THE ATTLEE FOUNDATION LECURE 1986
CLEMENT ATTLEE AND FOREIGN POLICY

BY Lord Sherfield

I am much honoured by the invitation from the Trustees of the Attlee Foundation to deliver the Fourth Attlee Lecture. The Foundation itself dates from 1967; its annual lecture is a recent addition to its programme, the wide range of which in the social field, both at home and in the Commonwealth, is well exemplified by its annual report.

This invitation gives me an opportunity to pay a tribute to a man for whom I had a great admiration. I intend to devote most of my address to some aspects of the foreign anc commonwealth policy of the two Attlee governments.

But first, I propose to say something of my relationship with the man himself.

In 1941 it was decided on the proposal of Canada, but at American instigation, to hold a conference of the International Labour Organisation, of which the United States was amember, in New York and Washington. In setting up this Conference, President Roosevelt and HMG had different objectives. the President wanted to keep social and economic matters in the forefrount of public debate, mainly to offset the propaganda about the Hitler New Order, and especially for the benefit of the Latin American countries and neutrals. For us it was basically a public relations exercise, which, because of its essentially non-political character, would it was thought, indirectly have a beneficial effect on American official and public opinion. The event was judged to be of sufficient importance for Mr Attlee, then Lord Privy Seal, to lead the British Delegation. As the official in the Foreign Office responsible for what was left of the League of Nations, I was instructed to accompany Mr Attlee, as an adviser to the Delegation, and a paper in the Public Record Office reveals that an early duty was to telegraph to the Consul-General in New York to have some visiting cards made for Mr Attlee as they were unprocurable in London. Such are the minutiae of diplomatic life.

A party of four, including Mr Arthure Jenkins, Mr Attlee's PPS, left on the 21st October for Lisbon to take the Pan American Clipper, then the most agreeable means of travel across the Atlantic. When the Clipper came in on October 24th, there were only two seats available, so for some reason, perhaps because I was the only member of the party who had been in the United States before, I was selected to escort Mr Attlee. We put down at Lagens in the Azores, where Mr Attlee and I took a long walk together about - I dare say the conversation was somewhat monosyllabic. We eventually reached New York, where we were greeted by Mrs Frances Perkins, the American Secretary of Labour and Chairman-Elect of the conference, Mr Ralph Assheton (later Lord Clitheroe) Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Labour and horde of presse men. The welcome was enthusiastic, but the situation was delicate as the Draft Bill was before Congress and the delegation had to avoid any overt propaganda. Mr Attlee handled the Press conference with consummate skill, answering all the questions frankly and openly, but in fact saying very little. Later in the day, Mr Attlee and I left for Washington by train and I delivered him safely to Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador, who had arranged for him to see the President.

The conference was held in New York, but the concluding sessions took place in Washington, at which President Roosevelt, made a speech of major importance. Mr Attlee held another Press conference, which successfully followed the pattern of the first. In his speech to the Conference he declared, "We are determined not only to win the war but to win the peace. Planning for the post war period cannot be left to the end of the war and we in Britain are considering our plans now. We are determined that economic questions and questions of improvement of the standards of living and nutrition shall not be neglected, as they were after the last war, owing to preoccupaiton with political problems". After the conference, which substantially achieved its objectives, Mr Attlee

went on up to Ottawa to touch base with the Canadians. I remained in Washington for talks on the outcome of the Conference with the State Department(1).

On a later occasion, in 1950, at the time of the Korean War, I once more accompanied Mr Attlee to Washington and the pattern was repeated. After the conference with President Truman, which I described in more detail later, we went up to Ottawa where we set up an office in Government House. I was sitting in the office when a small figure slipped unnoticed into the room, spotted a spare typewriter and sat down to type with two fingers on some small sheets of paper for half an hour or so. Then he got up, gathered up the sheets and left as silently and unseen as he had come. It was the Prime Minister preparing his speech for the Canadian Government Dinner that evening, which was subsequently very well received. It was one of many occasions on which I observed that Mr Attlee, like Siegfried in Wagner's Ring, possessed a "tarnhelm", which shielded him from public notice.

In this period, my wife and I went to many official parties, and we often saw the Prime Minister standing alone and unnoticed in a corner. We always made a point of going up and engaging him in conversation. His natural modesty and lack of pretension were indeed remarkable. I quote examples from a recently published memoir of Geoffrey de Freitas(2). He was Mr Attlee's Parliamentary Private Secretary, and had been promoted to the post of Junior Minister. He was taking his duties very seriously. The Trooping the Colour was coming up and Mr Attlee asked Geoffrey whether he was taking his two boys to watch it. Geoffrey said he was too busy, whereupon the PM observed, "They're only young once you know, I'll take 'em. Haven't much on".

One year the Attlees went to France on holiday. The Mayor of the local town came back from his own holiday to give them lunch. The PM remarked, "His wife said it was an honour for him. It must have been inconvenient. Kind of Him".

On the other hand he could be crisp, not to say sharp. On some poetry which John Strachey's office had sent to the PM by mistake, The PM minuted, "Doesn't rhyme, doesn't scan. CRA".

For a time in 1948 and 1949 as Chairman of the Official Committee on Atomic Energy, I reported direct to the prime Minister. The papers came back in two or three hours inscribed CRA in red ink. Only once or twice did he put "See me", and this was to make a political point for my guidance. I never had a more efficient chief.

His mastery of the Cabinet was proverbial. I saw him in action in the Cabinet Committee on Atomic Energy, of which all the big guns were members. The Prime Minister sat hunched in his chair while the salvoes were firing, drawing geometrical designs with a multi-coloured chalk pencil. After he thought the discussion had gone on long enough, he would look up and say, "Yep", and announce the decision in a few crisp sentences. It was a vintage performance.

But I now turn from anecdote to a theme, which is the foreign policy of the Attlee Government. It is a well known and well documented fact that Mr Attlee and Mr Bevin were very close, and that mr Bevin in fact made no major move in foreign policy without consulting the Prime Minister. I often heard Mr Bevin say, before or after a visit to Paris or elsewhere, "I must see Clem". Conversely, the Prime Minister, always ready to take a back seat, trusted his Foreign Secretary and backed him up; he also frequently sent Mr Bevin minutes with specific suggestions for action. As he says in his memoirs (arguably the flattest political autobiography ever written) "If you have a good dog, don't bark yourself, and in Mr Bevin I had an exceptionally good dog"(3). It is an essential prerequisite of a successful British foreign policy that the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister should be in agreement, and the Attlee Government's foreign policy was very successful, except in Palestine.

However, while in general the Prime Minsiter gave his Foreign Secretary his head, there were occasions when he himself took the initiative, especially when Mr Bevin's health was failing, and after Mr Herbert Morrision became Foreign Secretary, and proved to be completely miscast. ("The worst appointment I ever made", is reported to be Mr Attlee's subsequent comment.) The same could be said about Commonwealth policy; if the Colombo Plan was all Mr Bevin's work, Indian and Burmese independence was all the Prime Minister's work and perhaps his greatest achievement in overseas policy.

I shall deal in turn with the main initiatives taken by Mr Attlee, and especially with those in which I myself was to some extent personally involved. I shall not deal with India since Mr Attlee's achievement is already so well known and documented.

I turn first to the United Nations. IN 1945 Mr Attlee was a member of the British Delegation to the San Francisco Confernce. Although he was Deputy Prime Minister he was, characteristically, perfectly happy to serve with Anthony Eden as leader of the Delegation. He subsequently, on presenting the Charter to the House of Commons paid a warm tribute to Eden's leadership as well as to the work of his fellow delegates, especially Lords Halifax and Cranborne, who remained in charge in San Francisco when the politicians had to return to London for the general election.

There is not doubt that Mr Attlee had a genuine enthusiasm for and belief in the United Nations. His House of Commons speech of the 22nd August 1945(4), and his speches to the United Nations Association on October 1st 1945 and to the opening session of the UNO in London on January 10th 1946 were marked by unaccustomed eloquence and warmth.

One quotation form his January speech will suffice: "I am glad that the Charter .... does not deal only with governments and states or with policies and war, but with the simple elemental needs of human beings whatever their race, their colour, or their creed. In the Charter we reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights. We see the freedom of the individual in the State as an essential complement to the freedom of the State in the world community of nations. We stress, too, that social justice and the best possible standards of life for all are essential factors in promoting and maintaining the peace of the world".

But he was not starry eyed about the UN (he was not starry eyed about anything). He reiterates in these speeches that the Charter is not perfect. " .. But there is only one way of improving it - to use it, use it to the full. That is how we shall learn to remove its imperfections and to develop its great possibilities. For our part that is what we intend to do. But in order to do so effectively we must have an informed and insistent public opinion ahead of us. ..... In peace as in war, Governments can only act with success when the people they represent want them to do so".

The Atomic Bomb

Mr Attlee's commitment to international solutions was manifest in the initiative which he took, at the outset of his administration, to promote the international control of atomic energy.

He opened the subject with President Truman after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but before the Japanese surrender, in a thoughtful telegram in which he advocated a joint Anglo-American declaration of the intention to utilise "the existence of this great power not for our ends but as trustees for humanity in the interests of all peoples. .... The problems of control will require careful consideration", and further, "the economic effects will probably not reveal themselves for several years, the influence on international relations is immediate".

It should be said here that Mr Attlee and president Truman were cast in the same mould.

Attlee had met Truman briefly on his way back from San Francisco in 1945, and had the opportunity to get to know him at the Potsdam Conference. And it was a fortunate circumstance that the haberdasher from Independence, Missouri and the social worker from East London found that they were on the same wavelength and very much in tune with each other. In the context of the international control of atomic energy, an identity of outlook was immediately established. Truman echoed Attlee's thoughts in a broadcast to the American people and Attlee issued a similar statement from No.10

Truman responded in similar fashion on two other important issues which arose in the immediate postwar period.

Demobilisation of British Troops

An Anglo-American dispute blew up in November 1945 over the demobilisation of British and American troops. The two Cunarder Queens and the Aquitania had been lent to the United States for the transport of American troops. Although many British troops had been overseas much longer than the Americans, the American Chiefs of Staff were insisting that their troops must have priority in demobilisation and refused to return the Cunarders or to make equivalent transport available. Mr Attlee intrvened immediately with a strong protest to Mr Truman, who in spite of the intense pressure he was under from american motherhood to "get the boys home", overruled his chiefs of staff and ordered them to return the Cunarders or provide alternative transport for the demobilisation of the British Troops.

World Food Shortages

The second issue was the world food shortage in the winter of 1945-46, and particularly the shortage of wheat and rice. In Europe food production was 25% below normal and millions of Europeans were down to a subsistence diet of 2,000 calories a day, or less. I still vividly remember the shock of returning from the USA in February 1947 to discover the parlous food situation at home. In Asia the rice crop was 15% below normal. Mr Attlee took the initiative and intervened energetically with Truman, with Chifley, the Australian Prime Minister and with Mr Mackenzie King. Truman, unlike Chifley, responded immediately, generously and effectively. Thanks mainly to American action, actual famine, with all the consequences which would have flowed from it, was avoided. The persistent pressure from Mr Attlee was a major factor in this achievement.

This was just as well, as the abrupt ending of Lend-Lease and the need to negotiate an American loan, had caused Anglo-American relations to enter rough waters, and indeed throughtout the period of the Attlee governments they remained distictly choppy, notably in the field of atomic energy, and even more so on Palestine.

Nuclear Energy

Following on his initial exchange of views in September with Truman on the consequences of the atom bomb, Mr Attlee in September 1945, sent a long and thoughtful letter to the President and proposed a meeting to discuss the atomic energy problem, and early in November Attlee set out for Washington accompanied by Sir John Anderson, who had been in charge of the British atomic energy programme as President of the Council since 1941.

Attlee's purpose on this visit was in fact twofold, first to discuss how the international control of atomic energy should be pursued through the United Nations, and secondly t negotiate the continuance in peacetime of the wartime partnership in the development of atomic energy.

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The second point needs a brief explanation. The wartime Anglo-American co-operation on the development of the atomic weapon had its ups and downs, but was finally established by an agreement between President Roosevelt and Churchill at the Quebec Conference in November 1944 subsequently known as "The Quebec Agreement". Like so many events in the history of the development of atomic energy, the agreement can only be described as bizarre. In form an agreement between President and Prime Minister, it in effect brought in the Canadians as equal partners. It was secret, and in its preamble contained certain conditions which were in effect unenforceable and one of which was highly prejudicial to the United Kingdom. Even more bizarre was another bilateral agreement between the President and the Prime Minister signed at Hyde Park, Roosevelt's house, in 1945, in which both men accepted the wartime collaboration between the two countries would be continued in the post war period. The American copy of this bit of paper was immediately lost and its existence only made known to an embarrassed State Department by myself later in the year.

However, the Quebec Agreement set up machinery through which the development of the projet could be negotiated. There were two bodies: the Combined Policy Committee consisting of Lord Halifax, Mr Byrnes, and the Canadian Ambassador in Washington, Mr Lester Pearson, and the Combined Development Trust, which had the task of procuring and allocating raw materials required for atomic energy development.

It so happened that I joined the staff of the Embassy as a Minister in January 1945 and one of my tasks was to deal with the atomic energy problem. I was, in form, the British secretary of the Combined Policy Committee and I was therefore deeply involved in the second objective of the PM's visit.

Once more, bizarre is the best adjective to describe the course of events. The tripartite talks concentrated entirely on the question of international control and on this agreement was reached (though the conversation, which took place on the Navy Department boat, was not recorded. Mr Leslie (later Sir Leslie) Rowan, the PM's secretary was taking notes of the conversation on board, when Mr Byrnes ordered him to tear them up and throw them into the Potomac).

A declaration was worked out proposing the setting up of a Commission under the UN to make recommendations to the Organisation inter alia on the exhange of scientific information, the control of atomic energy to ensure that it was used only for peaceful purposes, the elimination of nuclear weapons, and safeguards by way of inspection.

But the subject of postwar collaboration was never discussed at all at the top level, and the heads of Government were about to depart. In desperation I drafted a memorandum of agreement that there should be full and effective co-operation in the field of atomic energy between the three countries, and that the Combined Policy should consider and recommend appropriate arrangements for this purpose. This was duly signed by Mr Attlee and the President (though I was doubtful at the time whether he understood what he was signing and he later admitted in a message to the Prime Minister that this was the case). Since Mr Mackenzie King had already left for Canada, he signed the memo later in Ottawa. However, Sir John Anderson was able to have a talk with General Groves, the head of the Manhattan (atomic weapon) project and get some guidelines for further negotiation.

The fate of the project for international control is soon told. By April 1946 an America Committee had elaborated proposals (subsequently known as the Acheson-Lilienthal proposals) to be submitted to the UN Commission, which by that time had been set up, and Mr Bernard Baruch was appointed (it was a less than inspired appointment) to be the chief American representative on the Commission. The British representttive was Sir Alexander Cadogan assisted by the eminent physicist, Sir George Thompson. Proposals were eventually made to the Security Council, where

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they were promptly vetoed by the Russians. The project had withered in the cold war. Even in a more propitious climate, the Russians would never have agreed to supervisory control (which at that time meant, in effect, Anglo-American control) of any agreement and the Congress, which was convinced that the atomic weapon was an American monopoly, would never have agreed to anything less.

As regards exchange of information on a tripatrite basis, a sub-committee of the CPC consisted of General Groves, Mr Lester Pearson and myself, laboured through the winter.

The UK representative was in a very weak position, he had a good moral case, but in practice all he had to rely on was three bits of paper, one of which, the Quebec agrement, was a secret agreement of doubtful status, one had lost by the Americans, and one had been drafted in five minutes by myself and was, as the Americanas rightly claimed, in very general terms. Moreover, the Americans had two formal objectives of some merit: first that an unpublished agreement was prohibited bilateral agreement would be imcompatible with the simultaneous proposals for international control which were being sent to the UN. The sub-committee came up with some proposals but they were rejected out of hand by the Americans in a meeting of the Combined Policy Committee held on the 15th April 1946. Mr Attlee reached vigorously to this rebuff and sent strong telegrams to the President and to Mr Mackenzie King. The President's reply was uncompromising, the Administration saw no obligation arising from the agreements to supply any information on atomic energy developments to the UK.

At this point, we once more enter the realm of the bizarre. Mr Attlee sent a long, closely reasoned letter to the President, rehearsing the whole story of the collaboration on atomic energy between the two, indeed the three governments. it was a major state paper. It never received a reply.

Mr Attlee, as recorded by Francis Williams(5) bore no grudge. "I don't blame Truman", he said, "he was a prisoner of the Congress". Truman in his memoirs says he did not reply because the matter was before Congress and, by implication, there was no prospect of there being anything but a negative answer. Nevertheless, as between close allies, it was an unusual performance. It led directly to the discussion by Attlee and Bevin to press ahead with development of nuclear energy in the UK. It is significant that no Minister queried the decision and of all those in the know, only Sir Patrick Blackett, and later Sir Henry Tizard, argued against it. This, though in form a domestic decision, was subsequently of central importance to the development of British foreign policy.

Negotiations for a resumption of Anglo-American collaboration began in 1947, some step by step progress was achieved, and complete co-operation on all military aspects of atomic energy was finally restored by 1958. The negotiations were undoubtedly helped to this successful conclusion by the development of the British programme.

Some historians have sharply ciriticised Mr Attlee's handling of the British nuclear energy programme on a number of grounds: for example, that it was treated as a secret matter confined to a small group of Ministers and officials. I disagree with this criticism and in a review article on the subject, I wrote in 1975 as follows: "The PM kept a firm hand on the tiller and never lost his interest. His habit of working quietly, swiftly, without the slightest fuss and with a minimum of written direction, masks for a later generation his powers of decision and control"(6).

European Policy

Though this is not a field in which Mr Attlee took any personal initiative, it is one in which over thirty years later considerable criticism is being levelled at the Attlee Government. There is a school of thought, encouraged by certain publicists and

historians, that the Attlee Government was lukewarm on the subject of European co-operation, and in particular missed an historic opportunity to promote European integration by declining to join the Schuman Plan as a founder member in 1950. Moreover, some of those, whose memories stretch back as far as 1950, have had an attack of "esprit d'escalier".

There is no time or space to try to iron out these distortions in this lecture, but a few observations on the subject are called for.

The policy of the Attlee Government in regard to Europe is, with his usual clarity and sccinctness, summed up by Mr Attlee himself.

In his biography he says(7) "As a Government we favoured every effort to effect greater European integration, such as the Benelux agreement and setting up of the coal and steel Organisation under the Schuman Plan, but we could not enter into engagements to the full extent possible to the Continental powers. The issue arose in an acute form over the proposal to create a council of Europe. We took part in its formation but we were unable to accept the views of the extreme federalists". And again, "Britain has never regarded herself as just a European power. She is the heart of a great commonwealth and tends to look outward from Europe".

Attlee left the conduct of European policy very much in Bevin's hands. Its purpose, within the framework outlined above by the Prime Minister, was to promote European economic recovery and European defence, step by step, the former through the European Recovery plan, the latter through the process marked successively by the Dunkirk treaty, Western Europe Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty. But the key work was co-operation, not federalism or supra-nationalism, and overriding priority was given to keeping the US Government completely involved both in European economic recovery and European defence.

The American attitude was ambivalent. There were indeed two schools of thought, one which sympathised with the British policy and was prepared to go along with it, the other more attracted by the ideas of supra-national organisation and pooling of sovereignty current in continental Europe and propagated with single minded conviction by Jean Monnet.

There was no support in any influential quarter in Britain at that time for these supra-national or federal schemes. It must be remembered that the Commonwealth was still virtually intact in 1950. Though India and Pakistan had received their independence, they had opted to remain in the Commonwealth.

There was also a fear, which certainly had some basis, that some Americans favoured a federal solution for Europe which would enable them to draw back from the intimate involvement which had developed.

These views found practical expression, for example, in a controversy over the organisation of the OEEC. The Americans, with some continental support, pressed for the appointment of what was called "une haute personnalité compentente" (alias Henri Spaak) to act as independent Chairman of OEEC. The Chairman would represent the Organisation, notably in negotiations with the United States. The British Government strongly and successfully resisted this veiled step towards supra-nationality. Then, almost immediately, came the launching of the Schuman Plan for the creation of the Coal and Steel Community as the first step in a federal solution for Europe.

This was the brainchild of Jean Monnet. Its prime purpose was to take a major step in bringing Germany and France into an indissoluble union. Monnet, who had the closest connections over many years with the British and American Governments and was a personal friend of most of the leading ministers and officials in London and Washington, knew both countries intimately. Having secured official but covert American backing for his project, he was well aware that the British could not accept the federal implications.

He knew perfectly well that there was no support either in the Government or in Parliament for a commitment to a Federal Europe. So he deliberately arranged that the British Government should not be consulted, and used his influence with Schuman and Adenauer to prevent any derogation from the federal content of the Plan in order to prevent the British Government watering it down through some compromise arrangement, which could in fact have easily been devised.

It so happened that when the plan was presented by Monnet to the British Government, with a specific condition that if they could not accept the federal commitment they were not eligible for membership, both Attlee and Bevin were ill, and it fell to Kenneth Younger, who incidentally was completely out of sympathy with his political chief, to deal with the matter with Herbert Morrison as the senior available minister.

The decision taken was however so completely in accord with Government policy that there was at the time no serious criticism of it, except from the Conservative Opposition. It is indeed ironic that when the Conservatives came to power, they made a far more fudamental decision against a supra-national solution for Europe, when they withdrew from participation in the Messina negotiations which drew up the EEC Treaty. It is only now, thirty-five years later, that we are told that an historic opportunity was missed. This is an illustration of the difficulty, which publicists and even serious historians, have in comprehending the realities of a bygone age. It is conceivable that if Attlee and Bevin had been operational, the matter might tactically have been handled differently; that they would have taken a different view is, however, inconceivable.

In practice, the Government entered into very close collaboration with the Coal and Steel Community, which could not indeed have functioned without British participation.

The European policy of the Attlee Government was clear and consistent, and as subsequent events have shown, for example, the policy of the Churchill Government, and the strong opposition to our joining the EEC, even after the British external situation had changed so much for the worse, it was in line with the views of the electorate and the political circumstances of the time.

Some of those who were dealing with the question considered that there would later be opporunities for the British Government to move closer to Europe without having to accept any commitment to federal schemes, and so it has eventually turned out. But I do not think that any of them foresaw how stony the path would be or how resolute an opposition on the part of a substantial minority of the British electorate would develop.

Korean Crisis, November 1951

At the end of November 1951 large Chinese forces, nominally "volunteers", crossed the Yalu river into North Korea and made a suprise attack on General MacArthur's forces, which were just completing their occupation of South Korea, causing them to retreat in confusion.

In the ensuing crisis, President Truman made some injudicious replies at a Press conference which were widlely interpreted as favouring the use of the atomic bomb against the Chinese army in North Korea and China itself. In spite of what Dean Acheson calls the formation of a "damage control party", to put the record straight, these reports caused constenation in Europe and particularly in London, where they arrived in the middle of a routine foreign affairs debate in the House of Commons, and caused something of a furore in the House. Mr Bevin was incapacitated, so Mr Attlee stepped in and proposed that he should pay a visit to Mr Truman in Washington, which he was able to announce amid relieved applause at the end of the debate.

The Prime Minister left on the 4th December for Washington with a party which included

Field Marshal Slim, the newly appointed CIGS, and other officials. I was a member of the party. Sir Oliver Franks, who was Ambassador in Washington, orchestrated the arrangements for the British team, strenghtened by Air Marshall Tedder, then in Washington, and Kenneth Younger who was leading the British delegation at the UN Assembly where there was also something of a furore. On the American side the President was supported by Dean Acheson, Averell Harriman, John Sugden, Generals Marshall, Bradley and Collins (from Korea) and many others.

Mr Attlee had put three items on the agenda, the extension of the war in the Far East, the raw materials situation, which had been exacerbated by stockpiling for rearmament, and European defence. All these matters had been under intensive discussion with the Americans through the diplomatic channel, nevertheless, the political excitement over the possible use of the atomic bomb, gave an excuse for a review of these subjects at the top level. We met first at the White House, and then moved to the Presidential yacht "Williamsburg", which was moored in the Potomac.

The discussions extended over four days - a long period for a conference of this kind. Mr Truman has given a 17 page blow by blow account of the proceedings(8) and Dean Acheson a characteristically racy commentary in "Present at the Creation"(9). In his Memoirs, Mr Attlee manages to deal with the meeting in two paragraphs (10). The British account is in the archives (11).

The meeting was marked by some very plain speaking on both sides, and did not in fact resuot in agreement on any of the threee main issues, but it undoubtedly cleared the air, and brought the points of view of the two governments closer together.

The principal subject which had triggered off the meeting in the first place, the use of the atomic bomb, was not raised until its very end. While the communiqué was being drafted, the President took Mr Attlee to his office and they conversed alone for fifteen or twenty minutes. When they came back, as Dean Acheson relates, the President said cheerfully, "We have been discussing the atomic weapon and agreed that neither of us would use these weapons without prior consultation with each other". Dean Acheson promptly reformed the damage control party, since an announcement in these terms would have contradicted some of the President's previous public statements and would have outraged Congress. Oliver Franks, whose performance throughout the meeting was outstanding, came once more to the rescue and drafted a passage for the communiqué which read, "The President stated that it was his hope that world conditions would never call for the use of the atomic bomb. The president told the prime Minister that it was also his desire to keep the Prime Minister at all times informed of developments which might bring about a change in the situation". This was enough to enable the Prime Minister to put out the political fire at home, and for the President to satisfy the Senate.

The crisis was over.

It is interesting that the British record of the meeting is more positive. It quotes the President as saying that the British and Canadian Governments were partners with the US Government in the atomic weapon and that the US Government would not consider its use without consulting the UK and Canada. The understanding on this point was clear even though it depended on no written agreement.

in his report to the House of Commons the Prime Minister felt able to say that he was completely satisfied by his talk with the President on this question. "I ask the House to accept my assurance that there is no difference of opinion in this vital matter".

My own view has always been that whatever some of his generals may have been planning, the president ahd no intention of authorising the use of the atomic weapon in Korea or

There are two general observations to make about this meeting.

The first relates to the extremely skilful way in which Mr Attlee conducted the British case. Dean Acheson, who in Lord Bullock's words "missed Ernie Bevin", was not attracted by Mr Attlee. He calls him a Job's comforter, and quotes the saying, "he spoke with all the passion of a woodchuck chewing a carrot". "His thought", Dean Acheson continues, "impressed me as a long withdrawing melacholy sigh". Like many other clever people, Mr Acheson was misled by Mr Attlee's low profile, and could not conceal his admiration for Mr Attlee's ability and negotioating skill. "Mr Attlee early noticed a tendency of the President to indicate whether he agreed or not at each stage of the argument, so he framed his statements to draw Presidentail agreement as he developed his theme, so he soon led the President well on to the flypaper". Dean Acheson then reveals how he put a stop to this process.

My second observation is that, in spite of the modest outcome of the meeting, it formed something of a landmark in Anglo-American relations. The atomic energy and Palestine episodes were forgotten in the obviously harmonious and friendly relationship between the two principals. It demonstrated publicly that Britain, in spite of previous misunderstandings and divergent views, for example on Europe, was still regarded as Dean Acheson said at the last meeting, as America's "only real ally on whom they could rely". The discussions did pave the way for subsequent agreement on many issues. Thsi was a substantial achievement on the part of the Prime Minister.

At the conclusion of the meeting Mr Attlee made a very good speech to the Washington Press Club and we went to New York and on to Ottawa, as I have already related.

Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis

I now come to the Anglo-Iranian oil crisis of 1957. In March of that year, after the murder of the Prime Minister, General Razmara, Mossadeq took over the Government and nationalised the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (as it was still called). This led to a long drawn out crisis which took nearly three years to settle. Mr Attlee's Government was therefore only concerned with the first phase.

The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had failed to move with the times. In the first phase of the crisis, it showed an arrogance and an immobility which in practice prevented any possibility of a settlement. It was supported in its attitude both by the Ministry of Fuel and Power and by the Treasury, while at the Foreign Office, Herbert Morrison, who had just taken office, showed a belligerence and jingoism which surprised us all. To make the situation worse, the British Ambassador in Teheran had little Middle East experience, was out of sympathy with the Iranians and encouraged a hard line attitude. I happened to be the Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Affairs at the Foreign Office at the time. I knew little or nothing about Iran or for that matter Middle East politics, but as the oil industry was involved, it fell to me to deal with it at official level. It was an uphill task.

The US Government was deeply concerned by these developments, they had a conviction, which our Middle East experts did not share, that the alternative to Mossadeq would be a Tudeh, that is a Communist takeover, which would threaten the Western position and oil interests throughout the Middle East, and that therefore it was necessary to deal with Mossadeq however unsatisfactory the outcome was likely to be. It so happened that the State Department official dealing with the Middle East was then George McGhee, an oil man himself. He came to London and gave us some very good advice, which fell on deaf ears.

As the situation deteriorated, the Americans arranged in July to send Averell Harriman to Teheran to try to bring about the resumption of negotiations. On the 12th July the Cabinet met(13) and the Prime Minister in effect took over the handling of the crisis.

Overruling Morrison's advice, the Cabinet decided to take no military action against iran other than that needed for the protection of British lives. Mr Attlee set the tone for future policy. We must, he said, as a Socialist Government accept the principle of nationalisation and stress our willingness to operate the oil industry on behalf of the Iranian Government on a basis of friendly partnership, nor must we alienate genuine nationalist feeling in Iran by clinging to the old techniques of obtaining concessions.

At a further Cabinet meeting on the 23rd July (14) Morrison still pressed for military aciton. Bue the Law Officers said that this could not legally be justified and consideration of it was deferred.

On August 1st (15) the Cabinet agreed to resume negotiations with the Iranian Government on the lines recommended by Averell Harriman and to send a special envoy to Teheran. Unfortunately the choice fell on Mr Richard Stokes, the Lord Privy Seal, who was without either diplomatic or Middle Eastern experience, and who operated in a very clumsy and tactless way. After a few weeks Harriman and Stokes concluded that there was no hope of an agreement and the talks were suspended. Stokes later advised Attlee to resume negotiations with Mossadeq.

In the meantime the British Government had referred the issue to the International Council of Justice and had obtained an interim injunction against the Iranian Governmeent. The situation then deteriorated further; Iranian deposits in London were frozen, the Abadan refinery closed, and the British employees evacuated. The British Government by then had completed its military preparations and the Cabinet met on the 27th September (16) to determine the policy to be followed. Morrison still hankered after a military solution, but Attlee stood firm. The Cabinet decided against the use of force and in favour of referring the issue to the Security Council.

This was the last action of the Government in this affair before the election.

There is no doubt that the firm handling of the situation by the Prime Minister and his strong stand against Morrison's proposals averted a disastrous and humiliating military adventure. His good sense and calm judgement grasped the essential elements of the problem. But the Government fell before any positive proposal for the resumption of negotiations with Iran could be agreed.

Palestine

I have not had the time to deal with the Palestine problem. This was something which Mr Attlee left to Mr Bevin to handle, and further, one with which I personally was never concerened. Suffice to say that the Prime Minister had to intervene at the end to try to limit the damage, but by that time Truman had the bit between his teeth and made a negotiated agreement impossible. The British government threw in its hand and surrendered the mandate to the UN. It was a low point in Anglo-American relations and the low point in Attlee's relationship with Truman. The question whether it would have been otherwise if Attlee, who had his qualms about the Foreign Office policy, had taken some earlier action, remains open.

Conclusion

In considering the foreign policy of the Attlee Government, it is important to remember that as Deputy Prime Minister in the Coalition Government, Mr Attlee had played an active role in the making of policy, and therefore not only had much experience, but had formed his own views, especially on the future of Germany and relations with Russia.

At Potsdam he picked up the threads of the coalition's policy and did not in essence

alter it on these major issues. While still pinning his hopes on the establishment of the authority of the United Nations, he took a realistic view of the Russian threat from the Potsdam conference onward. He was equally firm in his belief in the prime importance of th American alliance.

In these views, he had the general support of the Conservative opposition. Mr Bevin and Mr Anthony Eden kept in close touch and were on friendly terms. Sir Winston Churchill kept Mr Attlee informed of the effect of his speech at Fulton Mo. and of a subsequent speech at the Washington Press Club, and received a telegram of warm thanks from the Prime Minister. There was a strong element of bi-partisanship in Mr Attlee's policy on Germany, the Soviet Union, the United Nations and the American alliance, and later, on rearmament.

In these repects Mr Attlee was at odds with the left wing of his party, which first came to a head in 1946 when Dick Crossman and fifty-six other MPs, in Mr Bevin's absence at a conference, moved an amendment to the King's speech asking for a review of foreign policy and "a democratic and socialist alternative to the existing line". Over 120 MPs supported Crossman on this occasion by abstaining in a division. But Attlee shrugged off these attacks, and he and his Foreign Secretary were not deflected from their purpose.

Their policy remained firm and consistant throughout the period. It was generally successful except in Palestine, and for that failure the United States bears the major responsibility. The European policy was criticised by the opposition, but as later events proved, there was no fundamental difference between Labour and Conservative governments in their approach to it.

Mr Attlee never lost sight of the national interest and served it with robustness and determination. In foreign policy, as in so many other fields, his contribution and achievement had been generally underestimated.

Notes on "Clement Attlee and Foreign Policy"

1. For the official account of this conference VFO C12933/111/98 November 22 1941.

2. "The Slighter Side" by Geoffrey & Helen de Freitas

3. "As It Happened" p. 169

4. Hansard 22 August 1945

5. "A Prime Minister Remembers" by Francis Williams

6. Round Table 1975. Review by Lord Sherfield of Professor Margaret Gowing's book, "Great Britain & Atomic Energy, 1939-1945" p.193

7. Op Cit p. 173

8. Truman Memoirs, Vol 2 pp. 396-413

9. "Present at the Creation" by Dean Acheson, pp 478-485

10. Op Cit pp. 200-201

11. PRO FO 800/445

12. Bullock

13. CAB 128

14. CAB 129

15. ditto

16. CAB 130