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“THE USUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF A SHOT-GUN WEDDING”. BRITISH LABOUR AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES IN EASTERN EUROPE, 1945-1948

Introduction

On the evening of September 26th 1947, Denis Healey, the Labour Party's International Secretary, hosted a BBC Home Service radio broadcast. In it, he reflected upon the role of the Social Democratic parties in Europe. Democratic Socialism, he argued, was above all a “middle of the road doctrine”, it agreed with Conservatives on the significance of political democracy, while it fell in with Communists on the importance of economic planning. Occupying a mediating position between these mutually antagonistic extremes, Social Democratic parties should at all costs avoid throwing in their lots with either one of them. Some might insist that Socialists should always safeguard the interest of the working-class and cooperate with Communists in united fronts. The trouble was that most European Social Democratic parties had “found that collaboration with the Communists is rather like going for a ride on a tiger”, more often than not ending up “with the lady inside and the smile on the face of the tiger”.¹ Within fifteen months, Healey would be proven right by events in Eastern Europe. Across the region, Communist parties had forced their Social Democratic coalition partners into a fusion. The last domino fell in December 1948, when the Polish Socialist Party merged with the Polish Communists. An era of limited freedom in Eastern Europe came to an end with this, as Healey remarked cynically, “formal act of hara-kiri”.²

This article seeks to explore the relations between the Labour Party and its Eastern European fraternal bodies during the first years after the Second World War. These parties had been full members of the so-called “informal Socialist International” that emerged in 1946.³ Though it is certainly overstating the case to argue,

¹ Europe. In: Labour Party Archives [LPA], International Department [LP/ID], Box 13, Labour History Archive and Study Centre [LHASC], Manchester.

² The Fusion of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). In: *Ibid.*

³ The Socialist International was not re-established until 1951. Before that, international Socialist cooperation was coordinated via the Socialist Information and Liaison Office (1946-1947) and the Commission for International Socialist Conferences (1947-1951). – For a fine overview of the various difficulties entailed in the reconstruction of the Socialist International: *Steininger*, Rolf: Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die deutsche Frage, die Internationale und das Problem der Wiederaufnahme der SPD auf den internationalen sozialistischen Konferenzen bis 1951 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Labour Party. Darstellung und Dokumentation. Bonn 1979 (Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, Beiheft 7).

as the Polish Communists did in late 1946, that Labour was the "cock of the Socialist roost" and that the other Social Democratic parties went to Great Britain "for instructions", the British were indeed the leading force in the post-war international Socialist movement.⁴ Its heroic wartime record and its landslide victory at the polls in mid-1945 had invested Labour with enormous prestige, not least amongst the Eastern European Social Democrats.⁵ But the fact that the Socialists were governing Britain was as much a liability as it was an asset to the international Socialist movement. By its very impartial nature, a Government cannot be seen to discriminate between foreign parties in favour of fraternal groupings. As a result, both the Labour Party and the Labour Government were often walking a tightrope in their attempts to encourage and reinforce the Eastern European Social Democrats.

The purposes of this article are fourfold. In the first place, it aims to shed some light upon a largely neglected area of post-war British foreign policy-making. Even fairly recent historiographical accounts describe Eastern Europe as a region that had been written off to Britain under the notorious "percentages agreement" that Stalin and Churchill entered into in October 1944.⁶ In the second place, it aspires to add one further chapter to those narratives which query whether Labour's foreign policy was continuous with that of the pre-war Tory Governments.⁷ In accordance with contemporary publications, it argues that British post-war international politics cannot be understood without an appreciation of its distinct ideological elements.⁸ Thirdly, it attempts to illustrate that the interplay between the Labour Party and the British Foreign Office was both more intensive and more intricate than has often been supposed. As regards the attitudes towards the Eastern European Social Democrats, there were no clear fault lines and positions shifted in keeping with events.⁹ In the fourth place, it endeavours to demonstrate that the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were nominally independent bodies up to at least late 1947. These parties have all too frequently been portrayed as "nothing but front

⁴ Commenting upon these Communist allegations R. B. Kirby, labour attaché at the British embassy in Warsaw, wrote: "I suppose it is a little difficult for Communists to understand how much argument and difference of opinion there can be amongst Socialists!" LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester.

⁵ For example, in his report of the November 1945 congress of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (CSSD), Morgan Philips, Secretary General of the Labour Party, noted that Labour's triumph "had certainly given confidence to the leaders and the delegates" of the party. After Philips had declared that Labour sought close and friendly relations with the Czechoslovak Social Democrats in his address to the congress, he was received with an "almost embarrassing reception". LPA, LP/ID, International Sub-Committee, Minutes & Documents 1944-1949, LHASC, Manchester.

⁶ See: Greenwood, Sean: Britain and the Cold War, 1945-1991. London, Basingstoke 2000, 7.

⁷ For a contrasting point of view: Saville, John: The Politics of Continuity. British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government 1945-46. London 1993.

⁸ See: Douglas, R. M.: The Labour Party, Nationalism and Internationalism 1939-1951. A new World Order. London 2004, 1-13.

⁹ It is in this context that this article will contest the findings in the sole treatise written on the relations between Labour and the Eastern European Social Democrats after the Second World War: Heunios, Peter: Die britische Labour Party und die sozialistischen Parteien Ostmitteleuropas 1944-1948. In: Bohemia 24 (1983) no. 2, 317-334.

organisations of the Communists".¹⁰ In fact, by early 1947 both Labour Party and Labour Government viewed the Social Democrats as the last stronghold against the full communisation of Eastern Europe.

Stocktaking

In the weeks that separated the holding of the July 1945 General Election from the calling of its results, Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, contemplated future British foreign policy in his memorandum "Stocktaking after VE-Day". He pointed to the Soviet Union as the major threat to post-war peace. Stalin seemed determined to secure his borders "by creating what might be termed an ideological Lebensraum in those countries which he considered strategically important". Britain was to withstand Soviet pressure in the diplomatic arena. This also applied to most of Eastern Europe, where Sargent aspired to hold on to British influence by keeping "our foot firmly in Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, even though we may have to abandon perhaps for the moment Rumania and Hungary".¹¹ By that time it was still widely believed that the General Election would produce a Tory victory, which was expected to pave the way for a swift return to traditional British anti-Soviet attitudes. Much to his distress, however, Sargent was faced with an incoming Labour Government. Full of gloom, he predicted "a Communist avalanche over Europe, a weak foreign policy, a private revolution at home and the reduction of England to a second-class power".¹²

These anxieties might well have been fuelled by signs of increasing radicalism amongst the Labour Party's rank-and-file in the run-up to the General Election. During its May 1945 Annual Conference Major Denis Healey, who was on a three-month leave from military service in the Italian peninsula, insisted that Labour ought to adopt a foreign policy that was "completely distinct" from that of the Tories. He had witnessed Socialist revolution emerging in continental Europe; it had already been "firmly established" in most of Eastern and Southern Europe. The central tenet of the Labour Party's foreign policy should be to bolster nascent Socialist revolutions across the continent. Most of those who had spent the war in Britain failed to grasp just how merciless the struggle for Socialism in Europe had been. It was perfectly understandable that the victors of that struggle were determined to hold on to the fruits of their success. Therefore, Healey concluded, "if the Labour Movement in Europe finds it necessary to introduce a greater degree of police supervision and more immediate and drastic punishment for their opponents than we in this country would be prepared to tolerate, we must be prepared to understand their point of view".¹³

¹⁰ *Orlow, Dietrich: Common Destiny. A Comparative History of the Dutch, French, and German Social Democratic Parties 1945-1969. New York 2000, 141.*

¹¹ Quoted in: *Deighton, Anne: The Impossible Peace. Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War. Oxford 1990, 26.*

¹² Quoted in: *Morgan, Kenneth: Labour in Power 1945-1951. Oxford 1984, 42.*

¹³ Report of the annual conference of the Labour Party [LPCR] 44 (1945) 114.

Over the course of the following months, both Sargent and Healey would come to occupy prominent positions in the British foreign political machinery. Sargent took over the post of Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in early 1946, thus becoming the effective head of the Foreign Office. Roughly at the same time, Healey was asked to apply for the vacancy at the top of the Labour Party's International Department, which he was awarded in due course. Formally, the Foreign Office and the Labour Party operated at entirely separate levels. The conduct of international politics at state level was presided over by the Foreign Office, while the Labour Party's international latitude was strictly confined to the party level. Hence, when Healey began his duties as International Secretary, his foremost tasks were to rebuild the relationships between Labour and foreign Socialist parties and to assist drawing up designs for a future Socialist International. But, as Healey asserted in his memoirs, since Socialist parties were coalition partners in almost all post-war European Governments, his contacts with Socialists abroad plunged him "into the centre of British foreign policy".¹⁴ As a consequence, clear lines of demarcation between a state and a party sphere in British international politics were often blurred.

Right from the beginning of its tenure, the Labour Government interfered in Labour Party affairs where it deemed its interests at stake. For example, in the autumn of 1945, it effectively vetoed a proposed visit of a Labour delegation to Bulgaria. In late September, Morgan Philips had informed Secretary of State Ernest Bevin that the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) had accepted an invitation from the governing Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) to visit the country. He requested that the necessary facilities would be put in place. Philips was, however, rebuffed by both Bevin and Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Dalton. Bevin wrote that there were "certain political difficulties" with regard to Bulgaria and maintained that only all-party delegations should visit the country: "otherwise I fear chaos will ensue". He urged that the NEC should henceforth consult with the Foreign Office before deciding on foreign invitations so as to avoid embarrassment. Dalton was more elaborate. He argued that the Soviet Union was in complete control in Bulgaria, and that no delegation would be able to get a clear view of the political situation. Furthermore, there was no significant Socialist party in this peasant country. Above all, Dalton pointed to the great risk that a visiting Labour delegation would be "construed as an anti-Soviet move". Bevin was having a hard enough time as it was and it was to be feared that this visit "will be, if not quite useless, positively harmful to Anglo-Russian relations".¹⁵

First Encounters

Anglo-Soviet relations also took centre stage when Labour had to decide between "Molotov-Socialists" and "Independent Socialists" in Eastern Europe. In Bulgaria, Poland and Rumania the Social Democrats had split over the issue of Communist-

¹⁴ Healey, Denis: *The Time of my Life*. London 1989, 74.

¹⁵ For the correspondence: I.P.A., John Stuart Middleton Papers (I.P./JSM), Box 3, I.HASC, Manchester.

Socialist collaboration. Dissident factions in those parties protesting against the police methods used by the Communist-dominated popular front Governments had broken away from their main bodies and entered into opposition. It was up to the Labour Party to determine which of these groupings to invite to the first full-fledged post-war International Socialist Conference that was scheduled for May 1946 in the seaside resort of Clacton.¹⁶ The question of the invitations was discussed by the NEC in the spring. While it resolved to invite neither Socialist faction from Bulgaria and Rumania, it decided to issue the PPS Government with an invitation barring both the opposition Polish Social Democrats and the London-based exiled PPS from the international Socialist movement. It appears that this verdict was predominantly influenced by reluctance to put Anglo-Soviet relations on the line. Official support for overtly anti-Soviet political currents in Eastern Europe would provoke the Soviet Union, with all its dire consequences for the future of Socialism on that side of the European divide. As Healey noted after the Clacton Conference, the Social Democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe were “a barometer of relations between Britain and the Soviet Union [...], their survival depends wholly on Anglo-Soviet friendship”.¹⁷

In addition to concerns about repercussions for the bonds between Britain and the Soviet Union, prognoses on the political potential of the opposition Social Democratic parties in Eastern Europe seem to have been a major factor in Labour's decision to favour their governing counterparts. Whereas all opposition parties were subjected to severe persecution, the governing Social Democrats found themselves in a position to exert real influence upon the state machine and to gather a mass following around them. Reflecting upon Eastern European Socialism in mid-1947, Healey maintained that the anti-Communist attitudes of the opposition Social Democrats had left them with no choice but to struggle alongside their “class enemies” against the popular front Governments with no chance of success whatsoever. On the other hand, the Government Social Democratic parties had followed the right tactics. By joining the popular fronts, they had been able to build up a strong party organisation and widespread support amongst the population. This had enabled the governing Social Democrats to “blackmail the Communists into giving them a larger share of power” and made them a force “to be reckoned with”.¹⁸

In Clacton, the Hungarian, Polish and Rumanian Social Democrats defended the Communist-Socialist cooperation and the methods used by the popular front Governments.¹⁹ It was contended that there were anti-democratic majorities in each

¹⁶ The first post-war International Socialist Conference had been held in London in March 1945. It is, however, hardly relevant in the context of this article as “Enemy Alien” Socialists from (former) Axis countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary and Rumania) were not allowed to the Conference and as most of the Czechoslovakian and Polish delegates did not return on the international Socialist platform after 1945.

¹⁷ Towards a Socialist International? In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester. – For a similar line of reasoning: *Heumos*, Peter: Einleitung. In: *Idem* (ed.): *Europäischer Sozialismus im Kalten Krieg. Briefe und Berichte 1944-1948*. Frankfurt a. M. 2004, 13-46, here 30 (Quellen und Studien zur Sozialgeschichte 20).

¹⁸ LPA, LP/ID, Box 4, LHASC, Manchester.

¹⁹ In spite of the fact that the NEC had decided not to invite any of the Balkan Socialist

of these countries and that the popular fronts had to arm themselves against these currents. A split between Communists and Socialists would be utilized by the forces of Fascism to rebuild dictatorships in Eastern Europe. At the same time the Hungarians and Rumanians indicated that they were suspicious of Communist objectives, while the Czechoslovakian Social Democrats argued that "democracy was preserved" in the first months after the liberation only as a result of the fact that they had convinced the Communists to enter a united front. For that reason, the Eastern European delegations urged that the contacts between Western European and Eastern European Social Democrats would be upheld on the basis of mutual understanding. The "dangerous dispute of Western and Eastern Socialism" ought to be avoided at all costs, as Polish representative Ludwik Grosfeld insisted. Instead, "a bridge of understanding" should be erected across differences of opinion and diverging tactics.²⁰

The extent of Communist interference in continental Social Democratic parties witnessed at Clacton alarmed Healey. A week after the Conference, he noted that of the nineteen parties represented in Clacton "more than twelve found Communist intrigue a major or minor nuisance, while even some of the Parties which collaborate on particular issues with the Communists showed the usual psychological effects of a shotgun wedding".²¹ The forceful merger of Communists and Social Democrats in the Soviet Zone of Germany in April had already shattered any illusions about Communist intentions in the regions occupied by the Red Army. Therefore, from the Clacton Conference onwards, the attitude of the Labour Party towards the Eastern European Social Democrats was marked by two central motives. In the first place, Labour showed sympathy for the difficulties with which the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were faced. It was argued that these parties would find themselves in a critical position at least until the tensions between the Great Powers abated. Consequently, the relations with the Government Social Democratic parties were to be kept intact and the Eastern European Socialists were not to be caused embarrassment at home.²² In the second place, Labour tried all in

Parties, a representative of the Government Rumanian Social Democrats showed up in Clacton. After an intervention on his behalf by the Czechoslovak delegation, it was resolved to allow him to the Conference. From then on, the popular front Rumanian Social Democratic Party would be a full member of the international Socialist movement. See: Mai 1946. Prag – Bericht über die internationale sozialistische Konferenz in Clacton für den Zentralrat der tschechoslowakischen Gewerkschaften. In: *Heumos* (ed.): *Europäischer Sozialismus* 338-341, here 339 (cf. fn. 17).

²⁰ International Socialist Conference at Clacton May 17th-20th 1946. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 3, LHASC, Manchester.

²¹ LPA, LP/ID, Box 3, LHASC, Manchester.

²² In the context of the international Socialist movement, this applied above all to the question of the Socialist International. In 1946 and 1947 the European Socialists were confronted with repeated Belgian and French calls for a rapid reestablishment of the Second International. In Clacton, the Eastern European Socialists had already declared that the geopolitical position of their countries in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence did not allow for membership in a Socialist International that would inevitably be dominated by the Western European parties. Labour took up this argument, contending that the premature construction of a Socialist International would contribute to block-building in Europe. Some

its power to encourage the Eastern European Social Democratic parties to sustain their organisational independence from the Communists. Over the course of the next year and a half it would develop various initiatives to this end.

Intransigence

In order for these policies to be successful, the Labour Party needed Foreign Office backing, but such support was not forthcoming in 1946. Instead, the Foreign Office seems to have viewed the political situation in post-war Eastern Europe from a black-and-white perspective in which all parties that were not overtly anti-Communist were written off as "well sold to the Communists".²³ It comes as no surprise, then, that the Foreign Office had pinned its hopes upon those Conservative, Liberal and Peasant parties that it considered most likely to prove a bulwark against Communism in Eastern Europe. For example, in Poland it fostered the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and its leader Stanisław Mikołajczyk. In November 1945, he spoke privately with Bevin in London. Mikołajczyk assured the Foreign Secretary that the struggle for democracy was being won in Poland and over the next year the Foreign Office attempted to shore up the PSL.²⁴

The fact that a Labour Government was supporting Conservative forces in Eastern Europe to the neglect of the Socialist parties caused particular distress both at the Labour Party's headquarters and amongst its rank-and-file. Most often, the diplomatic personnel at Britain's Eastern European embassies was held to be the culprit. Writing in August 1946, Healey argued that there was "a real danger in accepting at face value the evidence of 'converted' Tories" of the "Quintin Hogg and Bob Boothby type" at British embassies. According to Healey, these diplomats were more interested "in finding sticks with which to beat the Russians" than in the future of the democratic order in Eastern Europe. For that reason too, all Eastern European Social Democratic parties were begging the Labour Party "to send out labour attachés so that they can have at least one person in each embassy to whom they can talk without fear and with some hope of sympathetic understanding".²⁵

Similarly, at both the 1946 and 1947 Labour Party Conferences, resolutions were taken calling upon Bevin to modernise and broaden the Foreign Service. It was

authors claim that this line of reasoning was chiefly intended to conceal the Labour Party's own interest in forestalling the reconstitution of the Socialist International. See: *Loth*, Wilfried: *Sozialismus und Internationalismus. Die französischen Sozialisten und die Nachkriegsordnung Europas 1940-1950*. Stuttgart 1977, 113-116.

²³ Quoted in: *Heumos*: Die britische Labour Party 319 (cf. fn. 9).

²⁴ *Bullock*, Alan: *Ernest Bevin. Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*. Oxford, New York, London 1983, 140-141.

²⁵ LPA, LP/ID, Box 4, LHASC, Manchester. Labour attachés were Ministry of Labour officials at British embassies. Formally, it was their duty to report back to the Ministry of Labour on labour conditions and trade union organisation. In fact, some got involved in political work, as labour attachés were a focal point for left-wing political leaders who had beforehand found no contact in British embassy circles. An outstanding example is the post-war labour attaché at Britain's Italian embassy, W. H. Braine, who "found himself exerting a political influence at least comparable to that of the Ambassador himself".

contended that "the men who were brought up in the old narrow ruling circles of Eton and Harrow and Rugby" were incapable of representing a Labour Government in the upheaval-ridden countries of Eastern Europe and that labour attachés should be appointed to each British embassy.²⁶ In the end, these efforts on the part of the Labour Party met with some success. By 1947, there were labour attachés in the British embassies in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In the same year, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, the British Ambassador to Poland, was re-assigned to Brazil, while William Houstoun Boswall, the British Ambassador to Bulgaria, had been recalled in November 1946. In the latter case, there were widespread rumours that the Labour Government had lost confidence in its Bulgarian representative.²⁷

The Eastern European Social Democrats themselves were outraged at the policies of the Foreign Office. Corresponding with Healey in late 1946, Nuselovici-Moldovanu, the international representative of the (Government) Rumanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR), criticized Bevin. If the Socialist Foreign Minister of Great Britain sincerely cared about democracy in Rumania, he would have picked the PSDR as his "ami naturel". Instead, he paid lip-service to Rumanian democracy only as a pretext to attack the Soviet Union, while official British support was bestowed upon Liberal, Peasant and (Opposition) Independent Social Democratic Parties. If the Foreign Office persisted in its attitude, "on donnera un bel spectacle de la solidarité internationale des socialistes au monde et il réussira a rendre impossible la formation d'un gouvernement à direction socialiste en Roumanie". In response, Healey indicated that he concurred with Moldovanu's views and claimed to be "in continual argument with the Foreign Office over the question".²⁸

These arguments would soon take a turn for the better. In a late December letter, the International Secretary recommended transferring support to the Rumanian Government Social Democrats. It might be "repugnant" to do so, but it was the "only policy which will further British interests in Rumania at the present time". Titel Petrescu, the leader of the Opposition Social Democrats, was but an "ineffective old man", whose following consisted for the most part of the intellectual bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the Government Social Democratic Party, led by Lotar Rădăceanu, had built up a mass following amongst the workers and the peasants. While many of the leading characters within the PSDR might indeed be "unsavoury", they were "at least preferable [...] to the Maniu and Brătianu gang".²⁹ Shifting support to the Government Social Democrats might enable them "to open a door to the West, increase their popular backing, and to wean themselves away

²⁶ LPCR 45 (1946) 152-153. – LPCR 46 (1947) 165-166 (cf. fn. 13).

²⁷ These rumours were denied by Christopher Mayhew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, in the House of Commons on November 12th 1946. See: Foreign Office (FO) 371/58538 R16535, National Archives (NA), London.

²⁸ LPA, LP/ID, Box 4, LHASC, Manchester.

²⁹ Iuliu Maniu and Constantin Brătianu were the respective leaders of the Rumanian Peasant and Liberal Parties. According to Healey, a "glance at election results before the war, when Maniu and Brătianu were able to control the electoral machine, makes our own enthusiasm for giving them democratic freedom in Rumania today seem either ingenious or dishonest to the average Rumanian workmen". FO 371/67252b R201/201/37, NA, London.

from the Communists".³⁰ The advice was communicated to Adrian Holman, the British Ambassador in Rumania, who agreed with its general line even though he thought that efforts to make the Opposition and Government Social Democrats cooperate might be worthwhile. One month later the die had been cast, as the Foreign Office had decided "to drop their support of the Maniu, Brătianu and Petrescu Parties and to concentrate on backing the Rădăceanu Socialists".³¹ It was to prove a herald of a much more extensive modification of Foreign Office attitudes towards the Eastern European Social Democrats.

Year of Decisions

In December 1946, Bevin had summoned the heads of his Eastern European embassies to London in order to discuss Britain's future policies in that part of the continent. Meetings between high-ranking Foreign Office bureaucrats and the Ambassadors to Eastern Europe were held on January 13th, 14th and 17th 1947, chaired by Sargent, Bevin and Minister of State Hector McNeil respectively. Opening the first meeting, Sargent explained why Bevin had convened these gatherings. The Secretary of State hoped to make up his mind about Eastern Europe in view of both the new situation that had arisen after elections had been held in each country and the upcoming Moscow round of the Council of Foreign Ministers. Hitherto, Britain's attitude towards Eastern Europe had been marked first and foremost by an emphasis on the observation of the Yalta provision on organising "free and unfettered" elections in the regions occupied by the Red Army. This policy had been a mixed success at best: while fair elections had been held in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Communists had rigged elections in Bulgaria, Poland and Rumania. Against this background, Sargent presented the Ambassadors with two alternatives. Either the Foreign Office could continue to resist Communist predominance in Eastern Europe or it could acquiesce with Communist political supremacy and resign itself to the further development of cultural and trade relations with Eastern Europe.³²

On this question, the verdict was unanimously in favour of the former option. It was generally agreed that giving up on political pluralism in Eastern Europe would do great harm to Britain's moral standing across the region. Moreover, it was likely to shock the American State Department, which had thus far pursued a policy parallel to that of the Foreign Office. Above all, however, it would produce nothing but adverse results in the diplomatic arena. The Soviet Union "believed in a foreign policy of friction, they would be amazed if we ceased to oppose them in Eastern Europe, and, if we were to relax our opposition, we should expect increased pressure from the Russians in Western Europe and the Middle East". The Soviet Union was experiencing major domestic difficulties: industrial output was low and another bad harvest was coming up. Therefore, if Britain kept "the ball in the Russian twenty-

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ FO 371/67249 R1313/G, NA, London.

³² FO 371/65964 N710, NA, London.

five", the situation in Eastern Europe might well alter in its favour in a couple of years. The general objective would be "to hold position against the spread of Communism in order that Western concepts of Social Democracy may, if possible, in the course of time be adopted in as many Eastern European countries as possible".³³

But, so far, the Eastern European Social Democrats had not been great standard-bearers of these concepts. It was pointed out during the London meetings that the Eastern European Social Democratic parties "had shown themselves weak and flabby in the past and lacking in courage to oppose the Communists", in effect they had been "in the wrong camp".³⁴ Yet, as Cavendish-Bentinck noted, the virtual destruction of the PSL in Poland gave cause to suspect that the Socialists would be next on the list. For that reason, he advocated to bestow discreet support upon the PPS. While Holman pleaded for a similar line towards the Rumanian Social Democrats, some of his colleagues pointed to hopeful "signs of a growing spirit of Socialist independence".³⁵ Where possible, Britain should bolster these tendencies and seek to disengage the Eastern European Social Democratic parties from the Communists. Greater collaboration between Social Democratic and Peasant parties was also to be stimulated. Even the possibility of giving financial assistance to the Eastern European Social Democrats was discussed.

The Labour Party was to fulfil a central role in these attempts to encourage the Eastern European Social Democratic parties. According to McNeil, these parties had, after a long period of German and Communist domination, lost their "organisational touch" and were unable to "make independent opposition effective". Above all, they required "friendly Socialists from abroad to advise them on how their independence could best be asserted".³⁶ Sargent also felt that the Labour Party should step up efforts to "penetrate and collaborate with" its Eastern European fraternal bodies. The British Ambassador to Czechoslovakia recommended cultivating the right-wing of the CSSD, which stood close to the Labour Party ideologically. Finally, Knox Helm, the head of the British Political Mission in Hungary, hoped that visits by responsible Labour MPs would "open the eyes of the Social Democrats to the dangers of the course pursued by their present leaders".³⁷

More extensive contacts between Labour and the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were thus much welcomed by the Foreign Office. There were, however, certain difficulties encountered in this context. In the first place, the Labour rank-and-file was often little acquainted with conditions in continental Europe. Accustomed to a democratic order at home, they found it hard to conceive

³³ FO 371/65964 N1246, NA, London. – The view that Britain's post-war purpose was not so much to initiate a Cold War, but to pressure the Soviet Union into making concessions has already been advocated with regard to Great Power negotiations on Germany, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Western Europe by: *Greenwood: Britain and the Cold War* 40–42 (cf. fn. 6).

³⁴ FO 371/65964 N710, NA, London.

³⁵ FO 371/65964 N2218, NA, London.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ FO 371/65964 N710, NA, London.

of such things as open terrorisation or police state methods and were more concerned about the improvement of the situation of the working-classes than about the defence of personal freedom. Consequently, so as to avoid embarrassment, Labour MPs visiting Eastern Europe ought to be selected and briefed carefully.³⁸ In addition to that, Bevin was opposed to the dispatching of delegations to Eastern Europe consisting solely of Labour MPs. Both on financial grounds and in order to guarantee political representativeness, Bevin urged the Ambassadors to make increased use of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to send out all-party delegations to Eastern Europe.³⁹ The Foreign Office also explored further options to facilitate contacts between British Socialists and Eastern European Social Democrats, for example through exchanges of visits between Co-Operative Movements.

The most ambitious scheme to strengthen the Eastern European Social Democratic parties vis-à-vis Communism was submitted by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Christopher Mayhew. The usual stress on the political virtues of Social Democracy against Communism could in his view be linked to potential economic benefits. He argued that it made sense "to popularise the idea that the social revolutions in Eastern Europe, which in themselves promise better living conditions for the masses, are being exploited by Russia for her own selfish economic advantage". To accomplish this, the Soviet Union made use of well-known techniques of Capitalist colonial exploitation: it blockaded the establishment of close economic relations between Eastern Europe and the West and it extracted more wealth from the Eastern European countries than it returned. But without its Communist fifth column in Eastern Europe frustrating attempts to arrive at more profound forms of democracy and to attain higher living standards for the peasants and the working-classes, the Soviet Union would be hard-pressed to implement its exploitative measures. So therefore Mayhew hoped to rally the Eastern European masses behind the Social Democratic parties by embarking upon a propaganda campaign against this "Soviet Colonial System". Its pivotal assumption was to be that "[o]nly in free Social Democratic countries are the workers safeguarded against both Capitalist and Communist exploitation".⁴⁰

Mayhew's plan was well received by the Ambassadors and the Foreign Office leadership. McNeil argued that the best way to respond to Soviet exploitation was for Britain to offer the Eastern European countries trade agreements on a fairer basis. It was also decided to popularise the phrase "Soviet Colonial System": it should be introduced in a House of Commons speech, to be carried on in newspapers and semi-technical journals such as *The Economist*. And although the phrase was not to appear in the bulletins of the British embassies in Eastern Europe, its personnel should do everything in its power to advance the campaign amongst independence-minded Eastern European Social Democrats.⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ FO 371/65964 N1246, NA, London.

⁴⁰ FO 371/65964 N4247, NA, London.

⁴¹ FO 371/65964 N2218, NA, London.

Yet, even before the campaign could be launched, Bevin dismissed the entire scheme. He indicated that he wanted to postpone any anti-Soviet propaganda campaign in Eastern Europe until it became clear how the Eastern European countries would respond to the newly founded Economic Committee for Europe. Foremost on the Foreign Minister's mind seems, however, to have been his anxiety "to avoid being always the 'official opposition' in Eastern Europe".⁴²

Indian Summer

Even so, in their efforts to encourage the Eastern European Social Democrats to assert their independence, the Labour Party and the Foreign Office would act in concord over the following six months. Promising signs abounded. In Poland, Józef Cyrankiewicz, who had replaced the fellow-travelling Edward Osóbka-Morawski as leader of the PPS in 1946 and had become Prime Minister after the elections, steered an independent course. In April 1947, the Polish Communist Party (PPR) approached him with a proposal for the immediate fusion of Socialists and Communists, to be announced in a dramatic fashion on May 1st. Cyrankiewicz refused it out of hand, forcing Władysław Gomułka, General Secretary of the PPR, to rewrite his May Day message.⁴³ Cyrankiewicz also appears to have positively impressed Bevin when the two men met in Warsaw in late April. At the Labour Party Conference in May, the Foreign Minister declared that his Office had experienced difficulties with the Poles as they had not lived up to the Potsdam agreements. When "they had the good sense to select a Social Democratic Prime Minister, the Social Democratic Party taking an entirely different view, the situation was altered".⁴⁴ Notes of optimism sprung even from Rumania. In March, it was reported that tensions between Social Democrats and Communists were mounting. Rădăceanu led a movement to break with the Communist Party and seek rapprochement with the Independent Social Democrats.⁴⁵

But, for the time being, most attention was being paid to the dilemmas facing the Hungarian Social Democrats. In a November 1946 visit to the country, Morgan Philips had met with the leaders of all Hungarian political parties and concluded that Hungary found itself at crossroads. In the free elections of late 1945 the Communists had rallied only 17 percent of the electorate behind them, while the Smallholders' Party had secured more than half of the popular vote. From the elections onwards, the principal objective of the Communists had been to redress the balance and destroy the Smallholders' by branding them as counter-revolutionaries. The Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSzDP) had struggled alongside the Com-

⁴² FO 371/65964 N4248, NA, London.

⁴³ FO 371/66093 N6707, NA London.

⁴⁴ LPCR 46 (1947) 180 (cf. fn. 13). – The Polish Socialists themselves seem to have much welcomed British interest in their cause. After Bevin's visit to Warsaw, Grosfeld went out of his way to thank British diplomats for the "gesture" the Secretary of State had made to Cyrankiewicz. British "support would make it easier for them to carry out Socialist revolution in Poland on Western not totalitarian lines". FO 371/67185 R12615, NA, London.

⁴⁵ LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester.

munists in the so-called Left Wing Bloc. But the Left Wing Bloc was fighting a race against time: the Smallholders' had to be annihilated before the signing of a peace treaty would result in the departure of the Red Army. For that reason, Philips argued, the January 1947 congress of the MSzDP was "bound to influence decisively the outcome of the struggle". The Hungarian Social Democrats would have to choose between persisting in the present course of following the Communists "blindly and unreservedly" and embarking upon "a policy aimed at restoring the full independence" of the party. In that case, there would be a real "possibility of greater collaboration between the Smallholder Centre and the Social-Democratic Party".⁴⁶ In this respect, the Foreign Office was in complete agreement with Philips. The British Political Mission in Budapest had already pointed to the appeal of an anti-Communist coalition of Social Democrats and Smallholders'.⁴⁷

At the congress, which was attended by Healey, the issue of Social Democratic-Communist cooperation took centre stage. Similar to their Polish counterparts a few months later, the Hungarian Communists had recently suggested a merger. The Social Democrats had "so emphatically rejected" this offer "that it has not since been heard". There were, however, certain other problems. Most of all, the MSzDP was led by the weak and unreliable pro-Communist Árpád Szakasits. While the Social Democrats had "the best masses", the Communists possessed "the best leaders". During the congress, the party leadership made no efforts to approach the Smallholders'. On the contrary, Károly Peyer, the pre-war leader of the MSzDP, was denounced by Szakasits for being friendly to the Smallholders' Party.⁴⁸ And the close collaboration with the Hungarian Communists was reaffirmed. Yet, recently there had been signs not only of growing Social Democratic independence, but also of successful efforts "to hold the Communists back".⁴⁹ For that reason, Healey expected discord between Social Democrats and Communists to increase over the following months. Throughout this crucial period an unremitting British interest in the MSzDP was of the utmost importance, as "the Socialist leaders will be influenced by their estimate of the help which the Western parties will give them". The present leadership was, however, feeble, and a change of power was to be hoped for. Of the prospective leaders in waiting, Minister of Industry Antal Bán seemed "the most promising to back".⁵⁰

In the case of the Hungarian Social Democrats, backing meant financial support above all. As Minister of Industry, Bán had just presented his Three Year Plan for the revitalisation of Hungarian agriculture and industry. This plan entailed heavy sacri-

⁴⁶ Report on the Austrian Socialist Party Congress held in Vienna, 15th to 18th November 1946 – Morgan Philips. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 1, LHASC, Manchester.

⁴⁷ *Heumos*: Die britische Labour Party 326 (cf. fn. 9).

⁴⁸ In his diary, Healey criticized Szakasits for these remarks: "He had encouraged the Smallholders' right against his own left and damaged SP prestige abroad; he sentimentally hankered after the comfortable opportunism of pre-war and would not face the exigencies of power". See: Pearce, Edward: Denis Healey. A Life in our Times. London 2002, 106.

⁴⁹ Hungary – The Political Prospect. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester.

⁵⁰ Notes on visit to Budapest, January 29th-February 4th. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester.

fices on the part of the workers, as precedence was given to capital investment and agricultural development. These kinds of sacrifices could easily be exploited by Communist demagoguery. Therefore, to strengthen Bán's position and prestige within the country and to avoid the Communists taking advantage of working-class disillusionment with the Three Year Plan, Hungary desperately needed foreign credits.⁵¹ On his return from Budapest, Healey immediately got in touch with Dalton to arrange for a meeting between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Social Democratic Hungarian Under-Secretary of Finance. During the first post-war years, however, Britain was hardly in a position to prop up foreign economies. As a consequence, the success of the Three Year Plan depended entirely upon American willingness to provide the Hungarian Government with another credit.⁵²

At the same time as the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were struggling to assert their independence at home, they won their greatest victory within the framework of the international Socialist movement. At the International Socialist Conference in Zurich in June 1947, they succeeded in delaying the re-admission of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) to the European Socialist family with another six months. A mixture of domestic, foreign and nationalist arguments had pitted the Eastern European Social Democrats against the SPD and its flamboyant leader Kurt Schumacher.⁵³ In the face of overwhelming Western European support for the German Social Democrats, the Eastern European parties seemed to be outnumbered at first hand. But, as it turned out, the Belgian Socialists had been unable to mandate their delegation and abstained from voting on the question; as a result, the SPD failed to meet the required two-third majority by a single vote. Even though the Labour Party had voted in favour of the German Social Democrats, Healey concluded that the verdict on the SPD was in fact a blessing in disguise. Schumacher "returned with the publicly expressed confidence of nine major parties, while the opposition of the East European Parties would certainly not damage his prestige inside Germany". On the other hand, the Eastern European Social Democrats had "deprived their local Communists of a valuable propaganda weapon against them, a point of some importance in view of the recent intensification of Communist pressure and propaganda against right-wing Social Democracy".⁵⁴

⁵¹ Hungary – The Political Prospect. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester.

⁵² The United States had already granted the Hungarian Government 15 million dollars, with the express objective of giving "solid encouragement to the moderate elements whether Smallholder or Social Democrat". See: FO 371/67170 R2150, NA, London.

⁵³ Steininger emphasizes the first two factors. In his view, the Eastern European Social Democrats had already succumbed to Communist and Soviet pressure and voted against Schumacher "nicht weil er ein deutscher, sondern weil er ein antikommunistischer Sozialdemokrat ist". *Steininger: Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale* 83 (cf. fn. 3). – Conversely, Heumos points to the nationalist motives governing the conduct of the Eastern European parties. He argues that such national issues as the dispute over the Oder-Neisse border or the question of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans far outweighed any domestic or foreign shackles as explanation for Eastern European implacability towards the SPD. *Heumos: Europäischer Sozialismus* 40–43 (cf. fn. 17).

⁵⁴ Notes on the Minutes of the Zurich Conference. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester.

In more than one respect, the first half of 1947 was the Indian Summer of the Eastern European Social Democratic parties. The Communists, "dizzy with success" after the effective elimination of most Conservative, Liberal and Peasant parties, experienced major setbacks as the Social Democrats rejected fusion and asserted their independence. Furthermore, there were signals that the Social Democratic parties were steadily gaining ground amongst the Eastern European populations. In June, the British Ambassador in Prague reported that the Social Democratic emancipation from Communism had "gathered increasing momentum" over the last months. He believed that the CSSD was the only party that could successfully struggle with the Communists for the heart of the working-class. Recent evidence suggested that the Social Democrats were "on their way towards overhauling their rivals".⁵⁵ In the same vein, the Hungarian Social Democrats claimed that since the November 1945 elections "they had gained whereas the Communists had lost support among Hungarian industrial workers". As there was every prospect of these developments continuing, the Communists would not be able to govern without the MSzDP and the Social Democrats would uphold their independence.⁵⁶

Hot Summer

Very soon, though, the development of the Eastern European Social Democratic parties would come to be overshadowed by mounting tensions in the international arena. In late June, Healey observed a "trend towards greater rigidity in East Europe", which might be countered by an international détente.⁵⁷ The American "offensive", launched with the formulation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, seems to have been perceived by most Eastern European Social Democrats as being directed as much against Socialism as against Communism.⁵⁸ Ever since its proclamation, Social Democrats across the region feared that the United States would "pursue a clumsy, heavy-handed and indiscriminate campaign against the new regimes in Eastern Europe which will intensify polarisations of opinion in those countries and drive the Communists to more and more extreme measures". Even if successful, this campaign could only result in "a counter-revolutionary white terror in which the Socialists would go down together with the Communists".⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵ FO 371/65785 N7316, NA, London.

⁵⁶ FO 371/67170 R2470, NA, London.

⁵⁷ LPA, LP/ID, Box 6, LHASC, Manchester.

⁵⁸ In: LPA, LP/ID, International Sub Committee 1944–1949, LHASC, Manchester.

⁵⁹ LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester. – It is difficult to pass a clear-cut judgement on the American State Department's attitude towards the Eastern European Social Democratic parties. On the one hand, as has been attested to above (cf. fn. 52), American loans to Eastern European Governments were also intended to encourage independence-minded Social Democrats. On the other hand, American diplomatic personnel seem not to have held a high regard for most Eastern European Social Democrats, even to the point of ridiculing the Labour Party for cooperating with them. After the International Socialist Conference in Bournemouth of November 1946, an official at the American Embassy in London "thought it was amusing that the Socialists here should have any real illusions about the affiliations or practical freedom of Socialists from countries behind the iron curtain. Their presence merely wrecked the work proceedings from our point of view". See: FO 371/56244 N14860, NA, London.

Eastern European Social Democrats needed reassurance above all. For that reason, Healey urged the Foreign Office to make every effort to disprove the impression that Labour Britain was but a junior partner in a dollar-imperialistic world offensive. Furthermore, he asked Philip Noel-Baker, Secretary of State for Air in the Labour Government, to emphasise in his opening address to the Annual Conference that the Labour Party considered "the unity of Eastern and Western Europe to be possible and necessary, without entailing any sacrifices of the social gains in Eastern Europe, or the adoption of policies which might offend the Soviet Union".⁶⁰

Yet, it was unquestionable that the tide was turning in world politics, as Great Power cooperation was giving way to ever-increasing polarisation. For all its vows to continued collaboration between East and West within the international Socialist movement, certain developments were beyond the Labour Party's control. In France, the Communists had been ejected from the Government in May. The fact that the French Socialists had not followed suit, thereby demolishing united working-class ranks in France, caused particular discontent within the PPS. No wonder the Polish Socialists are reported to have felt vindicated, when France was subsequently paralysed by a wave of strikes.⁶¹ Referring chiefly to the situation in France, Cyrankiewicz declared that the Polish Socialists were "wiser than the West European Socialists by a whole historical period".⁶² In October, the PPS announced its intention "to produce conditions in which a united Workers' International could be set up, to which both Socialists and Communists belong"; to this end, it would seek to cultivate left-wingers in Western European Social Democratic parties over the following months.⁶³ In the face of the inexorable rise of US-sponsored right-wing parties in Western Europe, the Socialist-Communist united front was presented as the stronghold protecting the social revolutions in post-war Eastern Europe. For as "long as the international situation contains the germs of war, Poland and Russia, Socialists and Communists in Poland, sink or swim together". In this manner, the Polish Socialists hoped to "survive the Cold War".⁶⁴

The idea that the Cold War would be a short-term conflict was still widespread in late 1947. In mid-October, Healey predicted it would take between twelve and eighteen months before Britain could hope for success in it. In the meantime, it was imperative that Britain should do everything in its power to prevent the "complete [G]leichschaltung" of Eastern Europe to the Soviet model. It seems that Bulgaria and Rumania had for the moment been given up on by Healey. On the other hand, he

⁶⁰ LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester.

⁶¹ The argument between the Polish Socialists and their French counterparts would mount over the summer. In October, the French Socialists even threatened to reconsider its relations to the PPS, if it would not distance itself from the founding manifest of the Cominform. See: *Misgeld*, Klaus: Sozialdemokratie und Außenpolitik in Schweden. Sozialistische Internationale, Europapolitik und die Deutschlandfrage 1945-1955. Frankfurt am Main 1984, 110 (Campus Forschung 392).

⁶² Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Polish Socialist Party. In: FO 371/66097 N14846, NA, London.

⁶³ "Robotnik" Manifesto: 23rd October 1947. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester.

⁶⁴ As Healey set out the predicament of the Polish Socialists in December 1947. See: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester.

deemed the future of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland as still undetermined. But a Soviet attempt to redirect the foreign trade of these three countries in a way that would reduce their standards of living was to be expected before long. For that reason, he pleaded to make "special concessions" to each of them.⁶⁵ The Hungarians were to be supported in their efforts to obtain membership of the United Nations, while British influence upon the United States was to be used to convince the international bank to grant Poland a reconstruction loan. The latter undertaking was also assumed to "give direct support to the Polish Socialists".⁶⁶

By this time, however, the Foreign Office was no longer willing to make concessions to Poland solely in the hope of strengthening the PPS. On July 31st, Sir Donald Gainer, the new British Ambassador in Poland, met with Bevin and top Foreign Office diplomats to discuss the state of affairs in Poland. It was concluded that the Polish Socialists were not offering enough resistance to Communists, and had in fact yielded to the further communisation of their country. As a consequence, the Foreign Office now regarded the PPS as a "broken reed".⁶⁷ Bevin hoped that the Catholic Church would be able to counter Communist dominance in Poland, but Gainer was rather sceptical on this count as well. Still, Eastern Europe was not yet completely given up on. While the situation in Bulgaria and Rumania was "beyond repair", in Bevin's view Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland were "still in the balance". The limited resources that Britain possessed would be focused on these three countries.⁶⁸ Some weeks afterwards, Healey was informed on the Foreign Office's change of heart regarding the Polish Socialists. He is reported to have agreed "that if the effect of recent international developments (the Marshall Plan etc.) was in the end to perpetuate the division of Europe into two, [...] the Socialist parties in Eastern Europe were all doomed".⁶⁹

Appeasement

The "hot summer" of 1947 ended with a bang. The founding of the Cominform in late September is often pointed to as the impetus for the forced mergers of Communists and Socialists in Eastern Europe. In this view, the Eastern European Social

⁶⁵ The Labour Party attached great importance to keeping Eastern Europe out of the economic sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. Its endeavours to this end went back to late 1946, when Morgan Philips considered offering the Hungarian Social Democrats a "blank cheque" to advance the economic integration of the Central and Eastern European countries. At the second Danube Conference of Central and Eastern European Socialist parties, which took place in May 1947, Healey witnessed "how jealously" each delegate "protected the right of his country to trade freely with Western Europe". Even as late as December 1947, the International Secretary urged the upholding of the "economic interdependence of the two halves of Europe" in his speech to the congress of the PPS. See: *Heumos*, Peter: *Die Konferenzen der sozialistischen Parteien Zentral- und Osteuropas in Prag und Budapest 1946 und 1947. Darstellung und Dokumentation*. Stuttgart 1985, 42-43 (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa 22). – Talk on British Labour and Europe. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester.

⁶⁶ LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester.

⁶⁷ FO 371/66094 N9823, NA, London.

⁶⁸ FO 371/66094 N9082, NA, London.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Democratic parties lost their independence shortly after the Szklarska Poręba conference and were forced to undergo extensive purges over the following months.⁷⁰ To be sure, a brow-beaten congress of the (Government) Rumanian Social Democrats would acquiesce with a fusion with the Communist Party within weeks of the creation of the Cominform. Yet the fact that a palace revolution propelled Bán to the position of second-in-command within the MSzDP in October cannot be explained by this narrative.⁷¹ Neither does it elucidate how it was possible that even the long forsaken Bulgarian Social Democrats did not embrace the Cominform line of denouncing the Labour Party's leaders as "imperialist lackeys" at their October congress, but instead maintained that British support for American imperialism emanated from "the forces of dying English Capitalism [...] headed by Churchill".⁷² Above all, however, developments in Czechoslovakia and Poland lend credence to the impression that the CSSD and the PPS had preserved their independence in late 1947.

Diverging appraisals of the events in the summer account for the opposing strategies chosen by the Czechoslovakian Social Democrats and the Polish Socialists in the second half of 1947. In the face of increasing Communist pressure at home and mounting tensions between the Great Powers, the CSSD opted for an ever stronger pro-Western course, while the PPS decided on an intensification of the politics of appeasement. The concept of appeasement was first coined by Healey to describe the conduct of the Eastern European Social Democratic parties in mid-1947. The rationale behind appeasement was that while the Soviet Union was in a position to impose Communist dictatorship on the countries in its sphere of influence, it would, in view of the diversion of energies and resources the upholding of such dictatorships would require, be loathe to do so as long as popular front coalitions, leaning on a modicum of popular support, would be prepared to meet its strategic and economic demands. Therefore, until tensions in the international arena abated, the Eastern European Social Democrats had no choice but to yield to most Communist demands if they wished to keep their organisational independence intact. The time thus bought was to be used to consolidate an autonomous party apparatus and to strengthen the bonds with the Western European Social Democratic parties.⁷³ Britain could contribute to the success of the politics of appeasement if it kept "the political temperature low" and refrained from encouraging the Eastern European Social Democrats "into policies which can only expose them to Communist attacks, against which we are powerless to protect them".⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See: *Steininger: Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale* 90 (cf. fn. 3). – *Loth, Wilfried: Die Teilung der Welt. Geschichte des Kalten Krieges 1941-1955*. Rev. ed. Munich 2000, 190.

⁷¹ See: *Heumos: Einleitung* 33-34 (cf. fn. 17).

⁷² LPA, LP/ID, Box 6, LHASC, Manchester.

⁷³ LPA, LP/ID, Box 4, LHASC, Manchester. It was acknowledged by Healey that "the habit of appeasement does not strengthen the character". As a consequence, the Hungarian and Rumanian Social Democrats were led by "weak personalities, susceptible to Communist pressure". Yet, even within these parties there were "Socialist leaders of great integrity and strength who will inevitably play an important role if the Russian pressure is reduced in the future".

⁷⁴ LPA, LP/ID, Box 8, LHASC, Manchester.

Still, by the summer of 1947, the CSSD was about to abandon the politics of appeasement, realising it had “more to gain by challenging than by lining up behind the Communists”.⁷⁵ Reasons peculiar to the situation in post-war Czechoslovakia underlay this volte-face. In the first place, the disappointing results at the polls in mid-1946, where the Social Democrats returned only 14 percent of the popular vote, gave cause to qualms over strategies pursued thus far. In the second place, the mere presence of other independent non-Communist parties in the Czechoslovakian National Front Government, presented the CSSD with an alternative to close collaboration with the Communists that was simply unavailable to the other Eastern European Social Democratic parties. Thirdly, Stalin’s effective veto on Czechoslovakian participation in the Marshall Plan, designating that the country found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence after all, deepened pre-existing pro-Western sentiments within Social Democratic ranks.⁷⁶

The turnaround in the CSSD’s attitude towards Communism met with approval in British circles. In mid-July, Healey noted that Zdeněk Fierlinger and Bohumil Laušman, two of the most prominent leaders of the party, had “flirted too closely with the Communists” and caused the bad Social Democratic turn-out at the elections. At present, however, the Social Democrats were “much more independent” and were expected to regain some of the lost ground in the new elections that were scheduled for the Spring of 1948.⁷⁷ In the same vein, the Foreign Office considered it “most encouraging that two weathercocks like Fierlinger and Lau[š]man should have decided that they can profitably adopt Western ideas and align their party against Communism”.⁷⁸ Over the following months, the CSSD would substitute the radicalism of the immediate post-war period for a more moderate line. In late August, the Social Democrats voted, with the other non-Communist National Front parties, against the Communist proposal on a “millionaires’ tax”, inflicting upon the Communists their first defeat in the Czechoslovakian Cabinet since the end of the war.⁷⁹ In September, though, a crisis erupted within the CSSD, after Fierlinger, without consulting the party leadership, had signed a “pact of unity” with the Communists. The stage seemed to be set for united front Communist-Social Democratic collaboration after the Polish model, but the pact was engulfed by a wave of indignation amongst both the party leadership and its rank-and-file and was repudiated

⁷⁵ FO 371/65785 N7316, NA, London.

⁷⁶ In his report of a mid-1946 visit to Czechoslovakia, Koos Vorrink, the chairman of the Dutch Labour Party, noted that nearly all Social Democrats attested to the great political, economic and cultural significance of close relations between their country and the West. Enkele Aantekeningen naar aanleiding van mijn Reis naar Tsjecho-Slovakije (27 augustus tot 5 september 1946) [Some notes resulting from my journey to Czechoslovakia (August 27 to September 5, 1946)]. In: Archief Partij van de Arbeid [Archive of the Workers’ Party, PvdA], Box 2286, International Institute for Social History [IISH], Amsterdam.

⁷⁷ LPA, LP/ID, Box 4, LHASC, Manchester.

⁷⁸ FO 371/65785 N7316, NA, London.

⁷⁹ *Tigris, Pavel: The Prague Coup of 1948: The Elegant Takeover.* In: *Hammond, Thomas* (ed.): *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers.* London, New Haven 1975, 399-432, here 411.

in due course. It was in this atmosphere that the congress of the CSSD assembled in Brno in mid-November. Fierlinger, exposed as fellow-traveller, was replaced by Laušman as General Secretary of the party. For his part, Laušman would be kept in check by an Executive Committee dominated by "autonomists".⁸⁰ According to Healey, the congress was a major setback to the Czechoslovakian Communists, who were now "faced with an almost impossible task" to obtain their proclaimed objective of 51 percent of the popular vote in the next elections "without open terrorisation".⁸¹

Optimism at the results of the congress prevailed both at the Foreign Office and within the Labour Party. In the first place, the construction of an exclusive Communist-Social Democratic alliance had been avoided. The Social Democrats were now "tied firmly to the policy of the National Front of all parties rather than of collaborating with the Communists in a workers' bloc".⁸² Even though British attempts to bring about closer relations between the CSSD and the National Socialists backfired in the face of mutual distrust, the "pluck and resolution" shown by the Social Democrats had done much to encourage the other non-Communist parties.⁸³ In the second place, most observers had been struck by the enormous reverberation of the concepts of democracy and independence amongst the Social Democratic rank-and-file. Even the pro-Communists justified their policies "on grounds of expediency or necessity, while accepting the same principle as the anti-Communist wing".⁸⁴ One delegate was even "warmly applauded" for a speech in which "he went so far as to offer a defence of American foreign policy" – remarkable stuff indeed, in late 1947 Eastern Europe.

At the same time as the Czechoslovakian Social Democrats gravitated more and more towards the West, the Polish Socialists stepped up their efforts to placate the Communists at home. The foundation of the Cominform seems to have caused particular alarm within the PPS. Within days of its creation, Cyrankiewicz approached the CSSD with a plan to sever relations to the Western European Social Democrats and to establish an international organisation of Eastern European Social Democratic parties. The Czechoslovakian Social Democrats turned down the suggestion,

⁸⁰ LPA, LP/ID, Box 6, LIIASC, Manchester.

⁸¹ FO 371/65802 N13414, NA, London.

⁸² LPA, LP/ID, Box 6, LHASC, Manchester.

⁸³ FO 371/65787 N13486, NA, London. – On the endeavours to bring about an alliance between the Social Democrats and the National Socialists: *Heumos*, Peter: Die Sozialdemokratie in Ostmitteleuropa 1945-1948. Zum gesellschaftlichen Potential des Demokratischen Sozialismus in Polen, der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn. In: *Lemberg*, Hans (ed.): Sowjetisches Modell und nationale Prägung. Kontinuität und Wandel in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Marburg a. d. Lahn 1991, 51-70, here 69 (Historische und landeskundliche Ostmitteleuropastudien 7).

⁸⁴ FO 371/65802 N13414, NA, London. – In a newspaper article published on the eve of the congress, Fierlinger, though perhaps in an attempt to perform some damage control, asserted that the CSSD "would not allow itself to be upset by attacks from outside". Furthermore, he "advocated co-operation with western Socialists and declared himself opposed to the creation of a Socialist International, as well as to the new 'Cominform'". FO 371/65787 N13486, NA, London.

declaring that they were unwilling to denounce their Western European counterparts as traitors or imperialists.⁸⁵ Thus rebuffed, the Polish Socialists accelerated their campaign to further the formation of a Socialist-Communist united front on the international level. In the following months, the PPS would publish its contacts with the Italian Socialists, who were in a long-term united front with the Communists, and Konni Zilliacus, the most outspoken advocate of collaboration with Communism within the Labour Party. In Healey's view, though, the publication of these dealings was chiefly intended to "delude" the Polish Communists.⁸⁶ In order to ward off Communist assaults upon their independence, the Polish Socialists had little choice but to present themselves "as the champions of the united front in the international Socialist movement".⁸⁷

Even so, a new Communist demand for fusion would not be long in coming. On the first day of the December congress of the PPS in Wrocław, Gomułka reminded those present that the Communist-Socialist pact entered into in late 1946 foresaw the eventual merger of the two parties. He was, however, counteracted by Cyrankiewicz, who, while singing the praises of the united front, declared "that the PPS considered it had a unique and indispensable function to perform in the development of the Polish State". This was taken by the delegates as a clear rejection of Gomułka's plea. After having been cheered to "for several minutes", Cyrankiewicz went on avowing "that the PPS did not propose to be a moon to somebody else's sun".⁸⁸ The outcome of the congress heartened Healey; it had gone "a good deal further in affirming the independence of the Polish Socialist Party" than he had expected beforehand.⁸⁹ The politics of appeasement was doing its work. The Polish Socialists would go to great lengths to preserve their distinctive character and "put up with much so long as essentials remained intact". The British Ambassador in Warsaw was, however, doubtful about the merits of appeasement. He asked what positive results the politics of appeasement were to produce, short of encouraging "the Communists to turn the screw still tighter". These "drawbacks" to appeasement were acknowledged by Healey, arguing that the Socialist leaders were alert to the risks entailed in their policies. Yet, for the time being, it was "a question of survival". Above all, the Polish Socialists "hoped to gain time to consolidate their party

⁸⁵ *Heumos*: Die Konferenzen 40-41 (cf. fn. 65).

⁸⁶ LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester. – Healey may well have been right. During their visit to Rome, the Polish Socialists were reported to have surprised their Italian hosts, insisting "on the need for unity between the Right Wing and the Left Wing Socialists and by their open statements to the effect that they do not believe that the violent attacks against Right Wing Socialists serve any useful purpose". FO 371/66250 N14131, NA, London.

⁸⁷ LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester.

⁸⁸ Report on the 27th Congress of the Polish Socialist Party in Wrocław, December 14-16, 1947 (cf. fn. 58).

⁸⁹ LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester. – In addition to Cyrankiewicz's speech, Bolesław Drobner, deputy chairman of the Central Committee of the PPS, stated that "whereas the 'stooge' Democratic Party was a serf, the Socialists wished to be free and warned M. Gomułka that any purge of the Socialist Party must be effected by the Socialists themselves". Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Polish Socialist Party. In: FO 371/66097 N14846, NA, London.

and its relations with their co-religionists in other countries pending the final outcome of the 'cold' war now being waged".⁹⁰

Meanwhile, there was little Britain could do but wait and see. Still, on his return from Poland, Healey urged Bevin to adopt another viewpoint in the question of the Oder-Neiße border. Whilst in Wrocław, he had been "very strongly impressed by the damage which our equivocal attitude on Poland's Western frontier is causing to pro-British sentiment". He predicted that, once the final peace settlement was signed, the new Polish borders would remain unchanged. But, not living up to its wartime promise to support Polish claims in the West, Britain was "antagonising the whole of Polish public opinion".⁹¹ This was likely to have direct repercussions for the standing of the Polish Socialists at home, as popular outlook in post-war Europe seems to have identified the Socialist/Social Democratic parties in their domestic contexts with the exploits of the Labour Government in the international field.⁹² During their April conversation, Cyrankiewicz had warned Bevin of the danger "should the port of Stettin be turned into a second Danzig, [...] becoming the centre of a German irredentist movement". In his view, "it would contribute to the peace of Europe if Poland received support from more than one Power".⁹³ Even though Soviet support for the Oder-Neisse frontier guaranteed de facto Polish possession of the Western territories, the Poles were desperate to have their new borders recognised by the Western Powers, as it was feared that a possible division of Germany might lead the Soviet Union to re-annex Silesia to its part of the truncated German state. This accounts for the panic caused by the failure of the London round of the Council of Foreign Ministers, which had been expected to settle the question once and for all. At the Wrocław congress, Cyrankiewicz even spoke of a "new Munich".⁹⁴

With the breaking-up of the Foreign Ministers in London the perspectives of the Eastern European Social Democrats faded. Nonetheless, in late January 1948, Healey was still hopeful about the prospects of the Central Eastern European Social Democratic parties. The PPS had "[b]rought survival" and was "[w]ell led by Cyrankiewicz"; a fusion had been postponed. The CSSD had embarked upon the right course at its mid-November congress, although it still refused "to break [the] National Front". The MSZDP stood "at crossroad[s]": infighting between the left-

⁹⁰ Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Polish Socialist Party. In: FO 371/66097 N14846, NA, London.

⁹¹ LPA, LP/ID, Box 9, LHASC, Manchester.

⁹² In this context, it was established for the Italian political scene in mid-1946 that all parties were "regarded [...] if not as the instrument, so at least as the 'protégé' of one of the big foreign powers: the Communists as the champions of the Soviet Union, Christian-Democrats as the champions of the Vatican, of the North- and South-American Catholics and of the French M.R.P., the Liberals as the champions of the State Department [...], and the Socialists, quite naturally, as the champions of the British Labour Party and government". Notes on the Situation in Italy. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 3 LHASC, Manchester.

⁹³ FO 800/490 Pol/47/4, NA London.

⁹⁴ Het XXVIIe Congres van de Poolse Socialistische Partij (P.P.S.) Wrocław (Breslau), 14-18 december 1947. [The XXVIIth congress of the Polish Socialist Party (P.P.S.) Wrocław (Breslau), 14th to 18th December 1947]. In: Archief PvdA, IISH, Amsterdam.

wing and the right-wing was proceeding, with a fusion looming in the background.⁹⁵ Yet, when the Communists resorted to “open terrorisation” in Czechoslovakia after all, the bonds with the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were severed. It is most telling that in mid-March, just a couple of weeks after the Prague coup, Denis Healey and Morgan Philips took a plane to Rome to talk some sense to the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party, who had condoned the Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia and sent a letter of good wishes to Fierlinger.⁹⁶ The focus had shifted from upholding the Social Democratic parties in Eastern Europe to saving the Social Democratic parties in Western Europe. The Cold War had begun in earnest.

Conclusion

With it came the severe denunciations of Communism. Writing to his Ambassador in Prague in April 1948, Bevin apologised for any personal disgust or distress experienced at the events in Czechoslovakia. Yet, as he pointed out, there was a great moral lesson entailed in the entire episode: “Living through a Communist revolution, as you did, is unequalled as an education in the utter ruthlessness and perfidy of Communism, which is difficult, if not impossible to grasp fully until one has seen it at work”.⁹⁷ With it, too, came the grotesque over-simplifications of the entire post-war era in Eastern Europe, which was depicted as a giant run-up to the violent overthrows of 1948, leaving little, if any, room for alternating perspectives. Even some of the actors that had been involved in the popular front Governments seem to have suffered from historical amnesia whilst composing their accounts of the period.⁹⁸

What were Labour Britain’s objectives in post-war Eastern Europe? At any rate, it must be established that the Foreign Office had not renounced its claims to influence in Eastern Europe before the Labour Government took office. In fact, it attempted to keep Eastern Europe out of the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union wholesale right up to 1948. In these endeavours, the Foreign Office felt, rather by default, forced to support the Eastern European Social Democratic parties from late 1946 onwards. For that reason, the Labour Party was urged to increase its efforts to stimulate the Eastern European Social Democrats to assert their independence. Next to that, the Labour Party developed initiatives of its own to reinforce its Eastern

⁹⁵ European Socialism. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester. – This memorandum calls into question the suggestion, implied in the work of some authors, that the Labour Party, from late 1947 onwards, steered towards a split with the Eastern European Social Democrats. See: *Steininger: Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale* 91 (cf. fn. 3). – *Misgeld: Sozialdemokratie und Außenpolitik* 122 (cf. fn. 61).

⁹⁶ The Labour Party and Italy. In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester.
⁹⁷ FO 800/450 G/48/26, NA, London.

⁹⁸ See: *Healey, Denis (ed.): The Curtain Falls. The Story of the Socialists in Eastern Europe.* London 1951. – This volume contains articles from such exiled Eastern European Social Democrats as Antal Bán and Václav Majer, the former leader of the right-wing of the CSSD. While these essays dwell extensively upon Communist brutality and the undermining activities of inner-party traitors, very little regard is given to the question to what extent the Eastern European Social Democrats were implicated in their own demise.

European sister parties, for which it needed Foreign Office backing. Two varieties of encouragement of the Eastern European Social Democrats can be discerned.

In the first place, the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were to be given moral encouragement. This kind of encouragement was chiefly intended to wean these parties from their Communist allegiance. On the one hand, the Eastern European Social Democrats were stimulated to enter into alliances with other non-Communist parties. On the other hand, the Eastern European Social Democrats were reassured that Britain was by no means bent on endangering the post-war social revolutions in their countries. On the need to disengage the Eastern European Social Democratic parties from their Communist coalition partners, Foreign Office and Labour Party were of one mind. No illusions were held about Communist intentions; it was deemed to be in Britain's best interest that the Eastern European Social Democrats resisted the further communisation of their countries.

Secondly, the Eastern European Social Democratic parties were to be offered material encouragement. This kind of encouragement was above all intended to strengthen the position of these parties, or their leading personalities, within their respective countries. Various schemes to provide Eastern European countries with financial aid, backing in international organisations or support in frontier disputes were drawn up within the Labour Party. Yet, the Foreign Office was often unwilling to supplement moral encouragement with material encouragement. Of course, during the first post-war years, Britain, only just recovering from its own bankruptcy, had little economic leverage. In most cases, however, the designs anticipated spending not British, but American funds on the Eastern European countries. Therefore, the fact that Foreign Office personnel held no high esteem for most Eastern European Social Democrats seems to have played a considerable role in their reluctance. The decision to bestow British support upon the Government Social Democratic parties in Eastern Europe was always a half-hearted one. For example, when new deliberations between the Foreign Office and the State Department on the issue of extending a further American credit to the Hungarian Government were prepared in April 1947, a leading diplomat doubted whether "the near-Communists of Mr. Szakasits" were indeed "the best bet".⁹⁹ When Foreign Office officials were enthusiastic about bold schemes to prop up the Eastern European Social Democrats, they stumbled upon a reluctant Foreign Minister. The "Mayhew Plan", set to increase the popular appeal of the Eastern European Social Democratic parties via a propaganda campaign, was sacrificed on the altar of non-interference by Bevin. In the face of blatant American and Soviet support for affable political currents across the continent, it was a missed chance indeed.¹⁰⁰

This was all the more so as the politics of appeasement seemed to be bearing fruits. When the merger of Communists and Socialists in Poland was announced in March

⁹⁹ FO 371/67173 R5129, NA, London.

¹⁰⁰ The American State Department even went as far as giving outright financial support to the Italian Workers' Socialist Party (PSLI), the anti-Communist grouping led by Giuseppe Saragat which broke away from the pro-Communist Italian Socialist Party in January 1947. See: Sassoon, Donald: *One Hundred Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*. London, New York 1996, 135.

1948, it was intended to materialise in the summer. In fact, opposition to fusion was so vast within the PPS that it took a full nine months before the inner-party purge was completed, suggesting that the consolidation of the party had indeed progressed to a considerable extent during the period of appeasement.¹⁰¹ On top of that, the politics of appeasement even appear to have left room for influencing long-term societal developments. Speaking on the Polish Three Year Plan at the Wrocław congress of the PPS, Adam Rapacki, the economic specialist of the Polish Socialists, argued that both the PPS and the PPR made “unique and complementary contributions” to the plan – the Communists “providing the revolutionary élan”, the Socialists “providing the humanism and regard for the individual”.¹⁰² Socialist humanitarianism might then have contributed to the fact that Poland was the sole state in the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence never to become totalitarian.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The Fusion of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). In: LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester.

¹⁰² LPA, LP/ID, Box 13, LHASC, Manchester.

¹⁰³ According to Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan “a significant de facto degree of societal pluralism” survived in post-1948 Poland, thereby not corresponding to the typology of a totalitarian state. See: *Linz, Juan J./Stepan, Alfred: Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern-Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore 1996, 255-261.