasonable that Britain and France and the United States should undertake the defence of Germany, while Germany enjoys the immense advantages of having no army, air force or navy to maintain ... but the right answer is that all security must be paid for, and German disarmament is at present not the least part of security."

Thus the popular image of the aggressive German nation remained the starting-point for any analysis of British policy towards Germany in the aftermath of the press speculation about German rearmament.

However, the economic benefits accruing to Germany concerned many. The popular image of a militaristic Germany was already being diverted into one of a Germany totally and ruthlessly organised for economic expansion under Adenauer, just as it was thought she had been organised for war under Hitler. In December 1949, Whitehall was therefore studying means by which Germany could contribute economically to the burden of Western defence instead of contributing armed contingents.* Prospects for the success of such a markedly Germanophobic policy were however sunk by Adenauer's consistent refusal to contemplate anything less than full equality for Germany within an integrated system of Western defence.*

* Times : 19th December 1949

* Scotsman : 26th December 1949

* K. Adenauer : op. cit. p. 270

III

THE CHURCHILL PROPOSALS OF MARCH 1950

The speculation of November and December 1949 was followed by a period of calm with only isolated references to German rearmament. The most significant of these was that contained in "Keeping Left", the electoral publication of the Tribune group of Left-wing Labour M.P.'s* This pamphlet accepted the military promise that West European defence was impossible without German rearmament but retorted that German rearmament was equally impossible for four main reasons. First, this was the corollary of the disastrous appeasement policy which Chamberlain had tried in the 1930's; secondly, it would destroy any hope of true German democracy; thirdly, it would play into the hands of the Communist parties of Western Europe; and, finally, it would rule out the possibility of any real solution of the German problem short of war. To solve the security dilemma, the pamphlet described any Soviet intention of launching a military attack in Western Europe; and German rearmament would undermine the much more important economic, social and psychological defences of the West.*

The pamphlet is significant in that it was one of the very few Left-wing publications against German rearmament which presented any resemblance of reasoned non-emotive arguments; references to Belsen, Auschwitz and the Luftwaffe, which were


* R. Acland et. al. : Keeping Left.

* Ibid. p.21

later to become the basis of most of the Left's arguments against German rearmament, being conspicuous by their absence from this early publication. However, Foreign affairs in general, and German rearmament in particular, were far too remote concerns to play any role in the General Election of February 1950. *

The German problem was held in further abeyance for a time following the Election, but disturbing developments in the Soviet Zone put an end to this relative tranquillity. On 13th March 1950, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Kenneth Younger, revealed that the militarised Volkspolizei had reached a total strength of approximately 45,000 men. *

Against this background, Churchill, in the House of Commons defence debate of 16th March, argued that the long military front in central Europe necessitated by the Western adoption of a forward defence strategy "cannot be successfully defended without the active aid of Western Germany." * In addition, Churchill introduced the economic arguments for burden sharing, and the need to raise morals and pro-Western sentiment in the German Federal Republic to reinforce the strategic arguments for German rearmament. Though Churchill stressed that he was speaking in a private capacity, the enormous prestige which he enjoyed, both in Britain and abroad, lent considerable weight to his pronouncements.

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* cf. H.G. Nicholas : The British General Election of 1950

* Hansard : 5th series Vol. 472 p. 28

* Ibid col. 1288

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V, 56; 1955 N54 (21) K9

His statements revealed a division of opinion in the House more or less along party lines. Most Labour speakers followed the lead of Richard Crossman in arguing that since West European defence depended primarily on Anglo-French understanding, the continued disarmament of Germany was essential to the maintenance of French loyalty to the West, and prevented her large Communist Party gaining considerable popular support on the platform of opposition to German rearmament. "However strong the argument on military grounds, it would be absolutely disastrous politically."* Labour members could not, however, resist the temptation to indulge in highly emotive speeches resplendent with references to Goebbels, concentration camps and the Gestapo. The Government summing-up speech of Prime Minister Attlee caused considerable misgivings on the Labour benches, which eagerly awaited a categorical repudiation of Churchill's suggestion by their leader. He stated: *

"I am bound to say I was astonished at the right hon. Gentlemen's irresponsible reference to the question of the rearmament of Germany. ... It raises matters of high policy which we cannot decide offhand in a Debate like this. We are acting with our Western allies, with the United States and with France. Our policy has been laid down in this matter perfectly clearly ... it is a most difficult and thorny subject."

However, the ambiguity and apparent evasiveness of Attlee's reply was due more to the unexpectedness of the suggestion, and to Attlee's own involved and awkward formulations rather than to any attempt at deception.

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 472 Col. 1333

* Ibid : Col. 1392

Nevertheless, there was sufficient disquiet, both at home and on the continent, for the Foreign Office, on the very next day, to take the unusual step of issuing a formal statement firmly repudiating Churchill's proposals and outlining the "overwhelming" reasons for the Government's opposition to any form of German rearmament. These were : first, the apparently irreconcilable dilemma that, if a small German contingent was raised, the accretion to Western strength would be negligible and a needless provocation to Russia, whereas if it were longer it would give Germany a predominant position in Western Union. Secondly, German rearmament would place Germany in a strong bargaining position between East and West, and thus able to revive the British nightmare of a Rapallo - politik. On the other hand, thirdly, a rearmed Germany might be tempted to regain its lost territories by force, thus producing a new war in central Europe. Fourthly, the population of a rearmed Germany would certainly demand the withdrawal of Western occupation forces, thus freeing Germany from all effective control by the Western democracies. Fifthly, it would greatly increase the France-German estrangement, whose eventual elimination was the only hope for Western Union; and, finally, as it was by no means certain that the German people wanted to be rearmed, the only people to benefit from rearmament would be the irreconciled militarist and nationalist elements who would flock into a new Reichswehr, thus endangering the still tender plant of German democracy. *

* New York Times : 18th March 1950

The mere fact that the Foreign Office found it necessary to give such a detailed exposition of the case against German rearmament indicates that it was seriously perturbed by the growth of responsible opinion advocating it. However, as the case for German rearmament was argued largely on the grounds of strategic necessity, and could not be effectively rebutted by military arguments, the case against was based predominantly on political considerations. It should be noted that the Foreign Office statement did not deny that a German defence contribution was necessary for the military defence of Western Europe.

The reaction of the British press to Churchill's suggestion accorded with the pattern established three months earlier. The political weeklies of the centre* and the two main Sunday newspapers* presented reiterations of their previous attitudes, being in favour of some German defence contribution. However, the mainly critical attitude of the daily press showed noticeable signs of weakening. This was due partly to the latest developments in East Germany and partly, as far as the Tory press was concerned, to a reluctance to criticise Churchill. The Daily Telegraph* found Churchill's vision of a Germany sincerely and strongly joining the defence of the West an attractive one, but doubted whether "the leopard has changed his spots". The Daily Express* resolved its dilemma of

* Economist, Spectator, Time and Tide : 18th March, 1950

* Sunday Times and Observer : 19th March 1950

* Daily Telegraph : 17th March 1950

* Daily Express : 17th March 1950

supporting Churchill but opposing German rearmament by merely reporting his speech without comment. The Daily Mail*, however, now came out in favour of a limited German rearmament under close Western control. The Labour newspapers (Daily Herald, Daily Mirror and Reynolds News)* and weeklies*, on the other hand, firmly supported the Government's policy. The emotional tone of these publications; which deliberately sought to equate contemporary West Germany with that of the 1930's, and evoked crude and emotive sentiments with headlines such as "Shall the Goosestep March Across Europe Again",* must have embarrassed some of the more reasoned supporters of the Government; but they undoubtedly gave the most accurate expression of popular feeling on this issue.

Of the quality daily press, the Times remained opposed to German rearmament.*

"Nothing would damage the 'forces of peace' in Germany more than a premature decision to create a German Army. The longer this can wait the better. One day, no doubt, Germany must have her own forces taking their part, it is to be hoped, in a greater army of Western Europe ... To form a German army now would be to restore the very forces that destroyed Europe only after a complete break in the German military tradition will it be possible to form a German army that will act as a servant of a democratic government and not as its master ... It will be time enough to consider this when German democracy is established more firmly."

* Daily Mail : 21st March 1950

* Daily Herald and Daily Mirror: 17th March 1950. Reynolds News: 19th

* New Statesman and Tribune: 18th March 1950 March 1950

* Reynolds News : 2nd April 1950

* Times : 18th March 1950

The most significant fact about the attitude of the Times however, was that, unlike the emotional Labour press, the reasoned arguments of the "Thunderer" now accepted then eventual inclusion of a democratic West Germany in the Western defence system. The other daily 'heavy', the Manchester Guardian, also found the idea of a German defence contribution "disagreeable" and reiterated the arguments of the Foreign Office statement against the scheme.*

The concern expressed by the French Prime Minister, Georges Bidault, to Hugh Dalton on 24th March about Churchill's advocacy of German rearmament was immediately communicated to London where it served as additional reinforcement for the Government's attitude.*

Churchill, however, remained unimpressed by the arguments of the Foreign Office and the press and the concern of Bidault, and returned to the theme in the foreign affairs debate on 28th March. He vigorously rejected the charge of irresponsibility, claiming that his sole objective was the creation of an effective defence against Russia, for which German soldiers were essential: "Europe cannot be restored without the active aid of Germany and ... without a restored Europe, world peace cannot be established on secure foundations."* The ensuing debate demonstrated

* Manchester Guardian : 18th March 1950

* H. Dalton : High Tide and After. p. 327

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 473. Col. 191-192

once again the strength of Labour opposition to any form of German rearmament. It also vividly revealed the image of Germany held by most members, which formed the basis for their attitudes. Labour speeches were once again studded with references to "faded field-m Marshals lurking in the shadows"* in West Germany, and "the Gas wagon following up behind"* the German army. Even Sir Anthony Eden voiced his doubts about the German character: *

"I can never altogether escape the feeling that in the minds of many Germans there is a desire, or at any rate a tendency, to believe that the Germans have some special mission with regard to the rest of Europe which ... means the domination of her neighbours."

The most important and the most revealing statement on the German character, however, emanated from the Foreign-Secretary himself, who insisted that, "The Hitler revolution did not change the German character very much. It expressed it."*

An interesting deviation from this image of Germany as a nation of unmitigated Nazis, indeed a sheer contradiction of it, was that held by another section of Labour members, equally opposed to German rearmament, who based their opposition on the belief that Germany was now a nation of ardent pacifists, none of whom wished to take up arms.*

It was once again left to Richard Crossman to provide a

* Ibid : Col. 266

* Ibid : Col. 268

* Ibid : Col. 315

* Ibid Col. 323

* See in particular the speech of Emrys Hughes: Ibid Col. 299

clear and reasoned argument against German rearmament along the lines that the more proficient German soldiery could ever accept integration into an international force, that German rearmament would strain Western unity, that it would consolidate the Russian hold over Eastern Europe (already the discussion of German rearmament in the West was providing the Soviets with excellent propaganda) and it would induce the Americans to withdraw from Germany, and probably from the entire continent. Furthermore, a new German army would destroy all hope of democracy in Germany:*

"Every Social Democrat in Germany is begging us to stop this talk of rearming the Germans. They say that there is no chance of democracy if we rearm the Germans, because back will come the people to power who really believe in German rearmament ... we have to face the fact that to rearm Germany ... destroys the basis on which we can build any hope of German democracy."

It fell to Bevin to deliver the final Government pronouncement on the discussion of German rearmament. "All of us", he stated, "are against it". I repeat, all of us are against it. It is a frightful decision to take." He ridiculed Churchill's suggestion of forging Franco-German amity on the anvil of German rearmament.*

"I can only suggest that if I went to Strasbourg or Paris with that proposal I am afraid that the bringing of France and Germany together would be set back for a very long time ...

* Ibid : Cols. 279-280

* Ibid : Col. 324

Therefore I must say ... that we have set our face against the arming of Germany and that, I am afraid, we must adhere to."

Such an emphatic and unequivocal statement of Government policy cheered the Labour supporters and ended speculation for some time.

To add further emphasis to the Government's refusal to consider any idea of German rearmament at this time, the Easter Annual Conference of the Co-operative Party, an integral part of the Labour Movement in Britain, unanimously passed a resolution condemning proposals for German rearmament and fully endorsing the Government's stand.*

In British military circles, however, pressure for some form of German contribution to Western defence was steadily and inexorably mounting. The army had for long favoured the re-creation of some German divisions : their advocacy of German rearmament was now reinforced by the R.A.F. who pointed out the necessity for the establishment of N.A.T.O. radar stations in West Germany;* and by the Royal Navy who displayed an interest in a German contribution towards meeting a serious deficiency of minesweepers and anti-submarine vessels particularly in the Baltic.*

* Daily Worker : 8th January 1951

* Hansard : 5th Series. Vol. 472, Cols. 1867-1868

* L.W. Martin : The American Decision to Rearm Germany in H. Stein. (ed.) : American Civil - Military Decisions. p. 649

IV

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AND BRITISH REACTIONS

The military advisers, however, still could not persuade their political masters of the strategic necessity for German rearmament, and the debate now shifted from the British to the international scene.

The Defence Committee of N.A.T.O. met at the Hague on 1st April to approve the Medium Term Defence Plan. Newspapers reported on unofficial Anglo-American accord established at this meeting whereby the two governments gave assurances to France that no German rearmament would be permitted, at least until French rearmament had been completed.* The British emphasised to the Americans that they considered two American divisions east of the Rhine a far better guarantee of security than fifteen German divisions.

The next international gathering was that of Western Foreign Ministers in London in May 1950, and the subsequent N.A.T.O. Council, which once again raised some speculation as to the intentions of the Western allies regarding German rearmament. On the eve of the meeting, Field-Marshal Montgomery was summoned to London for talks with Attlee and Shinwell, the Defence Minister, at which, "it is believed they discussed ... Germany's claim to armed forces."*

* See in particular, Scotsman : 17th April, 1950

* Daily Express : 9th May 1950

The meetings of the Western allies were primarily concerned with the question of how a balance of strength could be established between East and West. The resulting decision to build up Western strength was however to be carried out at a "leisurely pace". * Although no official reports of the proceedings at these meetings was issued, it is inconceivable that the issue of German rearmament was not raised, and the American High Commissioner in Germany, McCloy, in his private report to Adenauer after the meeting, hinted at this.* So too did Mr. Ernest Davies, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, who, at Question Time on 15th May, agreed that the existence of the Volkspolizei had "inevitably entered into consideration" at the meeting.*

N.A.T.O. opinion, however, appears to have been unanimously opposed to such a departure, and no mention of Germany is made in the Council communique. Furthermore, various measures taken by the Western allies in May 1950 bore witness to the fact that their policy on demilitarisation had not changed. It was at this time that Dr. Adenauer and President ~~Heuss~~ experienced great difficulty in receiving the consent of the High Commissioner for their possession of revolvers for personal protection.* On 8th May, the Military Security Board promulgated the "definitive law for the prevention of

* Lord Iamay : NATO; The First Five Years. p. 29

* K. Adenauer : op. cit. pgs. 261-262

* Hansard : 5th Series. Vol. 475, Col. 848

* K. Adenauer : op. cit. p.375

German rearmament",* by which enforcement of demilitarisation controls, previously the responsibility of each occupying power was co-ordinated.

However, the continuing build-up of the Volkspolizei in the Soviet Zone of Germany, and the identification within it of the Bereitachften, whose organisation, control and weaponry were obviously unsuitable and probably unintended for purposes of internal security, continued to cause grave anxiety. In London, the main fear was that the Russians would secure a climacteric diplomatic triumph by proposing mutual withdrawal of all occupying forces from German soil, and enabling a united neutralised German state to be established. The Western allies would have great difficulty convinving their own, and the German, public of their reasons for rejecting such an apparently conciliatory gesture by the Russians. However, to accede to it would ensure the triumph of the armed might of the Communist Bereitschaften throughout the unarmed Western zones of Germany, and the adoption of a Rapallo-politik.

With this possibility in mind, Dr. Adenauer, in June 1950, approached Sir Brian Robertson, the British High Commissioner, with a proposal that the Federal Republic should be allowed to raise a motarised paramilitary force on the same lines as the Volkspolizei. Sir Brian himself strongly supported this idea and urged the British Government to accept it.

* C.G.D. Onslow : West German Rearmament in World Politics July 1951 p. 460

Ernest Bevin was prepared to approve the idea if it received the endorsement of the other two High Commissioners.*

This whole policy, however, was abruptly and spectacularly overtaken by events when the Cold War suddenly erupted into open conflict with the invasion of South Korea by North Korean armed forces. The Korean War was interrupted by the West as proof that Russia, which was held to have inspired the North Korean attack, would not hesitate to increase the area under its influence by direct military means, provided that the balance of forces in the chosen area afforded a sufficiently high degree of certainty of success. It was on this appraisal of Soviet intentions that Western policy was henceforth based.

The parallels between Korea and Germany were obvious to all. East Germany faithfully mirrored the pattern of North Korea, with an intransigent Communist regime, backed by powerful paramilitary forces, pursuing a vigorous propaganda campaign advocating the unification of the country and apparently prepared to use all the means at its disposal to achieve it. Accordingly, the likelihood of a resort to force by the Bereitschaften, was held to have greatly increased.

On 26th July, Defence Minister Shinwell described the terrifying confrontation in central Europe to the anxious House of Commons:*

* D.C. Watt : Britain Looks to Germany pgs. 103-104

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 478 Col. 471

"The Soviet Union (he said) maintains an army of some one hundred and twenty-five active divisions, of which one third are mechanised and tank divisions comprising about 25,000 tanks. Of these an appreciable number are at immediate readiness in the Soviet Zone of Germany. It has 2,800,000 men under arms and could double this number on mobilisation. This force is backed by about 17,000 military aircraft including jet aircraft of the latest design, both bombers and fighters. It has considerable naval forces, which include strong submarine fleets, many of them of modern design. (Against this N.A.T.O. could oppose only twelve divisions, mostly ill-equipped, and well under 1,000 aircraft). I will not conceal from the House that the forces at present available, or in sight, fall a long way short of requirements."

In response to those formidable statistics, Churchill repeated his demands for German rearmament which now appeared to an increasing number of M.P.'s to be the only solution. The Defence Minister himself at this time appears to have been resisting mounting pressure from his service advisers to urge such a policy upon the Cabinet. On the same day as he quoted these figures, however, Kenneth Younger, for the Foreign Office, insisted that Government policy had not changed since Bevin's unequivocal statement of 28th March.* From the simultaneity of these two statements by Government Ministers, it would appear that there was some conflict of policy between the two departments- the Defence Ministry favouring German rearmament, whereas the Foreign Office and Cabinet remained opposed to it.

* Ibid : Col. 461

The hectic succession of Brussels Pact and N.A.T.O. meetings in July and early August conveys some impression of the sense of crisis and acute danger and the feeling of urgency and even of despair which dominated the weeks following the North Korean invasion. In West Germany itself there were signs of widespread war panic; food began to be hoarded; businessmen began courting Local Communists, and the Land police were reluctant to operate against Communist demonstrators.* Throughout the Western alliance it was increasingly felt that imaginative and bold remedies were necessary to raise the morale of the West German citizens and to cure the strategic malaise outlined by the British Defence Minister.

There were at this time four distinct proposals concerning some form of German contribution to Western security. These proposals, although in fact quite separate, naturally became confused in the minds of the public, the newspapers and at times even of the Government itself.

The first, and most innocuous of these proposals, was the Federal Government's request for a strengthening of the ordinary police forces and an increased measure of central control and direction over them. Such an increase would have been required by the normal course of events, But the timing of the request resulted in its entanglement with the German rearmament issue. The British and other allied Governments readily favoured acceptance of this request.

* D.C. Watt : op. cit. p. 104

The second proposal was for the establishment of a West German equivalent of the Bereitschaften, and this also emanated from Federal Government sources. Adenauer's suggestion to this effect of June 1950 to General Robertson were passed to his successor, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, who, with the Foreign Secretary's approval, proposed acceptance of such forces at the meeting of the three High Commissioners on 17th August. By this date however, the American Administration was beginning to formulate proposals of its own which it was to bring before the allies at the forthcoming New York meeting of Foreign Ministers. Accordingly, discussion of the British supported proposals of 17th August for a West German equivalent of the Bereitschaften was shelved.*

The third proposal for a German defence contribution, which was inextricably linked to the contemporary pressures in favour of European integration, was for some form of German participation in a European Army. The Labour Government was opposed to these moves towards European integration and regarded the Army project with unconcealed dislike. The most significant proposal for the European Army at this time was that contained in the famous resolution of the Council of Europe on 11th August. Although this resolution did not explicitly mention German participation, its Sponsor, Winston Churchill, made it clear that he envisioned such an eventuality.*

* Ibid

* R.I.I.A. : Survey of International Affairs 1949-50 p. 160

The fact that the Tory leader was the moving spirit of the European Army did nothing to endear the scheme to the Labour leaders. During the debate in the Consultative Assembly, Labour Party delegates, led by Hugh Dalton, sided with the German Social Democrats in pouring scorn upon the idea, describing it as logistically impractical and as a "fantasy".* Labour respect for European susceptibilities was, however, sufficient to prevent open opposition in the vote on the resolution, from which the majority of Labour Party delegates abstained. Throughout August, however, Callaghan and Crossland, the Labour Party representatives on the General Affairs Committee, which was entrusted with the task of drafting a detailed plan for a European Army, conducted stout resistance to any progress along such lines.*

The fourth proposal was for the outright re-creation of a German national army, unhampered by European complications, but sufficiently integrated into the N.A.T.O. force then under discussion, to prevent the resurgence of German militarism. This proposal was the one which found most favour in the Pentagon, as the one of most immediate military relevance and feasibility. To the British Government, however, it was the least palatable. Bitter experience had taught that once the vital threshold of establishing a German national army had been crossed, even the most stringent international controls cannot be maintained.

* H. Dalton : High Tide and After p. 329

* Ibid

Hence, from the British point of view, no controls on a German national army could be sufficient to prevent German military resurgence, or to guarantee the security of Western Europe.

Thus, despite the impact of Korea and its resultant shock waves, the British policy on German rearmament remained substantially unchanged. However, there was more discussion of the four different types of German rearmament in Government circles, and an increasing number of advocates of each type. On 2nd July, for example, the influential military historian, Captain Liddell Hart, spoke of the need for an increase in Western strength, and, although he agreed that "it would be politically inadvisable at the present" and "could even provoke war", he felt that some means had to be found for enabling the Germans to make a contribution towards Western defence.*

Perhaps the most surprising, but also the most instructive, convert to the idea of German rearmament in the aftermath of Korea was the veteran Germanophobe, Lord Vansittart. In the House of Lords on 27th July, the author of 'Black Record' astounded his fellows peers by stating that although German rearmament was highly dangerous, "Soviet policy has made it inevitable."*

Moreover, the Government itself was becoming increasingly concerned about mounting criticism of European inactivity in the United States, which was leading to a re-emergence of demands for a return to a Fortress American strategy.

* Times : 4th July 1950

* Times : 28th July 1950

In particular, the public statements of ex-President Hoover, in August, to the effect that unless the Europeans agreed to German rearmament, America should 'bring back her boys'; caused grave misgivings in Government circles in London, where they were felt to reflect sentiments widespread throughout the United States, and not altogether absent from the American Administration itself.*

Despite all this, however, the policy of the Government remained that stated by Kirkpatrick in his press conference of 17th July to the effect that "there are no plans under consideration to build a West German army or to re-militarise the country in any way ... but a request by Dr. Adenauer to authorise the formation of a Federal police force is being considered."* Even British approval of plans for a West German Bereitschaften had, as we have seen, been given by General Robertson in early June, that is before the outbreak of the Korean War.

That there had been no change in British policy was made absolutely clear by a statement issued by the Foreign Office in 23rd August. The international press had acquired some garbled reports of the 17th August High Commission meeting, which had misreported the proceedings to the effect that Kirkpatrick had been advocating the re-establishment of a German army.* To calm the outraged susceptibilities of the British public at these reports that this representative was advocating such a heinous policy, the Foreign Office had to

* Manchester Guardian : 18th July 1950

* R.I.I.A. : Britain and the United States p. 149

deny all intention of supporting the re-creation of a German army. The statement made it clear, however, that the British Government had "full sympathy with the anxieties of Dr. Adenauer about the dangers from the growing militarism of Eastern Germany.*

The growth in the topicality of German rearmament was reflected in the British press, whose attitude remained basically cautious, but whose presentation of the issue increasingly stressed its inevitability. The popular press, on the whole, still reflected the emotional opposition of the general public, although an article by Douglas Bader in the News of the World advocating a "new Luftwaffe" must have raised many eyebrows.* The quality press, however, was obviously starting to condition and prepare the 'attentive public' for the political decision which would have to be made. The Times concluded that the "painful idea" of German rearmament was now being discussed within the Government.* Of the quality press, the Times,* Daily Telegraph* Scotsman* and Observer* all now favoured Adenauer's proposals for a West German Bereitschaften, which received the support of the British Government. The Sunday Times* even went further and advocated a new German national army. The Manchester Guardian,* however, retained its intense opposition to

* New York Times : 25th August 1950

* News of the World : 8th September 1950

* Times : 9th August 1950

* Times : 28th August 1950

* Daily Telegraph : 10th August 1950

* Scotsman : 24th August 1950

* Observer : 27th August 1950

* Sunday Times : 27th August 1950

German rearmament; believing that a West German Bereitschaften would be irrelevant in a conflict with Russia, and unnecessary to repulse an attack by the East German forces alone, which was quite within the competence of the Western occupation forces. Hence the paper was prepared to accept only an increase in the ordinary German police for internal stability.*

To add considerable weight to the increasing advocacy of German rearmament in influential circles, and to the preparation of the public for its acceptance, the Royal Institute of International Affairs published in late August, a pamphlet entitled 'Defence in the Cold War', which pungently asserted the military necessity for a new German army.*

"The logic of purely military arguments points unmistakably to this conclusion: that the creation of limited German forces, and a contribution to rearmament from the heavy industries of the Ruhr should be allowed - indeed encouraged. In no other way ... can the military threat to Western Europe be quickly and adequately countered without exhausting demands on the manpower and economic resources of Britain, France and their smaller allies."

The Chatham House study group examined in detail arguments frequently presented against German rearmament and attempted to prove them baseless. To the argument that German rearmament would provide Russia with a pretext for attack, the pamphlet maintained that Soviet policy was never to attack directly but only by proxy, and hence this became an additional reason for a West German equivalent of the Bereitschaften.

* Manchester Guardian : 25th August 1950

* R.I.I.A. : Defence in the Cold War p. 78 passim

The study group assumed that French opposition would evaporate once German forces were integrated into the N.A.T.O. Command. Moreover, the group saw no logical reason why the Bonn Government should prove unable to control a new Wehrmacht, or why international controls should not prove effective. The fear of Germany's neighbours was dismissed as without foundation, and it was thought that a clear decision by the Western allies to rearm Germany would quickly dispel the confusion of the German public on this issue.

Having blithely disposed of arguments against, the group then added further arguments in favour of German rearmament; it firmly bound West Germany to the Western cause, and hence prevented a Rapallo-politik not encouraged once; it would also ensure that Germany played her full part in the defence of Western civilisation of which she is an integral part."

It can readily be seen that the conclusions of this study group were far in advance of anything then considered feasible by the Government or by large sections of responsible opinion; but the report is instructive in that it provided further evidence of the increasing support in elite circles in Britain for the more drastic forms of German rearmament.

The press also perceived a gradual adjustment of British public opinion with regard to the rearming of Germany under the influence of events and the attitude of the press.*

* On this see M. Michel : op. cit. p 82

The Korean War completed the process of focussing popular hostility on Russia as the main danger to peace although the bulk of the population, basically uninformed and inarticulate, remained opposed to the rearming of the enemy of only five years ago. Kenneth Younger, however, has made it clear that in the formaulation of Government policy on German rearmament in the summer of 1950, the attitude of the British public played a role only insofar as it laid down a general framework outside of which Government policy could not step.* These constraints were of course reinforced by the fact that public misgivings were shared by many of the Government leaders. In this context it can be seen that the constraints of public opinion prevented the Government declaring in favour of a new Germany army while support for a West German Bereitschaften came within these limits.

Despite the official silence concerning German rearmament maintained by the avoidance of discussion in the Council of N.A.T.O. Deputies meeting in London throughout August, whose competence did not stretch to such explosive topics, it was widely recognised that the forthcoming meeting of Western Foreign Ministers at New York would be crucial for discussion of the issue. Accordingly on 21st August, Kirkpatrick was summoned to London for discussions with Bevin on German rearmament. Of this meeting Kirkpatrick wrote:*

* K. Younger : Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in British Journal of Sociology 1955 pgs. 169-175

"I told him (Bevin) that I favoured granting Adenauer's request for a police force on the Eastern German model. I knew that rearmament (meaning the re-creation of a German army) would not be popular in Germany, and it seemed wiser to grant a German request than to seek to impose on them a repugnant proposal ...
... Bevin was in full agreement."

Thus the Foreign Secretary, having secured Cabinet approval, embarked for New York intent upon pressing for a paramilitary West German force, but equally intent upon resisting any proposals for a new German army.

THE NEW YORK CONFERENCE

British policy at the New York meeting was complicated by the fact that simultaneously the House of Commons was debating defence. Attlee fearful of the effects of any controversy over German re-armament on his small parliamentary majority, opened the debate on 12th September in non-committal fashion: "This is a very difficult problem, and it will need careful consideration by all the parties. I prefer not to say any more on that point at the present time."* However, under Tory pressure, the Prime Minister was bold enough to outline the Government's policy. Referring to the problem of German internal security, and to Adenauer's requests for a para-military force and an enlarged police, Attlee stated*

".. there are strong reasons for this, The Federal Republic is constantly faced with the threat of Communist inspired disorders provoked by propaganda from the East backed by the so-called 'People's Police' in the Soviet Zone. The existing police forces are not adequate either in numbers or organisation to deal with widespread disturbances, and it would be most undesirable if the occupation forces had to be directed to the keeping of internal order."

In addition:

"The Federal Government needs to have at its disposal some force which could act swiftly in an emergency, What is envisaged is a gendarmarie or mobile guard under proper democratic control, and not an embryo army. That again is a matter which is being discussed at ... New York."

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 478, Col. 963

* Ibid

The Tories and some Labour Members assumed that the Prime Minister's reticence was concealing some alteration in Government policy. Labour doubters, however, were reassured when they read in that evening's papers of Bevin's unequivocal remark to reporters when the Queen Mary docked at New York. "German rearmament", he said, "is unthinkable".* This unusual diplomatic practice of making a precise statement of policy on a matter that was to be reviewed at the conference, and about which differences were known to exist amongst the participants indicates that the Foreign Secretary did not expect to be faced with the need to make a decision on German rearmament. Kenneth Younger confirms that "there had not been any preparatory consultations through the usual diplomatic channels to suggest this",* although Acheson had telegraphed Bevin when the Queen Mary was at sea, that the United States intended to raise the question of German rearmament. However, as Acheson had not specified what form of German rearmament, the Foreign Secretary would appear to have assumed that the message meant America had now decided to support the Anglo-German proposals for a paramilitary force.*

When the meeting of the three leading Western Foreign Ministers convened in the afternoon of 12th September, the statesmen readily agreed to a substantial increase in the German police forces and an increased degree of central control over them. Equally readily the Foreign Ministers endorsed the forward defence strategy which

* D.C. Watt : op. cit. p 104

* Personal information to M. Michel.

* R.N. Rosecrance : Defence of the Realm p. 130

had been approved by the Council of Deputies, and had formed the basis of all Western defence planning since the earliest days of the Brussels Treaty Organisation.*

Then however, Secretary of State Acheson sprang his surprise. He put forward a three-point programme in the form of an integral package deal, which, he maintained, was essential in order to give effect to this strategy. The three points were : the creation of an integrated N.A.T.O. force under an American Supreme Comander; the reinforcement of American ground forces in Europe, and the raising of an army of twelve divisions with tactical air forces in West Germany.* These proposals were later referred to by a member of the British delegation as "the bomb in the Waldorf".* (The hotel where the meeting was held.)

The British ardently desired the first two points of the package, which would irrevocably commit the United States to the defence of Western Europe, and hence eliminate, once and for all, the British nightmare of a re-emergence of American isolationism. Bevin, in particular, was immediately taken with the idea of an integrated Atlantic force and a Supreme Commander, which, he thought, would spur the Europeans to action more than anything else.*

The German clauses, however, would entail the re-creation of the Wehrmacht, something to which Bevin could not agree. Accordingly, he sought, at first, to separate the items of the

* See C. Bell : op. cit.

* D.C. Watt : op. cit. pgs. 104-105

* L.W. Martin : op. cit. p 658

* H.S. Truman : Years of Trial and Hope p 269

package deal, but Acheson was firmly committed by Pentagon pressure to maintaining its integrity.* The Foreign Secretary then fought hard for the militarised German police force requested by Adenauer,"* on the grounds that the German people would not accept the large scale proposals of the Americans. To this the American delegation retorted that Britain was merely "fabricating arguments" as an excuse to prevent German rearmament.*

Acheson's secret report to Truman on 15th September clearly indicates the dilemma in which the British Government was placed, and the pressures upon it:*

"I pointed out that in our discussions the British and French had been prepared to accept what was offered ... and had flatly refused to face in any way the question of German participation ... The ensuing discussion brought out very clearly ... that Bevin, who really agreed with me, had been put under wraps by his Government and was not permitted to say anything. This grows out of the current debate in the House of Commons on this very subject, in which the Labour Government has a pathological fear of Churchill."

During the private discussions, however, Acheson was able to make some progress:

"It completely blew out of the water the practicality of leaving the beginning of the formation of German military units until the Allied forces were completely supplied with equipment."

* D. Acheson : Sketches From Life p. 33

* Kirkpatrick : op. cit p. 241

* Ibid

* H.S. Truman : op. cit. pgs. 269-270

I think it destroyed any logical basis to this fear that the bringing of Germans into the creation of Allied strength in the West increased the possibility of preventive war by the Russians as against the mere creation of Allied strength."

With this slight progress the meeting adjourned to allow Bevin and Schuman to consult fully with their Government on the issue. Bevin himself urged the Cabinet to accept the package deal "in principle" in the hope that the French would always block any German rearmament and hence incur American odium; and Britain could thereafter exert her efforts towards breaking the integrity of the package deal so as to secure her desires, avoid her fears, and ensure that all American impatience was directed against France.*

There was widespread irritation in Britain at the manner in which the American Government had produced its proposals. Bevin himself was most annoyed, and in the Cabinet there was strong resistance to the acceptance even of the principle of German rearmament, and the Ministers argued back and forth three times in a long exchange of argumentative telegrams across the North Atlantic.* Dalton led the opposition in the Cabinet, and he received the support of a number of his colleagues including Hector McNeill, Chuter Ede and Nye Bevan; he also had strong support outside the Cabinet, in the Parliamentary Labour Party, and in the many sections of the Labour Movement.*

* D. Acheson : op. cit. p. 34 See also K. Dalton : Diary, August 1951

* H. Dalton : Diary, August 1951

* Ibid

Nor, of course, was there much eagerness amongst the general public to rearm the Germans. Kenneth Younger summed up the general feeling in influential quarters in London:*

"British ... military opinion did not dispute that German manpower would eventually be required in order to hold a line of defence on the Elbe. But there was still so much to be done in building up the forces of the North Atlantic Treaty powers themselves, that there seemed to be no compelling need at that stage to tackle the delicate question of the German contribution which was so clearly bound to heighten the tension between East and West and to confuse opinion among the Western allies."

On 14th September, the day the Foreign Ministers adjourned, Defence Minister Shinwell told the House of Commons that, "the matter (of German rearmament) is being studied".* He also indicated the Government's view when he castigated the European Army scheme as "quaint and fantastic", and insisted that the Germans must be allowed to decide for themselves and must not be compelled to make a grudging contribution.

Of the motivations of the Government at this stage, Kenneth Younger later wrote:*

"One of our main concerns when the proposal was brusquely launched in September 1950 was the possibility of a strong popular revulsion in France which might destroy the already precarious political stability of that country."

* K. Younger : The German Problem p. 6

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 478, Col. 1395

* K. Younger : Public Opinion and Foreign Policy p. 170

The immediate importance of the feelings of the British public in the Cabinet's decision to accept the package was, according to Younger, negligible.

The British Government also felt perturbed by the far-reaching nature of the American demands which were much greater than the suggestions of Adenauer, and indeed departed further from the Potsdam Declaration on demilitarisation than anything the Russians had done in East Germany. This fact gave rise to grave fears in the Government that the Soviets might genuinely interpret the New York decisions as provocative, and be tempted to launch an attack whilst the Western allies were still divided by the prospect of German rearmament, but not yet strengthened by its reality.

On 17th September, however, the Cabinet decided to take Bevin's advice and accept the package deal:

"not because we thought that a German military contribution was immediately essential, but because we thought that American participation in Western European defence was essential, and it seemed clear that the Americans were not prepared to play their part unless there was some provision for a German contribution."*

Therefore, having accepted the reality of the Soviet threat in Europe, it was vital to the Government to receive a full scale American commitment to the defence of Europe, especially since the realisation of Britain's own defence programme itself depended on

* K. Younger : German Rearmament; For and Against p. 6

American aid. Given this supreme objective there was really no choice once Acheson had made unmistakably clear Americans determination to make its continued presence and increased effort in Europe dependent on the raising of German forces.

It was, however, clearly understood by Bevin, and by the rest of the Cabinet that, despite acceptance "in principle" the timing, method and the amount of this German contribution to Western defence was to be left over for further discussion. Even at New York, Britain and France laid down ~~two~~ basic conditions to this acceptance of the principle of German rearmament; first, that the rearmament of N.A.T.O. members was to have absolute priority; and, secondly, that the organisation itself, and the integrated command had to be fully established before German units were raised.

However, not all the Cabinet were reconciled to even this acceptance in principle. Describing the meeting, Dalton wrote in his diary:*

"I tried to insist even this and told (the) Cabinet at (the) end that I accepted even 'principle' with great reluctance ... and I hoped nothing would come of it (a) because I did not trust the Germans with arms - I didn't know which way they'd shoot. (b) because we hadn't arms to spare for them anyhow. (c) because it was the one thing that might provoke the Russians."

With his new instructions, Bevin was free to support Acheson's schemes in the N.A.T.O. Council meeting, and in the re-convened meeting of the Foreign Ministers on 19th September. Accordingly,

* H. Dalton : Diary, August 1951. Underlined in original

the communique issued on the 19th indicated that the Ministers had reached an important agreement on the principle of German rearmament.*

"We recognise the fact that outright military units have been created in the Soviet Zone ... and this fact, together with recent events in Germany and elsewhere have given rise to a situation of great concern. The Ministers are fully agreed that the re-creation of a German national army would not serve the best interests of Germany or of Europe ... The Ministers have taken note however of sentiments expressed in Germany and elsewhere in favour of German participation in an integrated force for the defence of European freedom. The question raised by the problem of the participation of the German Federal Republic in the common defence of Europe are at present the subject of study and exchange of views."

With this agreement the N.A.T.O. Council was also able to reconvene and reach agreement that:*

"Germany should be enabled to contribute to the build-up of the defence of Western Europe, and .. requested the Defence Committee to make recommendations at the earliest possible date as to the methods by which Germany could most usefully make its contribution."

Despite such superficial agreement "in principle" it was clear that Britain and France would strive to ensure the maximum safeguarding of their interests, and that a lengthy and arduous process of negotiations would be required to bring the divergent concepts of the Western allies into harmony.

Many members of the British Government felt that by reversing its policy so precipitately, the United States gave the bargaining

* R.I.I.A. : Documents on International Affairs 1949-50 pgs. 333-336

* Lord Ismay : op cit Appendix IV p. 186

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* Lord Ismay : op cit Appendix IV p. 186

advantage to the Germans. Bevin, in particular, felt uneasy about the continued prevalence of nationalistic feelings in West Germany, and immediately after the New York Conference expressly instructed Kirkpatrick to convey his misgivings to Adenauer, stressing the need at this crucial time "for all men of goodwill to try to guide developments forward in the right direction."* Kirkpatrick himself was also concerned by the opportunities the New York decisions gave to the Germans for using the Western strategic needs to blackmail the allies into returning full sovereignty to Germany. Accordingly, on 30th September, the British High Commissioner warned the German people to identify themselves wholly with the Western cause and "to forgo opportunities of chiselling out petty advantages over the West."*

The first domestic reaction to the New York decisions was provided by the simultaneous House of Commons defence debate which once again illustrated the intense opposition of Labour Members to the re-creation of a German army. Again it was Richard Crossman who led the opposition to the Government's reluctant acceptance of this proposal. Even Crossman, however, was now forced to base his opposition to the scheme on a preference for the creation of a West German Bereitschaften.* This enthusiasm for a West German Bereitschaften was, however, regarded with grave suspicion by several Labour backbenchers who, if pushed to a choice,

* K. Adenauer : op. cit. p 285

* Manchester Guardian : 9th October 1950

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 478 Col. 1264-1265

had a preference for the re-creation of the Wehrmacht before that of the S.S.

The Tory backbenchers also felt uneasy now that the prospect of a new Wehrmacht seemed close. Whilst the Tory leaders reiterated their ideas of a European Army, their followers produced such fantastic schemes as the re-formation of the King's German Legion* in the British Army which, historians recalled, had played a major role in the British campaign of the eighteenth century. The Nationalist Tory Right-Wing in particular was uneasy about a new Wehrmacht, and the Commons was treated to the spectacle of their leading spokesman, Viscount Hinchingbrooke, appealing to Ernest Bevin to "stick to his guns".* However, Hinchingbrooke's bizarre ideas about the Bereitschaften being the anti-Bolshevick successor of the Freikorps robbed his speech of much of its credibility. Nevertheless, it is significant that George Thomas, of Left-wing opponent of German rearmament, registered the convergence of the parliamentary extremes by describing Hinchingbrooke's speech as "the first word of sanity we have heard."*

The British press, including the Labour newspapers, welcomed the New York decisions as helping to integrate Germany into the Western world. The acceptance of the principle of German rearmament was, however, played down by the press, often because the studied vagueness of the New York communiques deceived the press as to

* Ibid Col. 1035

* Ibid Col. 1200

* Ibid Col. 1219

their time significance.* The Times* merely stated that German rearmament had been discussed; the Daily Telegraph* even thought that the issue had been shelved for the moment.

The Manchester Guardian* was still the only daily 'heavy' to take a firm stand one way or the other when it reiterated its opposition to any form of German rearmament. Nevertheless, "the general pattern of press reaction suggests that concrete proposals were being awaited before the adoption of definite attitudes."*

* See in particular, Daily Herald : 20th September 1950

* Times : 20th September 1950

* Daily Telegraph : 20th September 1950

* Manchester Guardian : 30th September 1950

* M. Michel : op. cit. p. 115

VI

GOVERNMENT POLICY AFTER NEW YORK

The noticeable absence of any strong press or public reaction to the New York Conference finds its explanation partly in the general impression that no firm decisions had been taken about the awkward problem, and partly to the deliberate policy of restraint and the avoidance of discussion adopted by the Government. The decision to rearm Germany was one of the most unpopular that could have been taken with a General Election always imminent. It was therefore vital to the Government that nothing should happen to alarm the public or endanger their slim parliamentary majority.

The zenith of Government reticence on this issue was achieved at the Annual Labour Party Conference in early October. In the Conference debate on foreign affairs, all Government speakers carefully avoided reference to German rearmament. Even when Shinwell enumerated the decisions of the N.A.T.O. Council, he studiously omitted any reference to German rearmament.* Bevin referred, by way of aside, to the German problem. He spoke of Labour endeavours to re-build Germany, "but we did not want a military Germany ... I believe myself that most of the Germans now realise the futility of war"; adding this advice to the faithful; "You cannot do better in your local Labour parties than study the decisions arrived at .. in New York." Although also failing to state that German rearmament was one of these decisions,

* Labour Party Annual Conference : Report p. 140

he continued: "Great risks have to be run, decisions that make you wonder whether they will lead to a resurgence of German militarism, and you have to weigh them accordingly and take precautions."* Although the Government's foreign policy received overwhelming endorsement from the Conference, the Foreign Secretary's speech did nothing to clarify the widespread confusion as to just what had been decided at New York regarding German rearmament, and exactly where the British Government stood on this issue.

However, in political circles out of the public view, German rearmament was the subject of considerable controversy, but even here the assurance that there had been merely agreement in principle served to allay anxieties.*

The condition of public opinion in October 1950 was still one of opposition to any German rearmament. To the question: "Would you approve or disapprove if West Germany were allowed to build up an army as part of a European Army?", 37% of those questioned indicated approval and 41% disapproval.* Thus the usual suggestion that public opinion was overwhelmingly opposed to any form of German rearmament seems highly dubious as early as October 1950. The reason lies in the profound impact of Korea upon the public -- far greater indeed than its impact upon the British Government -- which heightened fears of Russia, and correspondingly reduced fears of Germany. Moreover, an increasingly large number of people were now beginning to resent the fact that Germany was

* M. Michel : op. cit p. 115

* British Institute of Publication : (Gallup Polls) Records.

excluded from participation in Western defence, and thought that, provided German forces were kept under international supervision, there seemed little reason to deny the West the use of the undoubted military prowess of the impeccably Russophobic Germans.

Labour Party opinion, however, had not re-aligned its sentiments as rapidly as had the general public. An indication of the state of opinion within the Party was furnished by Mr. Morgan Phillips, who was reported to have told a meeting of the Committee of the International Socialist Conference in Paris on 22nd October; that the Labour Party was aware of the dangers of German rearmament, and that neither the Party nor the Government had made up its mind on this "terrible dilemma".*

The confusion which this statement caused in continental circles, and especially within the French Government constrained the Foreign Office to issue an immediate statement to the effect that:*

"The British Government's attitude on this question was made clear to the other Governments concerned during the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in New York, and has not changed. They consider that Germany should be enabled to make an appropriate contribution to the build-up of the defence of Western Europe."

This statement, issued on 23rd October; was the first Government admission to its domestic audience that it supported German rearmament.

Under pressure from Churchill, the Prime Minister finally made the Government's policy explicit in the Debate on the Address on 31st October.*

* Daily Telegraph : 23rd October 1950. * Times : 24th October 1950
* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 480, Col. 34.

"In considering these proposals, the main object of His Majesty's Government has been to ensure the creation at the earliest date of an effective defence force in Europe under the North Atlantic Treaty system ... As we have already made plain, on our view Germany should be able to make an appropriate contribution to the building up of the defence of Europe. This also is under discussion in Washington, but until that study is complete it is not possible to make public any further information,"

Only Crossman challenged this and expressed his surprise that a major change of Government policy had been announced in "an odd sentence of the Prime Minister's";* otherwise the Government's policy of playing down the issue on the domestic scene continued to be successful.

On the international scene, however, the Government had decided to follow the opposite policy of pressing with the greatest haste, for Western agreement on the implementation of the New York decisions. In accordance with Bevin's diplomatic strategem of September, it was held that British support for the American package would enable Britain to separate the items of it, and hence achieve her desired ends of American reinforcements for Europe and an integrated force, and then allow the issue of German rearmament to become bogged down in complex negotiations.

Consistent with this international policy, Shinwell pressed for early agreement at the Washington meeting of the Defence Committee in October. On his arrival at Washington, Shinwell made this plain by declaring that: "It is time we got down to

* Ibid : Col. 365

business - the longer we delay, the worse it will be for every one of us."* At Washington, the spectacle of Shinwell, acting in accord with the Government's diplomatic strategy, bullying his fellow-Jew, the French Defence Minister, Jules Moch, into accepting German rearmament, which neither of them wanted must have been a most ironic sight.*

In October, two almost simultaneous international proposals relating to German rearmament were made which led to the whole issue becoming inextricably intertwined with two other developments on the international scene. The first emanated from the Prague meeting of Soviet bloc Foreign Ministers, called in response to the New York Conference, on 21st October. The Communists described the Western plans to rearm Germany as highly provocative and suggested a Four-Power meeting to discuss Germany.* This offer was supplemented by a Soviet note to the Western allies in which Russia warned that she could "not tolerate" any German rearmament.* These moves were deliberately aimed at appealing to the British longing for Four-Power agreement, and at fostering the belief that German rearmament would permanently bar such talks and might provoke war. It is significant that at every stage of the Western effort to provide the necessary legal and political conditions for beginning the process of German rearmament, the Soviet Union held out the chimera of Four-Power agreement

* C.G.D. Onslow : op. cit. p. 471

* M. Michel : op. cit. p. 117a

* R.I.I.A. : Survey of International Affairs 1949-50 pgs. 78-79

* R.I.I.A. : Britain and the United States p. 150

which appealed to so many Labour followers who were loath to admit that their high hopes of 1945 had been dashed and were continually seeking ways to revive them.

On 13th November, Bevin replied to the Soviet moves. Respecting Labour susceptibilities, he did not veto any Four-Power talks, but insisted that such talks must include subjects other than the future of Germany, and in particular must include the Far East.* The Soviet Union, of course, could not at this time enter discussions on the Far East. Thus Bevin hoped to retain Labour support for the Government's domestic stance of muted hostility to German rearmament and eagerness for Four-Power talks to prevent it, and yet impose no constraints upon the Government's haste at the Washington meeting.

The second development was the scheme announced on 24th October by the French Prime Minister, Pleven, for a European Army and a European Defence Community. The initial British reaction to the Pleven Plan was one of undisguised hostility. Being a further manifestation of that movement towards European integration which the Labour Government opposed, and, having its origins in a suggestion of Churchill's the scheme was anathema to the Government. Above all, however, the Government's opposition to the Plan was based on the very same reason which the French found so appealing, namely, that its negotiation would impose a long delay on all other plans for the build-up of Western strength.*

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 480 Col.s 1383-1387

* Ibid : Col. 1727-1731

The Government, however, was by now experiencing increasing difficulty in keeping its dual policies mutually separate, and appears to have decided at this stage that it could less afford to offend the Americans than its own backbenchers. Accordingly, on 15th November, after considerable pressure from Labour backbenchers, Shinwell agreed to make a statement to the House on the progress of the Washington talks. The Defence Minister stated that the Americans were insisting on the integrity of their package proposals, and hence to obtain the British desiderate of an integrated force and American reinforcements, the Government had agreed to accept a German defence contribution. The British delegates had therefore supported the American proposals on the nature of this contribution in order to expedite the creation of an integrated N.A.T.O. force and to secure American reinforcements for Europe.*

"Consideration of the French proposal would ... inevitably, in the view of His Majesty's Government, involve great delay in meeting up the integrated force under the Supreme Commander which (is) the next step to be taken in building up the defence of Western Europe."

The Defence Committee had, however, been unable to gain French acceptance of the American proposals and the problem had now been passed to the Council of Deputies. Shinwell agreed that some progress had been made "but not enough to satisfy me."*

* Ibid

* C.G.D. Onslow : op. cit. p 471

Bevin himself added further explanation of Government policy to the House of Commons in the foreign affairs debate on 29th November, but once again the dichotomy between policy in the N.A.T.O. meetings and in the House of Commons was apparent. Bevin gave the fullest importance to the integrated force, describing it as, "full of hope and promise for our future defence and security", adding that in N.A.T.O. meetings "we urged that it should be carried into effect without delay". However, the Americans had insisted upon tying the proposals to German rearmament, and the Government had decided that the importance of the integrated force and the full American commitment to Europe was greater than their fears of a remilitarised Germany. However, Bevin added, there were respectable and weighty reasons to favour a German defence contribution:*

"... if Western Germany is to be defended, it seems to us only fair and reasonable that the people of West Germany should help in their own defence. Many people are quite understandably worried at the prospect of rearming Germany so shortly after the war. They fear that the spirit of Nazism will rise again ... That is a point of great anxiety to all the Governments, and to everyone else who has had to study the problem. But it is something which the rest of the Atlantic powers would not tolerate."

Speaking of the Plevin Plan, Bevin continued; "His Majesty's Government do not favour this proposal" because of the delay and complications it would entail for the creation of the integrated force.

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 481, Cols. 1170-1173

Labour backbenchers, however, were not appeased by the Foreign Secretary's speech, and his attempt to play down the German rearmament issue. Above all they found the idea of Four-Power talks attractive, and this reinforced their opposition to German rearmament, which would prove an inevitable bar to such talks.* So intense was the Labour feeling that when the debate resumed on 30th November, it commenced with an official statement on German rearmament delivered by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Mr. Ernest Davies. Following the Government's policy of presenting a stance of muted hostility towards German rearmament for its domestic audience Davies stated:*

"We can all appreciate the reluctant acceptance of German rearmament with all its potential dangers. No one accepts the necessity for German rearmament without considerable regret and reluctance, but it is believed that the change in circumstances has made it necessary."

Davies continued to outline the reasons for the change of policy, which the Government wanted to put before its domestic audience:

"One reason is that we do not want to have to liberate the continent again.. if enemy forces succeeded in reaching the Channel Ports again, the position of this country would clearly be untebable... The large cost of modern defence in both men and materials requires now, in the view of HIs Mahesty's Government, some German rearmament. Fears have been expressed that it will be extremely difficult to

* See for example, the speeches of Yates and E. Jones; Ibid

* Ibid Cols. 1350-1354

Col. 1187 & 1239-1241

prevent the re-emergence of German militarism. The suggested integration of the German units inside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is thought to provide the answer. The Foreign Secretary yesterday did not rule out the possibility of a European Army being fitted into the pattern of Atlantic defence, provided that there was no delay in building up Western defences, and no danger of weakening the security of the Atlantic Powers."

Then came the sentence which summed up the whole approach of the Government to German rearmament at this stage: "We cannot take any risk of there being a delay in building up the North Atlantic Treaty forces".

Davies then attempted to calm Labour fears.

"It has been suggested by Hon. Friends behind me, that if German units are created it will be impossible to prevent the emergence of a German national army, and a resurgence of German militarism; that as a German military machine is again built up there may be pressure to regain the Eastern countries, and that this would create a dangerous situation on the continent. We understand these grave doubts which have been experienced, but ... the proposals now under consideration specifically avoid or indeed prohibit, the re-creation of the German General Staff or ... a German army on the old Wehrmacht model.

There is a very great distinction between what happened in the 1920's and what is happening now... Together with the Allies we have embarked upon a process of integrating Germany into the democratic framework of Western Europe. It was inevitable that on this course of development, Germany would one day take part in the duties of defending this Western way of life, of which she forms an integral part. The process has been hurried by the rapid

growth of the menace from the East, and we are combining appropriate safeguards with the principle of German participation. We think that these are genuine safeguards.

The final safeguard however is that Germany should feel herself a partner in the Western community of nations, and should form the habit of acting within that framework. I suggest therefore that those who talk or think of the dangers of German militarism should try to think of Germany as emerging as a new Germany, and one which can be brought into the community of nations in Europe, and can assist Europe in defending its democratic way of life."

This long and important exposition of Government policy to its domestic audience was sufficient to dampen temporarily Labour criticism, and in his summing up speech Attlee was safely able to revert to his preferred stance of completely ignoring the issue.

Whilst the Government was so reticent about exposing its complex double-headed policy on German rearmament, the press could give no guide to public opinion. The issue was widely debated in the press, but the previous attitudes adopted by the newspapers, which were largely non-committal, still prevailed.*

Developments on the international scene in early November raised alarming doubts about the continuation of the American commitment to Europe if France and Germany persisted in making difficulties over German rearmament. On 4th November, the State Department gave a clear warning to Paris and Bonn not to drag out the German rearmament issue, or America might reconsider her European defence commitment;* and on 23rd November the Times

* See for example, Daily Telegraph : 18th November 1950

* New York Times : 4th November 1958

reported that European indecision on German rearmament had delayed American reinforcements for Europe.* In order to break the log-jam and avoid the nightmare of an American withdrawal from Europe, Bevin announced his intention of visiting West Germany in order to urge the Social Democratic Party and the German Government to accept American plans, and he was prevented from doing so only by serious illness.*

In addition, the Government maintained its pressure for early agreement on implementation of the integrated force concept, and its corollary of German participation, though Sir Frederick Hoyer Millar, the British representative on the N.A.T.O. Council of Deputies. Millar and the Council Chairman Spofford, played an important role in presenting compromise proposals, and bringing the weight of opinion within N.A.T.O. to bear on the American and French Governments. Eventually on 13th December, the Deputies were able to forward an agreed report on the nature of the German contribution to the Defence Committee and the Council. A joint meeting of these two bodies on 18th December at Brussels, attended by Bevin and Shinwell, was able to announce unanimous agreement within N.A.T.O. on German participation along the lines of the Spofford Plan, and invited the Western occupying powers to "explore the matter with the German Federal Republic."* The Brussels Conference

* Times : 23rd November 1950

* New York Herald Tribune : 12th November 1950

* Lord Ismay : op. cit. Appendix IV p. 187

also decided to create immediately the N.A.T.O. integrated force and received the appointment of Eisenhower as its Supreme Commander.

The Brussels decisions were an unmitigated triumph for the British diplomatic strategy. Not only had British tenacity broken the integrity of the American package deal and secured the immediate creation of the much derided integrated force, whilst German rearmament was thrown back into negotiations between the German Federal Government and the Allied High Commission; but the British had also unintentionally acquired the added bonus that the basis of N.A.T.O. accord the Spofford Plan, was unacceptable to Dr. Adenauer as it placed Germany in a position of inferiority in the integrated force, and furthermore, the French had decided to call a conference in Paris on the European Army scheme. Thus these two sets of complex negotiations would both have to be resolved before a German put on a uniform, whereas the integrated force and the American reinforcements were to be set up immediately. Having achieved their desires the British Government was now planning to delay the negotiations on German rearmament; the Americans, having thrown away their trump card of an integral package deal, had completely vindicated Bevin's diplomatic strategy.

At Brussels, Bevin spoke of the vital importance of the integrated N.A.T.O. force to which he had persuaded the Government to subordinate its fear of a rearmed Germany.

* Lord Ismay : op. cit. p. 37

"It is given to few men to see their dreams fulfilled ... I kept myself alive because I wanted to see this North Atlantic Alliance properly launched. This has been done today."

Indeed, so confident about the outcome of the Brussels Conference had Bevin become that, as early as 12th December, he had circulated a paper to the Cabinet in which he argued that the first stage of the British diplomatic strategy had been successful and the integrity of the package deal broken, and the Government could therefore move to the second stage of "playing (German rearmament) very slow".*

* H. Dalton : Diary August 1951

VII

MOUNTING DOMESTIC DISSENT AND GOVERNMENT PROCRASTINATION AFTER BRUSSELS

British reluctance to press ahead with German rearmament after the Brussels triumph was reinforced by the repeated Soviet offers on the eve of the Conference for Four-Power negotiations on German demilitarisation. The Soviet note was the usual mixture of threats mingled with hopes of agreement,* and, on 17th December, a Foreign Office spokesman dismissed it as "a patently tactical device timed to coincide"* with the N.A.T.O. meeting. Once the Brussels decisions had registered the British triumphs, however, the Government regarded the Soviet offer in a much more favourable light, and the official reply in January spoke of a willingness to enter Four-Power talks on German demilitarisation.* Most Labour backbenchers and Government Ministers longed for successful negotiations with Russia, and the continued demilitarisation of Germany was one of the few subjects upon which Britain and Russia had a common interest. Bevin also favoured Four-Power talks, but wished to extend them to cover subjects other than German demilitarisation, and hoped that the threat of rearming West Germany could be used by the West in such talks to secure concessions elsewhere by Russia.*

Nevertheless, Labour supporters were uneasy at the apparent progress towards German rearmament registered at Brussels. It was these decisions which caused Callaghan to warn the Labour leaders that; "for the first time he did not feel that Attlee carried most

* New York Times : 17th December 1950

* New York Herald Tribune : 18th December 1950

* Manchester Guardian : 8th January 1951

* H. Dalton : Diary 20th December 1950

of the party with him."* Accordingly, on 20th December, on behalf of the critics, Dalton met Attlee and outlined the by now familiar reasons for opposing German rearmament. Attlee "didn't disagree" with Dalton's analysis, and assured him that Bevin shared his apprehension about German rearmament but hoped to use it as "a card to play in Four-Power talks".*

At the turn of the year, criticism of German rearmament mounted as people began to appreciate the significance of the decisions taken at New York and Brussels. Communist opposition was of course fully expected, as was the emotional opposition of Jews, ex-Servicemen and other such bodies; but the mirage of Four-Power talks greatly widened the catchment area of dissent. As ex-Servicemen marched to the Cenotaph to protest against German rearmament, and the Communists held demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, the Government received numerous appeals from those who found the prospect of Four-Power talks attractive. In addition, Tribune and the New Statesman kept up their constant campaign against German rearmament and in favour of talks with Russia.* The Government received additional reason for its decision to 'play it very slowly' from the increasing signs of a German desire to use the forthcoming negotiations with the High Commission in order to secure the abandonment of the occupation as the price for agreeing to rearmament. An even more disturbing feature of the German scene was the eagerness with which the American military and the German Federal Government were seeking

* Ibid : 21st December 1950

* Ibid : 20th December 1950

* See, in particular, editorials of 30th December 1950

out former Wehemacht generals as experts on military strategy.

These generals, in turn, insisted on the release of their imprisoned colleagues, and the restoration of the 'honour' of the German soldier before they would agree to implement any rearmament. When to this was added the fear of neo-Nazism aroused by the electoral successes of the Socialist Reich Party, the British Government considered it had strong grounds for doubting the wisdom of an early rearmament of Germany, and for using its influence to avert and delay a decision.

The Government's change of emphasis found immediate reflection in the press. The Times now considered it "unfortunate" that a Western defence plan dependent upon German assistance had been announced before the opening of negotiations with Germany. Above all, it felt that the decision to conduct simultaneous negotiations in Bonn on both the military and the political future of West Germany would give the Germans an opportunity for securing political concessions in return for their agreement to rearm, which no Government could pass up.* Both the Times and the Manchester Guardian now favoured the postponement of any discussions with Germany on her rearmament at least whilst the prospect of Four-Power talks was still real.* Of especial significance in indicating the present Government attitude were informative articles in the News Chronicle and Daily Herald* warning of the dangers of German rearmament even within an international force.

As 'informed opinion' in Britain, following the Government's lead began stressing the disadvantages of German rearmament, 'general

* Times : 12th January 1951

* Ibid : and Manchester Guardian : 4th January 1951

public opinion' was, paradoxically, moving in favour of it. In answer to an opinion poll in December 1950, a majority emerged in favour of German rearmament within a European Army with 41% in favour and only 38% now opposed.*

The Government, however, was uninfluenced by the mood of public opinion as a whole, and began to put into effect its policy of delay and procrastination on German rearmament. The British High Commission secured the postponement of the opening of the Bonn negotiations from the 1st until 9th January, when the American threat to conduct bilateral talks with the German Government finally brought the British to the negotiating table.* When they opened, the British Deputy High Commissioner, John Ward, immediately suggested adjournment until after Eisenhower's forthcoming European tour.*

The procrastinatory British policy in the negotiations was reinforced by several statements of Kirkpatrick in January warning the Germans against "a policy of ... playing off one power against another".* On 30th January, Kirkpatrick indicated that the British considered that German rearmament was "not a matter of great urgency" and expressed his agreement with Eisenhower's belief that the Atlantic army should first be brought into shape. The High Commissioner also warned the Americans against "undue impatience",

* British Institute of Public Opinion : op. cit.

* News Chronicle : 4th January 1951

* New York Times : 13th January 1951

* New York Times : 17th January 1951

* New York Times : 4th February 1951

and spoke of the need for the development of healthy relations between Germany and the rest of Western Europe being of precedence.*

In Britain, however, the Labour Party was beginning to show signs of increasing objection to schemes for German rearmament despite the ironic fact that the Government was now blowing cold on the idea in international negotiations. Towards the end of January, the momentum and the importance of the criticism mounted. A statement by Morrison on 25th January that the Government stood by its "known policy" first brought matters to a head. A speech by Attlee on 26th January, in which he stressed the dangers of German rearmament* was insufficient to appease the critics, and a "number of Labour members", led by Eric Fletcher, a consistent opponent of German rearmament, decided to table a Commons motion protesting against the rearmament of both East and West Germany on the grounds that such action would be offensive to large bodies of opinion in Britain and Germany. Under pressure from the Whips, the critics agreed to consult with the Parliamentary Labour Party Liaison Committee on 29th January before proceeding.* At this meeting, Attlee secured the withdrawal, of the motion by appealing for party unity on this issue at a time of delicate international negotiations and slim parliamentary majority.*

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 483 Col. 317

* Manchester Guardian : 27th January 1951

* Ibid

* Ibid

* Daily Worker : 1st February 1951

The anxieties of Labour Members, however, were not seduced away. The Government was sufficiently concerned about backbench feeling by 7th February to make explicit its open dislike for German rearmament. Davies told the House of Commons that the Brussels decisions and the Bonn talks were:*

"purely exploratory ... and no steps have been taken actually to rearm Germany. At present, the position is that we are explaining to the Germans our proposals, and the Germans are considering them and putting forward their proposals. But there has been no step taken which is irrecoverable."

This statement, however, succeeded only in raising Tory wrath without allaying Socialist fears. The Cabinet was becoming increasingly concerned at mounting backbench criticism. Despite the abandonment of the Fletcher motion, the Left-wing was considering a more militant motion, this time condemning only West German rearmament. Within the Cabinet itself, there was increasing feeling against German rearmament and it met on the 8th February to formulate its policy.*

"Nearly all think that although (acceptance in) principle cannot at present be repudiated, application should be delayed, at least until after the Russian talks, when this, as Ernest Bevin always intended (could) be used as a bargaining counter."

The impolitic demands of the Germans, Eisenhower's conclusion after his European tour that he wanted "no unwilling contingents" in his army* and the growing criticism in the Labour Movement

* H. Dalton : Diary, February 1951

* Times : 3rd February 1951

greatly strengthened the hands of the opponents of German rearmament in the Cabinet. The Cabinet immediately agreed to advise Kirkpatrick to go even slower in the Bonn negotiations; Dalton then led the attack on German rearmament, supported by Ede, Bevan, McNeil and Robens, and opposed only by Morrison.* "There was general agreement on my conclusion." Thus the Cabinet decided to make a further statement of policy which would emphatically announce its opposition to any further discussion of German rearmament, at least until after the proposed Four-Power talks, and even then only under the most stringent conditions. Kenneth Younger, writing in another context, summed up the Cabinet's motivation for its decision of 8th February:*

"I think that public opinion, especially as expressed through trade unions, increased the reluctance with which Labour ministers accepted the rearming of Germany. I think that probably the so-called Attlee conditions postponing the implementation of the policy were promoted largely by the feeling of the Labour Movement."

That very afternoon, however, Crossman tabled his Commons motion:*

"That this House urges the Government to press for a reconsideration by the Atlantic Powers of the proposal for the rearmament of West Germany, which would ally us with the most reactionary and unreliable elements of West Germany, remove the hope of unifying Germany without war, and, if decided upon

* This account is taken from Dalton : Diary, February 1951

* K. Younger : Public Opinion and Foreign Policy p. 171

* Manchester Guardian : 10th February 1951

before the forthcoming Four-Power Conference would make the failure of that Conference a foregone conclusion."

In view of the imminent foreign affairs debate, the resolution caused the Government serious embarrassment, more so as two of its signatories, Driberg and Mikardo, were members of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party. A highly informative incident occurred that evening in the smokeroom of the Commons when Nye Bevan lambasted Crossman for placing his resolution on the Order Paper: "You're just a bloody exhibitionist. You never know when you've won."*

Before the Government formally announced its change of policy, Kirkpatrick was recalled for consultations. His account of German political demands strengthened the Government's conviction of the rectitude of the course upon which it had already decided. Whilst in London, Kirkpatrick received further instructions to press for the maximum amount of delay in the Bonn talks. Before leaving Bonn, Kirkpatrick had reluctantly accepted a statement of principle designed to obviate the negotiation of the minute details of Germany's new status. On his return, the High Commissioner, accounced that the statement was unacceptable and that:*

"the British Government wished to take no further decisive steps until after the projected Foreign Minister's meeting! Then a metamorphosis of Britain's German policy was suddenly disclosed."

* H. Dalton : Diary 8th February 1951

* New York Herald Tribune : 2nd April, 1951

On 12th February, Attlee announced the Government's policy to the House of Commons. He opened by echoing the fears of Germany felt in Britain and the hopes for successful Four-Power talks. The basis of his speech was the passage:*

"If we can get real and genuine settlement with Soviet Russia, the matter of German rearmament would become less important, and fall into its natural place. But, if we cannot get this agreement, we have to consider the defence of the West, and that includes the defence of West Germany."

Attlee continued by dismissing the alternative suggestions of a massive Anglo-French military build-up as impractical and the idea of mutual withdrawal from Germany as handing West Germany over to the Bereitschaften. Thus,

".. we have accepted the need for a contribution from Germany, but the time, method and conditions will require a great deal of working out. There is, first of all, the possession of arms. Obviously, the rearmament of the countries of the Atlantic Treaty must precede that of Germany. Second, I think that the building up of forces in the democratic states should precede the creation of German forces. Third, the arrangements must be such that German units are integrated in the defence forces in a way which would preclude the emergence again of a German military menace. Fourth, there must be agreement with the Germans themselves."

The later debate on German rearmament within the Labour Party when in Opposition which culminated in the Bevanite challenge to the leadership at the 1954 Party Conference was to give these "Attlee conditions" an unintended significance. In the context in which they were announced, the conditions for German rearmament

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 484 Cols. 65-67

were in fact attached to a secondary element of Attlee's outline of British policy. The main emphasis in his speech, and this was reflected during the ensuing debate, was on the prospect of Four-Power agreement, which would obviate the need for German rearmament. Only if these talks were to fail would German rearmament become necessary, and would the conditions outlined become applicable.*

"These conditions, later to arise as the 'Attlee conditions' were not stressed unduly in the course of the debate, and attracted little attention at the time."

Moreover; both Kenneth Younger, then Minister of State at the Foreign Office,* and Saul Rose, then a research officer in the Labour Party Research Department,* have testified to the subordination of the 'Attlee conditions' to the prospect of Four-Power talks. Furthermore, it would appear that in the formative Cabinet of 8th February, the main discussion centred on the hope of Four-Power talks, and there was relatively little discussion of the policy to be followed regarding German rearmament if these talks aborted. An examination of the 'conditions' creates the unmistakable impression that they were formulated with little concern for accuracy and clarity - the first and second conditions after all have identical meanings.

Further evidence that the most significant part of Attlee's speech in relation to German rearmament was the paramount importance he attached to Four-Power talks, and that the 'conditions'

* E. J. Mehan : The British Left and Foreign Policy (Ph.D.Thesis)p.413

* K. Younger : Public Opinion and Foreign Policy p. 171

* S. Rose : The Labour Party and German Rearmament, in Political Studies June 1966 pgs. 134-135

marked an important change of policy, is provided by the similarity between the 'conditions' and a five-point statement by Adenauer on 14th January and Eisenhower's Congressional address of 1st February. It had, by early February, become generally accepted, even in America, that German rearmament was dependent upon the consent of the German people.*

Attlee's speech found an echo in the Labour Party and in the country at large, and even the Tories could not dispute the attractiveness of Four-Power talks. Even the brief show of disgruntlement by the Left now became an asset to the Government, as it could be used in the international negotiations on German rearmament to stress that anything less than the most painfully slow progress would lead to Governmental instability in Britain.

Government policy for these negotiations received further clarification in a remarkably frank interview with Shinwell published by the Italian newspaper, Corriere Della Sera, on 24th February. Referring to prospects for a German contribution to Western defence, the Minister doubted whether this would come about "perhaps not for two years". When the Italian journalist suggested that the Germans were none too keen on being rearmed, Shinwell snapped back: "And no one particularly wants to rearm them."*

Furthermore, the Government was assisted in its procrastinatory endeavours by further important developments in the two themes with which German rearmament had become inextricably linked.

* C.G.D. Onslow : op. cit. p. 483

* Corriere Della Sera : 24th February 1951

In February, the French Government issued invitations to a conference in Paris to discuss plans for a European Army. These intricate negotiations over the size of the units which the Germans were to be permitted to contribute provided the British Government with ample opportunities for inserting several spokes in the wheel of progress of the Paris talks. The attitude of the British Government towards the European Army scheme showed distinct signs of mellowing and observers were even sent to Paris, for the Government fully realised that "the European Army comes in very useful as a delaying factor".*

The other development was the eventual opening of Four-Power talks at the Palais Rose on 5th March. Although these talks were merely at the level of ministerial deputies whose sole task was to attempt to prepare an agenda for future negotiations at a higher level, the British Government, on 23rd March, instructed Kirkpatrick to insist that no further negotiations on German rearmament at Bonn should take place until the outcome of the Palais Rose talks became evident.*

However, despite the adjournment of the military talks in Bonn, the commencement of Four-Power talks and the relegation of all international discussion of German rearmament to the incredibly complex maze of the Paris talks on the European Army - events which were largely the result of the machinations of the British Government - opposition to German rearmament was still steadily mounting in the Labour movement.

* H. Dalton : Diary August 1951

* Ibid

Attlee's speech in February had given the green light to the dissentient opinions within the Movement, and the Bevanite split in the Government in April shattered party unity and made criticism of policy fashionable. The pages of the Daily Worker throughout spring 1951 were full of resolutions from diverse trade union branches complaining against German rearmament. Although the unions on the whole felt it incumbent upon them to maintain party unity at this crucial time, the Easter Conference exhibited the strong feelings of the rank and file activists against German rearmament. The A.E.U., the pacifist Union of Shop, Distribution and Allied Workers, the Railwaymen and many others passed recommendations strongly condemnatory of German rearmament, and the Communists were able to manipulate the strength of feeling on this issue to recover the ground they had lost in the unions by their opposition to the Marshall Plan.* Groups of Labour activists were organising nation-wide petitions and sending them to their M.P.'s and to the Foreign Office. Indeed so strong became the flow of dissent that the Foreign Office took the unusual step of printing a circular to send out to the individual and collective opponents of its policy. Entitled: "The German Contribution to Western Defence", the circular set out the stereotyped Cold War views favouring German rearmament, and its emotional anti-communism is more reminiscent of the C.I.A. publications of this date than the reasoned logic one had come to expect from the Foreign Office.*

* M. Harrison : Trade Unions and the Labour Party pgs. 144-145

* See Daily Worker : 28th March 1951

It may be assumed that the circular served merely to inflame the passions of its recipients against German rearmament.

Even press opinion was now crystallising in favour of the Government's delaying tactics. The Manchester Guardian still continued to argue that "German rearmament ought at present to stay at the back of the diplomatic stage".* The Times thought that "Britain has as much reason as France to weigh carefully the risks of allowing the establishment of a national German force".* Perhaps the report most indicative of informed opinion at this stage was that of the Sunday Times, previously a consistent advocate of German rearmament, but which now, with an eye on the Palais Rose talks, concluded that it was "better for the present (to) let the idea of rearming Germany stand over".*

Indicative of the Government's tactics smothering discussion of the issue internationally were the two visits paid to Bonn by Foreign Office Ministers in spring 1951. The first, in March, culminated in a lengthy discussion between Lord Henderson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Adenauer, at which the issue of German rearmament was not once mentioned.* In May, the new Foreign Secretary, Herbert Morrison, visited Bonn for talks with the German Chancellor. Even Morrison, with whom "to hasten German rearmament became an obsession",* merely glossed over the issue, asking Adenauer whether he thought it would provoke Russia. The remainder of this meeting consisted of a lecture by Morrison on the nature of the British Constitution, and its incompatibility with the contemporary projects for European integration.*

* Manchester Guardian : 27th June 1951

* Times : 28th July 1951

* Sunday Times : 29th April 1951

* K. Adenauer : op. cit. p. 387

* K. Adenauer op. cit. p. 386

* H. Dalton Paper prepared for Cabinet in September 1951

VIII

GRASPING THE NETTLE

By the early summer, however, the main props of the Government's policy were steadily collapsing. The French elections were safely completed in May, and in June the Palais Rose negotiations finally broke down in disagreement. It was typical of the Government's endeavours to continue the deal in the negotiations on rearming Germany, and of the heartfelt desire for Four-Power agreement which motivated all Labour supporters, that the Government was prepared to risk a Four-Power meeting on the basis of the Soviet agenda.*

The consequent resumption of the Bonn negotiations resulted in the issue of a report setting out the details for a German army of twelve divisions. Despite Government apprehension lest the Americans immediately accept and attempt to implement this least favoured of all solutions to the German rearmament problem, a temporary respite was secured when, on 3rd July, McCloy announced that the American Government, having studied the Bonn report, now awaited the publication of a report from the Paris talks on the European Army before proceeding"

On 6th July, Dalton confided on his diary, "I'm afraid it's becoming actual again."* On 10th July, he wrote to Attlee asking for further information and once again describing the strength of Labour opposition to German rearmament.*

* M. Fitzsimmons : The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government

* New York Herald Tribune : 4th July 1951 p. 154

* H. Dalton : Diary 6th July 1951

* H. Dalton : Letter to Attlee dated 10th July 1951

"Your (that is, Attlee's) view .. was that we should play this very long. We may have been committed in principle to arming the West Germans some time ago, but it was always clear that we were not committed as to the manner, the extent or the speed of this operation ... It was also in our minds to use this as a bargaining counter with the Russians ... If the Russians would do certain things which we wanted, we would not proceed ... with West German rearmament.

I have never been happy about rearming these people. They are the only nation West of the Iron Curtain who have a vested interest in a war of revenge, and the sort of Germans who would flock into a German army tomorrow would be ex-Nazis and refugees from beyond the Iron Curtain, with only one idea in their heads, namely to fight the Russians, Poles and Czechs, in order to redraw the frontiers to their own liking. Nor, for some time to come, do I think that there will, in fact, be enough arms to spare for the Germans, even if we could trust them to use them, when we and our associates in NATO are still so miserably under-armed.

As you know, I was asked some time ago by the International Sub-Committee of the National Executive to discuss this matter with the Foreign Secretary... I went... to see Herbert and we had a very useful talk. But it is no use disguising the fact that, on this subject, there is a substantial element in the National Executive and in our Party, who are against West Germany's rearmament at the present time. It would be quite wrong that we should suddenly be faced, without warning, with a new situation in which definite decisions to arm the West Germans had been taken without the matter being discussed in the Cabinet.

Referring to the one remaining hope for delay, Dalton continued:

"I know that discussions have been going on for some time about a European Army to include armed Germans, and I recall that our people were told to drag out these discussions. I hope they have been successful and will continue to be successful in this."

To this influential letter, describing as it did the formidable strength of the Labour Party opposition to German rearmament, Attlee replied: "I am very much of your view".* As a result, Dalton was invited, as a representative of the dissentient Labour ranks on this issue, to a meeting of the Defence Committee of the Cabinet on 28th July to participate in a discussion on German rearmament. At the meeting,* Morrison and Shinwell opened by presenting a joint paper setting out once again the military necessity for German rearmament. John Strachey, Secretary of State for War, however, argued strongly in favour of continued delay, and he was supported by Dalton, who added a betrayal of his true reasons; "I hate the Germans". The only other speaker on this subject was Lord Pakenham, who based his argument in favour of German rearmament on emotional anti-Communism. The Defence Committee then decided to refer the whole issue to the Cabinet. Dalton's description of the Committee as "not very informative" is a masterpiece of under-statement.

Before the Cabinet discussion of 30th July, Strachey and Dalton met to co-ordinate their tactics. Strachey favoured basing their opposition on Eisenhower's views in order to undermine the military arguments of Morrison, but Dalton, fearing that if Eisenhower was to change his opinion "we'd be really up against it", preferred to rely on the emotional image of Germany.

* H. Dalton : Diary August 1951

* This account is taken from H. Dalton: Diary August 1951

"In Cabinet ... I brought up the Daily Herald account of Rancke and the Nazis. I was backed by Jim Griffiths, Hector McNeil and Albert Alexander as well as Strachey. Clem seemed more our way. Robens was in favour but didn't speak. Morrison was on the other side; Shinwell wobbling, Henderson silent."

Although the Cabinet of 30th July once again decided merely to "play it very slowly", further international developments were rendering such a policy less tenable. On the 24th July, the Paris talks finally issued an interim report on the incorporation of German units into a European Army. This report, together with that of the Bonn talks, was to be studied by the N.A.T.O. allies in order to deliver a firm decision on the German rearmament issue at the forthcoming N.A.T.O. Council meeting at Ottawa in September.

Whilst international developments were thus forcing the Government to abandon its delaying policy, pressure within the Labour Movement, on the other hand, was continuing to increase against any German rearmament. The Government's mounting dilemma was exposed in the House of Commons on 25th July, when at Question Time, Ernest Davies reassured Labour back-benchers that, in view of the collapse of the Palais Rose talks, the "Attlee conditions" were now official Government policy in relation to German rearmament; whilst during the ensuing foreign affairs debate, both Morrison and Younger stressed the inevitability of early German rearmament in an attempt to reconcile their supporters to a decision in favour of it at the September meetings.*

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 491 Col. 447 and subsequent debate.

The press was once more taking its lead from Government policy, and began urging the necessity for, and the inevitability of, an early discussion on German rearmament. Special feature articles in the Times* and the Daily Telegraph* outlining the military urgency for an end to indecision played an important role in preparing 'informed opinion' for the inevitable decisions to be taken in September. The political weeklies of the centre also continued their consistent and influential support for German rearmament.

The opposition within the Labour Movement found expression in the submission of resolutions for the annual conference in October. Altogether eleven resolutions expressing a range of opposition to German rearmament from "perturbation" to "unflinching opposition" were sent to Transport House from unions and constituency Labour parties.* Transport House at this time however, was playing an invaluable role in putting across the Government's difficulties to the Labour Movement rather than serving as a channel for the expression of rank and file sentiment.* With a General Election always imminent, the requirements of party loyalty were at a premium and many unions and local parties felt constrained to follow the advice they received from Transport House.

Dalton's faith in the permanent evil of the Germans was strengthened by a ~~sp~~ speech by the German Federal Minister for All-German Questions, Herr Kaiser, in August, demanding the

* Times : 31st July 1951

* Daily Telegraph : 9th August 1951.

* Labour Party : Annual Conference Resolutions 1951 pgs. 33-40

* K. Younger : Public Opinion and Foreign Policy p. 173

return of the lost provinces.*

"I was so shocked by this outburst that I urged Morrison to instruct our High Commissioner in West Germany to demand from Adenauer an explanation of this speech ... but Morrison seemed to attach no importance to this incident."

It was rumoured that the Foreign Secretary, resenting the interference of the Minister of Town and Country Planning, retorted that he knew of no Minister for All-German Answers to explain it!*

On 4th September, as the date of the crucial N.A.T.O. meeting approached, the Cabinet met to discuss its attitude to German rearmament. Dalton opened the discussion with a strong emotive speech, quoting Herr Kaiser's recent remark and adding that "the Germans are warmongers and ... might easily lead us into war".* Morrison, whose personal relations with Dalton left much to be desired, was "as usual irritated by my line." Dalton believed that Morrison himself "did not realise how delicate and difficult it was, and, being weak-willed, "was inclined to let his advisers rush him unduly on this most delicate and difficult question". Lord Pakenham "as usual reacts hysterically".

Dalton, however, received the support of Chuter Ede and Robens.

"Chuter says he'll (that is, Morrison) create something he cannot control. Robens dwelt on the enormity of arming Germans, while our own troops, not to mention the French are short of arms and equipment."

* H. Dalton : Paper prepared for Cabinet in September 1951

* New York Herald Tribune : 15th September 1951

* This account is taken from H. Dalton ; Diary 4th September 1951

However, the absence of McNeil and Griffiths from this Cabinet seriously weakened the opposition. Realising that he could not secure approval for outright opposition to German rearmament, Dalton switched to supporting Attlee's idea that "this should be played very slowly". Morrison, however, argued that these Fabian tactics might lead to America's deciding either to withdraw from Europe in frustration or to implement German rearmament on her own. Hence, Morrison argued, Fabian tactics were no longer either tenable or appropriate. When Gaitskell came down off the fence in support of Morrison, the issue was decided.*

"The Cabinet probably felt that the same reasons which forced reluctant ministers to the sticking-point would also convince the majority of their followers of the stern necessity."

After the Cabinet broke up, Dalton remained for a private talk with Attlee. He continued his emotional diatribe against the Germans, but although the Prime Minister agreed with him that the Germans were "very dangerous", Attlee insisted that he "must back the European Army" at the N.A.T.O. meetings.*

The continuing strength of Labour opposition to German rearmament was manifested the very next day when the T.U.C., then in session at Blackpool, debated a resolution condemning German rearmament. The motion was supported by most speakers in highly emotive terms, but was rejected by the Secretary-General, Sir Vincent Tewson, on behalf of the General Council, on the grounds that German rearmament formed an integral part of Western defence policy;

* K. Younger : Public Opinion and Foreign Policy p. 171

* H. Dalton : Diary 4th September 1951

that steps would be taken to prevent German military resurgence; and, that if there were no German rearmament, German trade competition would be much greater.*

This last argument was one which gained increasing currency in summer 1951, and, by reviving fears of economic competition from Germany, caused concern in Britain, thus subtly turning the British image of Germany onto its head, and using it as an argument in favour of British demands that the Germans participate in the economic burdens of Western defence. Indeed, in some Germophobe quarters one can detect at this time a positive insistence that the Germans be rearmed.

Although the Fire Brigade Union's motion critical of German rearmament was defeated by 4,482,000 votes to 2,608,000, it received considerable minority support, and its rejection was secured only by the bloc votes of fiercely anti-Communist union leaders like Arthur Deakin of the Transport and General Workers' Union. The debate and the vote indicate that the Communists in the British trade union movement were already succeeding in their use of the revulsion of rank and file sentiment against German rearmament to stage a comeback.

On 12th September, Morrison left for Washington, where a meeting of the Big Three Western Foreign Ministers was to be held preliminary to the N.A.T.O. Council in Ottawa. The Foreign Ministers worked our plans for the incorporation of German troops

* T.U.C. : Annual Report 1951 pgs. 455-463

in a European Army along the general lines of the interim report of the Paris talks, and for the replacement of the Occupation Statute by a 'peace contract' and the abolition of the High Commission.* These decisions were, however, not arrived at without a further crisis in British policy.

Dalton's pathological fear of Germany read too much into press reports of the proceedings at Washington, and he secured an interview with Attlee to express his concern at these reports of Morrison's handling of the German rearmament issue.*

"I reminded the Prime Minister that Cabinet had agreed only to Germans being recruited into a European Army when this had been set up, and when our Allies had what they needed...I suggested a telegram to Morrison drawing attention to (the reports) and requesting correction."

Free of the counsel of Morrison, Attlee's personal dislike of German rearmament came to the fore and he agreed to warn the Foreign Secretary not to agree to German participation in the European Army.

To counter this, Kirkpatrick and other Foreign Office advisers who accompanied Morrison, sought out Gaitskell, then in Washington on Treasury business.*

"I tried to impress (on Gaitskell) that we could not indefinitely afford to allow Germany to escape the burden of armaments...Germany would capture our markets, we should then be unable to sustain our efforts, and the consequence would be that, whilst Germany was not allowed to make armaments, we should not have the resources to make them...the collapse of Western defence would not be the only consequence."

* R.I.I.A. : Documents on International Affairs 1951 pgs. 133-136

* H. Dalton : Diary 16th September 1951

* I. Kirkpatrick : op. cit. p. 265

More serious still would be the circumstance that we had hoisted Germany into a position of economic preponderance in Europe. A Germany in that situation would be a greater danger to us than a Germany with an army and an armaments industry limited by treaty."

Fortified by Gaitskell's support, Morrison agreed to the proposals for German participation in a European Army with which Britain would be closely associated and the ending of the occupation of Germany. The three High Commissioners were instructed to open negotiations with Adenauer on ways and means of effecting the co-operation of West Germany in the defence of Europe and in the framework of the European Army, which in its turn was to be integrated within the N.A.T.O. force. A week later, Attlee and Dalton had their revenge by declaring a General Election without consulting Morrison.*

The N.A.T.O. Council meeting at Ottawa on 15th - 20th September welcomed the decisions of the Foreign Ministers to proceed with the plans for a European Defence Community of which Germany should form part

Thus, the British Government had finally accepted the rearmament of Germany, but Dalton, though dismayed at this, nevertheless realised that the negotiations over a Defence Community would present ample opportunities for further delay before German soldiers were actually recruited.*

The Labour Party, however, greatly disliked the Washington decisions which were a blatant violation of the 'Attlee Conditions' upon which the Party believed policy was based.

* Morrison of Lambeth : Autobiography p. 283

* cf. Dalton's broadcast of 15th December 1951

At the opening of the Annual Conference at Scarborough on 2nd October, one of the first acts of the faithful was to vote Shinwell off the National Executive Committee for his part in the acceptance of German rearmament and to deliver a strong jolt to Morrison. The voting on the whole showed marked favour for those who opposed German rearmament."

However, despite the eleven resolutions submitted to the Conference referring to German rearmament, the entire Conference was, because of the proximity of the General Election, devoted to a discussion of the Labour Election Manifesto, and the Government was relieved to find that the subject of German rearmament was not mentioned once throughout the entire proceedings.*

Press reaction to the Washington decisions was largely favourable. Those newspapers and weeklies who had consistently supported German rearmament naturally welcomed the fact that a firm decision had finally been taken. The Times, although fearing the growth of extremism in Germany, thought that, by granting concessions to Adenauer, the Allies would prevent the extremists gaining support.* The Manchester Guardian and the Labour weeklies, Tribune and New Statesman still continued their campaign of opposition, but they were now representing a distinctly minority press opinion.

The public, too, had largely become reconciled to the

* Labour Party : Conference Annual Report 1951 pgs. 74-134

* Times : 19th September 1951

inevitability of German rearmament. The press had successfully done its job in conditioning the public for the Washington decisions, and an opinion poll taken in December 1951 showed the increased support for German rearmament with 58% now approving and only 28% of the public disapproving.*

The General Election took place on 26th October and resulted in a narrow majority for the Conservatives. Dennis Healey suggests that the Government's decision in favour of German rearmament was one of the main reasons for their defeat.* This, however, is extremely doubtful. The 1951 election campaign certainly devoted an unusually large amount of attention to foreign policy, but it was the problems of Persia and Korea and the general issue of war and peace which concerned the public. As the opinion polls show, the public was anyway generally favourable to a German defence contribution. The 1951 General Election, moreover, was largely determined by a statistical freak in that Labour considerably increased its total vote but lost sufficient seats to tilt the parliamentary balance in the Tories' favour. Furthermore, as both parties broadly supported German rearmament as a matter of policy, and the distinction between their public standpoint was complex, one may conclude with David Butler that the electorate did not punish the Labour Party for its attitude towards German rearmament.*

* British Institute of Public Opinion : op. cit.

* D. Healey : Britain and N.A.T.O. in K. Knorr (ed) N.A.T.O. and American Security p. 213

* D. Butler : The British General Election of 1951 p. 17

C O N C L U S I O N

The hostile image of Germany held by the British people and their Government in these years was thus the foundation for the Government's reaction to all the proposals for rearming Germany. Despite the advent of the Cold War, public and Governmental hostility towards German rearmament remained the dominant consideration throughout 1949 and early 1950, for, despite the obvious strategic deficiency, the Government firmly opposed all forms of German rearmament.

It took the outbreak of a hot war in Korea to persuade the British public that Russia was a more potent and a more immediate menace than a rearmed Germany. Even Korea, however, failed to convince the Labour Government and its supporters of the strategic necessity for German rearmament, and it was only the American insistence upon tying the greatly desired integrated force and the American reinforcements for Europe to German rearmament that induced the British Government to accept with reluctance. However, the Labour supporters were not seduced by such American temptations, and the Government had, after New York, to indulge in a two-faced policy of hastening implementations in order to secure the implementation of the first two points of the package, whilst assuring its domestic supporters of its reservations on the third.

The British diplomatic success at Brussels secured the integrated force and American reinforcements and consigned German rearmament to several series of complex negotiations. As a result, the British

Government was now able to switch its international policy to hampering progress towards German rearmament. Ironically, it was at this time and not during the pre-Brussels period when the Government was hastening Western decisions on defence that the opposition to German rearmament within the Labour Party reached its zenith. The Government was, however, able in spring 1951, to use this sentiment to justify its procrastinatory international policy. However, with the collapse of the alternative policy of Four-Power agreement in summer 1951, the German rearmament issue came into a decisive stage. The post-Brussels policy of 'playing it very slowly' appeared inadequate in the face of American determination, and the Government decided reluctantly to accept the strategic and political necessity of German rearmament.

Sir Anthony Eden, who had to take over the determination and conduct of British foreign policy where this narrative ends in October 1951 perceptively summed up the reasons behind the reluctant acceptance of German rearmament when, on presenting the Contractual Agreement on Germany and the European Defence Community Treaty to the House of Commons in 1952 he said:*

"Mr. Bevin, like myself and, I dare say, many others, came to the conclusions which are embodied to these agreements after many hesitations. The truth is that in foreign policy one very rarely gets a free or agreeable choice. One almost always has to choose between two disadvantages. This is one of those occasions and I do not pretend to conceal it."

* Hansard : 5th Series Vol. 504 Col. 1945

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