

From the London End

## The Future of Labour Leadership'

**W**AS *The Economist* serious or was it merely poking fun at the Labour Party leadership when it suggested that Mr Arthur Deakin of the Transport & General Workers Union was Labour's obvious choice for the office of Foreign Secretary, should the Party ever come to power again? There has been some speculation about it in left circles. Considering the anxious interest shown by the responsible press on the foreign affairs debate at Scarborough as well as the army of American correspondents who crowded the press gallery there, little doubt remains as to what *The Economist* intended: it was deadly serious in making that very remarkable, and in any other circumstances, an utterly ludicrous suggestion. And what is the new circumstance which gives the suggestion an element of plausibility? The answer will be found in the Labour Party Conference which has just taken place at Scarborough.

Politically it was no accident that as the Labour delegates from up and down the country were marching up to the rostrum to have their say on whether the Germans should be rearmed or not, there sat at Lancaster House, in a somewhat more staid atmosphere, a body of Western foreign ministers debating the very same question. It was no accident because the whole country knew from the very beginning that Mr Eden would announce Britain's entry into Europe (*via* four divisions and a tactical air force) only if the Labour Party Conference was going to accept the rearmament of Germany as a matter of policy. And it was in securing such a Labour attitude, that the drama of Scarborough was enacted. Scarborough was nothing less than a depiction of the very profound division of opinion which has split the Labour Party from top to bottom on the crucial question of whether the Germans are once again to be allowed to rearm themselves. The debate was illuminating from other points of view: it showed up the weight of the trade union machines in that remarkable innovation to the practice of Labour democracy—the block vote; more than that, the cruder forms of political manoeuvre which from very early on became a feature of the Conference was a

spectacle which even raised the eyebrows of those who were hoping in constant anguish that Mr Morrison would pull through the German arms vote.

On the German arms debate itself two major facts emerge: it was the last minute swing of the Woodworkers Union vote of 13,000 which gave the Labour Executive its narrow majority, and secondly that in spite of all the pressures over the last week and the calculated imprecision of the official resolution, over three million votes were cast against the platform. If any member of the Morrison group reflected on this final outcome, he could not but conclude that the result of the debate was unworthy of the price which was paid for it. First, Mr Attlee had to make a somewhat "leftish" attack on the Americans for their support of the Chiang Kai-shek rump on Formosa in order to soften the delegates and secondly the price involved introducing an element of weakness in the Party in view of the open gag imposed on dissident members of the Executive.

This situation has not unexpectedly led to considerable speculation about the future of particular Labour leaders and in particular, that of Mr Bevan. It is clear that Mr Herbert Morrison has earned for himself the wrath of the constituency Parties: it was he who, according to the *New Statesman*, was "principally responsible for the intrigues which made any rational discussion of the German question impossible". But he remains deeply entrenched in the National Executive carrying, as he does, the explicit backing of the big battalions of the trade union movement. Mr Attlee, on the other hand, is in a more fortunate position and this certainly is the outcome of his skill in the practice of leadership. He has a reputation for side-stepping in the face of threats and crisis and unlike Mr Morrison and Mr Ernest Bevin of earlier days, he is not a "fixer". Mr Attlee's adroitness in the art of political manoeuvre springs from the manner in which he employs the *fait accompli* to force upon his followers the acceptance of his policy. Thus in the German arms debate he expressed his reluctance about German rearmament

but as he pointed out, arms for the Germans were becoming an "accomplished fact" whether Labour liked it or not. Lancaster House was considering how to "control" it—so, what use was there in opposing the inevitable? To do so would only isolate the Party and leave it swimming against the tide. And thus by attacking the emotionalism of his opponents and by pleading for "realism" he won the day and probably slipped through the debate unscathed in prestige and power.

Mr Attlee is a remarkable man from other points of view also. He was able to moderate the Left by his firm pronouncements on Chiang Kai-shek and Formosa and of the alternative he chose between co-existence and co-death. And yet, without giving the slightest indication of his recognition of the patent contradiction in what he was doing, he made a rallying call to the Conference for support of the SEA TO arrangement.

The big question to emerge from the Scarborough Conference is of course<sup>1</sup> the future of Mr Bevan. On the surface of things, Mr Bevan suffered two defeats: the German arms vote and the considerable swing away from him on the Treasurership vote. The *Manchester Guardian* suggests that both these defeats mean a certain, though not an early, political demise of Mr Bevan. This, in the view of your correspondent, is a somewhat superficial assessment of what happened at Scarborough and of the political strategy of Mr Bevan since he resigned from the Parliamentary Labour Party Committee. The whole country knew that Mr Bevan contested the office of Treasurership because he had long decided to leave the Executive: only in this way, as he subsequently explained, would he be able to un gag himself and go where true power lay—to the people. The demagogue in Mr Bevan came out very clearly here. The issues which were the burning ones, and which are agitating vast sections of Labour's supporters, were the only issues which he and not the National Executive wished to take up, and in this, his inimitable dynamism and political instinct are the essential factors

the him an animal so different from those who sit on the Executive. He therefore invited the dofrat for the office of Treasurr.

On the German arms vote, the salient fact is that the Party remains formingly divided with not insignificant minority easting their votes for Mr Bevan. This is certainly not the characteristic of political demise nor of political defeat, if account is taken of the pressures that were exerted on the Executive to support the rearmament of Germany. It is an indication that Mr Bevan rather silently, in view of the official gag, has brought to a head a crisis which has been brewing for some time. The great possibility—great in the sense of con-

sequences-- to the future of Mr Bevan is the likely reaction of the Morrison-Deakin wing of the Party to any political campaigning which Mr Bevan may carry out among the supporters of Labour. Will he be expelled from the Party? If he is expelled, will he not be ditched by those who now constitute the Bevanite group? Will this not leave Mr Bevan thoroughly isolated and make the *Manchester Guardian's* remarks come true? Alternatively, if the Executive is willing to leave him alone— to stew in his own juice" as Mr Tom O'Brien of the Trades Union Congress put it— will not the traditional loyalties of British Labour to the official leadership equally isolate him? These are some of the possibilities on the darker side from the point of view of Mr Bevan.

But Mr Bevan is certainly a calculating individual—his political instinct is to be coupled with his obvious genius for shrewd analysis and the story goes that Mr Bevan has expressed a belief that the British worker is awakening from the slumber long fostered by the pill of welfare functions adopted by the State since 1946 and, of course, from the full-employment situation. He believes in the revival of Labours militancy on the model of the '30s and that he can ride the horse when others like Mr Morrison will fail. In fact, this belief is nothing more than a gamble and only the future will have to be awaited to see what happens. Whatever happens the coming year is scheduled to be a very exciting one for Labour.

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