

**BACKBENCH DEBATE WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY
AND ITS INFLUENCE UPON BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY
1948-1956**

**SANDRA D ONSLOW
PHD THESIS
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
1994**

UMI Number: U074333

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U074333

Published by ProQuest LLC 2014. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ABSTRACT

This study examines Conservative backbench debate on European integration and British relations in the Middle East. It concentrates upon the Europeanists and the Suez Group and considers their attempts to influence British foreign policy from the formation of the Council of Europe in 1948 until the resignation of Sir Anthony Eden as Prime Minister in January 1957.

Interviews with former parliamentarians and contemporary sources, published and unpublished, are used to assess their influence. The position of these groups within the spectrum of the Conservative party is considered, and the extent to which a common philosophy and motivation can be attributed to each faction.

It analyses the role of the Europeanists in supporting Continental moves towards European integration, as well as broader Conservative attitudes to European integration and its emerging institutions: the Council of Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Defence Community, and the Messina process. The study looks at the reasons for the Churchill government's failure to build upon the successes of the Europeanists whilst the Conservatives were in opposition.

The thesis seeks to show that the Suez Group occupied a more important position within the party than has been appreciated hitherto. Attention is paid to the views and role of this nascent group in the Palestine and Abadan crises, and in the negotiations over self-government for the Sudan, together with the role of the Suez Group in the party struggle over the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on the Suez Canal Zone Base in 1954. The part played by the Suez Group and the Anti-Suez Group in the Suez crisis of 1956 is discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 2

Preface 11

Abbreviations 12

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 13

 Published Comment on the Europeanists, the Suez Group
 and the Anti-Suez Group 15

 The Political Significance of the Europeanists,
 the Suez and the Anti-Suez Groups 17

 Other Conservative Groups 19

 (a) The Progress Trust

 (b) Conservative Ginger Groups on Home Affairs

 (c) Informal Groups

 Conservative Backbench Influence and Government
 Policy 22

 (a) The Mechanics of the Conservative Party

 (b) The Nature of the Conservative Party

 Political Debate 1948-56 27

 (a) The House of Commons in the 1940s and 1950s

 (b) The MP outside Parliament

 The True Extent of Backbench Influence 31

 (a) Criteria for influencing policy

 (b) Criteria for influencing foreign policy

 (i) Public Methods

 (ii) Private Methods

CHAPTER 2: CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDES TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ... 36

 Categories of Conservative Opinion 36

 (a) The Europeanists

 (b) The Sceptics

 (c) The Anti-Europeanists

 The Europeanists 37

 (a) Churchill's Decision to Adopt
 the Cause of Europe

 (i) Robert Boothby

 (ii) Leo Amery

 (iii) Duncan Sandys

 (b) Other Prominent Supporters of European
 Integration

 (i) Macmillan

(ii) David Maxwell Fyfe	
(iii) David Eccles	
(iv) Peter Thorneycroft	
(v) Walter Elliot	
(c) Second-tier backbenchers	
(i) Sir Peter MacDonald	
(ii) Peter Roberts	
(d) Analysis of pro-European Thought	
The Sceptics	63
(a) Eden	
(b) The Majority of the Party	
(c) The Reasons for Conservative Ambivalence	
The Anti-Europeans	70
The Motivation of the Sceptics	
Summary	76

CHAPTER 3: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND EUROPE:

<u>IN OPPOSITION 1948-50</u>	77
The Move towards Europe: Labour vs Conservative	77
(a) Conservative Enthusiasm for Europe	
(b) Conservative Doubts Surface	
The Congress at the Hague	89
(a) The Reaction within the Conservative Party	
(b) The Reaction within the Government	
The Europeanists and the Conservative Sceptics:	
The Beginning of 1949	98
The Moderation of Conservative Opinion	
The Assembly of the Council of Europe	104
(a) The Conservative Europeanists and the Council of Europe	
(b) The Reaction of the Labour Government	
The Conservative Europeanists and The Party Conference of 1949	108
The Conservative Europeanists and Their Opponents:	
The End of 1949	111
Summary	115

CHAPTER 4: THE WAITING ROOM OF POWER: 1950-51

The Effect of the February Election	118
-------------------------------------------	-----

(a) Europeanists: Departures Arrivals	
(b) Anti-Europeanists: Departures Arrivals	
Conservative Attitudes to Europe	120
(a) Conservative Divisions Persist	
(b) The Economic Debate	
Conservatives and the Schuman Plan	123
(a) The Conservative Dilemma	
(b) The Conservative Europeanists' Response to the Schuman Plan	
(c) The Schuman Plan Debate: Conservative Doubts Persist	
(d) The Outcome	
The Macmillan-Eccles Plan	141
(a) The Impact of the Macmillan-Eccles Plan	
(b) The Reaction of the Labour Government	
The European Army	146
(a) The Conservative Europeanists and The European Army	
(b) The Reaction of the Labour Government	
(c) Conservative Opinion of the Pleven Plan	
Europe and the Commonwealth	150
Summary	151
<u>CHAPTER 5: THE TRIUMPH OF EDEN 1951-55</u>	153
The Effect of the October Election	154
(a) Europeanists: Departures (1951 election) Departures (1951-55) Arrivals	
(b) Anti-Europeanists: Departures (1951-55)	
The 'Crunch': Strasbourg, November 1951	155
The Conservative Europeanists and Europe: 1951-55 ...	157
(a) Conservative Europeanists and Military Integration	
(b) Conservative Europeanists and Political Integration: British Leadership in the Council of Europe	
(c) Conservative Europeanists and Economic Integration:	
(i) Europe and 'Europe Overseas'	
(ii) Atlantic Union	

The Influence of the Conservative Europeanists: 1951-55	173
(i) the loss of Churchill's interest and support	
(ii) the decisive influence of Eden	
(iii) Whitehall	
(iv) lack of ministerial support	
(v) the attitude of the Conservative backbenches	
 The Problems of Big Europe: Conservative attitudes to the Council of Europe	182
 The Distraction of Imperial Preference	186
 The Conservative Party and Europe: 1955-56	188
(a) Europeanists: Departures	
(b) Anti-Europeanists: Departures	
(c) The Revival of Interest in Europe	
(d) The Conservative Europeanists and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA)	
 The Influence of Conservative Europeanists 1955-56	
 Summary	199

CHAPTER 6: THE GENESIS OF THE SUEZ GROUP

<u>AND THE ANTI-SUEZ GROUP</u>	201
 The Irresponsibility of Opposition vs the Constraints of Power	201
 THE SUEZ GROUP	204
Membership	204
a) 1954-55	
b) 1955-6	
c) Sympathizers ('crypto-Suez Group') 1953-56	
 The Suez Group MPs	207
(a) Captain Charles Waterhouse	
(b) Julian Amery	
(c) Lord Hinchinbrooke	
(d) Major Harry Legge-Bourke	
(e) Other Members of the Suez Group	
 The Formation and Organization of the Suez Group	217
 The Continuation of the Suez Group	219
 The Position of the Suez Group within the Conservative Party	220
 The Public Perception of the Suez Group	224

The Philosophy of the Suez Group	225
The Suez Group and the Middle East	228
The Whips' View of the Suez Group	230
THE ANTI-SUEZ GROUP	231
Membership	232
The Formation and Organization of the Anti-Suez Group .	234
The 'Philosophy' of the Anti-Suez Group	235
Summary	237
<u>CHAPTER 7: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY</u>	
<u>AND THE MIDDLE EAST: 1948-1951</u>	238
Britain's Position in the Middle East after the Second World War	238
The Position of the Middle East in Conservative Thought	239
PALESTINE	239
Palestine: Tories United	240
Palestine: Tories Divided	242
(a) The pro-Zionists	
(b) The Optimists	
(c) The pro-Arabs	
Conservative Opinion of America	245
Conservative Opinion of the United Nations Organization	246
The Impact of Conservative Opinion on Labour policy ...	247
The Influence of the Palestine Crisis upon the Future Suez Group	250
BRITAIN'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT: 1948-51	251
Conservative Perceptions of the Strategic Importance of the Suez Canal	252
Economic Importance of the Middle East to the British Economy	253

The Suez Group <u>in potentia</u>	255
Conservative Influence on Labour's Egyptian Policy	258
THE ABADAN CRISIS: 1951	261
The Official Conservative Line:	262
(a) The Position of Eden	
(b) The Position of Churchill	
The Emerging Suez Group	266
The Views and Aims of the Emerging Suez Group	
The Effect of Tory Rhetoric	275
(a) on the Conservative party	
(b) on the Labour party	
Summary	277
<u>CHAPTER 8: THE CONSERVATIVES IN POWER:</u>	
<u>CONSERVATIVE DISAGREEMENTS OVER EGYPT AND THE SUDAN: 1951-53</u>	279
The View of Eden within the Conservative Party	280
The Legacy from Labour in the Middle East	281
PERSIA 1951-54	282
EGYPT: OCTOBER 1951-JULY 1952	282
Conservative Debate on Egypt	282
(a) The Mainstream of the Conservative Party	
(b) The Emerging Suez Group	
(c) Cabinet Dissent on Anglo-Egyptian Relations	
THE SUDAN	288
Conservative Backbench Attitudes to the Sudan	288
The Influence of Conservative Backbench Opinion in Cabinet: Eden vs Churchill	295
Summary	300

<u>CHAPTER 9: NEGOTIATING THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SUEZ CANAL ZONE BASE: 1952-54</u>	302
Conservative Debate on the Suez Base Agreement	302
(a) The Conservative Pragmatists and the Suez Base Agreement	
(b) The Suez Group and the Suez Base Agreement	
The Methods of the Suez Group	314
(a) The Suez Group as a backbench faction	
(b) The Suez Group MPs as individuals	
(c) Foreign vs domestic policy	
(d) Links with Labour?	
The Influence of the Suez Group: Churchill vs Eden	317
The Activities of the Suez Group	318
(a) The Suez Group in Ascent	
(i) The Impact of the December 1953 EDM upon Churchill and Eden	
(ii) The Continuing Struggle over Egypt between Eden and Churchill	
(b) The Suez Group Checked	
(c) Churchill Admits Defeat	
(d) The Suez Group 'Stalemated'	
The Continuation of the Suez Group	342
Summary	343

**CHAPTER 10: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY
AND THE MIDDLE EAST: 1955-56**

The Evolution of the Suez Group: 1955-56	345
(a) Domestic Factors	
(b) The Middle East	
(i) Egypt	
(ii) Cyprus	
(iii) Jordan	
The Catalyst: The Dismissal of Glubb Pasha	349
(a) The Reaction of the Suez Group	
(b) Eden's Response to the Conservative Outcry	
THE SUEZ GROUP	355
The Suez Group and the Suez Crisis:	
July-September 1956	355
(a) The Influence of the Suez Group upon the Conservative Party	
(b) The Influence of the Suez Group upon Eden	

The Suez Group in Temporary Eclipse: September 1956	363
The Suez Group in Ascent	366
(a) The Party Conference	
(b) The Impact of the Suez Group upon the Cabinet	
(i) at the Party Conference	
(ii) upon Eden: the French Siren 'Marianne'	
(iii) on Macmillan	
The Suez Group and Operation Musketeer	373
The Influence of the Suez Group: Cease-fire to Withdrawal	377
(a) on the Conservative Party	
(b) on Government Policy	
THE ANTI-SUEZ GROUP	389
The Anti-Suez Group and the Suez Crisis: July-September 1956	389
Parliament Recalled: The Influence of the Anti-Suez Group	391
The Anti-Suez Group and Operation Musketeer	394
The Influence of the Anti-Suez Group on the Government	400
The Influence of the Anti-Suez Group: Cease-fire to Withdrawal	402
Summary	406
<u>CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION</u>	408
The Europeanists	409
(a) The Europeanists in Opposition 1948-51	
(b) The Europeanists in Power 1951-56	
The Suez Group	415
(a) The Suez Group 1951-4	
(b) The Suez Group 1956	
The Anti-Suez Group	424
BIBLIOGRAPHY	427

PREFACE

I have always been intrigued by the suggestion that the Conservative party is more loath to express internal dissent in public than the Labour party, as this simply is not true. Equally misleading is the cynical view that backbenchers are merely cannon fodder for the division lobby: this is even more inaccurate when considering the decade after the Second World War when Conservative party managers were more tolerant than today.

Investigating backbench influence upon foreign policy certainly offered more of a challenge than the same exercise into the more perceptible influence of backbenchers upon domestic policy, but I was spurred in my research by the recent antics of the anti-Maastricht rebels and Britain's involvement in the Gulf War of 1991. The anti-Maastricht rebels are yet another manifestation of the spring of reactionary pressure within the Conservative party, which surfaces at regular intervals; however, unlike the 1940s and 1950s, there now appears no choice to Europe other than 'Little England', whereas in the 1940s and 1950s there appeared the options of the Commonwealth and Empire or Atlantic Union between Britain, Canada and America. America and the West's determination to confront Saddam Hussein offered a superficial historical analogy to my examination of the Suez Group's desire to confront Nasser in 1956, since in both cases it was hoped by a show of force to encourage sufficient internal dissent to overthrow a regime that was regarded as a vital threat to national interests.

This thesis also represents the triumph of academic perserverance over the demands of small children. I owe a great debt of thanks to the late Dr Roger Bullen, whose encouragement through the vissitudes of moving and early motherhood was invaluable. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Donald Watt, for his considerable insight and gentle guidance over the past five years; John Barnes and Dr Robert Boyce for their support and advice; and my father for his inspiration, humour and political acumen. I would like to thank my mother, Mrs Dorothy Grey and Mrs Susanna Bevan without whose help I could not have persevered. But my greatest debt is to my long-suffering husband, Bart.

ABBREVIATIONS

BOAPAH	British Oral Archive of Political and Administrative History
C&L	Conservative and Liberal
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDC	European Defence Community
EPC	European Political Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
ELEC	European League for Economic Co-operation
FAC	Foreign Affairs Committee
HC Deb	Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Fifth Series. House of Commons Official Report
HL Deb	Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Fifth Series. House of Lords Official Report
LSE	London School of Economics
MES-C	Middle East Sub-Committee
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NL&C	National Liberal and Conservative
OEEC	Organization for European Economic Co-operation
SEATO	South East Asia Treaty Organization
UEM	United Europe Movement
UNO	United Nations Organization
UU	Ulster Unionist
WEU	West European Union

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with backbench debate within the Conservative party on foreign affairs and MPs' attempts to influence the formulation and conduct of British foreign policy from January 1948 until the resignation of Sir Anthony Eden in January 1957.

The starting date is January 1948, when Bevin signalled a more favourable attitude towards ideas of European union circulating on the Continent. This choice offered the chance to compare the tactics of Conservative backbenchers in opposition, with their behaviour after the Conservatives were returned to power in October 1951. Eden's resignation as Prime Minister in January 1957 provides a natural break in the chronology. I have used the term 'backbench' to cover the entire party in opposition, and those behind the Treasury bench once Churchill returned to No. 10 Downing Street.

In the decade after the Second War there existed four discernible groups of Conservative backbench MPs who held decided views on particular aspects of British foreign policy. The issues were:

- (i) British attitudes to West European integration;
- (ii) British policy in the Middle East;
- (iii) Britain and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT); (the reverse of this was Conservative pressure for the maintenance and extension of imperial preference);
- (iv) relations with America and the United Nations Organization.

I have chosen British relations with Europe and the Middle East for my analysis. I have not tried to define a Conservative faction on imperial preference as at the time this was not seen as an issue of foreign affairs. The New Commonwealth (India, Pakistan and Ceylon), and to a great

extent the Old White Dominions were still seen as an integral part of Britain and no Conservative politician questioned the thought that the Empire formed an inalienable part of the fabric of British society, tradition and pattern of trade. Nor have I tried to define a specific Conservative anti-US and anti-UNO group; these feelings were remarkably widespread, but they were very largely inchoate. There existed a strong undercurrent of opposition to American policy, and what was seen as unnecessary British subservience to her war-time ally, but this rarely came into the open. Similarly, although many Tories felt that a system of 'spheres of influence' had functioned more satisfactorily, opposition towards the new UNO was expressed predominantly in private. Conservative hostility towards the UNO in the aftermath of the Suez crisis soon receded without any change in government policy towards the organization.

I have chosen to chart first the activities of the Conservative Europeanists¹, and then the Suez Group and Anti-Suez Group as study of these groupings offers an interesting contrast between the influence exercised by a tendency, a well-organized faction, and an *ad hoc* pressure group. I propose to argue that these groups of MPs, which differed markedly in their organization, the public perception of the calibre of their membership and their approach, did have an impact on British foreign policy, although not for the reasons one might suppose.

¹ I have used this term to describe those Conservative MPs who favoured a more positive response to continental ideas of West European integration. This was not a contemporary term.

Published comment on the Europeanists, the Suez Group and the Anti-Suez Group

Although there is some important literature on the Tory backbencher and his/her role², in comparison to the enormous amount of literature which concentrates on the political leadership in Britain's relations with Europe and the Middle East in this period, relatively little attention has been paid to Conservative backbench debate on these topics.

On Europe, opinion is agreed that the group's chief spokesman, Churchill, was 'forcing the pace of British and European policy from the foothills of opposition'³. Although Bevin bitterly resisted the siren of Europe as well as American pressure for closer, more rapid integration, the Europeanists helped to force the pace of public debate, and wrung unwilling concessions from Whitehall. But writers have concentrated on the intra-party debate on European integration between Labour and Conservative leaders, or on the 'élite' (that is, the Cabinet and senior civil service) approach to Europe⁴, and overlooked the debate within the Conservative party on the issue before the party's return to power. All are agreed that 'Europe' was not on the political agenda as far as the Conservative mainstream was concerned from November 1951 to December 1956. The reasons given are the hostility of Eden and the Foreign Office, and the aging Churchill's failing interest in matters outside his pet concerns of a summit with

² see Robert Jackson: *Rebels and Whips* (London 1968); Hugh Berrington: *Backbench Influence in the House of Commons 1945-55* (Oxford 1973); S E Finer, H Berrington and D Bartholomew: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59* (Oxford 1961); Leon Epstein: *British Politics in the Suez Crisis* (London 1964); see also D Leonard and V Herman: *The Backbencher and Parliament* (London 1980); Philip Norton: *Dissent in the House of Commons 1945-74* (London 1974); Ronald Butt: *The Power of Parliament* (London 1964)

³ Michael Charlton: *The Price of Victory* (London 1983), p.80

⁴ see Charlton

Russia, and the special relationship with the USA.⁵ John Young points out that 'Europe' was not dropped immediately from the Cabinet's political agenda⁶, but very little attention has been devoted to Conservative backbench attempts to foster Anglo-European links in the 1950s.⁷

Published comment on the Suez Group in 1953-54 tends to be dismissive; historians appear to have been heavily influenced by Anthony Nutting's view of these rebel MPs as a group of embittered ex-ministers and ambitious young men⁸. The historian Professor Donald Watt describes the Suez Group's influence as 'negative, indirect and outside the élite group' and awards it only nuisance value.⁹ However, Douglas Farnie in his book *East and West of Suez* grants these MPs' views more weight, as representative of wider Conservative opinion in Westminster and in the country. Leon Epstein gives more place to the Suez Group's role in the Suez crisis¹⁰. Epstein also discusses the case history of each of the eight outright dissidents of the Anti-Suez Group,¹¹ but does not address the impact of their views.

Overall the role of the backbenchers has been under-estimated, and the principal reason may well be the difficulty of obtaining evidence of their activities. The social dimension

⁵ see Charlton

⁶ see John Young: 'Churchill's No to Europe: the "Rejection" of European Union by Churchill's Post-War Government 1951-52': *Historical Journal* Vol.28, No.4, 1985, pp.923-937

⁷ see John Pinder and Richard Mayne: *Federal Union* (London 1990)

⁸ Anthony Nutting: *No End of a Lesson* (London 1967), pp.22-23

⁹ Professor Donald Watt: *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London 1965), p.10

¹⁰ Epstein, pp.41-60

¹¹ Epstein, pp.97-138

of the contact between MPs and their leaders is crucial to understanding the politics of this era¹², as backbench influence was usually exerted in informal ways and depended heavily upon private social contacts. The influence of personality on the interaction between politicians is frequently overlooked, but this pattern of personal likes and dislikes was woven into the very fabric of political debate. Personal affection for a fellow member, no matter how extraordinary his professed views, was very often accompanied by a greater tolerance for an aberrant opinion.¹³ Conversely, deepseated dislike would encourage dismissal of an argument. As the 1948-57 period is still accessible by means of interviews with participants, I have interviewed and written to more than 40 former MPs, attempting to fill the large gap between the anecdotal memoirs of MPs and the arid record of Parliamentary proceedings. The picture I have gathered is very different from the image of Conservative leaders being able to fob off their parliamentary colleagues.

The Political Significance of the Europeanists, the Suez and the Anti-Suez Groups

Some might argue that these groups were symptomatic of a more basic division of philosophy within the Conservative party; that is, the Europeanists and the Anti-Suez Group, and the Suez Group as an expression of the progressive and the reactionary wings. However, the party in these years defies attempts to identify fundamental divisions within the Tory ranks. When the lists of each group's adherents are examined more closely, at most a broad generalization can be made about the type of MP likely to be a member of each grouping. In each case there are important exceptions. For example, Julian Amery, whom some would firmly place on the 'right' of the

¹² see Watt, pp.1-15

¹³ Sir Reginald Bennett interview with author

party, had supported the independence of India, held decidedly progressive views in social policy, opposed capital punishment, encouraged a more positive approach to European affairs, and yet ardently advocated the viability of Empire and opposed any withdrawal from British positions overseas from 1947 onwards. Angus Maude was another such latter-day 'Social Imperialist'. And 'almost half the Suez Group of 1956/7 voted for the abolition of capital punishment'.¹⁴ Major Harry Legge-Bourke, another rebel with firm views on Britain's duty in the Middle East, regarded himself as a progressive, liberal Tory¹⁵ - even if no one else did.

Historians have noted this recurrent theme within the Tory party of military men with progressive social views and robust attitudes on foreign policy.¹⁶ But this notion cannot be taken too far. Not all men who had achieved senior military rank during World War II held martial views on the conduct of foreign policy (for example, Brigadier Frank Medlicott, Brigadier Otho Prior-Palmer and Colonel James Hutchison). Nor did they all hold progressive social views (for example, Brigadier Terence Clarke, Brigadier Ralph Rayner).

The Suez Group's fundamental importance lies in 'the continuum it represents within the Tory party'¹⁷: this is the discernible thread in Conservative party history which runs through opposition to Indian independence in the 1930s; opposition to the Yalta agreement; opposition to withdrawal from Palestine, Abadan, the Sudan and Egypt in the 1950s; opposition to government policy on Cyprus in the mid-1950s; opposition to entry into the European Economic Community in 1962; Rhodesia in 1960s; the anti-Marketeters of the 1970s, and the anti-Maastricht rebels of the 1990s. Not all the members

¹⁴ John Biggs-Davison letter, *Spectator* 21.2.63

¹⁵ Sir Robert Rhodes James interview with author

¹⁶ Sir Robert Rhodes James

¹⁷ Wilfred Sendall interview with author

of the Suez Group in the 1950s were rabidly anti-European. Those staunch imperialists who also favoured closer links with Europe were spurred by their conviction that the Empire and Europe could form a formidable economic bloc which would free Britain from American tutelage and the domination of the mighty dollar.

Other Conservative groups:

(a) the Progress Trust:

There were other important backbench ginger groups in this decade. Although Churchill directed that the Tory Reform Group be wound up in 1945, and decreed that there should be no more such political cliques as they dissipated the energies of the party, the Progress Trust continued to meet throughout these years. It was still in existence in 1956 as R A ('RAB') Butler dined with these MPs in the Suez Crisis.¹⁸ Originally formed in 1943 as a 'libertarian' counterweight to the Tory Reform Group which was advocating the implementation of the Beveridge Report, the Trust subsequently evolved into a forum to protect Conservative principles.¹⁹ In essence, it represented the persistence of a pre-war view of the ideal political arrangement - paternalistic and strictly hierarchical. Its continued existence was indicative of the political influence it wielded and the value placed upon its work by Tory leaders.

The Trust was highly organized and possessed its own sources of information. It met weekly, the chairman had immediate access to the Chief Whip's office and to No. 10 whenever he so wished, and the monthly dinner invitations to Cabinet

¹⁸ R A Butler: *The Art of the Possible*, (London 1971), p.194

¹⁹ Hartmut Kopsch: '*The Approach of the Conservative Party to Social Policy during the Second World War*', PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1970

Ministers were not to be ignored.²⁰ Its organization was extremely discreet and deliberately so, in the firm belief that private influence was the most effective way for a backbench group to convey its views to the party leadership. This was very much in keeping with the attitude to all private debate within the party's backbench committees; in the early 1950s Tories were incensed to discover that discussion within the Foreign Affairs committee was being leaked to the press. The Trust's membership was selective and limited to approximately 20 MPs. Membership of this élite group was considered a very great honour; two members were far more put out to discover that resigning the Conservative Whip would mean they were disbarred from the Trust than they were at the prospect of being excluded from the proceedings of the 1922 Committee.²¹ The Progress Trust was composed not just of Tory grandees; its members were also MPs of considerable independence and acknowledged political influence, holding other important backbench positions. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that past Chairmen and officers of the 1922 Committee were also members of the Trust.²² The fact that at least 5 members of the Progress Trust were also Suez Group rebels, or former active members of this group, shows that in the eyes of their peers they were not negligible politicians, and places their opinions more squarely in the centre of the party than other political writers have appreciated. Conversely, membership of the Progress Trust gave the Suez Group an exceptionally powerful forum in which it could air and appeal for support for its views; in addition, the Suez Group could exploit the different political links offered by the Progress Trust, as the organization was a source of powerful political patronage, and formed a bond between its former members in the Cabinet and the

²⁰ private information

²¹ Private information

²² see Kopsch

backbenchers. Given the number of dissidents who were also members of this key backbench group, Conservative party managers could not easily dismiss their views.

By the late 1940s many MPs had come to regard the Progress Trust, even more than the 1922 Committee, as the backbone of the Tory party; indeed, in the mid 1950s the Trust became the unofficial backbench cabal,²³ setting the tone for the party's other official backbench committees. The success of the Progress Trust behind the scenes in influencing the agenda and tone of political debate within the Conservative party obviated the need to publicize such views. So political commentators who asserted that the claim of sustained 'right-wing' influence on the Conservative party was hollow²⁴ completely missed the point.

(b) Conservative Ginger Groups on Home Affairs:

The formation of the One Nation group after the 1950 general election had a considerable impact on the Conservative party conference later that year; spurred by their frustration at the apparent continuation of the bankrupt policies in the 1930s, nine new young members published their coherent social philosophy in the pamphlet '*One Nation*'. The three most prominent original members were Iain Macleod, Enoch Powell, and Angus Maude.²⁵

In addition to his activities in the Suez Group, Ralph Assheton led a backbench ginger group which was fiercely critical of Butler's economic policy in the 1950s. Captain Charles Waterhouse was another prominent member of this faction. There also existed an informal group whose main aim

²³ Private information.

²⁴ eg Donald McLachlan, *Daily Telegraph*, 30.1.57

²⁵ The other founder members were John Rodgers, Gilbert Longden, Cuthbert Alport, Robert Carr, Edward Heath and Richard Fort.

was the introduction of commercial television. Its success gave a considerable fillip to other pressure groups.²⁶ Nabarro led a group which harried the Conservative Government on fuel and power; and Hinchingsbrooke, from his position as Chairman of the backbench Transport Committee, led pressure for a change in transport policy.

(c) Informal Groups:

There were other more informal regular gatherings. Each political generation had its own dining club; the NAAFI (No Aims Ambitions Fractional Interest) Club was another jocular dining club²⁷, as was the 5,000 Acre Club (a telling reflection of the extensive landed interests of some Conservative MPs). The Conservative 'Brigadier Group' was a creation of the press, inspired by the election of a considerable number of former serving officers, of whom great things were expected. They included Otho Prior-Palmer, John Selwyn Lloyd, 'Toby' Low, Frank Medlicott, and after 1950, Enoch Powell. Their political views ranged widely, as did their preparedness to toe the party line.

Conservative Backbench Influence and Government Policy

The nature of the post-war Conservative party, the character of the House of Commons, and the forms of public debate outside Westminster all had an important bearing on the way politicians behaved.

a) The Mechanics of the Conservative party:

The Conservative party operated in a more complicated fashion than a simple model suggesting Tory leaders outlining policy to their uncomplaining supporters. As far as an

²⁶ Sir Geoffrey Cox interview with author

²⁷ 'Our fundamental rule was never to be seen talking willingly to a Whip, and above all the Chief Whip': Sir Reginald Bennett

'organizational' model can be defined, it was a case of small backbench groups - the leaven within the lump - attempting to seize the attention of the leadership, as well as trying to drum up support within the central mass to demonstrate to the leadership the extent of this support. The attention of these factions was thus primarily devoted to the leadership since in the overwhelming majority of instances once the party's seniors had declared for a policy, the loyal rank and file fell in line without too much agonizing thought. But there was a limit to which the leadership would give: there was a decided element of bluff and counter-bluff. It is because of this constructive tension between the leadership and their supporters, that I have devoted attention to the Conservative leadership as well as to the backbenches.

(b) The Nature of The Conservative party:

The rejection by the electorate in 1945 proved a very chastening experience, and for the first few years in opposition the party was 'punch drunk'.²⁸ However, after the shock of defeat dissipated, the talk among party managers in Westminster and in the country became 'not if we get back in, but when'.²⁹ Bolstered by the work of Butler and his 'backroom boys' in the Conservative Research Department in reshaping Conservative policy to offer a positive alternative to socialism, by 1948 the Conservatives were 'back in business'.

The Tory party of the 1945 Parliament was a different animal from the pre-war creature. The anti-appeasers' considerable success in weeding out candidates who had supported what were seen as the bankrupt policies of the Chamberlain era, was carried further by the defeat of many pre-war Tories in 1945.

Not only was the Parliamentary party much smaller;

²⁸ Lord Fraser of Kilmorack interview with author

²⁹ Ursula Branston interview with author

approximately one third of the Conservatives in the new Parliament were newcomers. The elimination of those too closely associated with discredited policies, the revitalized sense of purpose, combined with the greatly reduced number (213 MPs), reinforced the links between the 1945 intake and older MPs.

The party was strengthened by the election of a considerable number of independent-minded MPs, whose war-time service rendered them less inclined to obey the dictates of the Whips' Office. Added to this was the continued presence of older MPs who regarded their constituencies as personal fiefs (for example, Ralph Rayner and Robert Boothby). Therefore the newfound freedom, and indeed irresponsibility of opposition, as compounded by greater tendency to political independence. In a real sense the 1950 election did see the passing of a political generation, despite the reappearance of some 1930s stalwarts. This was the result of a large number of pre-war MPs declining to stand again and changes in the selection process, thanks to the Maxwell Fyfe reforms of 1948. The intake of 92 new Conservatives included grammar school Tories and industrialists, with different connections and allegiances which broadened the base of party in the Commons. Their success outside Parliament engendered a sense of personal confidence. They were increasingly less beholden to the aristocratic families who had formerly controlled seats and were more inclined to question the wisdom and judgment of their leaders, expecting the government to earn the loyalty of its supporters.³⁰

However, despite this political 'changing of the guard' , the spirit of the 1930s was by no means dead. The tradition of Tory political families continued, as well as the tradition of sons of peers beginning their political apprenticeship in the House of Commons. There also persisted among some members the

³⁰ Paul Williams interview with author

attitude that the best way to address a problem was a quiet word with the Minister, who was probably a family friend, in the box at Ascot.³¹ As before the War, contacts and friendships formed at school, university, through the regiment or other war-time experiences continued to play an vital part. There continued for many an 'old fashioned' view of politics. This sense of public service was characteristic of the decade. The Conservative backbenches contained many 'knights of the shires'³², who entertained no sense of ambition beyond serving their constituents and their country to the best of their ability - from the backbenches (for example, Legge-Bourke, Anthony Hurd, Guy Lloyd and Charles Mott-Radclyffe).³³ These knights formed 'the ballast of the party'. Instinctively conservative and wary of rapid change, they were men of principle and independent thought, but whose loyalty to the party was unswerving. For them, the greatest length to which their opposition to government policy would go was their studied absence from Westminster despite the imposition of a three-line whip.³⁴

After the War the Whips' office, widely regarded as a home for retired army majors, persisted in its opinion of the party as a superior public school³⁵ or regiment and sought to impose military discipline on the backbench troops. This, together with the experience of public school and war service,³⁶ instilled in the party generally a certain discipline and

³¹ Lord Watkinson interview with author

³² Lord Watkinson

³³ John Morrison and Arthur Vere Harvey, although not strictly 'knights of the shires' since they were made Lord Margadale and Lord Harvey respectively, were other highly regarded and influential backbench MPs.

³⁴ see Division on Suez Base Agreement, 29.7.54, *Hansard Official Report. Fifth Series. Parliamentary Debates. Commons* Volume 431 columns 820-822.

³⁵ Christopher Hollis: *Seven Ages* (London 1974), p.177

³⁶ John Baldock interview with author

sense of order: 'the feeling that Westminster was a glorified officers' mess'³⁷ was reinforced by the continued practice of addressing MPs by their war-time rank which persisted until the mid-1950s.³⁸ Pressure on a recalcitrant MP was very well-mannered in the late 1940s and early 1950s. (This offered a stark contrast to David Margesson's methods as Chief Whip before the War.) Conservative MPs had a very well-defined sense of what was and what was not acceptable in the game of politics. 'There was never any Whips' pressure on the party association in my day. Any attempt by the Whips office to produce any influence at all on the constituency would have been met with an immediate rebuff; the Whips would never have touched the question of a difficult MP with his constituency association - it would not have been right'.³⁹ Gradually the Whips' Office came to be seen as a step on the ladder of promotion within the party, signalled by the promotion of Edward Heath⁴⁰ in 1951. (His friends were horrified, and thought he had consigned himself to political oblivion.)⁴¹ With this change came a change in the pressures and tactics used on unruly backbenchers. This most famously came to light in the aftermath of the Suez crisis when Patrick Maitland publicly complained⁴² of the extraordinary means of persuasion exerted on his local agent and constituency party to try and silence Maitland's opposition to Britain's withdrawal from Port Said.

Finally, one last important fact about the Tory Party in the

³⁷ Sir Bernard Braine interview with author

³⁸ see *Hansard* volume 548 (1956-7)

³⁹ Lord Glendevon (formerly Lord John Hope) interview with author

⁴⁰ MP for Bexley 1950-74; Bexley and Sidcup 1974-

⁴¹ Lord Carr interview, British Oral Archive of Political and Administrative History, the London School of Economics

⁴² *Daily Herald* 8.12.56

late 1940s and 1950s was the sustained grip exerted behind the scenes by the 'old school Tories'. Some party stalwarts resented the advent of the welfare state and the adjustments being recommended by Butler and his cohorts, and were firmly resistant to the views put forward by others of a more progressive stamp within the party and later the Government. Through membership of the Progress Trust and their executive positions on the relevant backbench committees, notably the 1922, the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Treasury Committee, they ensured that the agenda and tone of debate within these forums maintained a robust flavour.⁴³ This highly discreet influence ensured the continuation of the Tory party as a class organization⁴⁴, despite its more progressive public face.

Political Debate 1948-1956:

(a) The House of Commons in the 1940s and 1950s:

The House of Commons in the 1940s and 1950s was very different from today. This made a considerable impression on the manner of debate. The need for outside employment or independent wealth to supplement a meagre parliamentary salary meant that full-time Conservative MPs were rare. Attendance at debates was poor, except on important occasions or when the Member wished to speak.⁴⁵ Those who could fill the Chamber were few: on the annunciator the names Churchill, Bevan, Boothby or William (Will 'Y') Darling, described as 'the licensed jester of the backbenches'⁴⁶, could rouse MPs from their roosts in the smoking rooms or the bar, but 'most people beat it to the

⁴³ Private information

⁴⁴ Private information

⁴⁵ Sir John Astor interview with author

⁴⁶ Hollis, p.174

Tea Room as soon as the Minister sat down'.⁴⁷ This made good attendance at a debate worthy of comment. The different pattern of attendance was underscored by the lack of office facilities in the Palace of Westminster. 'Only the very grand had offices there'⁴⁸; more often an MP would use one of the communal rooms, or indeed the committee corridor, to dictate correspondence to a secretary. In the 1950 Parliament during the Conservative war of attrition against the knife-edge Labour majority of 6, marathon all-night sittings and snap divisions obliged many young MPs to sleep where they could find a convenient bench.⁴⁹ In addition, the relationship between backbenchers and ministers was very much less structured. Although the reversal of Conservative fortunes in 1945 induced greater contact and sense of camaraderie between senior and junior MPs, there remained a discernible divide between the ranks of the party, and the political generations. The generation gap, underlined by war-time and opposition experience, became even more apparent when the Conservatives returned to office in 1951: one new entrant in 1950 commented, 'Ministers were very much more remote, more 'godlike'. One might see them in the Smoking Room'⁵⁰, but given the general pattern of parliamentary attendance, this was the exception rather than the rule.

All of this made the private forums of debate very important.⁵¹ It reinforced the importance of party backbench committees⁵² as a primary source of information and augmented the influence of opinions expressed there. Discussion in

⁴⁷ Wilfred Sendall

⁴⁸ Sir John Astor

⁴⁹ John Baldock

⁵⁰ Lord Watkinson; see Harold Watkinson: *Turning Points* (Salisbury 1986) p.33

⁵¹ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe

⁵² Lord Watkinson

these committees was confidential; therefore it was possible to have uninhibited exchanges of view in a way impossible on the floor of the House.⁵³ As these committees were attended by a Whip, they 'were very much a two-way street: we heard the government view ahead of the backbenches, and we got to the government what the party had in mind'.⁵⁴ Therefore in the 1940s and 1950s the Conservative backbench committees exercised very considerable influence over their front bench. This influence was enhanced by the very fact it was discreet. Relatively few in number, the most important elective backbench committee was the 1922 Committee, followed by those which shadowed the three great offices of state: Foreign Affairs, Treasury and Home Affairs. These committees met regularly; others, for example the Defence Committee, were convened only to discuss specific issues when they arose. Lord Glendevon, (then Lord John Hope) recalled: 'I was on the executive of the 1922 in 1951-3 and we used to see Winston every month or two. We did not mince our words, so much so that once he said, "Now, if you will forgive me, I will go and see my other Cabinet".' Lord Glendevon also served on the Foreign Affairs Committee, acting as vice-chairman in 1952-53: 'Every committee, including the Foreign Affairs committee, was powerful. The leadership never ignored their views; we (the Foreign Affairs Committee) were certainly always listened to. Eden never rode roughshod over us, nor ignored us. He never put a foot wrong.'⁵⁵

The other venue for Conservative MPs was the Smoking Room, supplemented by the Members' Dining Room as a place to meet, gossip and exchange views. All the MPs to whom I spoke were united on their view of Parliament's seductive and enjoyable club atmosphere and 'the fun of politics'. But they were are

⁵³ Nigel Nicolson interview with author

⁵⁴ Lord Glendevon

⁵⁵ Lord Glendevon

divided on whether the Smoking Room was the most important venue for discussion, supplemented by the Dining Room; or whether backbench committee rooms formed the powerhouse of debate. Essentially, this depended upon the type of MP. The social animals or the intriguers - such as Boothby, Peter Smithers, or Julian Amery - had a decided preference for the former; whereas the more patrician (Lord John Hope, Nigel Nicolson, John Jacob ['Jakie'] Astor) placed the emphasis upon the latter.

The problem for research is, of course, that Smoking Room discussion is undocumented, and in view of the laws of libel in certain cases probably happily so. I have been obliged therefore to fall back upon the backbench committee minutes, private reminiscences, and the Hansard record, which although only a pale reflection of the robust exchanges that took place in the privacy of the Smoking Room and at Mrs Goddard's table in the Members' Dining Room⁵⁶, give a fair indication of the temperature of debate within the party.⁵⁷

(b) The MP outside Parliament:

The pattern of the political world in the 1940s and 1950s opened different avenues to those MPs intent on furthering political causes. With television in its infancy, political debate outside the House of Commons was conducted largely on the hustings, in public meetings in constituencies, and in the press. MPs had far more contact with the general public and many older MPs deplored the introduction of 'surgeries'.⁵⁸ There was greater attendance at public meetings, and down in his constituency fastness - away from the control of Central Office - an MP was likely to be more forthright 'on the stump'

⁵⁶ Mrs Goddard was a portly waitress renowned for looking after senior backbenchers in the Dining Room: Sir Peter Smithers letter to author

⁵⁷ confirmed by Sir Peter Smithers

⁵⁸ eg Reginald Bevins: *The Greasy Pole* (London 1965), p.21

than at Westminster. Here the importance of the local and provincial press was significant, since the public relied upon the radio and the printed word for information. MPs' speeches were syndicated around the country in a manner no longer seen.

The True Extent of Backbench Influence

Then, as now, parliamentary views on the extent to which backbench MPs could influence the government varied widely; the spectrum of opinion ranged from those newly elected MPs who initially saw their position as the opportunity to contribute decisively to political debate⁵⁹; to those longstanding backbenchers whose estimation of their individual capacity to influence events was extremely limited indeed: 'Most of the duties of an MP could be better performed by an intelligent poodle dog'.⁶⁰ This cynicism is misleading. The impact of backbench opinion was greater than one might suppose. This backbench influence was largely informal, and therefore extremely difficult to measure: it was more a process of constant 'action and interaction'. 'In the life of a Parliament many ideas are put forward within the party. All are thrashed out in frank debate upstairs, in meetings with Ministers or in other ways.' As the Whips attended backbench meetings, 'the guidance they subsequently issue as to how members should vote is merely the outcome of these discussions ... Those policies that are accepted only rarely fail to satisfy the party's supporters. Even so MPs do on occasion dissent both in subsequent public debate and in the division lobbies from the agreed policy of their party colleagues as expressed by the Whips. In the main though they find little need to do so. They have already influenced the party's

⁵⁹ Sir John Astor

⁶⁰ Hollis, quoting Lecky, p.165

policy to their satisfaction.'⁶¹

Obviously Conservative backbench opinion was only one factor in the government's formulation and management of foreign policy. Opinion within the Labour party (when in power), Conservative Central Office, the pro- and anti-Tory press, opinion in the constituencies and the City all played a part. Admittedly a government pays far more attention to its own ranks. When the Conservative party was in power its backbenches could not be totally ignored since soothing backbench sensibilities was an essential part of the smooth running of the government's business. Although direct influence on government decisions may have been rare, indirect influence was a constant factor. I have sought to gauge the influence of my chosen groups in the judgment of their contemporaries (at the time and with hindsight); the extent to which these groups were able to capture press and public attention and support; the time and energy devoted by government spokesmen to answering their complaints, and the quality of the government's responses. The terse minutes of the Foreign Affairs Committee are also revealing.

(a) Criteria for influencing policy:

There were a number of important criteria which governed backbenchers' attempts to exert influence, individually or collectively. These were the political experience of the individual MP; the personality of the MP(s) involved; the size of the backbench revolt and the government's majority; and the unity of the Cabinet. There were also opportunities for MPs to appeal to, or manipulate, opinion outside the Chamber. Support for a cause in the House of Lords, in the press, in the party in the country (constituency associations), and general public opinion could be crucial in promoting a particular line.

⁶¹ Thomas Iremonger letter, *Times* 29.5.55; also Stanley Prescott letter, *Times* 2.6.55

b) Methods of influencing foreign policy:

The field of foreign policy tends to be less confrontational (the Munich and Suez crises were notable exceptions) than the home front in the House of Commons as the former involves almost no legislation and Parliament is normally only required to endorse or register disapproval of the government's line. However, backbenchers did exert influence on the terms on which foreign policy was debated, advocated and defended, and the professional civil servants in the Foreign office were very conscious of the political situation in which ministers had to quote.

(i) Public Methods:

Conservative backbench MPs strove to bring influence directly to bear on the government (whether Labour or Conservative) in a number of ways:

- (1) Early Day Motions;
- (2) questions on the floor of the House;
- (3) participation in debates, abstention in the division lobby;
- (4) very rarely, since it could prove counter-productive by bringing their government down, cross-voting;
- (5) and even more rarely, resigning the party Whip;
- (6) extra-parliamentary means: conversations with lobby correspondents, critical letters and articles in the press, week-end speeches in constituencies, and speeches in extra-parliamentary organizations.

(ii) Private Methods:

There was also a variety of discreet avenues available:

- (1) private conversations in the Smoking Room and dining rooms, the corridors of Westminster and Members' lobby;
- (2) the Whips' office and with (when in power) relevant ministers and their Parliamentary Private Secretaries;
- (3) comment in the 1922 Committee, or relevant backbench Committees (Defence, Foreign Affairs) and sub-committees (Army, Navy, Mediterranean).

The Conservative leadership, in opposition and in government, was more sensitive than is generally acknowledged to their backbenches.⁶² In the years 1948-1956 Conservative backbench MPs had considerable opportunity to influence British foreign policy, and they were not shy of exploiting these openings. In opposition and woefully outnumbered in the House of Commons, the Tories' best hope on contentious issues, such as Europe, might have seemed to lie in acting collectively to 'trim' foreign policy and to contribute to minor adjustments rather than major shifts in policy. However, several factors conspired to assist their efforts: the existence of considerable cross-party support for closer relations with Western Europe, and the titanic presence of Churchill successfully offset the Labour government's massive parliamentary majority. Denied access to the same information, backbench criticism might have been ill-informed and therefore ineffective, but Bevin and Attlee were scrupulous in keeping their former war-time colleagues, Churchill and Eden, fully informed by regular briefings. Back in government from October 1951, the Conservative government's principal foreign policy critics on their own benches. Frustrated by the lack of impact of their opinions within the privacy of party committees, the Suez Group MPs decided to resort to direct, public pressure to counter Eden's Egypt policy as well as maintaining their attack behind the scenes. Again, these critics did not suffer from lack of information: through war-time links, many Conservative backbenchers had their own equally reliable sources (such as Julian Amery and Neil ('Billy') McLean, who used to great effect their knowledge gleaned from the 'old boy network' in the intelligence service).

In opposition and in government, the Conservative backbenchers' contribution towards the climate of debate in foreign affairs, was probably more important than their

⁶² *Times*, 22.4.55

contribution to policy formulation - to the 'atmosphere of contentment or disillusion' - serving as a check on policy makers by helping to set the parameters within which the government was obliged to manoeuvre. Conservative backbenchers concurred that while it was not their role to make policy, 'we are failing in our duty if we do not help form it'.⁶³

⁶³ Gilbert Longden memorandum to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Foreign Affairs Committee minutes, undated.1.56

CHAPTER 2: CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDES TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

To the extent that classifications can be imposed upon the party on the question of European integration, Conservatives can be divided roughly into three categories.

Categories of Conservative Opinion

It must be stressed that this categorization is only approximate. At the time no such hard and fast divisions were apparent to the active participants; indeed, questions put to surviving MPs from this era about the extent to which specific groupings could be identified on Europe, prompted snorts of laughter and derision. Composition of these groups tended to shift according to the international climate, and as the debate became focused upon specific proposals.

(a) the Europeanists:

The Europeanists were the vocal MPs who favoured closer co-operation with Europe, although even they harboured considerable differences of view on Britain's role. Their opinions ranged from Churchill's preference for British sponsorship and support (stopping short of actual membership), to those who were keen to see British participation in confederal arrangements with Europe (see below). The group included MPs whose membership of organizations favouring more 'extreme' measures (for example, Federal Union, World Government) indicated their enthusiasm for close links with Europe to prevent a future war, rather than for the goal of British political federation with Europe. 'No Conservative favoured a federal Europe'.¹

(b) the Sceptics:

Between those who urged a more positive approach towards

¹ Sir Peter Smithers

Europe and those who remained distinctly suspicious, sat uncomfortably those who were ambivalent about the lure of Europe. They harboured feelings that Britain had far more pressing concerns than involvement beyond her traditional sphere of action, or strong doubts about the implications of closer association with Europe, which they feared might jeopardise Britain's historic ties with the Empire and Commonwealth. This was not an active pressure group, but rather an unorganized collection of MPs whose feelings were aroused only on specific issues or particular occasions, moving the fulcrum of opinion within the party.

(c) the anti-Europeans:

This small group, on the 'diehard' or reactionary wing of the party, became deeply opposed to any closer ties with the Continent. Most appear to have regarded their continental neighbours as degenerate, second-rate foreigners.² Although not all who opposed links with Europe did so on these chauvinist grounds, these Conservatives felt a deep-seated antipathy towards any moves which might limit Britain's freedom of action and prejudice her future. These MPs were also staunch supporters of imperial preference.

The Europeanists

Although the press might speak of the 'Strasbourg' as an identifiable parliamentary faction, the Conservative Europeanists did not represent a united bloc within Parliament. Advocacy of closer links with Europe was left to individual, often well-placed Conservative backbenchers. Unlike the Suez Group's cause, there was widespread cross-party support for European integration and support from outside organizations at home and abroad (the United Europe Movement (UEM - founded 1947), the European League for

² Sir Peter Smithers

Economic Co-operation (ELEC - founded 1946) and the Council of Europe (founded 1948) where the means used were those of education, discussion and persuasion.

Conservative views on Europe in the late 1940s should not be seen through the prism of later antagonisms towards the Continent that emerged in the 1950s. In the 1940s the question of Europe was inextricably linked to the question of security.³ The bedrock concern was that there should never again be war between the European nations - specifically France and Germany - and, as the shadow of Russia fell across the continent, that Europe must unite to protect herself against this threat. While ideas of European integration or co-operation were amorphous, there was an overwhelming sense that this cause which restored a sense of self-worth (and greater protection) to the defeated nations of the Continent was highly laudable. European unity was also seen as a means of offering hope and encouragement to the East European nations under Russia's yoke, seen in the stress placed in the original declaration of Churchill's United Europe Movement (UEM) on the whole of Europe, and the formation and activities of the UEM's East European Committee.

Approximately 60 Conservatives favoured a more active approach towards European integration. There was a hard core: 'a personal Churchill clique, which went back to anti-appeasement':⁴

Winston Churchill
Robert Boothby
Harold Macmillan

³ Lord Eccles interview with author

⁴ Lord Amery interview with author

Duncan Sandys⁵

Beyond this lay two outer concentric circles of MPs whose enthusiasm for Europe fluctuated between 1946 and 1949, forming a combination of 'enthusiasts for some form of closer union, and pro-Commonwealthers', who, while accepting that closer unspecified links with Europe were an excellent idea, were determined that 'nothing should be done which might adversely affect the Commonwealth and Empire, particularly to the advantage of "Continental"''.⁶ Using the extensive lists in Ronald Mackay's papers in the London School of Economics' archive, membership of the British Committee of the European League for Economic Co-operation (ELEC), attendance of international conferences (Gstaad, the Hague and Interlaken), debates and Early Day Motions (EDMs), it is possible to identify the following Conservatives:

Tufton Beamish
Herbert Butcher (NL&C)
Uvedale Corbett
Viscountess Davidson
Lord Willoughby de Eresby
Rupert de la Bère
Douglas Dodds-Parker
David Eccles
Walter Elliot
Ian Orr-Ewing
Walter Fletcher
John Foster
Hugh Fraser
Connelly Gage (UU)

⁵ Sandys was out of Parliament from 1945 until February 1950, when he was returned for Streatham. However, I have included him on the basis of his relationship with Churchill and his position in the European Movement.

⁶ John Hay letter to author

David Gammans
Sir Cuthbert Headlam
James Henderson Stewart
Viscount Hinchingsbrooke
Quintin Hogg
Christopher Hollis
Anthony Langford-Holt
Norman Hulbert
James Hutchison
Montgomery Hyde
Lord John Hope
Edward Keeling
Colin Thornton-Kemsley
Richard Law
Martin Lindsay
Jocelyn Lucas
Hugh Lucas-Tooth
Sir Peter MacDonald
John Maclay (NL&C)
Reginald Manningham-Buller
Sidney Marshall
David Maxwell Fyfe
Hugh Molson
Charles Mott-Radclyffe
Sir Thomas Moore
William Neill (UU)
Godfrey Nicholson
Basil Nield
Anthony Nutting
Christopher Peto
Oliver Poole
David Price-White
Otho Prior-Palmer
David Renton (NL&C)
Peter Roberts
Roland Robinson
Douglas Savory

Walter Smiles (UU)
Alec Spearman
Henry Spence
Ernest Taylor
William Teeling
Peter Thorneycroft
Lady Tweedsmuir
Arthur Vere Harvey
Sir Wavell Wakefield
George Ward
Gerald Williams

Churchill's 'personal clique' was ably supported by Maxwell Fyfe, and Thorneycroft and Eccles through their work on the British Committee of ELEC; and by MacDonald and Roberts in the parliamentary all-party group for Europe. Teeling, George Ward, Hutchison, Headlam, Hugh Fraser, Keeling and de Eresby also took a particularly active interest. Although they were sensitive towards potentially conflicting obligations of Empire and Europe - they strongly resisted British participation in a European customs union which did not permit the continuation of imperial preference⁷ - they were confident that the problems could be bridged.⁸

Beyond these MPs, there existed a wider circle of interested observers in the developments in Europe, willing to put their names to EDMs recommending closer links with Europe or to attend the Hague conference. However, although these MPs were not perhaps as sceptical as Eden, their enthusiasm for the cause was certainly more restrained:

Derek Heathcoat Amory
Brendan Bracken
Alfred Bossom

⁷ see Hutchison 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.475

⁸ MacDonald 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.488

Norman Bower
Malcolm Bullock
Edward Carson
William Cuthbert
William Darling
George Drayson
William Duthie
Ian Fraser
Sir Gifford Fox
Thomas D Galbraith
Ernest Gates
Arnold Gridley
Patrick Hannon
John Hare
Frederick Harris
Anthony Head
Sir John Henderson
Sir Arthur Howard
Sir John Kerr
Neill Cooper-Key
Alan Lennox-Boyd
Geoffrey Lloyd
John Selwyn Lloyd
'Toby' Low
Duncan McCallum
John Maitland
Ernest Marples
John Maude
Frank Medlicott (NL)
Alan Noble
Cyril Osborne
Charles Ponsonby
Stanley Prescott
Victor Raikes
David Robertson
Stanley Reed
Sir Frank Sanderson

Sidney Shephard
William Shepherd
Edward Smith
Oliver Stanley
Malcolm Stoddart-Scott
Henry Studholme
Robert Thorp
Derek Walker-Smith
Mervyn Wheatley
Christopher York
Sir Arthur Young

Support for closer British ties with Europe ebbed and flowed even within the ranks of the Europeanists: there was an element of 'jumping on the political bandwagon' in the early years. There were 39 Tories among the 133 MPs who supported the establishment of a 'European federation within the framework of the UNO' in January 1947; and 62 Conservatives initially supported Mackay's European Parliamentary Union.⁹ 57 signed the EDM calling for a political union and trading area, whereas by February 1949 the more restrained EDM was supported by 61 Conservatives and included many from the wider circle. A critical point came at the second European Parliamentary Congress at Interlaken in September 1948; British delegates included MacDonald, Keeling, Langford-Holt, Moore, Roberts and Savory. Here a marked divergence of principle emerged between those who favoured British participation in a European federation, and those who could not countenance such a move because of Britain's other ties and responsibilities. The split within the ranks of the British all-party group widened in the remaining months of 1948. This culminated in Robert's resignation as secretary to the British Group of EPU and the establishment of a new, separate all-party committee in February 1949. The moderation in aims was reflected in the more restrained EDM of February

⁹ Mackay papers, LSE

1949 (see below).

(a) Churchill's Decision to Adopt the Cause of Europe:

In any discussion of the Conservatives and Europe in the 1940s the principal figure is Churchill. Without his leadership and inspiration, the cause of Europe would never have acquired its political momentum, nor would the Conservative party have come to be closely identified with the cause in the public's mind, however mistakenly.

To a great extent, the political vacuum in Europe after the Second World War lent itself overwhelmingly to the European ideal, which found wide appeal across the political spectrum. The European countries were in a state of misery and collapse.¹⁰ The United States appeared to be repeating its disastrous retreat into isolation (despite membership of the newly formed UNO) just as the Russian barbarian seemed poised to ravish the prostrate European nations that lay outside Soviet control. 'In the first few years after the War, Britain was the sole European victor [although] she had suffered materially ... by comparison with the other countries in Europe [she was] still relatively rich and her commerce and industry were largely intact.'¹¹

From the outset Churchill was a key player. Long before the War he had pondered the notion of European Union. At the time of the Briand Plan (1929-30) Churchill wrote an article published in the *Saturday Evening Post* (a popular American magazine, which admittedly did not enjoy a wide readership in Britain), setting out his views on British association with such an entity: 'We are with Europe but not of it. We are linked but not comprised. We are interested, associated but

¹⁰ Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune 1945-55* (London 1969), p.155

¹¹ John Colville: *The Churchillians* (London 1981), p.208

not absorbed.' He was to repeat the strand of these thoughts on European integration on various occasions in the succeeding years: in 1939 as President of the New Commonwealth Society (an organization which was crucial to early support for European union) he called for a supranational peacekeeping force for Europe; in 1940 as part of a desperate attempt to shore up crumbling French morale following the French army's shattering defeat by Hitler's troops, he proposed an indissoluble union between France and Britain with a common parliament. Between 1940 and 1942 he dwelt several times upon the idea of unifying Europe under a Council with powers to enforce its decisions¹² - a kind of European UNO.

He returned again to the idea in speeches immediately after the War.¹³ Thus his speech entitled 'Let Europe Arise', delivered at the University of Zurich on 19 September 1946, stemmed largely from a long-held conviction, augmented by his desire to prevent future Franco-German animosity and his concern that if European civilisation was to save itself from Russian encroachment it had to do so by its own efforts. This speech, which was widely reported, was a logical progression from his address at Fulton, Missouri, six months earlier, when he warned of an iron curtain descending across Europe from Stettin to Trieste.

A desire to promote lasting peace¹⁴ was not the only ingredient in Churchill's decision to act as leader of the United Europe Movement in early 1947. Motives of political calculation and personal vanity almost certainly also featured. Churchill enjoyed 'an unrivalled position as the war leader who had helped to save Europe ... but he was also

¹² Walter Lipgens: *A History of European Union* (Oxford 1982); and Lipgens ed: *Documents on the History of European Integration Vol.II. Plans for European Union in Britain and in Exile 1939-45*, pp.229-233

¹³ in Brussels 16.11.45 and the Hague 8.5.46

¹⁴ Colville: *The Churchillians*, p.208

a party politician, an active and sometimes truculent leader of an Opposition anxious to weaken and as soon as possible take the place of the existing government'.¹⁵ He was also an intuitive politician *par excellence*, and sensed the emotional attraction of the phoenix rising from Europe's ashes, as well as the practicalities. Later Labour accusations that Churchill's adoption of the cause of European unity was merely a publicity stunt, motivated solely by political opportunism¹⁶, probably contained an element of truth. In Robert Boothby's opinion, Churchill was not very interested in being leader of the Opposition after all those years of supreme power.¹⁷ With the English domestic political scene offering little scope for him to play world statesman, a united Europe held out a potential solution to Franco-German antagonism and perhaps best of all it presented a weapon with which to beat Labour at Westminster.

Once persuaded by Duncan Sandys to act as Chairman of the UEM, Churchill threw his considerable energies into 'the crusade ... of forming a united Europe'.¹⁸ However, Churchill was never a convert to active British participation in European integration, and in this he remained a product of his political generation. His intention was for Britain to 'promote unity':¹⁹ this country should provide moral support and intellectual leadership for a United Europe, but Britain would stay, of necessity, outside the emerging institutions. Britain was to provide the vital link with America, and because of her Empire, with Africa, Asia and the Pacific

¹⁵ Macmillan, p.159

¹⁶ Ungeod-Thomas, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2305

¹⁷ Boothby, in Alan Thompson: *The Day Before Yesterday* (London, 1971), p.88

¹⁸ Boothby, in Thompson, p.88

¹⁹ Colville: *The Churchillians*, p.208

basin.²⁰ He was to make a virtue of his lack of a clear plan on how European integration was to be achieved, claiming that his task was to provide the vision; it was for others to fill in the details. To be fair, in the early years very few people had a clear idea of the means and the ends, save for the Federalists who saw European integration as the halfway house towards their utopia of world government.

Churchill did not share the federalists' conviction of the need for European political federation for its own sake. However, free from the constraints of office he and his pro-European supporters fell into the trap of trying to offer all things to all men. Intent on 'forcing the European pace on the Europeans, he aimed his speeches at a world audience'.²¹ Churchill recognized the need to attract a broad spectrum of support from existing organizations for his newly created United Europe Movement, but his own preference for generalizations and keen domestic political sense that specific details might prove unattractive (or indeed unpalatable) to the British electorate, encouraged vague and ambiguous statements from Churchill and his supporters. In Lord Fraser's opinion Churchill's words were clear²², but the enthusiasts chose to read more into his declarations than he had implied, while those worried about the implications were increasingly concerned. In Zurich Churchill had spoken of Britain's 'benevolent association' with a United States of Europe, implying that Britain's position as head of the Commonwealth precluded ordinary membership. However, his speech at the Royal Albert Hall on 16 May 1947 (to mark the inauguration of the United Europe Movement) referred to Britain as member of a European family and having to play her full part, adding that although the Commonwealth would have to

²⁰ Colville: *The Churchillians*, p.208

²¹ Lord Fraser

²² Lord Fraser

support such an association he saw no reason why the Dominions would not do so, thus implying Britain's active participation. There remained an inherent contradiction in Churchill's vision towards European unity, which 'he never resolved, either intellectually or emotionally'.²³

Churchill's decision to adopt the cause of Europe was influenced by three Conservatives:

(i) Robert Boothby:

Boothby had been a supporter of ideas of European integration since the 1920s; in 1928 he had helped write a book which touched on the subject with Macmillan and Loeder. Aware of the Continental appeal of a revived Europe through his contacts with the Free French in the 1940s, he had called for the creation of a United States of Europe in his despatches from the San Francisco conference in 1945.²⁴ Boothby repeatedly expressed his ardent conviction of the need for economic, political and cultural integration in Western Europe²⁵, on the grounds that Western democracies were too small to survive as independent political and economic units flanked by the United States and Russia. Boothby acted as secretary to the *ad hoc* all-party parliamentary committee which had drafted the EDM of 16 March 1948 which called for Western Union. By April 1948 this committee boasted of 58 Tory and 70 Labour MPs.²⁶

Boothby was an extremely gifted, able, but flawed politician. One of the most outspoken Conservatives of his generation since his election to Parliament in 1924 for Aberdeenshire

²³ Colville: *The Churchillians*, p.208

²⁴ Robert Boothby: *Recollections of a Rebel* (London 1978), p.216

²⁵ see 4.6.46 *HC Deb.*423.1944-1954; and 19.6.47 *HC Deb.*438.2311-18

²⁶ Mackay papers

East, and a former *protégé* of Churchill, he was asked to join Churchill's European venture at the outset; but he never regained Churchill's total confidence which he had enjoyed in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁷ Boothby was still tainted by the 'Czech gold scandal' of the early 1940s and there remained within the Conservative Party an undercurrent of mistrust about 'what could be in it for Boothby'. As one former colleague expressed it: 'it was said that at his christening, the good fairies had given him every gift - except the ability to distinguish right from wrong.'²⁸ One of the few MPs able to rouse his colleagues from their roosts in the smoking rooms or the bar with the appearance of his name on the annunciator, his speeches attracted comment but not respect: 'He had the character that when he made a speech in the Commons, you could be sure that the applause he got came from the opposition benches'.²⁹ In a sense, he was the Conservatives' Richard Crossman, with whom he was great friends. He was disliked intensely by establishment Tories: James Stuart, the Tory Chief Whip until 1948, loathed him.³⁰ Thus although Boothby held sincere and articulate views on British ties with the continent, persistent questions about his integrity undermined the force of his message. He was appreciated as a very convivial companion, but was regarded as 'a thoroughly bad man!'³¹

(ii) Leo Amery:

The public's identification of the cause of Europe with Churchill after the War frequently caused Leo Amery's role to be overlooked. No longer an MP but still very much an elder

²⁷ Robert Rhodes James: *Bob Boothby* (London 1991), pp.337-8

²⁸ Sir Reginald Bennett

²⁹ Sir Reginald Bennett

³⁰ see *Within the Fringe* (London 1967), p.104

³¹ Sir Godfrey Nicholson interview with author

statesman of the party, Amery had long held coherent views of the place of Europe in an expanded imperial economic structure - ideas which his son, Julian, absorbed, and argued with intellectual conviction and vigour.

Amery knew well the pre-war continental pro-European politicians, such as Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi³², and had attended conferences on the topic in the 1930s. A political ally of Churchill from the days of his opposition to appeasement, Amery persuaded Churchill to come to lunch to meet Coudenhove-Kalergi in early 1939; this meeting prompted Churchill to publish an article in the Evening Standard on the importance of a united Europe.³³ Amery sent Churchill the text of his speech to the London University on the subject of European integration, and came to believe that this was the origin of Churchill's call in Zurich.³⁴ It was certainly a contributory factor. Amery was involved from the outset in Churchill's pro-Europe venture, urging him to pursue the matter.³⁵ Amery's contacts with Coudenhove-Kalergi became very important as Coudenhove-Kalergi was busy reviving his pre-war organization and was very concerned that Churchill should preside at the Congress Coudenhove-Kalergi was proposing to convene early the following year.³⁶ Julian Amery³⁷ was staying with Coudenhove-Kalergi in Gstaad when a telegram arrived from Churchill: 'I remember you have a European movement and I am thinking of starting one. I would

³² President of the Pan-European Union, which he founded in 1923, and which held regular congresses, and founder of European Parliamentary Union (1947).

³³ Lord Amery

³⁴ Leo Amery diary entry 19.9.46, in John Barnes ed: *The Empire at Bay - The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-45*, p.1060

³⁵ Barnes' transcript of Leo Amery Ms: Amery to Churchill, 20.9.46

³⁶ Barnes' transcript of Leo Amery Ms: Amery to Churchill 24.7.46

³⁷ MP for Preston 1950-66; Brighton Pavillion 1969-92

like to combine. Please send all details.' Lord Amery recalls:

'Coudenhove-Kalergi telegraphed back: "Julian Amery staying with me and will bring full details." I came back to London fully briefed, and rang up Churchill's office and was invited to lunch on 20 September. [Leo Amery, Sandys and Boothby were also there.] I reported on Coudenhove-Kalergi and sat in on the conversation. The importance of my father was that Churchill was very conscious that the imperial wing of the party might be very unhappy; to make him vice-chairman was seen as an answer to any criticism that the European movement was not anti-Empire.'³⁸

Until his death, Leo Amery remained an impassioned supporter of European unity but his position as head of 'the imperial preference boys'³⁹, which Churchill and his fellow Conservative Europe enthusiasts had hoped to harness to their cause, in fact diminished the force of his message, as '90% of these imperial stalwarts were anti-European'.⁴⁰ Leo Amery remained firm in his belief that at all costs Britain must avoid a return to a 'balkanized' Europe where small states looked to outside patrons for support in their squabbles, and provoked confrontation between these patrons. In his view, only a European Commonwealth could hold its own against Russia and figure as one of the real world powers.⁴¹ Amery shared Sandys view that 'the only hope of keeping Germany with us is to hold out the prospect of playing a real part in a united

³⁸ Lord Amery

³⁹ Sir Peter Smithers

⁴⁰ Sir Peter Smithers

⁴¹ Barnes' transcript of Leo Amery Ms: Amery to Churchill 12.11.45

Europe rather than as an annexe of Bolshevism'.⁴² He also saw Europe in domestic political terms -as a 'positive antidote to socialism' - hoping to use the idea as a creed to attract the working classes.

(iii) Duncan Sandys:

Sandys was crucial in persuading Churchill to adopt the cause of Europe. Initially urged by Churchill to interest himself in Coudenhove-Kalergi's attempts to revive his pre-war pan-Europe organization, Sandys had been in close touch with Coudenhove-Kalergi throughout the summer of 1946. Churchill was reluctant to become involved in such moves, on account of the overtly anti-Russian bent of Coudenhove-Kalergi's concept.⁴³ There may also have been an element in Churchill's thinking of giving a tiresome and ambitious son-in-law something to do.⁴⁴ However, Churchill had come to the conclusion that if Europe was to defend itself, from without and within, it must unite; he argued this fervently at dinner several days before he was due to address the University of Zurich in September 1946. Sandys and Jan Smuts were impressed by his argument and convinced him to use his forthcoming speech as an occasion to issue a clarion call to the free nations of Europe.⁴⁵ Sandys also helped to draft Churchill's speech.⁴⁶ Despite Churchill's reluctance to follow up this address with an organized campaign action,⁴⁷ he was keen to see the genesis of a movement for European unity, and agreed by late September to chair the new organization, provided this did not amount 'anything more than signing letters and acting

⁴² Barnes' transcript of Leo Amery Ms: Amery diary entry 22.8.46

⁴³ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Churchill to Sandys 25.6.46, and 29.6.46

⁴⁴ Lord Deedes interview with author

⁴⁵ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms

⁴⁶ Lord Amery

⁴⁷ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms

as the figurehead'.⁴⁸ Following Churchill's Zurich speech Sandys lost no time in organizing a committee to promote the United Europe idea. ⁴⁹ Although officially only the general secretary of the movement, Sandys played the decisive role in maintaining the momentum unleashed by his father-in-law.⁵⁰ Out of Parliament until 1950, Sandys devoted his prodigious energy and tenacity to the issue, seeking to provide the 'nuts and bolts' to Churchill's grand design. 'The man was a steam roller - he would grind away in first gear and nothing could stand in his path'.⁵¹

From the outset he was keen to enlist all sections of the Conservative party for the nascent movement, as well as recruiting Labour and Liberal support.⁵² Sandys accordingly approached known supporters of European integration (Boothby and Macmillan), but also Tories who were important for the influence and respect they commanded within the party: Harry Crookshank, Lord Cranborne⁵³, Walter Elliot, Geoffrey Lloyd and Oliver Stanley. Sandys also advised Churchill in the run-up to the inaugural meeting of the United Europe Movement at the Albert Hall in May 1947, 'it is important that a few more of the leading members of the Conservative Party should be associated with the United Europe Movement. Otherwise there is some danger that feeling left out, they may become suspicious or hostile to it.'⁵⁴ He suggested inviting Eden, Hudson, Butler, Anderson and Law. Significantly, Eden's name

⁴⁸ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms

⁴⁹ John Pinder and Richard Mayne: *Federal Union*, p.94

⁵⁰ Lord Amery; Macmillan, p.157; Boothby, p.216

⁵¹ Lord Orr-Ewing interview with author

⁵² Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Sandys to Churchill 4.10.46

⁵³ succeeded his father as Marquis of Salisbury in 1947.

⁵⁴ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Sandys to Churchill 27.4.47

had not been included in the list of those to be canvassed at the outset of discussions the previous winter. Sandys appreciated the need to enlist Eden's support (*vide* his suggestion to Churchill that 'the invitation to Anthony should come personally from you' to the Albert Hall meeting) but he certainly did not crave Eden's involvement. Sandys harboured a deep resentment of Eden, by now Churchill's acknowledged heir, which dated from the 1930s⁵⁵, and which Sandys did nothing to hide. 'It became a sort of feud within the Tory party.'⁵⁶

While acting as Churchill's liaison officer with the emerging European movement, to a large extent Sandys was left to his own devices. His influence was very considerable; for example, Churchill sent Sandys the text of the speech he intended to make at the inaugural meeting at the Albert Hall; 'Sandys did not like Churchill's speech, and wrote his own version, which he sent back to Winston. Churchill did not like that, and rang Sandys up asking for the original. Sandys said he was very sorry, but he had torn it up. As there was no common copy, Churchill had to make Sandys' speech, with such changes as he could make.'⁵⁷ Sandys used his relationship with Churchill as an umbrella for his activities on the Continent. Both were keen to organize the formation of a group outside England: it was Sandys contacted French federalists. He also attended Coudenhove-Kalergi's 'preliminary European parliament' at Gstaad in September 1947, with his former parliamentary colleague and friend Somerset de Chair. 'At one point Sandys commented to me: "I think the old man should have sent a telegram to the Conference. You write it." So I wrote it and Sandys transmitted it to Coudenhove-

⁵⁵ Robert Rhodes James: *Churchill - A Study In Failure* (London 1970) p.335

⁵⁶ Lord Amery

⁵⁷ Lord Amery

Kalergi, who read it out very proudly'.⁵⁸

Sandys deliberately sought to harness existing groups favouring European integration, including those promoting political federation, to exploit their organizations and contacts. Accordingly, Churchill's committee contained four representatives of Federal Union.⁵⁹ Sandys himself favoured more modest co-operation between governments but recognized that he needed continental support for his campaign, and that the federalists could deliver one of the few multi-national groupings. Sandys also enlisted supporters of World Government, on the basis that 'European unity should be pursued as the immediate practical step and that any idea of World Government is a project for the more distant future'.⁶⁰ Sandys thus decided to go to Amsterdam in 1946, and Gstaad and Montreux in 1947. In Montreux Sandys attended as an observer, but was hardly idle. He spoke at a public meeting at the Palais des Sports, and after talking to Joseph Retinger 'the whole of one night', the two men decided join forces to organize a large-scale Congress of Europe.⁶¹

(b) Other Prominent Conservative Supporters of European Integration:

In Walter Lipgens view, the great majority of party politicians had no idea of European unity before 1946, or had resigned themselves to its impossibility. Certainly Quintin Hogg, writing on the federation of Europe for the *Spectator* in

⁵⁸ Somerset De Chair interview with author

⁵⁹ see Pinder and Mayne, p.94

⁶⁰ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Sandys to Churchill 23.12.46

⁶¹ John Pomian ed.: *Joseph Retinger: Memoirs of an Eminence Grise*, (London 1972), p.215

1943,⁶² concluded that the idea was impractical. Indeed, until 1948 the average Tory had not given the matter any thought.⁶³ However, not all had concluded that the notion was a lost cause and should be abandoned, nor ignored the idea.

(i) Macmillan:⁶⁴

Another supporter of Churchill in 1938 and 1940, Macmillan had given thought to ideas of European integration as far back as the 1920s when, together with Boothby and Loeder, he had written a book which touched on the topic. As part of Sandys' deliberate policy, Macmillan was among the senior Tories invited to the inaugural meeting at the Albert Hall, and was later included on the General Committee. By 1949 he had taken on the important and influential position of chairman of the East European committee of the UEM.

In these years, Macmillan was still as much in the political wilderness as he had been before the Second World War, despite his war-time position as Resident Minister in North Africa. His decision to join forces with the Europeanists appeared to contain more than an element of political opportunism.⁶⁵ He was not so cynical a politician for this to be his only motive, but the glamorous appeal of the crusade, and the not-inconsiderable element of eschewing the forlorn political landscape at home⁶⁶, combined with his desire to pour himself into politics to compensate for the wasteland of his personal life. To his credit, Macmillan was a sincere admirer of Jean Monnet, and his greatest nightmare was a revived Germany

⁶² quoted in Walter Lippens ed.: Documents on the History of European Integration, p.240; and Hogg: *Making Peace* (London 1945)

⁶³ Lord Colyton (formerly Henry Hopkinson) interview with author

⁶⁴ MP for Stockton-on-Tees 1924-29, 1931-45; MP for Bromley 1945-1964

⁶⁵ John Hay

⁶⁶ Alistair Horne: *Macmillan 1894-1956* (London 1988), p.314

without Britain's counterweight, or even worse a revived Germany unshackled to the West leaning towards Russia (the spectre of Rapallo). He had coherent views on the necessity to harness the industries of the Ruhr to the economies of the West, which he repeatedly voiced inside and outside Westminster. Europe became the new focus for his idealism,⁶⁷ but his enthusiasm for this newfound cause came to appear to some of his colleagues as 'boundless and excessive'⁶⁸: on 17 August 1949 he went so far as to support the Council of Europe's resolution calling for the Committee of Ministers to be an executive authority with supranational powers.

(ii) David Maxwell Fyfe:⁶⁹

A former Attorney-General and Prosecutor at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, Maxwell Fyfe attended the first meeting of Churchill's committee on 3 December 1946 and was invited to join the managing committee of the UEM at the beginning of 1947. Unlike Macmillan, Sandys and Boothby, Maxwell Fyfe had not supported Churchill in his opposition to appeasement before the War. Some of Maxwell Fyfe's colleagues ascribed his fervour for Europe as an attempt to atone for his stance on Munich.⁷⁰ In the intervening period between the Congress of the Hague, and the convention of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, Maxwell Fyfe devoted 'considerable study to a European Convention of Human Rights', serving as one of the *rapporteurs* to the International Judicial Section, set up by the European Movement, which set about preparing a draft Convention.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Home, p.314

⁶⁸ Home, p.314

⁶⁹ MP for West Derby 1935-1954.

⁷⁰ Lord Eccles

⁷¹ see the Earl of Kilmuir: *Political Adventure* (London 1964), p.176

(iii) David Eccles:⁷²

Another member of Churchill's committee, Eccles' undoubted ability was unfortunately marred by his arrogance which earned him the nickname 'Smartyboots' in the party. Nor was Eccles a Smoking Room man which might have mitigated this fault in his critics' eyes. His parliamentary impact was inhibited by his inability to make political friends, and unfortunately he spoke less well in the House than he did in private.⁷³ Concentrating on the economic aspects of European union, through his membership of the British Committee of ELEC, Eccles saw the argument for European union as fundamentally one of security: the chance to avert renewed Franco-German hostility, and to defend Europe against Russia's advance.⁷⁴ His preference for economic arrangements for an integrated Europe was for *laissez faire* arrangements based on the extension of the GATT procedures. This was a marked contrast to the Amery and Boothby approach.

(iv) Peter Thorneycroft:⁷⁵

Peter Thorneycroft was also on Churchill's committee. Co-founder of the Tory Reform Group in 1942 with Lord Hinchingsbrooke, Thorneycroft served on the British Committee of the ELEC with Eccles and Macmillan.

(v) Walter Elliot:⁷⁶

Elliot was invited by Leo Amery to join Churchill's movement in late 1946. Elliot's political position was somewhat anomalous: tipped in the 1930s as a potential leader of the

⁷² MP for Chippenham 1943-62

⁷³ Reginald Bevins: *The Greasy Pole* (London 1965), p.30

⁷⁴ Lord Eccles

⁷⁵ MP for Stafford 1938-45; MP for Monmouth 1945-66

⁷⁶ MP for Lanark 1918-23; MP for Kelvingrove 1924-45; MP for Combined Scottish Universities 1946-50; MP for Kelvingrove 1950-58

party⁷⁷, his political confidence had been shattered by Munich, and although he was acknowledged as one of the senior party stalwarts by the 1940s, he remained a broken man.

(c) Second-tier backbenchers:

(i) Sir Peter MacDonald:⁷⁸

Born in 1895, MacDonald was very much an old-world Tory - an ardent supporter of imperial preference, and a prime example of the school of thought within the Europeanists who envisaged the union of economic blocs together with their colonial empires. By his own admission,⁷⁹ MacDonald was sceptical about European federation and Britain's participation in any such moves, but he was impressed by the enthusiasm on the Continent. Chairman of the Conservative party Imperial Affairs Committee, as well as a founder member of the all-party parliamentary committee on European union, MacDonald was sensitive to fears that closer integration with Europe might interfere with relations with the Commonwealth. He asserted in general terms that the old loyalties of Empire and the new obligations of Europe could be reconciled,⁸⁰ but he was emphatic that all depended on what shape the policy took. If this required the surrender of British sovereignty, then he was against joining such an organization.

MacDonald joined Ronald ('Kim') Mackay's Parliamentary group for European Parliamentary Union (EPU). There developed considerable tension within this parliamentary group between Mackay's band of federalists and those Conservatives and National Liberals who favoured a looser British association

⁷⁷ Philip Goodhart: *The 1922* (London 1973), p.126

⁷⁸ MP for the Isle of Wight 1924-59

⁷⁹ 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.448

⁸⁰ 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.448

with Europe. This came into the open at the Interlaken conference in early September 1948, and was resolved when the all-party group was constituted in February 1949; this group formally withdrew from EPU, and its officers were delegated to approach the British Council for the European Movement (which was to be formed shortly), but to retain the group's parliamentary autonomy. MacDonald and Boothby were elected as Vice-Presidents.

(ii) Peter Roberts:⁸¹

Like MacDonald, Roberts was originally involved (as Secretary) in Mackay's EPU British group, but could not support Mackay's federalist approach. He resigned as Secretary from this group in December 1948. When the all-party group was set up in February 1949, Roberts was elected Hon. Secretary.

(d) Analysis of Pro-European Conservative Thought

Among the Conservative Europeanists, just as within the European Movement as a whole, differences existed over Britain's relationship with the Continent. These differences lay at the very heart of the Movement. Churchill remained convinced that Britain's role was to act as sponsor. He might speak of Britain being part of the European family, but this was always in the context of his vision of the 'three interlocking circles'; Britain's relationships with America and her Commonwealth and Empire precluded placing the greatest emphasis on Western Europe. Sandys, on the other hand, was more swayed than Churchill by the arguments of Monnet and Spaak, although a considerable part of the attraction of the federalist movement was the support it commanded on the Continent. Also Sandys had come to feel, with the end of the British Raj in India, that the days of the Empire were

⁸¹ MP for Sheffield, Eccleshall 1945-50; MP(C&L) for Sheffield, Heeley 1950-66

numbered; he was fearful that if Britain allied with America she would be too subordinate to exercise any influence. In his opinion Britain was no longer a great power, and union with Europe offered the only feasible alternative. He envisaged union with Europe based on the Marshall Plan, with economic integration leading to military integration⁸²; thus he conceived of the vital necessity of British membership of a European community - something which Churchill did not endorse. The division within the ranks of the Europeanists was not just along political lines; there were also marked differences in the economic sphere. Eccles, an active campaigner in the ELEC movement, favoured a *laissez faire* approach (along the lines of the GATT), whereas Boothby argued long and hard for a union with Europe and the overseas territories, welded together into a coherent economic bloc. The need to gloss over these divisions contributed to the confusion over the precise meaning of such phrases as European union, European unity, European federation, European integration. Unfortunately, this proved a two-edged sword as, in turn, the continental federalists and their supporters in Britain raised hopes in Western Europe that they only had to wait until Churchill was returned to power for Britain to become a full member of a united Europe.

The ambiguity necessary to patch over differences among pro-European politicians and political activists was evident from the outset.⁸³ With the benefit of hindsight this seems an inherently flawed approach, but at the time the method provided the necessary cloak for European integration to move forward. Thus whether or not it is fair now to criticise Tory politicians for their contradictory and frequently misleading rhetoric is beside the point. Churchill himself repeatedly refused to be drawn, in public or in private: when quizzed by Boothby in the train on the way to the first Strasbourg

⁸² Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: De Rougemont Diary 28.8.47

⁸³ see Aidan Crawley, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2236-43

Assembly, on what he meant by a United States of Europe, Churchill replied, 'We are not making a machine, we are growing a living plant, and we must wait and see until we understand what this plant turns out to be'.⁸⁴ Not unnaturally this imprecision, together with the apparent endorsement by the party through the presence of leading Conservatives on the United Europe Committee (Boothby, Maxwell Fyfe, Stanley, Leo Amery, Sandys and Ernest Brown), fostered the belief among British and continental supporters of European federation that Churchill and his like-minded parliamentary colleagues favoured active British participation in European political and economic integration, and that, by extension, so did the Conservative party. Nice distinctions between 'European unity' and 'European union' were lost on the bulk of the British public. The link between the Tory party and European integration was reinforced in the public's imagination when the National Executive of the Labour Party forbade any of its members to have anything to do with Churchill's United Europe Committee.

This unintentional but occasionally deliberate obfuscation aroused the antagonism of the Labour party from the start; Churchill protested that the UEM did not aspire to compete with the government in any way but was merely designed to foster 'moral, cultural, sentimental and social unities and affinities through Europe'⁸⁵, but he was accused of seeking to make 'political capital out of what is fundamentally a non-party ideal'.⁸⁶ Labour felt that if Churchill really wished to use his unique position in Europe, he should have resigned the leadership of the opposition and raised himself above party political considerations.

⁸⁴ Boothby, p.217

⁸⁵ 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.553

⁸⁶ Crawley, 5.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1297

The Sceptics

(a) Eden

Eden was the most prominent Tory agnostic. Throughout the late 1940s he was noticeably restrained in his comments on closer association with Europe. In this Eden was 'anti-Europe': 'although his war papers talked much of European union, by the end of the War he had come to the conclusion that we were broke, Europe was even broker, and our only hope was to be with the Americans'.⁸⁷ However, Eden was not crudely 'anti-European': he was acutely aware of the need, and the desirability, for harmonious relations with the Continent. Nor was he oblivious to the advantages of some sort of European economic integration. On several occasions since 1945 he had called on the government to take steps to secure closer economic co-operation with 'our Western neighbours, and in particular with France'.⁸⁸ This remained firmly in the context of inter-governmental co-operation. He approved of the development of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) as 'wholly compatible with the progressive development of trade which we all want to see within the Empire'.⁸⁹ There was a logical progression from this approval of inter-governmental economic co-operation to his arguments that Britain should accept the French invitation for discussions on the Schuman Plan in 1950.

He remained a convinced 'Concert of Europe man', 'a product of his political generation'.⁹⁰ Eden shared with Churchill the goal of close and harmonious relations between European states, and also the vision of Britain at the centre of the

⁸⁷ Lord Amery

⁸⁸ 19.6.47, *HC Deb.*437.1743 and 15.5.47, *HC Deb.*438.2238

⁸⁹ 19.6.47, *HC Deb.*438.2238

⁹⁰ Lord Fraser

'three interlocking circles'. The difference between them lay in their use of 'emotion'. 'Eden's temperament could not have been more different from Churchill's. They both broadly agreed with Britain not being part of Europe. But Churchill was forcing the pace on the Europeans in Europe; his speeches were aimed at a world audience ... They had a different approach to Europe.'⁹¹ Eden, although a consummate diplomat, was not a man of vision; he concentrated more on tactics, and he shared with the Foreign Office an innate distaste for the sentimental underpinning of the European movement. Eden remained in close touch with Foreign Office officials, both because of his war-time role and because it was clear that if the Conservatives were reelected he would again be Foreign Secretary. His personal prejudice was thereby reinforced by the civil servants. Unlike Churchill, and in particular Sandys, who saw the emotional yearning for European integration as the essential fuel for their cause, the practical Eden regarded such sentiments as clouding the issue. He had no time for such distractions.

Eden supported Bevin so that isolationist forces on the left of the Labour party should not prevail. He, and other more thoughtful Conservatives also realized Bevin's stance on Europe was more in tune with the British electorate. As far as the Sceptics were concerned there were already satisfactory British moves towards Europe through the Brussels Pact, the European Recovery Programme leading to the creation of the inter-governmental OEEC, and then the NATO negotiations prompted by the 1948 Berlin crisis. These appeared of more concrete benefit than the more nebulous ideas of European political co-operation.

Eden's vanity, it seems, was also involved. He was the other acknowledged foreign affairs expert on the Conservative benches, yet 'Churchill was getting all the applause, all the

⁹¹ Lord Fraser

glamour for his leadership of Europe'.⁹² He came to see Churchill's conduct in the Council of Europe as a 'party stunt', devoid of any political meaning.⁹³ Jealous of his position within the party, Eden was quick to react to any perceived slight. Churchill's refusal to have a shadow cabinet *per se* - relying instead on a group of senior parliamentary colleagues who were called upon to speak in the House on a variety of topics - did nothing for Eden's *amour propre*. 'It was almost automatic that if there was a foreign affairs debate, Eden was chosen to lead unless Churchill wanted to do so himself; [but] no one had a prescriptive right - therefore Eden had to [work to] maintain his supremacy in foreign affairs. This played a part in it'.⁹⁴

Sandys' attempt to soothe potentially ruffled feelings did not extend to a concerted campaign to recruit Eden. (As they admitted, Boothby and Sandys later saw this as a fundamental mistake.) The hostility of key active Europeanists to Eden was heartily reciprocated. 'I think he was impatient of Sandys, Macmillan and Boothby, who did not hold him in high regard either. There were mutters that Eden had not really been anti-appeasement before the war.'⁹⁵ For political and personal reasons, Eden was deeply suspicious of the behaviour of those who surrounded Churchill, whom he regarded as potential rivals for the crown, and preferred to distance himself from his ebullient leader's pronouncements. However, his appearance at the Albert Hall and at the Hague conferred upon the proceedings the official stamp of party approval. There was no distinction in the eyes of the public between the front ranks of the party on the issue.

⁹² Lord Amery

⁹³ Kilmuir, p.177

⁹⁴ Lord Amery

⁹⁵ Lord Amery

(b) The Majority of the Party

Eden's distaste for the pro-Europe policy pursued by Churchill undoubtedly made the older, more empire-minded Tory backbenchers pause for thought. In addition, other members of Churchill's shadow cabinet were noticeably reticent on the subject of Europe. Whereas Macmillan and Maxwell Fyfe were vociferous supporters of Churchill's pro-Europe policy, Butler⁹⁶ and Stanley⁹⁷ spoke in increasingly qualified terms. A month after Churchill's speech in Zurich, Butler had urged greater economic co-operation with Europe,⁹⁸ and opened the foreign policy debate in early May 1948 with the words 'there must be even more urgency in pursuing this desirable aim'. However, he came to see Churchill's European crusade as an electoral liability.⁹⁹ Similarly, Stanley spoke in support of European union at the inaugural meeting of the UEM and was a member of the United Europe Committee. However, he shared Eden's prejudices¹⁰⁰ and his statements became increasingly more restrained. Their fellow Conservative front bench colleagues in the Commons (Ralph Assheton, Patrick Buchan-Hepburn, Harry Crookshank, Oliver Lyttleton, William Morrison, James Stuart and Henry Willink) were pointedly subdued or silent. The leading Tories in the House of Lords, Salisbury and Woolton, were also notably cautious.

The majority of the party echoed Eden's view that 'the whole European "thing" was insubstantial'.¹⁰¹ Their number

⁹⁶ MP for Saffron Waldon 1929-64

⁹⁷ MP for Westmoreland 1924-45; Bristol 1945-50

⁹⁸ 22.10.46, *HC Deb.* 427.1523

⁹⁹ Shuckburgh diary February 1949, quoted in Michael Charlton, *The Price of Victory*, p.79

¹⁰⁰ Kilmuir, p.186

¹⁰¹ Sir Peter Smithers

fluctuated over the period 1947-50 as the party's enthusiasm for Europe waxed and then waned, but their underlying anxiety over Churchill's European posturing did not abate. Sandys' political antennae were acutely sensitive to this unease; he sought to alleviate internal party tension in his recommendation that all senior Conservatives should be invited to the UEM's inaugural meeting, specifically to avoid any feelings of exclusion or pique among senior Tories. He also pointed out to Churchill on the eve of his inauguration speech that he had heard 'there is a certain amount of feeling among Conservative backbenchers that they have not sufficiently been taken into your confidence about your United Europe Movement and there is in consequence a danger they may become hostile to it'.¹⁰² Sandys added that he thought it would be wise for Churchill to address the 1922 committee in the near future to 'endeavour to secure their good will and support'.

In the period after the first flush of public enthusiasm generated by Churchill's Zurich speech and before the Congress of the Hague in May 1948, anxiety about Churchill's involvement in Europe abated but never completely disappeared. Initially many were borne along on the pro-Europe tide but their enthusiasm was not very well thought out.¹⁰³ As time went on some shifted their stance as Churchill and his supporters persisted in their policy statements on Europe that were long on eloquence but short on substance, and frequently seemed to commit the party to a drastic departure in its traditional approach to Europe. The sceptics firmly believed 'of course, nothing will ever come of it, and probably just as well'.¹⁰⁴ 'Doubts crystallized a bit at the Hague

¹⁰² Sandys to Churchill, 17.4.47, quoted in Martin Gilbert: *Never Despair* (London 1988), p.321

¹⁰³ Lord Colyton

¹⁰⁴ John Hay

Conference',¹⁰⁵ but these reservations never led to the formation of a Conservative centrist group to counter Churchill and his fellow enthusiasts: it was rather a section of the party.¹⁰⁶ 'Feelings ranged from dislike to suspicion to wariness'¹⁰⁷ - outspoken opposition came from the diehard wing of the party.

The Sceptics tended to be of an older political generation who wanted to rescue Europe from her post-war impotence, and to help unite the continent under British leadership, by association with the British Commonwealth - an approach favoured by Eden and other leading Conservatives. In this they supported Bevin's approach to Western Europe. In essence so did Churchill. It boiled down to a question of tone and tactics. Thus when Attlee stated, 'Western Europe cannot live by itself as an economic unit ... hence the desire for wider integration with Africa and other overseas territories and with the great Western democracies and with our own Dominions',¹⁰⁸ he was voicing the Conservative sceptics' creed for relations with Europe. While supporting Western European integration in the abstract, the Sceptics favoured Bevin's gradualist, inter-governmental approach, 'rather than to have some kind of dramatic meeting with a concrete plan where probably all the difficulties of the plan would come out most clearly and all the details would cause dissension ... Union of Europe is a fruitful idea ... [but] we must be careful not to think that it is something exclusive, and something that excludes the rest of the world.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Lord Amery

¹⁰⁶ Lord Amery

¹⁰⁷ John Hay

¹⁰⁸ 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.418-429

¹⁰⁹ Attlee, 23.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.615

(c) The Reasons for Conservative Ambivalence:

There existed on both sides of the House a profound feeling that the value of British institutions had been reconfirmed by their survival in the crucible of war, together with a realization that Britain's salvation in the recent conflict had lain with two non-European nations, Russia and America. There existed, too, the feeling that twice in the past fifty years Britain had become deeply embroiled in the continent, and 'each time it had had disagreeable results'.¹¹⁰ The Conservative party's tradition of colonial connections reinforced these MPs' recent service experience. The continuing conviction that the British Empire and emerging Commonwealth was the mainstay of Britain's great power status, and that this unit had a viable future, provided a powerful counterweight to the lure of Europe. Therefore, it was felt, Britain should not ally herself too closely with the continent.

For some of these MPs, their personal support for Churchill was ambivalent. Although Churchill and his supporters had ruthlessly weeded out party opponents in the selection process, aided by the failure of many former Chamberlain men to be reelected in 1945, there existed an 'anti-Churchill' rump after the War.¹¹¹ Of the Sceptics, 35 had supported Neville Chamberlain in 1940, and only two Churchill (Drewe and Winterton). There was an attempt to oust Churchill as party leader in 1947,¹¹² and renewed rumblings against his leadership following the Conservatives' defeat in the South Hammersmith by-election in February 1949.¹¹³ However, in the main, dissatisfaction against his leadership was confined to

¹¹⁰ Sir Richard Body interview with author

¹¹¹ Lord Amery; Somerset de Chair interview with author

¹¹² Stuart, p.146-7

¹¹³ Macmillan, p.287

private grumbles that 'the Old Boy is past it', not active intriguing to replace him.¹¹⁴

The Anti-Europeans:

As the euphoria created by Churchill's ringing rhetoric subsided, and calm reflection reasserted itself, so too did deep unease at the public utterances by some on the Tory front bench. Eden's obvious reservations and the silence from other respected members of Churchill's informal shadow cabinet confirmed many Tories in their gut feeling that their leader's attachment to European integration was woefully misplaced. Among a small section of the party this disquiet hardened into a deep-seated antipathy towards European federation, with or without Britain.¹¹⁵ These MPs developed a hearty dislike of the Council of Europe¹¹⁶ on the grounds that it was an international pressure group¹¹⁷, but it was not until the Conservatives forced a debate on Labour's refusal to attend the Paris talks on the Schuman Plan that this opposition to European integration came into the open.

These MPs tended to be stalwart supporters of the Empire, for whom Britain's imperial record was a source of considerable pride and achievement; they favoured increasing collaboration with the Commonwealth because this would not restrict Britain's freedom of action. They shared the view that every time Britain became entangled with Europe, the result was

¹¹⁴ Lord Glendevon

¹¹⁵ Legge-Bourke, FAC 5.5.54

¹¹⁶ The first meeting of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe was in August 1949.

¹¹⁷ Sir Herbert Williams, *HC Deb.*480.1458 and Legge-Bourke *HC Deb.*480.1479, 13.11.50

disagreeable.¹¹⁸ They were therefore determined that Britain should retain her historic aloofness from the Continent. This was not a large group, and its parliamentary opposition tended to be subdued. It was rare that these MPs' antipathy to Europe emerged in debate or at question time. More usually they confined their criticism to party committees or discreet words to the Whips. This does not mean that their convictions were any less deeply held.

The following Conservatives came to be stoutly opposed to Europe in the 1945 Parliament:

Max Aitken
Beverley Baxter
Eric Gandar-Dower
Harry Legge-Bourke
Anthony Marlowe
Arthur Marsden
Sir John Mellor
Stephen McAdden
Kenneth Pickthorn
Waldron Smithers

The first seven MPs on this list all gave notice to the Conservative Leadership that they opposed American sponsorship of closer ties with the Continent by voting against Marshall Aid in 1948. The influence of the right-wing press was apparent: Anthony Marlowe was the son of Thomas Marlowe, former editor of the *Daily Mail*; Max Aitken was Beaverbrook's son and Beverley Baxter, another Canadian and journalist for the Beaverbrook stable, was a crony. Despite his membership of Churchill's personal war-time clique, Beaverbrook vehemently opposed the Tory leader's crusade, even going to the lengths of directing his newspapers to avoid any coverage of the issue in their columns in the 1950s. Kenneth Pickthorn was another Tory who developed decidedly anti-European views.

¹¹⁸ Sir Richard Body

An intellectual and former Cambridge don who was once described by Oliver Stanley as 'God's gift to Socialism',¹¹⁹ his acerbic tongue and sarcastic manner was not to every one's taste. Like Eden, Pickthorn was strictly a 'Concert of Europe' Conservative, who came to be deeply distrustful of those who supported a more active role in Europe. He once stormed out of a Conservative backbench committee discussion on Europe, 'complaining that the smell of *paté de foie gras*, and clink of glasses was making him feel nauseous'.¹²⁰

The Motivation of the Sceptics:

Part of the problem was Churchill. There continued a residue of distrust of Churchill, who was evidently not a Tory: 'A Grand Whig!'.¹²¹ Baxter, Mellor and Marlowe had supported Chamberlain in 1940. In addition, Churchill's message on Europe appeared confused. 'Nobody outside of an intimate circle knew what he thought about Europe ... To the backbenches it simply seemed that he was saying that Europe was a good thing and should set itself up on better lines than before, and that the Empire was a good thing and should continue to be such. How he proposed to reconcile the two was unclear.'¹²² However, this lack of clarity - vital if Churchill and Sandys were to carry the motley collection of European politicians along with their crusade - alienated the anti-Europeans, unused perhaps to the apparent chicanery that accompanies diplomatic negotiations.

A discernible thread of anti-American feeling united these opponents of closer links with Europe; there was also a

¹¹⁹ Lord Glendevon

¹²⁰ Sir Peter Smithers

¹²¹ Enoch Powell interview with author

¹²² Sir Peter Smithers

noticeable anti-UNO flavour in their views. They were strong suspicious of American encouragement for European union. Did America see Britain as a second-class nation, in the same category as the prostrate and morally bankrupt nations of Western Europe? The idea that Britain was no longer a power of the first rank, and fit only to be, as Bevin once expressed it, 'a cog in the European wheel' was deeply insulting. To the anti-Europeans it seemed that America was trying to hurry European integration to provide the excuse for another retreat into the 'splendid isolation' of the years following the Great War - a concern they shared with Bevin and the Foreign Office. These MPs were consistently opposed to what they regarded as American economic imperialism, voting against Bretton Woods and the US loan in 1945;¹²³ however, this vote is not an infallible litmus test of Tory attitudes towards Europe as Boothby, Hollis,¹²⁴ Nutting,¹²⁵ Thorneycroft, Moore,¹²⁶ Savory¹²⁷ and Teeling¹²⁸ also had voted against the party whip on the matter. It was feared that the creation of a United States of Europe was part of America's plan through the GATT to create global free trade without, of course, America lowering its own high tariff walls; Marshall Aid was thus seen as Europe under American tutelage.

These Tories tended to be among the longer serving MPs, although the date of entry into Parliament is not an certain guide to backbenchers' attitudes towards Europe, as Boothby,

¹²³ 47 Conservatives voted against Bretton Woods, with 74 Tories voted against the second motion, despite an Opposition two-line whip instructing MPs to abstain.

¹²⁴ MP for Devizes 1945-55

¹²⁵ MP for Melton Mowbray 1945-56

¹²⁶ MP for Ayr Burghs 1925-50; MP for Ayrshire and Bute 1950-64.

¹²⁷ MP (UU) for Queen's University, Belfast 1940-50; MP for South Antrim 1950-55

¹²⁸ MP for Brighton 1944-50; MP for Brighton Pavillion 1950-69.

MacDonald and Cuthbert Headlam¹²⁹ proved.¹³⁰ They also tended to be the more vocal supporters of imperial preference and pride in Empire - again Boothby, the Amerys, MacDonald, Moore and Peter Smithers are exceptions. Support for imperial preference and distrust of the United States did not automatically rule out support for Europe, but such feelings tended to make those harbouring such thoughts much less inclined to do so. Mostly, 'they saw it as a straight case of either/or. If that were so, there was no doubt which it should be'.¹³¹ Britain's post-war recovery and salvation lay in developing her links with Commonwealth and Empire, not with some untried notion of European union.

The idea of Empire was all-important to these men. It was 'still the main religion of the Tory party'.¹³² In marked contrast to the opportunities offered by the Empire and Commonwealth, to these Tories

'Europe was a basket case. Not to put too fine a point on it, the French were regarded with contempt after their abject performance in 1940 and during the Vichy years. The Germans were regarded with intense dislike, though not with the bitter hatred which I remember after World War I ... The Italians had run away pitiably in North Africa and had been panicked by a couple of British cruisers into sinking their own fleet, through sheer incompetence ... Charming people, but no one took them seriously ... There was not much else. But the Empire, all told, had come up trumps in a tight corner, [although] nobody actually said all this in public. It is difficult to realise today just how powerful [the

¹²⁹ MP for Barnards Castle 1924-29, 1931-35; MP for Newcastle-upon-Tyne 1940-51

¹³⁰ All were elected to Parliament in 1924.

¹³¹ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³² Lord Amery

Empire] was, in the national mind and particularly in Conservative thinking, right up to the early Sixties. Many of us thought ... that the concept could be revived and indeed could take on a new and greater dimension in the form of the Commonwealth. This would give Britain a part more in keeping with her post-war capabilities, would give free rein to the political aspirations of the Colonial Empire and the Dominions, and would give us a distinctive position in the modern geopolitical scene. It was attractive from every point of view.'¹³³

These MPs did not share Macmillan's recurrent fear of Germany dominating a United Europe. As the 1940s progressed, there was a growing Conservative awareness of a revival of German economic competition in British overseas markets, but 'Germany looked altogether too decrepit still to be thought of as a threat, and the Germans of those days were distressingly apologetic'.¹³⁴ As for the notion of a Communist United Europe: 'certainly the Communist threat in Europe, particularly in France and Italy, was perceived as being much more substantial than it really was, [but] I doubt whether [this] idea crossed the horizon at any time.'¹³⁵ Europe 'did not appear to many people to require much thought!'.¹³⁶ Insofar as they considered the issue at all, faced with the idea of Europe uniting without Britain, these diehard opponents of European union entertained the historic feeling that a Europe united without Britain was a danger to this country and Britain should therefore try to prevent it happening.¹³⁷

¹³³ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³⁴ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³⁵ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³⁶ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³⁷ Sir Peter Smithers

Summary:

From the start there were internal Conservative tensions on the preferred approach to 'Europe', between the enthusiasts, the pro-Commonwealthers, the sceptics and the 'out-and-out antis'.¹³⁸ So long as it appeared that the Conservatives would not have to take 'Europe' seriously, these remained mere undercurrents of opinion. However, when faced with the reality of Europe in the shape of the Schuman Plan, the Conservative party was forced to confront the issue. Then 'came the divergence on principle'.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ John Hay

¹³⁹ Lord Amery

CHAPTER 3: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND EUROPE:
IN OPPOSITION 1948-50

Although the post-war bipartisan foreign policy did not extend to the issue of European union, the Conservative Europeanists did secure notable success in forcing a reluctant Labour government to acknowledge the momentum for European integration on the Continent. Conservative politicians were instrumental in organizing the Congress at the Hague in 1948, and in pressing Bevin to agree to the creation of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. Thanks to Churchill's initiative, supported by the Conservative delegates, the West Germans were admitted to this Assembly and their right to a voice in international affairs was recognized. Indeed, at times it appeared that Churchill and his colleagues at the Council of Europe were running an unofficial foreign policy from Strasbourg.

As the Russian military threat to Western Europe appeared increasingly menacing (with the arming of the East German 'police' and the outbreak of the Korean war), Churchill seized international attention with his demand in August 1950 for the immediate creation of a European army under a unified command with a single Defence Minister. This did not enjoy the same success as Churchill's earlier suggestions. The British government refused to participate in discussions about the form the European Army should take, while American demands for West German rearmament led to French insistence on an elaborate supranational structure: the proposed European Defence Community, known as the Plevin Plan, envisaged the integration of national units at the lowest possible level.

The Move towards Europe: Labour vs Conservative

In January 1948, following the breakdown of the Conference of Foreign Ministers the previous month, Bevin signalled that he

was more favourably disposed towards European integration.¹ Influenced by ideas from the Continent (to which Churchill was giving such prominence), Bevin hoped that, by organizing a Western European system, 'backed by the power of the Commonwealth and the Americas, it should be possible to develop our own power and influence to equal that of the United States of America and the USSR ... by giving a spiritual lead now we should be able to carry out our task in a way which will show clearly that we are not subservient to the US or the Soviet Union,'² Further evidence of the Labour government's determination to press ahead with a more positive approach to Europe came with negotiations with the French and the Benelux countries which culminated in the Brussels Treaty (March 1948). In negotiating this treaty, the Labour Government was 'consciously borrowing some of the ideas of the [continental] Federalists ...; that there should be a Parliament, for instance, and that it should cope with all kinds of social and economic matters which would not normally be in a Treaty ... short of accepting their actual supranational element which we thought ... was not acceptable to Great Britain.'³ These were also the ideas to which Churchill was giving such prominence.

Although Labour's move towards Europe had been welcomed by the Tories,⁴ the Europeanists remained impatient at the government's caution in seizing the lead in Europe.⁵ The continental federalists too were disappointed in the Brussels Treaty, which was only integrated on the military side (on other matters it remained an alliance), and in the 'leisurely

¹ see 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.383-409

² Bevin Cabinet paper, drafted by Gladwyn Jebb 4.1.48 and 5.1.48, quoted in Michael Charlton: *The Price of Victory*, p.54

³ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.55

⁴ see 22-23.1.48 *HC Deb.*446.383-622

⁵ Nutting *HC Deb.*446.409-413 and Mott-Radclyffe *HC Deb.*446.497-502, 22.1.48

consideration' by the Treaty powers of a Franco-Belgian proposal for a European Consultative Assembly and a British counter proposal for a European Council on an inter-government level.⁶ Lord Gladwyn, then a senior Foreign Office adviser to Bevin, recalled, 'Despairing of the British government joining some kind of federal Europe organized their own and got Churchill actually to lead the Great Congress at the Hague, which met to form a real European entity and unity.'⁷

This remark is misleading: in reality, it was Sandys who had determined to contact the federalists, and together with Retinger lobbied to such effect that the 'counter show'⁸ at the Hague was organized. Lord Gladwyn's comment also implies that Churchill was a dupe in the federalists' plans. This was not the case. Churchill and Sandys fully realised the federalists' aims but were intent on channelling their energy and drive, as well as the power of their organization, towards this exciting new concept. Both felt that to specify too rigid a form for future European relations would be counter-productive; the critical factor was to harness the emotional appeal of the Idea. Bevin's initiative in inter-government co-operation was thus sidetracked and overshadowed by the glamour of Churchill and the excitement his campaign generated on the Continent. With hindsight, Churchill's and Sandys' approach had inherent problems. Indeed, Churchill was aware that Conservative Europeanists were in danger of voicing high-sounding phrases which merely wished away difficulties.⁹ However, out of office, the Conservatives 'could give the appearance of being all things to all men, and the very fact of being in opposition, encouraged opposition to the

⁶ The Earl of Kilmuir: *Political Adventure*, pp.174-5

⁷ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.57

⁸ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.56

⁹ Churchill, 23.1.48 *HC Deb.*446.548-561

government policy regardless of content'.¹⁰ This combined with Churchill's own personal predilection for grandiloquent phrases: 'We are sure this European policy of unity can perfectly well be reconciled with and adjusted to our obligations to the Commonwealth and Empire of which we are the heart and centre'. With such an example, there was little incentive for the Europeanists to grasp the nettle.

'The motive force of Tory opinion in this period [on Europe] were (sic) more a function of the views of one man - Churchill - and less of a conscious party reappraisal or adherence to historic traditions. Churchill had set the pace for thought and action for integration with Europe by virtue of his status as a world statesman'.¹¹ Until the Congress at the Hague, most Tories paid no attention to the lure of Europe. Britain's own troubles, although considerably less severe economically, politically and spiritually than those endured by the Continental countries, were sufficiently absorbing that 'the ordinary Tory did not have a clue'.¹² The Congress at the Hague changed that dramatically. Although many still only had the haziest idea of what was being proposed, the topic attracted enormous attention,¹³ and to a great extent unreasoned support.¹⁴

(a) The Conservative Enthusiasm for Europe

With the Communist coup in Prague in February 1948 providing further stimulus to discussion on West European integration,

¹⁰ Jeremy Moon: *European Integration in British Politics 1950-63* (London 1985), p.86

¹¹ Moon, p.86

¹² Lord Colyton

¹³ see FAC 14.4.48

¹⁴ Lord Colyton

Conservative Europeanists continued to set the pace of debate. Against the background of Sandys' 'persistence and perseverance'¹⁵ in the International Committee of the Movement for European Unity¹⁶ to organize a congress of Europe, on 16 March 1948 Boothby, MacDonald, Roberts, and the Labour MPs Shawcross, Mackay and Hale sponsored an EDM calling for Western Union, which stated 'that in the opinion of this House, steps should now be taken in consultation with other members of the British Commonwealth to create in Western Europe a political union strong enough to save European democracy and the values of Western civilization, and a trading area large enough, with the Colonial territories, to enable its component parts to achieve economic recovery and stability.' The motion went on to call for a 'long term policy designed to bring forthwith a Council of Western Europe consisting of representatives of the governments of the 16 participating countries in the European Recovery Programme, and Western Germany, to lay down the lines of common action'. The motion ended by calling for a constituent assembly to be formed to frame a constitution for a democratic federation of Europe with 'defined powers with respect to ... external affairs, defence, currency, customs and the planning and production, trade, power and transport'.

The motion was 'not without importance', as it put in specific terms an aspect of foreign policy 'which has not been put in concrete terms before [and] represents quite an advance as it has brought together many different points of view'.¹⁷ Thanks

¹⁵ Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune*, p.156

¹⁶ in which Churchill's UEM committee cooperated with the French Council for United Europe, chaired by M. Herriot; the Economic League for European Co-operation, based in Brussels under M. van Zeeland; the European Union of Federalists, whose chairman was Brugmans, a Dutchman, and the Nouvelles Equipes Internationales, composed of Christian Democrats. Kilmuir, p.174

¹⁷ Mackay to William Ross, Labour MP, 1.4.48, Mackay papers

to the efforts of Conservative and Labour sponsors,¹⁸ over the following weeks¹⁹ this EDM was signed by approximately 200 MPS, over 60 of whom were Conservatives. The sheer number of signatures - gathered in the Easter recess - reflected the interest and support for Europe being generated by the forthcoming Congress.

It was a fairly radical document for any Tory to sign; despite the strong federalist tone, the following were not deterred:

Tufton Beamish
Norman Bower
Malcolm Bullock
Frederick Burden
Edward Carson
Neill Cooper-Key
Uvedale Corbett
Viscountess Davidson
Lord Willoughby de Eresby
Douglas Dodds-Parker
David Eccles
Walter Fletcher
Connelly Gage (UU)
David Gammans
Sir Cuthbert Headlam
Derek Heathcoate Amory
Quintin Hogg
Christopher Hollis
Sir Arthur Howard
Hugh Fraser
James Hutchison
Jocelyn Lucas
Edward Keeling
Anthony Langford-Holt

¹⁸ see Mackay papers 1.4.48

¹⁹ 16.3.48 - 27.4.48

Martin Lindsay
'Toby' Low
Hugh Lucas-Tooth
Commander John Maitland
Douglas Marshall
John Maude
Frank Medlicott (NL&C)
Charles Mott-Radclyffe
Godfrey Nicholson
Basil Nield
Allan Noble
Ian Orr-Ewing
Christopher Peto
Oliver Poole
David Price-White
Sir Stanley Reed
David Renton (NL&C)
Frank Sanderson
Walter Smiles (UU)
Alec Spearman
Ernest Taylor
William Teeling
Peter Thorneycroft
Colin Thornton-Kemsley
Derek Walker-Smith
Arthur Vere Harvey
Wavell Wakefield
George Ward
Gerald Williams²⁰

These Conservatives form an interesting cross section of political generations and outlooks. The list contained the independent souls, such as Lindsay, and inveterate members of ginger groups (Ian Orr-Ewing and Vere Harvey). Some were

²⁰ EDM No. 33: European Union. *Orders of the Day and Notices of Motions* Vol.3 (1947-48) 2274

newcomers to the European idea, while others, such as Hogg, had given the matter considerable thought. Approximately half were first elected to Parliament in 1945 and youth was prominently represented; however, pre-war MPs were also conspicuously present: the Economist was surprised the 'old fashioned Tory' Sir Cuthbert Headlam²¹ had signed. Of the older Tories, some were inveterate supporters of Churchill; others had supported Chamberlain in the Munich crisis and in May 1940 (Wakefield, Orr-Ewing, Taylor, Davidson, Reed and Sanderson) - there was possibly an element in their support of Churchill's European crusade, as with Maxwell Fyfe, of wishing to live down that opposition. Some were passionate believers in the continuing cause of Empire. To read the names Vere Harvey,²² Dodds-Parker,²³ Carson,²⁴ Gammans²⁵ and Fletcher²⁶ seems surprising, in view of their later second thoughts about the wisdom of closer economic and political ties with Europe, and Dodds-Parker's and Teeling's support of the Suez Group. However, their signatures were symptomatic of the prevailing Conservative optimism that a way could be found to reconcile the old loyalties of Empire and the new obligations of Europe, using imperial preference to integrate the two trading systems.

Five of those who signed later had second thoughts about the strong commitment to Europe embodied in this EDM: an amendment sponsored by Major Harry Legge-Bourke,²⁷ clearly concerned at any diminution of national sovereignty, stressed 'agreement'

²¹ MP for Barnards Castle 1924-29 and 1931-35; Newcastle upon Tyne North 1940-51

²² MP for Chester, Macclesfield 1945-71

²³ MP for Banbury 1945-59; Cheltenham 1964-74

²⁴ MP for Isle of Thanet 1945-53

²⁵ MP for Hornsey 1941-57

²⁶ MP for Bury and Radcliffe 1945-55

²⁷ MP for Isle of Ely 1945-73

rather than mere 'consultation' with the Commonwealth. This was seconded by Mott-Radclyffe,²⁸ Beamish,²⁹ Low,³⁰ Lucas,³¹ and Vere Harvey. Mott-Radclyffe was to become a member of the Conservative delegation to the Council of Europe in the 1950s, but throughout his political career he remained a 'strong moderate'. Although he firmly believed in the benefit of closer links with Europe, he was concerned that at no point should Britain distance herself from the Commonwealth and Empire, her historic source of strength. Low's commitment to Europe was similarly qualified. Vere Harvey attended the Hague Congress and became a member of the all-party parliamentary committee on Europe; his later opposition to the Schuman Plan demonstrated that while he fully supported continental moves towards integration, he disapproved of closer British ties with Europe which smacked of federalism. (see below). Ralph Glyn³² signed the second amendment to the Western Union EDM, put forward by the Labour MP Richard Stokes, which accepted co-operation with Europe, but rejected federation.

The Labour Government's reluctance to be pulled into Europe willy-nilly was increasingly obvious. MPs from all parties felt it was particularly important to have a debate on European integration before the Hague Congress.³³ Churchill was noticeably reticent in his support, warning that although he thought it a good thing that the motion be debated, he himself was not prepared to favour one particular structure or

²⁸ MP for Windsor 1942-70

²⁹ MP for Lewes 1945-74

³⁰ MP for Blackpool North 1945-62

³¹ MP for Portsmouth South 1945-66

³² MP for Abingdon 1924-53

³³ Thorneycroft, FAC 21.4.48

another.³⁴ He remained determinedly aloof from the parliamentary pressure to debate the issue in the succeeding fortnight,³⁵ seeking instead to counter government criticism that his was a one-man crusade by demonstrating the widespread backbench support for the topic. Despite its unwillingness to grant parliamentary time to debate European union,³⁶ not least because of a suspicion on the Labour backbenches 'about anything that can get such strong support from our opponents',³⁷ the government was obliged to bow to intense parliamentary pressure, orchestrated through Mackay's all-party group. The group's Conservative officers, Boothby, Roberts and MacDonald played a prominent part and helped to arrange the names of members wishing to speak, and coordinated and assisted in the preparation of speeches.³⁸

The EDM on Western union was debated during the second day of the foreign policy debate on 5 May, an unusual mark of attention for a backbench motion. In the main Conservatives showed themselves enthusiasts for membership of a European association or integration with Europe.³⁹ However, again following Churchill's example, every Tory speaker with the exception of Boothby, sought refuge in statements which deliberately avoided specific examination of Britain's exact role in a united Europe. Generalities successfully concealed any uncomfortable incompatibility of their traditional beliefs and their new-found support for such a far-reaching notion. Boothby disdained such obfuscation, elaborating his arguments for the need for a planned European economy combined with the

³⁴ FAC 14.4.48

³⁵ FAC 14.4.48 and Butler, FAC 21.4.48

³⁶ FAC 21.4.48

³⁷ Thomas Braddock to Mackay 1.4.48, Mackay papers

³⁸ All-party group minutes 21.4.48, Mackay papers

³⁹ *HC Deb.*450.1270-1392

development and regional and federation of European colonial territories. Calling on the government to make plain its real intentions towards Europe, he argued passionately for a positive union, supported by the British Commonwealth and the United States and not just for immediate political or economic ends, which he felt would fail, or for defensive ends, which would lead to war.⁴⁰

Despite the Europeanists' success in helping to generate parliamentary interest and debate on European union which influenced Bevin and the Foreign Office in their negotiations on the Brussels Treaty, the Labour government was not persuaded into accepting the available vehicle for Europe before the Congress at the Hague. However, thanks in large part to the Conservative Europeanists, the government increasingly was on the defensive: coming immediately before the Hague meeting, the cross-party support for the EDM on Western Union had a considerable impact upon continental politicians 'where people generally doubt whether British support for any real form of European federation is quite genuine'.⁴¹ The instruction to Labour MPs to stay away from the Congress, issued by their National Executive Committee, appeared motivated by pique, and also left the stage free for Churchill.

(b) Conservative Doubts Surface:

The Conservative Europeanists had not won their colleagues' wholehearted approval. As enthusiasm for European integration surged within the party, a sizeable number were entertaining doubts about the wisdom of Churchill's campaign. Eden had already publicly endorsed Bevin's cautious approach, implicitly rebuking his more enthusiastic colleagues.

⁴⁰ *HC Deb.* 450.1371-1382

⁴¹ Mackay to Ross 1.4.48, Mackay papers

However, Eden was intent on preserving a facade of unity with Churchill: he wanted 'the closest and most effective collaboration, economic, political and cultural, with all the free nations of Europe,' but '[t]hat collaboration can take any of a number of forms ... Some people speak of a united Europe and others again speak of a union of the nations of Western Europe. In my judgement, each and all of these objectives can be reconciled.'⁴² His reservations emerged again in his speech in the debate on Western Union, when he again made association with Europe conditional upon the Empire and tried to temper the Europeanists' enthusiasms by reminding them of Britain's global responsibilities which ruled out any exclusive association with Europe. Clearly hoping to discourage those who pinned their hopes on European political union forming the bulwark of Europe's defences in Europe, Eden reasserted that ultimately Britain's security lay with America (an uncomfortable, indeed unpalatable, truth for some Tories). Trying to play down Conservative aims, Eden concluded, 'We seek the same results in foreign policy which the Foreign Secretary is at this time trying to pursue'.⁴³

This scarcely coded public criticism echoed private Conservative misgivings which surfaced in committee about the direction Churchill and his fellow enthusiasts were taking the party.⁴⁴ A 'considerable portion' of the party 'was doubtful and even anxious about [the] movement' on the grounds that it might prejudice Britain's position as head of the Commonwealth and Empire.⁴⁵ Others criticised the EDM as appearing to 'jump all the fences at once', and tended to by-pass ministerial

⁴² 22.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.423

⁴³ 5.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1270-1280

⁴⁴ see FAC 14.4.48

⁴⁵ Macmillan, p.159

responsibility in international affairs.⁴⁶ MPs were reminded that the League of Nations had shown the dangers of embarking on grandiose schemes before the foundations had been properly laid.⁴⁷

The Congress at The Hague

Before his departure for the Hague Churchill was made aware of these hesitations about his role as leader of the UEM, and was sufficiently concerned to make an unusual appearance before the Foreign Affairs Committee in mid-April. He implicitly acknowledged that the party was not united with his qualifications, 'the Conservative party as a *whole* welcomed the *broad* aims of his and other movements'. (my italics). But he rebuffed private criticisms of unofficial 'European' action (clearly aimed at Sandys), stating that he was content to leave individuals to work out their actions as they pleased. Once more he stressed his vision of the growth of Europe as providing an opportunity for Britain to resume on a new plane her moral leadership in world affairs, repeating his view that Britain's cultural and political inheritance, together with her geographic position, placed her as the natural focus for developments in Europe.⁴⁸

The Congress at the Hague from 7-10 May was a resounding success. Organized by the whole European movement, it was attended by 730 delegates, including several former Prime Ministers, 29 former foreign ministers and several ministers in office. A strong Conservative delegation attended, but it was not numerous.⁴⁹ These delegates enjoyed themselves

⁴⁶ Pickthorn, FAC 21.4.48

⁴⁷ Pickthorn

⁴⁸ FAC 14.4.48

⁴⁹ 28 sitting Conservative MPs, 7 Conservative candidates and Leo Amery

immensely: 'It was a jolly good party!'⁵⁰ The opportunity of being entertained by friends, with the chance to renew old friendships and make new ones underlined the fun and spectacle of the occasion; the venue offered a marked contrast to a joyless Britain, where all seemed grey, arid and regulated.⁵¹ Eden also attended, more out of a sense of duty than any enthusiasm for the cause,⁵² and his presence, despite the contingent of 41 Labour MPs who defied 'Bevin's *diktat*',⁵³ reinforced the impression that the Conservative party closely identified itself with the emerging European cause and favoured European integration, whereas the Labour party did not.

'The guidelines of what was later done over the next twenty or so years to achieve various measures of European Unity were in fact first laid down at the Hague in Resolutions and Declarations'.⁵⁴ The central figure was Churchill,⁵⁵ the main speaker, placing himself at the head of the European unity movement which was endorsed by so many continental leaders and politicians. Conservatives played important roles in the Conference's committees: Maxwell Fyfe, who 'wanted to say something on human rights',⁵⁶ joined the cultural committee; Manningham-Buller acted as Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Political Committee, which considered the draft political resolution. Behind the scenes, Sandys played a vital part through his key position as Chairman of the International Committee of the Movements for European Unity;

⁵⁰ Lord Eccles

⁵¹ Macmillan, p.161

⁵² Lord Amery

⁵³ John Hay

⁵⁴ John Hay

⁵⁵ Kilmuir, p.175

⁵⁶ Kilmuir, p.175

he was still dealing with European matters referred to him by his father-in-law. Sandys fought hard at the Hague to resist continental efforts to promote resolutions favouring a supranational approach to unity, but he was prepared to go beyond Churchill in promoting union with Western Europe. The principal outcome of the Congress was the resolution for the creation of a new European institution, a parliamentary assembly. In the eyes of some Conservatives, no less significant was the decision ('though the papers made little of it'⁵⁷) to promote the East European exiles from observers to full delegates. 'It shows that the movement is intended not just as a strategic bridgehead for the United States, but to serve the political and moral idea of Europe itself'.⁵⁸

It was mainly as a result of Sandys' prodigious energies that there emerged from the Congress 'a movement for something more extensive than the Brussels Treaty organization'.⁵⁹ Together with Paul-Henri Spaak (former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Belgium) and Retinger, he lobbied with such effect⁶⁰ that the most spectacular of the Hague resolutions was achieved. His efforts were backed by the Europeanists at home who continued to harry the government. The highly public manner in which Churchill and his UEM committee chose to put before Attlee the results of the conference and its main proposals was a deliberate reproof: the theatre of their procession from the House of Commons to Downing Street⁶¹ undoubtedly appealed to Churchill's sense of mischief, but also conveyed the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction felt by pro-European politicians at Labour's reaction to

⁵⁷ Julian Amery to John Biggs-Davison 20.5.48, Biggs-Davison papers

⁵⁸ Amery to Biggs-Davison

⁵⁹ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.57

⁶⁰ John Pomian ed.: *Memoirs of an Eminence Grise*, pp.222-3

⁶¹ Macmillan, p.163

continental events. On their return from the Hague the Conservative members of Mackay's all-party group for European Union endorsed the committee's proposal to put down a motion asking for the convening of a European assembly, deliberately coinciding⁶² with efforts to secure the tabling of similar motions in other European parliaments. Support for this motion was widely canvassed.

(a) The Reaction within the Conservative Party

Behind the scenes Conservatives MPs were increasingly agitated. By the late 1940s the Tories considered themselves very much 'back in business', (manifest in their hopes of success in the South Hammersmith by-election of 1949). This improvement in the party's fortunes, together with the more concrete forms of inter-governmental organization which were developing (such as the OEEC), encouraged a restrained approach to Europe.

Even the enthusiasts had been concerned by the division at the Hague between those who favoured a confederal Europe and the majority who wanted to press ahead with federal arrangements.⁶³ Although great care had been paid to the wording of the various articles to bridge the gap,⁶⁴ they realized if the Conservative party intended to stay inside European Parliamentary Union, which was heavily involved on the side of federation, it would have to work very hard to control that view.⁶⁵ Backbench MPs were also well-aware that Churchill's leadership and Eden's presence at the Hague were bound to give the impression that the party was broadly in

⁶² Mackay papers 23.7.48

⁶³ see FAC 3.6.48

⁶⁴ Manningham-Buller, FAC 3.6.48

⁶⁵ Roberts, FAC 3.6.48

favour of the Hague resolutions, while the emotional appeal of a United Europe concealed the stark fact that people at large had simply no understanding of 'what sovereignty involved, nor how the status of the British parliament might be affected'.

The pervading backbench desire was for an urgent clarification of policy - it is revealing of the confusion within the Tory ranks that Butler thought it necessary to state his understanding of Churchill's conception - and leading Tories appreciated the necessity of sustaining a positive party line, 'which could be used by members, speakers and candidates'.⁶⁶ As Pickthorn pointed out, the party could not afford a split on so major an issue. European unity was the political issue of the hour, and the Conservatives - in marked contrast to the Labour party - appeared to be giving a coherent and positive lead on the matter. On one point the party was united: the Empire was not to be by-passed.

(b) The Reaction within the Government

For the British Government the outcome of the Hague, with the final resolution calling for the establishment of a European Assembly, was a disagreeable surprise, reinforced by the spectacle of Churchill revelling in the platform provided by the Congress. In deputations to the Prime Minister on their return, the Europeanists found Attlee friendly at first, and felt he 'could have been pushed further'.⁶⁷ However, as Attlee deferred Bevin on foreign affairs, Bevin's obduracy was all-important.

Human emotions and frailties entered the political picture. Bevin was piqued by Churchill's behaviour: 'Bevin, the Foreign Office and the Government regarded the Hague as simple grandstanding by Churchill to compensate for the loss of the

⁶⁶ Butler, FAC 3.6.48

⁶⁷ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Violet Bonham Carter to Churchill 24.6.48

British General Election!’⁶⁸ ‘He probably thought Churchill was taking advantage of his reputation to push ideas that had not been fully worked out, and on which he, Ernie, would have had some suggestions to make ... There was a certain jealousy [and] irritation at Churchill’s intervention in the field of Foreign Affairs.’⁶⁹ Bevin’s objections went beyond the personal level. At the outset ‘there is no doubt he appreciated very clearly the need to bring France and Germany into a state of mutual understanding and co-operation ... Then as the negotiations developed he had a slight fear that the Parliament might take too much upon itself, that they would get out of hand, and the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe would not be able to keep the Parliamentarians in check ... He feared it would become a nuisance.’⁷⁰ He ‘looked with some suspicion at any movement which might involve a European institution composed of democratically elected bodies or even representatives of democratically elected Parliaments; anything that needed to be done for European unity could surely be better done by Governments working through ministers, ambassadors, and officials’.⁷¹ There was also an attempt among Socialists generally to promote the concept that liberties and prosperities of Europe were only safe in Socialist hands.⁷²

But under pressure from their Brussels Pact allies (in particular the Belgians and the French), supported by Conservative lobbying at home and abroad and deputations from his own backbenches,⁷³ Bevin in succeeding months was obliged

⁶⁸ John Hay; see also Pomian ed., p.220

⁶⁹ Sir Roderick Barclay in Charlton, p.78

⁷⁰ Sir Roderick Barclay in Charlton, p.75

⁷¹ Sir Roderick Barclay in Charlton, p.75

⁷² Macmillan, pp.158-60; see also Healey in Charlton, p.120

⁷³ Christopher Mayhew in Charlton, p.76

to acquiesce in the establishment of a European assembly, despite his determination that Britain 'shouldn't go into any kind of federal thing'. 'However, he did not wish to veto, and felt obliged "to give them something and I think we'll give them this talking shop in Strasbourg".'⁷⁴ Labour's acceptance of the Council of Europe encouraged the optimists to hope that the government would do everything to make the assembly a success. The pessimists within the European camp feared that Labour's acceptance, only to 'allow the plan to fade out in failure or neglect would be a disaster for Europe and a fatal blow to British post-war policy'.⁷⁵ They appreciated⁷⁶ Bevin's insistence on the preeminence of the Council of Ministers was designed to be a wrecking move. Their concern was well-founded. The prevailing sentiments in Whitehall remained unease or downright hostility, especially in the Treasury and Foreign Office, as Whitehall continued to misjudge the intensity of the mood in Europe: 'A lot of them thought that this was a lot of nonsense anyhow and that we ought to concentrate chiefly on our relations with America and that was the only thing which really mattered; and if the others wanted to get together then, as I think Churchill fundamentally thought, if they really wanted to get together in a supranational organization, well, let them.'⁷⁷

Throughout the remainder of 1948 the Labour Government's consistent drive was to dilute quite deliberately the supranational idea in Europe⁷⁸ which emerged from the Hague. The pressure on Britain to be associated with Europe on the economic front had been gathering in 1947 and 1948 through the

⁷⁴ Christopher Mayhew in Charlton, p.77

⁷⁵ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Lord Layton to Sandys 13.5.48

⁷⁶ Layton to Sandys

⁷⁷ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.57

⁷⁸ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.57

discussions surrounding a Customs Union, paralleled by the political and military aspects of the Treaty of Brussels negotiations. Bevin and Foreign Office officials, who regarded the Customs Union idea as inimical to Britain's Commonwealth interests and her world position, successfully deflected these pressures into the creation of the OEEC. There came a strong indication that the British government's suspicion of organizations outside national government control was hardening into outright hostility, when Spaak's nomination to the Chairmanship of the OEEC was vetoed. Spaak noted in his memoirs: 'Bevin's feelings were undoubtedly influenced in part by his wish to prevent the OEEC from being led by a man whose ideas about the organization of Europe differed from those of the British Government.'⁷⁹

The Foreign Office's guiding principle remained that Britain should not become more involved in Europe than America was prepared to be, for fear that 'if we became involved in the purely European grouping, they were more likely to pull out'⁸⁰ which would leave Britain with the worst of both worlds. The corollary of this anxiety meant that Labour's policy towards Europe throughout this period was directed at combatting the 'endemic US disposition to isolationism'⁸¹ through opposition to anything that detracted from inter-governmental links with the Continent. Churchill shared the Foreign Office's view of the vital necessity of American support in the emerging Cold War. The fundamental difference between them lay in Churchill's conviction of the necessity of Britain 'being there' to give direction, whereas Bevin and the Foreign Office remained convinced that it was a distraction to the main thrust of their inter-governmental efforts through the OEEC and NATO.

⁷⁹ *The Continuing Battle*, p.196

⁸⁰ Lord Sherfield in Charlton, p.59

⁸¹ Lord Sherfield in Charlton, p.59

Churchill's vision and enthusiasm continued to exceed what Bevin and the Foreign Office considered desirable or practicable politics.⁸² Through his support and position as the figurehead of the European Movement, Churchill was running a powerful 'unofficial' foreign policy.⁸³ Thanks to his leadership and Sandys' efforts, there had developed the parallel channel of Europe⁸⁴, encouraging the Europeans to direct their energies into the formation of the Council of Europe, rather than West European union, to achieve their desired goal of supranationality. Labour was fighting a determined rear-guard action, harassed at home by Churchill and the Conservative Europeanists⁸⁵, from within their own party (led by Mackay), and from abroad by the Americans and Europeans. Bevin's tactics were to delay while appearing to be constructive.⁸⁶ He did not attempt to wrest back the initiative by trying to build up the economic and social side of the Brussels Treaty organization.⁸⁷ Bevin's determination to persevere⁸⁸ with his concept of a West European inter-governmental organization, in which America was fully involved, meant that in comparison to continental enthusiasm for the Council of Europe the Labour government appeared the odd-man-out. The Europeans (and that meant predominantly the Federalists), supported by Churchill and Conservative Europeanists, were defining the debate; the fact that Western Union, the OEEC, and NATO (especially after 1952) were served by integrated machinery was obscured.

⁸² Charlton, p.65

⁸³ Charlton, p.65

⁸⁴ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.56

⁸⁵ Lord Sherfield in Charlton, p.58

⁸⁶ Charlton, p.63

⁸⁷ Lord Gladwyn in Charlton, p.56

⁸⁸ Lord Sherfield in Charlton, p.59

The Europeanists and the Conservative Sceptics: The Beginning of 1949

By the beginning of 1949, with an election increasingly in the air (in mid-1949, the Tories led the polls with 46%, compared to Labour's 40%), Tory doubts about the Europeanists' behaviour - principally Churchill's because of his incomparable position - were hardening. Evelyn Shuckburgh recalls being present at an interview between Hector MacNeil, Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, and Butler in February 1949, 'in effect, sharing their concern together about the activities of Churchill on the European scene and thinking it was going to be a great embarrassment to either, whether it was going to be a Labour or Conservative government ... I think they were both thinking that the Council of Europe would be ruined by Churchill's overenthusiastic espousal of Federation.'⁸⁹ Eden certainly endorsed Bevin's view that foreign policy pronouncements were the prerogative of the Foreign Secretary.⁹⁰

The Moderation of Conservative Opinion:

The Conservative Europeanists themselves were also having second thoughts about the direction in which the federalists were heading. Tensions within the British Group of European Parliamentary Union (EPU) became irreconcilable at the Interlaken conference in September 1948 where the five Conservative delegates were 'not prepared to accept any immediate transfer of sovereignty to a European Parliament or a European political authority ... If European union is to come about, as it must, it is not going to be assisted by

⁸⁹ Shuckburgh in Charlton, p.79

⁹⁰ Lord Carr; Lord Glendevon

'fanatical federalists' or constitution-mongers'.⁹¹ On 10 February 1949 a new British all-party group was constituted, marking its formal withdrawal from the EPU.

Conservative reservations were reflected in the change in tone of the cross-party EDM, put down on 23 February 1949. Boothby and MacDonald (vice chairmen) and Roberts (Hon. Secretary) were among the all-party sponsors of this motion which welcomed the steps taken by the signatories of the Brussels Pact to establish a Council of Europe and expressed their opinion that British representation should reflect the relative strengths of the political parties in the House of Commons. No further mention was made of creating a democratic federation of Europe, with defined powers over external affairs, currency, customs and trade, as the ultimate goal. The earlier EDM had envisaged a constituent assembly specifically framing a constitution for such a federation. This motion did not specify the desirable role of the Council of Europe. Altogether it was a far more moderate declaration of Britain's association with Europe.

The motion attracted 24 new Tory signatures, (but 27 of the previous motion did not sign). Fifty-three of the 130 signatures came from the Conservative party and their allies. Those who had already signed the 1948 EDM on West European Union included:

Robert Boothby
Uvedale Corbett
Viscountess Davidson
Lord Willoughby de Eresby
David Eccles
Hugh Fraser
David Gammans
Sir Cuthbert Headlam

⁹¹ MacDonald letter, *Times* 29.9.48

Quintin Hogg
Christopher Hollis
James Hutchison
Edward Keeling
Martin Lindsay
Hugh Lucas-Tooth
Jocelyn Lucas
Sir Peter MacDonald
Frank Medlicott
Charles Mott-Radclyffe
Basil Nield
Ian Orr-Ewing
Peter Roberts
Ernest Taylor
William Teeling
Peter Thorneycroft
Arthur Vere Harvey
Derek Walker-Smith
George Ward
Gerald Williams

The new signatures came from:

Brendon Bracken
William Cuthbert
Barnaby Drayson
William Duthie
Sir Arnold Gridley
Sir Robert Grimston
Sir Patrick Hannon
John Hare
Lancelot Joynson-Hicks
Wing Commander Norman Hulbert
Major Duncan McCallum
Hugh Molson
Sir Thomas Moore
Colonel Ponsonby
Otho Prior-Palmer

Victor Raikes
Roland Robinson
Professor Douglas Savory (UU)
Malcolm Stoddart-Scott
Robert Thorp
Lady Tweedsmuir⁹²

These additions were of an older political generation, with the emphasis firmly on British links with her Empire and Commonwealth, rather than any new forms of association with Europe. In normal circumstances, the Chairmen of the 1922 committee were not given to signing backbench motions: the extraordinary inclusion of Gridley's⁹³ name on the order paper conveyed the official endorsement of the party backbenches upon this more moderate stance. Of the other additional signatories, Bracken⁹⁴ was a Churchill intimate, but one who did not approve of his leader's activities on Europe.⁹⁵ Raikes⁹⁶ had supported Churchill on India in the 1930s; and Hannon⁹⁷ had signed Legge-Bourke's amendment which sought to curtail possible British enthusiasm. In addition, nine of the above signatures had supported Chamberlain in 1940 (Gridley, Hannon, Bracken, Grimston,⁹⁸ Raikes, McCallum,⁹⁹ Ponsonby,¹⁰⁰

⁹² EDM. No.21: European Consultative Assembly. *Orders of the Day and Notices of Motions* (1948-9) 23.2.49

⁹³ MP for Stockport South 1935-55

⁹⁴ MP for Paddington North 1929-45; Bournemouth 1945-1952

⁹⁵ Lord Amery

⁹⁶ MP for South East Essex 1931-45; Liverpool, Wavetree 1945-1950; Liverpool, Garston 1950-57

⁹⁷ MP for Birmingham Molesley 1921-1950

⁹⁸ MP for Westbury 1931-64

⁹⁹ MP for Argyll 1940-58

¹⁰⁰ MP for Sevenoakes 1935-50

Moore and Robinson¹⁰¹). Twenty-seven of those who had supported the 1948 EDM did not sign the second motion. Given the manner in which signatures for EDMs are collected in Westminster, nothing sinister can necessarily be read into the absence of their names. However, it is interesting to note that Noble¹⁰² was Eden's PPS, and Fletcher and Carson took a robust imperialist stance on foreign affairs in the 1950s.

In March 1949 another meeting was organized in Brussels by the European Movement, on a more limited scale to the Hague. This conference was chiefly devoted to matters of organization and to define the immediate programme of propaganda. Macmillan contributed to the plans formulated there, on the basis of his lecture tour of Germany and Italy the previous autumn, where he had found 'growing enthusiasm for the European idea'.¹⁰³ Peter Smithers, prospective Conservative candidate for Winchester¹⁰⁴, was asked to act as Secretary to the group of three preparing a British position (Sandys, Victor Gollanz and Lord Layton). 'Most of the drafting was done by Duncan, who was an extremely meticulous and able draftsman and who would revise a document again and again until he was satisfied.'¹⁰⁵ A major achievement of the Brussels conference, in which Maxwell Fyfe played an extremely important part, was the drafting of a Charter for Human Rights together with the recommendation for the creation of a European Court. At the conference the clear division was increasingly apparent between the French and Belgian view - formal and theoretical, that if Governments could be induced to sign a Treaty obliging them to co-operate, this would compel them to bring their

¹⁰¹ MP for Widnes 1931-35; Blackpool 1935-45; Blackpool South 1945-66

¹⁰² MP for Chelsea 1945-59

¹⁰³ Macmillan, p.163

¹⁰⁴ MP for Winchester 1950-64

¹⁰⁵ Sir Peter Smithers

economies and societies into line with one another and finally to arrive at political unity - and the pragmatic British and Scandinavian view. The British Conservatives argued that until progress had been made with the harmonization of the various European economies and the integration of society there was no chance that political unity could be achieved. A premature Treaty would break down in practice. This fundamental difference of opinion remained unresolved and was to wreck the Council of Europe.¹⁰⁶

The following month the Westminster Conference, devoted to economic and financial matters, was convened under the auspices of ELEC. A number of distinguished economists, both outside and inside the European Movement, attended. The chief questions addressed were currency convertibility, European payments, the organization of basic industries (what was to become the European Coal and Steel Community) and the refugee problem. Both these conferences were preliminaries to the long-awaited convention of the Council of Europe; however, they received scant attention in the press. The post-war shortage of newsprint was largely responsible, but political correspondents recognized that such topics did not sell newspapers. Similarly, these conference recommendations, with the exception of the Charter of Human Rights, fell upon stony ground in Whitehall. The Conservative Europeanists continued to urge the government to take a more favourable attitude towards Europe, in Parliament¹⁰⁷ and outside through such organizations as the British Committee of ELEC, in which Thorneycroft, Macmillan, and Eccles were particularly active; but despite their continuing campaign the Labour government's enmity remained entrenched.

¹⁰⁶ Sir Peter Smithers

¹⁰⁷ eg. Macmillan, Hugh Fraser, Headlam and Foster, 21.7.49, *HC Deb.*467.1570-1689

The Assembly of the Council of Europe

The Statute of the Council of Europe was signed in London on 5 May 1949; the inaugural meeting of the Consultative Assembly was on 10 August 1949. The Conservative members of the British delegation were Churchill, Macmillan, Maxwell Fyfe, Boothby, Eccles, and Sir Ronald Ross (representing the Ulster Unionists), with John Foster¹⁰⁸ and Lord Birkenhead as the Conservative 'substitutes'.

(a) The Conservative Europeanists and the Council of Europe

In Strasbourg the Conservative delegation held the stage, in marked contrast to their position in Westminster. The Consultative Assembly contained most of the leading figures of Free Europe¹⁰⁹ who 'would only listen to the Conservatives because of Churchill. I did feel it was rather awkward for Labour because they were the government and enjoyed a large majority, [but] you had to be there to understand the extent to which Churchill was the spirit of Europe.'¹¹⁰ Thus, as 'the war leader who had helped to save Europe',¹¹¹ Churchill enjoyed an unrivalled position at Strasbourg. Not content to play world statesman, Churchill - to the consternation of his colleagues¹¹² - rapidly assumed the role of party politician.¹¹³ He shared the general 'childish delight' among Tory delegates in a forum in which they could beat Labour.

¹⁰⁸ MP for Chester Northwich 1945-74

¹⁰⁹ Kilmuir, p.178

¹¹⁰ Lord Eccles

¹¹¹ Macmillan, p.159

¹¹² Macmillan, p.175

¹¹³ Macmillan, p.159

As far as the continental delegates were concerned, the Conservative delegates made a valued contribution to the proceedings.¹¹⁴ Maxwell Fyfe served on the committee of fifteen 'to examine and interpret' the Assembly's remit, and was elected chairman of the Legal Committee.¹¹⁵ He made the issue of human rights his special work in the Assembly, calling in the main meeting on 19 August 1948 for a convention setting out 'basic personal rights, to be acknowledged by all governments, and a minimum standard of democratic conduct for all members'. The matter was referred to the Legal Committee, which drafted the Convention of Human Rights, designed to provide 'a moral basis for the activities of the Council', with machinery in the form of a Commission on Human Rights and an International Court.

Macmillan and Eccles served on the political and economic committees respectively. Boothby's work on the Committee of General Affairs, to which questions on political authority were referred, was particularly important because of its work on federalist demands for the creation of a political authority without delay; in the search for a compromise formula, the idea of a 'confederation of Western Europe' emerged.¹¹⁶ Sandys' position greatly augmented the Conservative delegates' ascendancy. Operating from the offices of the European Movement in Strasbourg, 'since a very large number of the members of the Assembly were well known to him, [Sandys] exercised much influence behind the scenes, in addition to acting as Chief of Staff to Churchill'.¹¹⁷ It may have also enabled Churchill to control some of Sandys' more exuberant public utterances as Churchill could point out that Sandys' presence in Strasbourg was in an unofficial

¹¹⁴ Spaak, pp.208-209

¹¹⁵ Kilmuir, p.178

¹¹⁶ Anthony Nutting: *Europe Will Not Wait* (London 1960), p.26

¹¹⁷ Macmillan, p.165 and p.176

capacity.

In addition to Maxwell Fyfe's work on the Convention of Human Rights, Churchill and his fellow Conservative delegates made a lasting and positive contribution in their advocacy and support for the admission of the West Germans¹¹⁸, representing the return by the pariah to the diplomatic fold. In an abrupt change of tack from party political animal in the debate on 16-17 August on Europe's political future, 'he rose to an altogether different plane,' giving a speech which though long awaited, 'must have been to the majority of those present a disappointment'.¹¹⁹ Acutely aware that Germany was the most immediate of Europe's problems, and that the spectre of a revived and remilitarised Germany was already rearing its head only four years after the defeat of Hitler, Churchill made the question of Germany the main and almost sole theme of his speech 'shocking some and almost bullying others'¹²⁰ by his insistent 'Where are the Germans?'. Only Churchill could have done this: his question caused initial deep offense among those delegates from former occupied lands, but the validity of his message was recognized by even the most reluctant. Thanks to Churchill's initiative and Macmillan's subsequent work in the political committee, at the end of the meeting the Assembly passed a final resolution for the discussion of the admission of new members to the Council of Europe - ie the whole German question. Before the delegates left Strasbourg a standing committee was created, empowered to deal with the Committee of Ministers. Maxwell Fyfe was selected as a member: 'I was told that, in view of my Nuremberg visit, my plea that the then new West German state should be brought back into the comity of nations ... had some effect. Yet the main inspiration was Winston's original vision and continuing

¹¹⁸ West Germany was not formally in existence until November 1949.

¹¹⁹ Macmillan, p.175

¹²⁰ Macmillan, p.176

pressure for the practical content of his slogan "Europe Unite".¹²¹ In the House of Commons Bevin expressed his willingness to try and get matters agreed as soon as possible.¹²² On 30 March 1950 a formal invitation was issued to the West German government.

(b) The Reaction of the Labour Government

There were, however, limits to the influence of Conservative delegates, who played such a prominent part in the first Assembly's proceedings. The Labour government did not regard their contribution as benign. Churchill was 'the spirit of Europe', but he - rather than the elected Labour government - also represented Britain in the eyes of the continentals. Churchill's party-political behaviour at Strasbourg infuriated Labour delegates and government alike¹²³ and served to reinforce the conviction that the Council of Europe was embarrassing¹²⁴, practically useless and potentially dangerous.¹²⁵ Despite impassioned speeches, the Europeanists failed to convince Attlee and Bevin that 'Europeanism' offered a viable alternative to the government's pursuit of 'Atlanticism'. The Labour government in the Council of Ministers, apart from the establishment of the European Court and the Convention on Human Rights, and the inclusion of the West Germans, studiously ignored or vetoed the bulk of the Assembly's resolutions.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Kilmuir, p.179

¹²² Bevin, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2209

¹²³ Herbert Morrison: *An Autobiography* (London 1960), p.279

¹²⁴ see Morrison, p.279

¹²⁵ see Bevin, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2208

¹²⁶ John Pinder and Richard Mayne: *Federal Union*, p.103

Nor did the Conservative Europeanists persuade the bulk of their colleagues that the emerging links with Europe were complementary with, or even could strengthen, ties with Empire and Commonwealth. Churchill's awareness of the abiding Conservative doubts that Britain's position as head of the Empire and Commonwealth might be prejudiced, had not inhibited him in any way at the Consultative Assembly, although these thoughts were certainly in the minds of his Strasbourg colleagues.¹²⁷ Churchill's conduct in Strasbourg heightened Conservative alarm back home. Eden, the most 'conspicuous absentee' from Strasbourg,¹²⁸ shared the growing Conservative consternation over the direction Churchill and his cohorts appeared to be taking the party.¹²⁹ Their presence and behaviour at the Consultative Assembly appeared counter-productive because it closely identified the Tories with the federal ideas.¹³⁰

The Conservative Europeanists and the Party Conference of 1949:

At previous party conferences, including the conference following Churchill's Zurich speech, Europe had been viewed in conjunction with America and the Commonwealth: that Europe had been considered at all was due to Churchill's and other senior Conservatives' prominent roles in European organizations and committees. Now, for the first time since Churchill's rousing cry 'Let Europe Unite' three years before, Europe became an issue in its own right, thanks to Sandys' determination to put down a resolution on the issue; this was mirrored by

¹²⁷ see Eccles' suggestion that delegates to the Council of Europe should be aware of the Foreign Affairs Committee's views, FAC 6.7.49

¹²⁸ Kilmuir, p.177

¹²⁹ Lord Glendevon

¹³⁰ see Manningham-Buller, FAC 3.6.48; and Pickthorn and Stanley, FAC 1.11.49

Conservative undercurrents of dissent which surfaced both before and during the party conference.

Gridley, the Chairman of the 1922 committee, was moved to write to Sandys urging him to modify the wording of the resolution on Europe. Gridley warned: 'at the last meeting of the 1922 Committee hopes were expressed that every effort should be made to avoid any risk of divided views on the United Europe resolution at the forthcoming party conference ... It is felt that no risk should be run in attempting to commit the conference to any detailed plan of action before the party in the House has had a full opportunity of discussion thereon.' Pointing out that there was to be a general meeting of the Foreign and Imperial Affairs Committees shortly after Parliament reassembled, Gridley continued, 'it would be disastrous if anything happened at the conference which might divide the party at a time when complete unity is essential in the face of the coming general election'. He included a stark instruction that Sandys was not to say anything on his resolution which 'might give rise to controversy or difference of view'.¹³¹ Gridley clearly feared Sandys was poised to do this.

This was an extraordinary intervention by the most powerful chairman of the official backbench committees, and spoke volumes for the private representations made to Gridley by his fellow backbenchers. The Europeanists still only comprised about 60 MPs, out of a total complement of 213 Conservatives. Some of those initially swept along by the ringing words of 1948 were having second thoughts on the emerging form of 'Europe': what did the motion passed at Strasbourg mean when it called for the Council of Europe to become a political authority with limited but definite powers? What of the resolutions passed in the French and Italian Parliaments that the Council of Europe should become as soon as possible an

¹³¹ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Gridley to Sandys 4.10.49

elected Parliament? A rather pedestrian figure, unimaginative and somewhat pedantic, Gridley would never have taken this step on his own initiative; he was not in the same league as later Chairmen of the 1922 (such as John Morrison), and his position on the backbenches was overshadowed by more illustrious names. Nevertheless, coming from the Chairman of the 1922 whose job it was to represent backbench views to the party leader, these comments carried considerable weight. They were also an implicit criticism of Churchill. As leader of the party's 'praetorian guard', Gridley was far more aware of the hesitation¹³² within the Parliamentary party than Churchill, who despite the grumbles of discontent at his absences from the House of Commons, remained an aloof figure.

Not only were the knights of the shires alarmed at the thought of Sandys going full steam ahead on Europe, hand-in-glove with European federalists. Attempts to present a coherent approach to Europe had encountered two difficulties:

(i) the first was that Conservative enthusiasts spoke in different tongues: Boothby on economic matters favoured planning, and was vociferous in his attempts to promote a coherent economic plan towards integration with Europe; Eccles, on the other hand, preferred the *laissez faire* approach. Macmillan seemed to favour making the Council of Ministers more of a European Cabinet - which to some implied a federal solution which threatened to erode the sovereignty of the British Parliament - whereas Churchill resisted any notion of a federal solution¹³³;

(ii) the second was that the process continued to evolve; it was not simply a matter of formulating a policy in response to a specific event. All West European politicians were feeling their way, and inevitably contradictions surfaced. Therefore the obvious solution was to refrain from a definite line of policy. As a tactic, this 'fudge' had the merit of avoiding

¹³² see Crawley, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2236

¹³³ Crawley, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2235-6

alienating Conservative sceptics and unbelievers at home, but raised Continental expectations which could not be fulfilled.

Sandys moved swiftly to defuse Conservative criticism about the implications of closer union by sending Gridley a copy of the speech he intended to make at the conference. Still hopeful of evolving a political structure of Europe out of the Council of Europe, Sandys was careful to ensure that the text of his resolution, which welcomed the creation of the Council of Europe and supported measures for closer European unity as consistent with the unity of Empire, had Churchill's and Macmillan's prior approval, and Leo Amery's support, which was very important for the imperial wing of the party. His decision to enlist Macmillan reflects the growing influence of the latter's ideas on Europe upon Churchill, who had been impressed by Macmillan's intervention in the Shadow Cabinet on Empire-Europe policy for the election. Both realised the impact a coherent approach could have on the Liberal party and the electorate as a whole.¹³⁴ Sandys also recruited Eccles and Foster, asking Foster to second the general resolution at the conference. The resolution was passed, no small thanks to the careful selection of speakers from the floor in support of the motion.

The Conservative Europeanists and Their Opponents: The End of 1949

By the end of 1949 Conservative advocates of closer links with Europe were fighting on three fronts:

(a) within the European Movement against the federalists: at the Executive meeting in Paris on 16 December 1949, Boothby, MacDonald and Layton sought to tone down the aggressive federalist approach advocated by representatives of France,

¹³⁴ Barnes' transcript of Sandys Ms: Sandys to Macmillan 26.9.49

Italy and Holland; and on the International Committee, Sandys was still trying to straddle the growing gulf between the two camps, seeking compromise between those who advocated evolution and the exponents of a contractual method.

(b) within their own party: the Sceptics and the Anti-Europeanists had not been won over, as the first formal backbench discussion in the Foreign Affairs Committee on the implications of the Council of Europe in early November clearly revealed.¹³⁵ Several MPs raised their concern 'not so much at the content ... as the form' of the Assembly, fearful that although Conservative members were not supposed to be representatives of their party, the image of these MPs in cahoots with continental politicians who were all espousing European federation, gave the impression that the Conservative party endorsed British membership. Alarmed by what was seen as excessive exuberance for European unity expressed by some Conservative delegates¹³⁶, there was a general desire to move away from 'a private army'.¹³⁷ Some conceded that Conservative delegates had avoided any pitfalls at the first session of the Consultative Assembly, and 'had not committed the party to anything undesirable'.¹³⁸ Others were not so charitable, feeling this was more by luck than good judgement: the whole idea was moving too fast and the instability of European governments (France leapt to mind) demonstrated 'that this was not the moment to jump all the way'.¹³⁹ The Sceptics wanted a coherent, restrained Conservative party view, 'expressed through consultation before meetings of the

¹³⁵ FAC 1.11.49

¹³⁶ notably Macmillan. See Alistair Horne, *Macmillan 1894-1956*, p 314

¹³⁷ Stanley, FAC 1.11.49

¹³⁸ Stanley, FAC 1.11.49

¹³⁹ Pickthorn, FAC 1.11.49

Council of Europe'.¹⁴⁰ This was to be done as discreetly as possible: Conservative grandees were keen to avoid signs of dissension on Europe unity to prevent adverse election propaganda.¹⁴¹

The issue that gave particular concern was preference policy, the touchstone of Empire. In August 1949 Conservative delegates at Strasbourg had voted for a resolution which asked for the creation of an economic union of free Europe which would include 'the abolition by stages of restrictions on the movement of men, money and goods'.¹⁴² Although the message from the Dominions at the recent Commonwealth Relations Conference was that short of federation, there was general support for European unity,¹⁴³ there remained concern that a customs union might cut across the preference system and might alienate the newly independent sub-continental countries. Too close links with France and Holland might also identify Britain with their 'outdated colonial systems' and any formal session of sovereignty might affect India's foreign policy 'in a way undesirable to us'.¹⁴⁴

The Europeanists moved swiftly to soothe their colleagues' ruffled feelings, implying the Conservative delegates' role at Strasbourg would change if the party was in power,¹⁴⁵ and acknowledging the need to harmonize the claims of Europe and Empire in the economic sphere.¹⁴⁶ They stressed Britain's

¹⁴⁰ Stanley, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁴¹ Earl Winterton, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁴² Hugh Dalton: *High Tide and After. Memoirs* (London 1962) p.335

¹⁴³ Butler, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁴⁴ Butler, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁴⁵ Macmillan, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁴⁶ Macmillan, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2323

first duty remained to its Empire and the sterling area,¹⁴⁷ and sought to allay fears of an attack on imperial preference by reassuring their colleagues that no more had been done at Strasbourg 'than to recommend to the Committee of Ministers calling of a conference to discuss freeing of trade in sterling area and Western Europe'.¹⁴⁸ All were aware that the party 'would be utterly opposed to any formal federation of Europe'.¹⁴⁹

(c) against the Labour government, implacably opposed to their brand of Europeanism. Labour sought to play down the importance of the discussions at Strasbourg. Herbert Morrison, as Leader of the House, refused several times Conservative requests to consider the outcome of the Strasbourg meeting as the topic of a separate debate in the autumn of 1949, despite support from his own side,¹⁵⁰ insisting that the topic should be included in the Foreign Affairs debate. Frustrated at the behaviour of the delegates of the unelected Consultative Assembly, Bevin determinedly stressed the importance of the Council of Ministers, saying pointedly in the Foreign Affairs Debate on 17 November 1949, 'I am sure ... th[e] committee of ministers will prove vital to the unity of Europe. They represent their governments... [T]he Assembly ... has a different function to perform. The ministers, themselves, being responsible representatives of their governments will from time to time have matters referred to them on which decision have to be taken.'¹⁵¹ With the exception of the Convention of Human Rights and the admission of the West Germans, the Council of Ministers studiously

¹⁴⁷ Macmillan

¹⁴⁸ Eccles, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁴⁹ Stanley, FAC 1.11.49

¹⁵⁰ Business of the House 27.10.49, 3.11.49, 10.11.49

¹⁵¹ Bevin, 17.11.49, *HC Deb.*469.2208

ignored the Consultative Assembly's resolutions.

Summary:

Thanks to Churchill's public endorsement, and the work of key Tories behind the scenes, the Conservative Europeanists had given great impetus to the ideal of European integration and had achieved a remarkable influence over Britain's relations with Europe, building upon support for European unity from the Continent, America and Monnet's friends in London. Bevin had been obliged to react to their efforts, even if this was in annoyance rather than swayed by persuasive argument. By late 1949 it appeared that the Council of Europe was the principal means by which European unity and the creation of a political authority could be achieved, rather than the inter-governmental approach of the Brussels Pact.

However, although Conservative Europeanists had helped 'hijack' the debate, their success in promoting a more positive approach to Europe had decided limits. They had aroused intense opposition within the Labour government and Whitehall, and severe misgivings within their own party. Despite some remarkable concessions, Bevin persisted in his Atlanticist approach to relations with Europe. In fact Bevin's determination to pursue closer European co-operation through inter-governmental agencies was probably strengthened by the Conservatives' campaign. Nor had the Conservative European enthusiasts convinced the Conservative party in the country nor British public opinion generally. The Labour government was indeed more in tune with the British public on this matter. The fact that European integration was an evolving, messy process inevitably laid its Conservative supporters open to Labour charges of contradiction and hypocrisy and private criticism from their colleagues. Given the diversity of opinion within the European movement, between supporters of federalism and confederalism, these accusations were

unavoidable as the only route open to the Conservative leadership was deliberately to avoid a definite stand. With the advent of the Schuman Plan in 1950, however, the Conservatives could no longer seek refuge in obfuscation.

CHAPTER 4: THE WAITING ROOM OF POWER: 1950-51

After the February election in 1950 power seemed within the Conservatives' grasp. Although the 3% swing to the Tories was insufficient to return Churchill to Downing Street, Labour's working majority was slashed to 6, and another election seemed imminent. As their party moved closer to power, the Conservative Europeanists' stance was modified, stemming from a renewed sense of responsibility and doubts about the electoral wisdom of enthusiasm for Europe. Within three months of the election the Conservatives were confronted with the Schuman Plan, designed to control West Germany's coal and steel production. Although the Conservative Europeanists on the middle benches led their party's attack on the Labour government's refusal to attend the Schuman Plan discussions, the government and Whitehall officials were not persuaded by their arguments; nor were their backbench colleagues convinced of the Plan's merits. The ultimate federalist goal lying behind Jean Monnet's functional proposal was of crucial importance, and there were powerful emotional arguments involved: Britain as part of Europe vs Britain and her Commonwealth and Empire. In addition, political memories were still raw from the recent parliamentary battle over the nationalization of Britain's own iron and steel industries.

Conservative Europeanists continued to press the government to respond more positively to continental proposals for European integration, advocating the inter-governmental Macmillan-Eccles Plan in the Council of Europe. However, this proposal lacked domestic support: the British government remained determinedly aloof from the Paris discussions, and although Churchill and Eden lent their qualified support, for many Tories, embarrassing the government on the issue no longer held the same political attraction. Monnet's determination to contain the Ruhr industries in a supranational structure sealed the Macmillan-Eccles Plan's fate.

Churchill and his colleagues successfully brought the idea of an European army to international attention in August 1950. They also scored a minor but not insignificant triumph in calling for the inclusion of Commonwealth observers in the Strasbourg proceedings. However, Conservatives were dismayed by the Plevin Plan which emerged in October 1950 as a compromise between American insistence upon an increased European contribution to its own defence, and French fears of a revived, rearmed Germany. The Plevin Plan was an extension of Monnet's supranational ideas for the control of West Germany, with its proposals for the integration of national armies at the lowest possible level in an European Defence Community (EDC). It made military nonsense and bore no relation to Churchill's original concept of a revived Grand Alliance.

The Effect of the February 1950 Election

The changing of the political guard in this 'new Model Parliament',¹ marked by the sizeable intake of young and capable MPs, altered the balance within the party on Europe. These younger MPs were more inclined to look favourably on Britain taking the lead in Europe: some saw a united Europe principally as a defence against the Soviet Union; others appreciated the economic advantages the concept offered - the chance to combine the Empire and sterling area with Europe to create a formidable trading bloc; and there were those Tories, such as Headlam, Hopkinson and Kerr, who viewed the moves to European unity as desirable in their own right.

(a) Europeanists:

Departures:

Lord Willoughby de Eresby

Sir William Neill (UU)

¹ Lord Watkinson

Ernest Taylor
Sir Gifford Fox
Sir Patrick Hannon
Sir Arthur Howard
Sir John Kerr
David Price-White
Sir Stanley Reed
Sidney Shephard
Frank Sanderson
Sir Arthur Young (d. 1950)

Arrivals:

Julian Amery
Nigel Davies
John Hay
Edward Heath
Henry Hopkinson
Hamilton Kerr
Gilbert Longden
John Rodgers
Duncan Sandys
Peter Smithers
John Tilney

(b) Anti-Europeanists:

Departures:

Max Aitken
Eric Gandar-Dower
Arthur Marsden

Arrivals:

Enoch Powell
Gerald Nabarro
Herbert Williams
Roland Russell

Hopkinson, a former career diplomat and head of the

Conservative Parliamentary Secretariat, had been a keen European since the War when he had been much influenced by Monnet's ideas.² Hay,³ Kerr⁴ and Rodgers⁵ became Parliamentary Private Secretaries to the pro-European ministers Thorneycroft⁶, Macmillan⁷ and Eccles⁸ respectively. Kerr⁹ became Macmillan's PPS when the latter was appointed Minister of Defence in 1954.

Conservative Attitudes to Europe:

(a) Conservative Divisions Persist:

Conservatives remained divided as to the best way to link Western Germany with the free nations of Europe. Churchill continued to call for Germany within a united and free Europe, urging very strongly that everything possible should be done to encourage and promote Franco/German reconciliation as an approach to unity, or even perhaps some form of union; but he resisted 'attempts to draw up precise and rigid constitutions ... too soon, or in a hurry'.¹⁰ Some Tories, such as Macmillan and Eccles, felt that as Germany still needed to be contained for the future security of Europe, Britain should be

² Lord Colyton

³ MP for Henley 1950-74

⁴ MP for Oldham 1935-45; Cambridge 1950-66

⁵ MP for Sevenoakes 1950-79. Rodgers was a former colleague of Eccles at the Ministry of Production during the War.

⁶ President of the Board of Trade

⁷ Minister of Housing and Local Government

⁸ Minister of Works

⁹ MP for Oldham 1935-45; Cambridge 1950-66

¹⁰ 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.196

a full partner of whatever arrangements emerged to counter what was seen as inevitable German domination. Others felt Britain's imperial position posed an insurmountable barrier to full participation of any such arrangements. There was also the perennial problem of German reunification (and the spectre of German revanchism), with many politicians arguing that Western Germany needed to be anchored firmly in the Western camp before any such proposals could be considered.

The Conservative Europeanists remained frustrated by what they regarded as the plodding and half-hearted pace with which military and economic co-operation between the various states in Western Union was being pursued, arguing that if this continued, there could be no hope of escape from the destruction of Europe if war should come. However, growing concern over the possible effect upon the British electorate of too European a stance was tempering their enthusiasm. Macmillan, who had gone to the lengths in August 1949 of tabling an amendment in the Consultative Assembly proposing that 'the Committee of Ministers shall be an executive authority with supranational powers', was now stressing that although Britain could not isolate herself from Europe, the Empire 'must always have first preference'.¹¹ Boothby's ardour was also cooling: at the beginning of the year he called for the creation of European Political Authority with 'limited competence but defined powers' which, if it was to have any reality must include Britain and Germany'.¹² As 1950 wore on, he came to share concerns about the direction in which French supranationalism appeared to be taking the debate.

¹¹ Macmillan article, *Manchester Despatch* 11.10.49, quoted in Alistair Horne: *Macmillan 1894-1956*, p.321

¹² 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.262

(b) The Economic Debate:

In the mid-1940s Conservatives had contributed to discussions on economic integration with Europe, principally in organizations such as the British Committee of ELEC, but there had not been widespread consideration of these implications within the Tory party; for example, the 1947 Conservative industrial policy statement virtually ignored Europe, and concentrated almost exclusively on the Commonwealth and colonies.¹³ By the end of the decade this had changed. Thanks to Marshall Aid, Western Germany was experiencing a remarkable economic revival, reflected in Conservative backbench questions on the reemergence of the threat of German exports to the British overseas market.¹⁴ Although the country was still under Allied control, this industrial recovery stimulated the debate over the future of the Ruhr industries, in the past the foundation of the German war machine. Before the advent of the Schuman Plan (May 1950), Conservative spokesmen had called on the government to study the political and economic implications of possible integration of Europe's heavy industry. Eden publicly had supported the argument for closer collaboration between the Ruhr and its competing industries in both France, Belgium and Luxembourg¹⁵, and had advocated integrating the heavy industry of Europe as a whole. In addition, the Conservative paper on the internal framework of the Ruhr had been circulated by the policy committee of the Parliamentary party in January 1949, and was subsequently submitted to Sir Andrew Duncan (of the British Iron and Steel Federation) for private comment. Macmillan, who had raised the matter in general terms in the House of Commons¹⁶, worked with Thorneycroft, Eccles, and Lady

¹³ Jeremy Moon: *European Integration in British Politics 1950-63*, p.87

¹⁴ see also Nigel Davies maiden speech, 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.269-273

¹⁵ 9.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.589-594

¹⁶ 23.3.49 *HC Deb.*463.384-5

Tweedsmuir in the British Committee of ELEC in discussions on ideas of international control of the Ruhr's iron and steel industries. These discussions led to consideration of a report on European coal and steel industries at the Westminster Economic Conference in April 1949.

There was a widespread Conservative belief that a return to 'cut-throat international competition based on free non-discriminatory multilateral trade' would be a return to economic anarchy. Despite concerted attacks on the preferential trading system from the United States, the Empire was still very much a going concern and some Conservative Europeanists, for example, Boothby, Amery, and Smithers, believed that the future lay with creation of larger economic blocs; in their eyes, the Empire and Western Europe formed a natural bloc and would offer a powerful counterpoint to the American economic leviathan. Not all pro-European Tories argued for this radical solution, but those who favoured increased European economic co-operation were concerned that a Western economic bloc which excluded Britain would sabotage the sterling area.

Conservatives and The Schuman Plan

The issue of European integration came to a critical point for the Conservatives when the French Prime Minister, Robert Schuman, issued an invitation to the British Government to attend talks on Jean Monnet's proposal for European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in May 1950.¹⁷

Given Churchill's leadership of the UEM and Eden's presence at the Albert Hall meeting and the Hague congress, there was a general anticipation that the Conservative leadership would

¹⁷ This proposal was the result of the failure of Britain and France to agree on the future of the Ruhr industries since the War. See Lord Plowden, Lord Roberthall and Etienne Hirsch in Michael Charlton: *The Price of Victory*, pp.82-8.

applaud the French initiative. The Conservative Europeanists saw the need for a swift and positive response: otherwise their party would lay itself open to the Labour charge of hypocrisy. However, the immediate Conservative reaction to Schuman's proposals was muted: it was not until 19 May - 10 days after Schuman's invitation to the Labour Government - that Churchill welcomed the Schuman Plan as an important and effective step in preventing another war between France and Germany. This was a heavily qualified statement, not the wholehearted endorsement desired by the enthusiastic Europeanists: 'We welcome the Schuman proposal cordially in principle but we must nevertheless consider carefully the way in which Britain can participate most effectively in such a larger grouping of European industry. We must be careful it does not carry with it a lowering of British wages and standards of life and labour. We must, I feel assert the principle of levelling up, not of levelling down.'¹⁸ The uncomfortable reality of European integration was at last raising its head, forcing Churchill to take a specific stand on the issue - something he had successfully avoided hitherto.

(a) The Conservative Dilemma

Although there was widespread Tory indignation at French behaviour - first in springing the idea on Britain, then presenting an ultimatum¹⁹ - compounded by a marked aversion to being bound in advance²⁰, Conservative politicians recognized and appreciated the motivation of the French plan as 'primarily an invention to resolve the dilemma of Germany rearmed'. If the German army was not reconstituted, Western

¹⁸ speech in Edinburgh, reported in *Times* 20.5.50

¹⁹ Churchill, 27.6.50, *HC Deb.* 476.2141

²⁰ Cherwell, *House of Lords Official Report. 5th Series. Parliamentary Debates. Lords* volume 168 columns 1219-1226

Europe would be at the mercy of Russia; if it was, France would again be at Germany's mercy. But if the steel industries of the two countries were merged, it would be impossible to make war.²¹

The problem was the manner proposed for integration. Although Britain had accepted supranational functional institutions in two World Wars (these had, of course, been for a limited duration), Churchill's own preference remained British sponsorship of Europe, short of actual membership; his fellow Europeanists favoured closer co-operation, but along inter-governmental lines. Schuman's initiative was specifically a supranational scheme. This principle had bedeviled Sandys' attempts in the International Committee in 1949 and 1950 to reconcile the British preference for collaboration short of a surrender of sovereignty, with the continental preference for a more radical approach. With the Schuman Plan on the table, such a dichotomy of opinion could no longer be concealed.

Conservatives were divided on the Schuman Plan which meant that the party was loath to declare its stance. No record remains of the Foreign Affairs Committee meetings at this time, but former MPs recall that most discussion on the issue took place in the Smoking Room, or the Dining Room.

'It tended to be divided into those who had a firm opinion one way or the other, who discussed mainly amongst themselves. In other words they reinforced one another in their preconceived opinions. There were many Members for whom the whole thing was slightly unreal and difficult to understand: it did not correspond at all with the political world in which they lived. There was more informed discussion outside of Parliament than within it, conducted through the Press and in various groups and movements.

²¹ Cherwell

'I think my view [on the Schuman Plan] was quite widely held. Most serious thinkers would have admitted that some dilution of sovereignty was necessary if we were to have the advantages of togetherness ... The "French" view in so far as it deserved that name, was seen by me and I suspect by many others as a rainbow affair. There were out-and-out Federalists in France and in politics but they were not by any means a majority, and it was obvious then as it is today that the French would never accept supranationality if it really inconvenienced them. The political future therefore looked fluid rather than rigid and it was our business to take part in it in order to push the outcome our way. I am here expressing the view of many of us at that time who knew the score from first hand experience in Strasbourg. But to others, simply studying the documents or the newspapers, the position appeared in much cruder terms of black and white.'²²

In marked contrast to the view that any treaty involved some piecemeal diminution of national sovereignty and British participation was vital 'to push things our way', those Conservatives who did not have the advantages of the Strasbourg experience, judged the issue in strictly national terms. Many were annoyed at the Europeans who 'were always keen to know on which side of the fence the Tories would land',²³ which echoed the Labour government's own preference for an empirical approach vs the French desire for a theoretical framework. Some Conservatives disliked the proposed economic arrangement on principle: the Schuman Plan was 'trying to make an honest woman of a cartel'.²⁴ It would be far better if European heavy industry continued under

²² Sir Peter Smithers

²³ Somerset de Chair letter, *Times* 24.6.50

²⁴ de Chair

private enterprise. However, the political implications of such a union were of supreme importance. It was seen as a slippery slope: once Britain had set foot upon it and subordinated two key industries, 'it would seem to me inevitable that we are entering on the path of political integration as well'.²⁵ The issue was seen as a case of either Empire or Europe, and 'if the Conservative party is now to take a further deep plunge into Europe, it must not be surprised if the countries of the Commonwealth are not prepared indefinitely to tag along like a gaggle of Strasbourg geese'.²⁶

Lord Watkinson remembers having a crisis of conscience over the Schuman Plan: 'It was muddled by two things: many backbench Tories felt they were choosing between France and the USA. Looking back to the War, America had been a more secure and satisfactory ally than France'.²⁷ In Watkinson's eyes too, the Schuman Plan was not limited to an arrangement governing coal and steel. It was a commitment to federate Europe. As such, it was unacceptable to him and he strongly felt it would be unacceptable to the British people. Similarly, Aubrey Jones²⁸ opposed the Schuman Plan, and wrote an article in *The Bulletin* (of the British Iron and Steel Federation) expressing his opposition. Jones came to support the Messina process in the late 1950s, but 'at that stage I was a Burkean Conservative, believing in the sanctity of inherited institutions, and the common unity implicit in the Schuman Plan was an artificial aspiration'.²⁹ His beliefs

²⁵ de Chair

²⁶ de Chair

²⁷ Lord Watkinson

²⁸ A former assistant to Sir Andrew Duncan (the independent Chairman of the British Iron and Steel Federation) and Deputy Director before his election as MP for Birmingham Hall Green in 1950.

²⁹ Aubrey Jones interview with author

were backed by his knowledge that 'the British steel industry were against it, as were the French steel industry'.³⁰

Within the small group of Churchill's intimates there were also 'important differences on the immediate problem and the general approach to vital issues'.³¹ The Conservative party could no longer disclaim responsibility as it had been able to do between 1945 and 1950, and this sense of responsibility was felt by both the Conservative front and back benches.³² Churchill was deeply and publicly committed to the principles of the UEM. Although Eden had 'not taken an active part',³³ nevertheless he fully realised the immense opportunities either for success or failure in restoring Europe's strength and had publicly advocated economic integration with Europe. On the other hand, some of Eden's front bench colleagues were 'definitely opposed to the surrender of sovereignty'³⁴ (undoubtedly Crookshank), or saw practical disadvantages for British industry. British steel was the most efficient in Europe, and this country was producing better and cheaper coal than her European rivals, with a readily available market overseas. What therefore could be gained by exchanging the present system? Another faction which included Macmillan and Eccles, felt that no matter the difficulties and dangers, the greatest danger would be if the European industry was remodelled without a British contribution even at the talks.

³⁰ Aubrey Jones

³¹ Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune*, p.192

³² Macmillan, p.192

³³ Macmillan, p.192

³⁴ Macmillan, p.192

(b) The Conservative Europeanists' Response to the Schuman Plan:

Keen to seize the political initiative,³⁵ the Conservative Europeanists on the middle benches swiftly undertook a series of manoeuvres to counteract their colleagues' reluctance. Macmillan used a constituency speech on 17 May 1950 to urge a positive British response.³⁶ The British Committee of ELEC (whose Conservative Parliamentary members included Julian Amery, Eccles, Macmillan, Thorneycroft and Lady Tweedsmuir) similarly urged:

'The Schuman proposals to create a European steel and coal organization as one of the foundations of a new Europe may prove to be as momentous as General Marshall's offer at Harvard ... It is not enough to applaud it. We must take our full share in working out the Schuman Plan. Its political and economic implications are of great importance, but the details remain to be worked out. It is therefore very much in Britain's interest that we should take an active part in its elaboration from the beginning ... We cannot turn our back on Europe at this critical moment.'³⁷

Beaverbrook issued a broadside on behalf of the imperialist anti-European wing of the party the following day when this letter was violently, and predictably, attacked in the *Daily Express*; this at least had the merit of airing the debate.

Boothby followed up this opening salvo with a letter written from Paris, describing the 'prevailing [French] impatience ... with the timidity and insular selfishness of British foreign

³⁵ Macmillan, p.188

³⁶ Macmillan, p.189

³⁷ letter, *Times* 22.5.50

policy [which] is widespread ... We might have led the movement for European union and moulded it according to our desires. We have chosen instead to obstruct it at every turn. What is now quite certain now is that we cannot stop it. If we continue upon our present course we shall find ourselves in a position of total isolation.'³⁸ The same day speaking to a group of industrialists in London, Macmillan referred to the possible consequences of failure of the Schuman plan: Europe could never revert to the situation which existed before the proposal was made. If the plan was not successful, the situation created might be the turning point. It would create one of two hideous results - either people would lose confidence in Western Europe as a whole, or the plan would operate under a Germany not controlled by Britain, or America, a Germany of the wrong kind. Britain might see a German Schuman Plan in the next five years which might be akin to a Ribbentrop-Stalin pact.³⁹ (This persistent fear was to colour Macmillan's attitude towards Eden's treatment of European Defence Community (EDC) in the 1950s.)

For these Conservative Europeanists there was a vital principle at stake in the Schuman Plan: it was nothing less than British leadership of Europe. They recognized the Plan as a bid by the French⁴⁰, with America's blessing, to direct emerging European institutions down the desired federal path, preventing the British (Conservative and Labour alike) from merely relying on the genuine European wish to ensure British participation to limit the scope of the relationship. Thus it was imperative that Britain attend the forthcoming talks in Paris to direct the emerging institution down acceptable inter-governmental channels to protect British and Commonwealth interests.

³⁸ *Times* 1.6.50

³⁹ *Times* 2.6.50

⁴⁰ Etienne Hirsch, p.88 and Lord Sherfield, p.93 in Charlton

Despite the government's reluctance to participate in the talks -manifest in its resistance to repeated Conservative calls for an early debate on the Schuman Plan, on the grounds that British suggestions were being held in reserve until the talks in Paris had had 'a fair run' - the Europeanists did not give up hope of swaying the debate in their favour. In a long letter to the *Times*, Eccles accused the Government of harbouring ideas of national sovereignty that were out of step with the Continent. He did not believe that Britain should urge member states of the Council of Europe by themselves to form close political federation for 'full federation is unwise', but added that Europe felt the need for piecemeal pooling of sovereignty. He was critical of France's methods of negotiating, 'but there is still time to take her hand and good reasons why we should'. He rebuffed Labour's arguments: the Schuman Plan could be used as a means of extending the areas of full employment; the Commonwealth would welcome British participation as it offered a stable market for produce in expanding prosperity of Europe; imperial preference could be maintained as was made clear at the Strasbourg meeting in December 1949; unless German competition was rationalized it would create future problems and the danger of a steel glut as soon as supply overtook demand; and the strategic problem of German dominance in Europe: the Schuman Plan would make sure, if ever there was another war, France and Germany would be on the same side: 'But on which side? How can we tell unless we are members of the Plan?'⁴¹

Much to the Conservative Europeanists' consternation, Churchill did not seize the heaven-sent opportunity to wrong-foot the government, even when Attlee's polite refusal to attend the Paris talks on 13 June 1950 coincided with the publication of Labour's National Executive Committee's pamphlet on European unity, laying Labour wide open to accusations of clumsiness and ineptitude. Churchill's

⁴¹ Eccles, *Times* 6.6.50

reluctance compared with Eden's determination that Schuman's overture should not be ignored. Eden had long argued for closer economic co-operation in Europe, and held coherent views on the future of the Ruhr industries. Concerned that Britain would miss a critical chance to help resolve Franco-German antagonism, his declaration to Anthony Nutting that 'it was madness to turn down the idea as Bevin had done'⁴² was a logical progression from these earlier arguments. But Eden had no time for the political goal evident in Schuman's proposal; he believed that Britain could successfully direct negotiations down inter-governmental channels which would benefit all concerned. At a Young Conservatives rally in Yorkshire, he set out very clearly his alternative view of British association with Europe: 'We have many times made clear that in any conflict of friendship or interest the British Commonwealth and Empire will always come first. We say this not merely out of loyalty or affection, but because we know it is as the heart and centre of the Commonwealth family that we can make our fullest contribution to promote our own prosperity and the peace of the world ... But while these convictions must always have first place in our minds, we should still have confidence to be able to play a full and constructive part in world affairs in Europe and elsewhere.'⁴³

Alarmed that his party was still undecided on its position⁴⁴, and fearful that his colleagues might not reach an effective decision or even might support the government line, Macmillan sent an urgent minute to Churchill urging participation in the forthcoming discussions along the lines of those accepted by the Dutch (reserving the right to go back on its prior acceptance of the general principles of supranationality if, in the course of negotiations, it proved impossible to

⁴² Sir Anthony Nutting interview with author

⁴³ *Times*, 16.6.50

⁴⁴ Macmillan, pp.193-5

translate these into practice). 'It is now widely reported that the British government will make an immense [and probably successful] effort to reopen negotiations ... in that event it is absolutely vital that this should come about as a result of pressure from the Tory party and from you.' He further exhorted his leader, 'You started united Europe ... This is the first supreme test ... you cannot let down all in Europe'.⁴⁵

Pleading with Churchill to put down a motion as soon as possible, he backed his argument with a description of a meeting of Conservative MPs (probably the Foreign Affairs Committee, although no record remains of the proceedings) which had taken place on 19 June 1950. Approximately 80 MPs had attended, and of the speakers, about two-thirds had been in favour of the Schuman Plan, and 'only two or three against ... Some of those who have special knowledge of the industries concerned had given their support ... The overwhelming majority that the party should take a lead and a motion should be tabled.'⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, Macmillan was putting a heavy gloss on Tory attitudes to the Schuman Plan. The two-thirds of those present were not necessarily in favour of a supranational organization. Although Macmillan pointedly referred to the positive attitude desired by the younger element, this was by no means universal. The views of some 200 Conservatives who had not attended the meeting were still open to question. Undaunted, Macmillan pressed ahead. With Boothby (who was currently in Paris) his most likely informant, Macmillan craftily appealed to Churchill's vanity, reporting that the British Embassy in Paris was spreading rumours that Churchill, under influence of his advisers and fearful of losing votes, was preparing to retreat on the whole concept of a united Europe now that practical decisions were being made. Macmillan then sent Churchill a draft motion

⁴⁵ Macmillan, p.194

⁴⁶ Macmillan, p.195

urging the use of the Dutch model. Boothby also wrote to Churchill urging him to provide 'the leadership for which the western world is now praying'.⁴⁷

Under these pressures Churchill finally made up his mind and was 'followed with differing degrees of enthusiasm by all his colleagues and the party as a whole'.⁴⁸ True to his apolitical nature, Churchill enlisted the support of the Liberals. The joint EDM pressed the government to take part in the Paris negotiations while reserving freedom of action if the plan proved impractical. As the *Times* noted, the wording carefully refrained from committing its supporters to endorsing wholeheartedly the Schuman Plan. In effect the opposition parties confined themselves to criticising Labour's decision not to attend the Paris negotiations. Clement Davies, the Liberal leader, had wanted the motion to be worded differently and in stronger language, but had at once agreed with Churchill on the overriding need to coordinate the attack on the government. The motion was framed thus to attract the widest possible cross-party support.

Churchill, whose slow reaction to Schuman's proposal reflected his own ambivalence, had undoubtedly realised that a great many Tories would not be able to stomach open Conservative support for the Schuman Plan. The careful attention to the preparation of the Conservative case in the party's briefs on the topic was clearly aimed at discounting internal as well as external criticism. A concerted effort was made to discount the argument that Conservatives were using the Schuman Plan merely as a stick with which to beat the government. Ursula Branston, the author of these briefs from the Conservative Research Department, argued 'we went a long way towards supranational bodies in the economic sphere through the Marshall Plan and the OEEC, and in the military sphere through

⁴⁷ 20.6.50, quoted in Horne, p.320

⁴⁸ Macmillan, p.196

NATO. If we want to dictate terms - better still if we want to be in a position where we do not need to dictate terms on which European integration can move towards gradually, we have to lead not follow.'⁴⁹ The party briefs also sought assiduously to disarm Labour's claim that Conservative support for the Schuman Plan was incompatible with opposition to iron and steel nationalization: the Schuman Plan would be a change in general policy, not ownership and the basis of management of Britain's coal and steel industries. The political consideration for Britain was the 'disequilibrium which would be set up in the whole European structure if the Franco-German relationship was to develop apart from the UK'. The political separation, if it crystallized, might easily extend to separation in matters of defence as well as economics. 'The vital factor is Germany rather than France. If Germany obtains a dominant role, it might not be revived militarism as much as an artificial bid for neutrality which would paralyse the French - with disastrous consequences. For our own sakes as well as Western solidarity, we have to be an active participant.'⁵⁰

(c) The Schuman Plan Debate: Conservative Doubts Persist

The Conservative and Liberal motion successfully raised the political temperature at Westminster and 'the Schuman Plan debate was the most important thus far in the session'.⁵¹ This was not solely because of the united opposition attack on the government. The press had picked up the feeling prevalent among many Tories that the Government might be right and Churchill and Eden were marching too far ahead of the party's traditional policies; the *Times* gave notice of the day's

⁴⁹ Foreign Affairs Committee brief 13.6.50

⁵⁰ FAC brief 13.6.50

⁵¹ *Madras Mail* 7.5.50

debate under the headline 'Misgivings among backbenches of party policies'.⁵² Conservative sceptics were very concerned at the implications of Churchill's motion. For them, if Churchill supported the view that it was a choice between winning the Cold War by subordinating national sovereignty and forfeiting national sovereignty by losing the Cold War, he would signal a great departure in Conservative and national policy.⁵³

The bulk of the party was in a dilemma.⁵⁴ For them Churchill's motion was either a deft parliamentary manoeuvre to put the government at a disadvantage, or by implication a new and important policy declaration by Her Majesty's Opposition. Privately many Tories felt that the Dutch analogy was misleading since the Dutch were prepared to accept a federal solution if it could be found to be practicable; thus the EDM seemed to imply the government should have accepted Schuman's prior condition. This would indeed have been a startling departure from traditional Tory policy towards Europe as it would mean that the Conservatives accepted a supranational authority as the first principle, subject only to being shown this was practicable - an acceptance which would come as a great surprise to Tory voters. Alarmed and irritated that some of their colleagues seemed 'to have become more European than the Europeans'⁵⁵, dissenting Conservatives appreciated Labour's riposte that after vehemently opposing the nationalization of British iron and steel, the Tories were apparently implying their willingness to 'run half way across Europe' to give away control to a body outside British control. Like Labour, the Conservative party as a whole had no intention of handing over commanding heights of British

⁵² 26.6.50

⁵³ de Chair letter, *Times* 24.6.50

⁵⁴ de Chair

⁵⁵ de Chair

industry to outside control. At the time Britain was producing half the coal and one third of the steel produced in Western Europe: there appeared therefore little immediate apparent benefit. Many Conservatives privately accepted Labour's argument that Tories would not have accepted French invitation had they been in power and presented with the same condition of attendance. Conservative party managers hoped to deflect this (valid) criticism with the counter accusation that the Schuman Plan arose from 'a most maladroit handling of foreign affairs and it is nothing more than a diplomatic disaster that Britain was absent from Paris'.⁵⁶ Recognizing the charge of hypocrisy, they stayed quiet.⁵⁷

The debate itself began under a cloud; although most MPs were 'inclined to play down the significance of the events in Korea, their minds kept wandering in a Far Easterly direction'.⁵⁸ The debate was conducted on two levels.⁵⁹ The first issue was the basis on which talks should have been conducted; the second concerned the wider question of sovereignty. There were clear arguments against the first charge that the government should have gone to Paris, with the Dutch reservation: it was against British diplomatic tradition to tie the government's hand beforehand; and the feeling was widespread that it would be wrong to take a step that might reduce, rather than enhance the chances of agreement in Europe on the principles of the Schuman Plan. On the second, broader, issue of sovereignty there was a divide. Whereas some Conservatives might rationally admit that every treaty involved the relinquishment of some aspect of sovereignty, there remained a fundamental reluctance on both sides of the House to place such vital British interests under foreign

⁵⁶ *Times* 26.6.50

⁵⁷ see *Observer* 2.7.50

⁵⁸ *News Chronicle* 1.7.50

⁵⁹ Macmillan, p.196

control. There was also the employment aspect.

It was therefore not surprising that the Conservatives concentrated on the issue of Labour's refusal to attend the Paris negotiations. The Labour benches were very aware of the Conservative predicament. 'The only real difference between us and the Conservatives - and Churchill made a superb speech in the House - was that Churchill thought we should be in the negotiations and be perfectly free to say, "We're not having it" or "we're not going to join it", whereas Attlee and Bevin said, "No, let them have the negotiations and we'll look and see what they produce at the end of the day, and then we'll decide and see whether there is any relationship we can have with it".'⁶⁰

(d) The Outcome

Despite some initial speculation that the government would be beaten in the vote on the Schuman Plan⁶¹, and whether there would then be an immediate General Election⁶², the government's confidence that it could command its usual small majority was not misplaced. The opposition were 15 short in the first division: five Conservatives were absent through illness: Stanley, Stoddart-Scott, Headlam, Gage and Roberts, and six Tories ostentatiously abstained on a three-line whip, although they voted with their party in the second division of the night:

Harry Legge-Bourke
Stephen McAdden

⁶⁰ Wilson in Charlton, p.109

⁶¹ P.A. Lobby Correspondent in *Cambridge News* and others 27.7.50

⁶² Since the end of May the Attlee government had survived from division to division only with the support of the Bevanites.

John Mellor
Gerald Nabarro
Enoch Powell
Arthur Vere Harvey

These six MPs represented 'the other wing of the Conservative party who believe ... that any supranational authority must be totalitarian if it is successful and chaotic if it is not, and in any event Britain will be robbed of her nationhood and her powers of defence'.⁶³ It is interesting that all six of these men later opposed Eden on his Egypt policy. Their revolt was 'fairly spontaneous, not a formal conspiracy ... a result of informal chats in the Members' lobby and elsewhere'.⁶⁴ Only Legge-Bourke had drawn attention to himself in the debate; the national newspapers were agreed that apart from the leading protagonists, his speech calling for outright rejection of the Plan had caused the greatest stir.⁶⁵ While not all Tories necessarily agreed with what Legge-Bourke said - at one point he called for the winding up of the UNO - his sincerity and courage commanded respect.⁶⁶ The other dissenters 'gave their leaders no warning. None of them protested at the various secret meetings held that week. Those who did toed the party line of the day.'⁶⁷ Politically, the most remarkable rebel was Enoch Powell, 'intellectually and morally one of the outstanding backbenchers on either side'. Vere Harvey's opposition seems surprising, given his endorsement of British support of European union in the all-party parliamentary committee in the late 1940s. For him, the supranational

⁶³ *Statist* 1.7.50

⁶⁴ Legge-Bourke, quoted in Andrew Roth: *Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune* (London 1970), p.68

⁶⁵ eg. *Guardian*, *News Chronicle*, *Financial Times*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Herald* on 27.6.50, as well as the provincial newspapers

⁶⁶ *Peterborough Citizen* 30.6.50

⁶⁷ *Observer* 2.7.50

nature of Schuman's proposal was undoubtedly the sticking point. Unluckily for these rebels, the same evening the Government announced their position on the two-day old Korean War so their rebellion was largely ignored in Westminster, although it attracted considerable press attention,⁶⁸ and enjoyed outright support in the right-wing press.⁶⁹ Beaverbrook lost no time in 'leaping back into the political arena to vocalize the section of the Tory party which regarded the French proposals as tantamount to the destruction of British economic links with the Commonwealth'.⁷⁰

Conservative pressure on the government on what was fundamentally a procedural difference, was to no avail. The decision not to attend the Paris talks had been made at a rump Cabinet meeting, with some important absences: Bevin was ill, and both Attlee and Cripps were away on holiday. Neither returned for the meeting - which implied the matter was not taken very seriously.⁷¹ Nor was the Commonwealth consulted.

The government saw no need to alter this stance following the Schuman Plan debate. A critical figure in the Labour government's attitude was Roger Makins, described as 'the most influential official at the time'.⁷² In a key position as Economic Deputy Under-Secretary, he represented a powerful counterweight to those within the Foreign Office (such as Kenneth Younger) who would have liked to have taken a more positive approach. But Foreign Office advice and the British Government's decision to stay out of the Schuman negotiations reflected British attitudes and national self-perceptions at

⁶⁸ eg. *Times*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *Daily Graphic*, *Daily Express*, *Guardian*, *News Chronicle*

⁶⁹ eg. *Truth* 30.6.50 and *Statist* 1.7.50

⁷⁰ Westminster Review, in *Egypt Gazette* 5.7.50

⁷¹ Lord Gordon-Walker in Charlton, p.111

⁷² Michael Cullis in Charlton, p.118

the time.⁷³ The virtual ultimatum from Schuman had given the impression 'that Schuman did not want us in ... you don't do that to a proud country. Feeling was terribly high about the manner in which it was done'.⁷⁴ Foreign Office advice remained 'Western Europe with the United Kingdom was not strong enough to stand alone. A wider grouping ... was essential if the Western democracies were to be secured' and continued to stress the 'essential importance of our relationship with the United States'.⁷⁵

The Macmillan-Eccles Plan

'Unhappy and dissatisfied with the outcome of the Schuman Plan vote', which they refused to accept as the last word⁷⁶, the Conservative Europeanists decided to use the opportunity of the next Consultative Assembly in Strasbourg in August 1950 to propose a compromise, since they recognized legitimate objections to the Schuman Plan as it currently stood.⁷⁷ They felt that the British government's objections to surrendering national sovereignty would be shared by other European governments, especially Holland and Belgium, when details of the plan became known. They were also banking on French fears of handing her weak and obsolete industry to German control without a British counterweight; they underestimated French determination in this regard.

As a result of hard work and assistance from organizations such as ELEC, on 15 August 1950 the 'Macmillan-Eccles Plan'

⁷³ Charlton, p.120

⁷⁴ Lord Gordon-Walker in Charlton, p.111

⁷⁵ Lord Sherfield in Charlton, p.122

⁷⁶ Macmillan, p.201

⁷⁷ Macmillan, p.201

was put forward in the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. It was not presented as a cut-and-dried plan, but in the belief that 'they are the kind of proposals which a British government could and ought to have put forward at least as a basis of discussion'.⁷⁸ Its main purpose, set out in the formal resolution, was to 'meet British fears without injury to the main feature of the [Schuman] Plan'.⁷⁹ In other words, it was designed to meet British fears of putting a vital industry in the hands of foreign bureaucrats. Macmillan felt this preserved 'some tenable position for Britain', and (significantly) his own party. The Plan differed from the Schuman original in broad areas: the experts coordinating the iron and steel industries were to be responsible to a Committee of Ministers, and thus the link with the respective member Parliaments would be maintained. Secondly, the basic social, economic and strategic interests of each country would be safeguarded from encroachment by experts. Finally, any member could withdraw at three months' notice. The imperial preference system should not be jeopardized as far as British exports to the Commonwealth were concerned, and the authority would have only advisory powers *vis-à-vis* capital investment in Britain. Other clauses sought to protect wage standards and bargaining; the voting powers of members of the authority should be in proportion to the production and consumption of coal and steel in the member countries. Since the British coal and steel industry occupied a preeminent position in Europe, this was a blatant tactic to ensure British supremacy in decision making. Finally British association and signature to any such treaty was to be subject to the ratification of Parliament.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ FAC brief 18.9.50

⁷⁹ Macmillan, p.202

⁸⁰ taken from Macmillan, pp.202-3

(a) The Impact of the Macmillan-Eccles Plan

Significantly these proposals did not have their Conservative colleagues' wholehearted approval. Of the informal shadow cabinet, Macmillan noted Lyttleton approved, whereas Churchill was only 'fairly satisfied'. In his autobiography, Macmillan explained this away with the argument that the authors preferred Churchill not to put his name to this paper, as he had not had time to consult his Shadow Cabinet. 'It was also felt that Churchill should stay out of detailed controversy', even if he should give his general blessing.⁸¹ Eden had been more forthcoming. In discussions with Macmillan, he expressed his opinion that this contribution was beneficial from Europe and the Conservative party's point of view.

The authors of the revised plan realized that a federal plan would not be acceptable to the British electorate, which was a crucial consideration since an election seemed imminent. The Macmillan-Eccles Plan was designed as a compromise between the French and British positions, but also to reassert British leadership of Europe. It foundered upon Monnet's determination that the British would not sabotage his carefully laid plans to tie the German and French economies tightly together. In the debate on the Schuman Plan in the Assembly, although Macmillan's speech was well received, Paul Reynaud argued that as the agreement on the Schuman Plan would be signed in four weeks nothing further could be done, and appealed to Macmillan to withdraw his amendment.⁸² 'As a consequence of the immediate and continuing favourable responses the Europeans and the Americans made to the Schuman proposals, Britain lost the more or less controlling influence it had managed to exercise until then over the evolving

⁸¹ Macmillan, p.203

⁸² Macmillan, p.209

character and extent of European unity.'⁸³

The scant attention paid by the British press to the Strasbourgers' tactics was critical. *Crossbencher* fulminated that by their advocacy of the Schuman Plan these Conservatives enabled Herbert Morrison to do real damage to their cause against the nationalization of iron and steel. The 'far-sighted men,' such as Legge-Bourke were applauded; whereas 'those slap-happy Schumanites, Boothby, Eccles and Macmillan' received the blame for laying the Tories open to 'this devastating argument'.⁸⁴ *Crossbencher* concluded, 'The Tories have promised that if they are returned at the next election they will denationalize steel. This too is not enough. They must promise not to internationalize it.'

The Conservative delegates at the Council of Europe felt very frustrated at the apathy in their national press, in public opinion, and in Westminster. Macmillan held a press conference immediately after the vote on the Schuman Plan in Strasbourg, and remarked, 'Of course I know that all this is only small beer and no one at home takes the slightest interest!' Behind the apparent self-deprecation, he was obviously bitter his campaign had achieved such limited success. His Strasbourg colleague, Lord Birkenhead ruefully commented the delegates of the Council of Europe had the feeling that they were at the hub of the universe in Strasbourg, and it had been a chastening and salutary experience on his return to Westminster to discover his political friends felt he had been buried in oblivion. This impression was attributed partly to the 'famine in newsprint' but he 'could not escape the conclusion that many regarded the Council of Europe as a polyglot debating society ... merely duplicating the functions of NATO, the Brussels Treaty and

⁸³ Charlton, p.89

⁸⁴ *Daily Express* 24.9.50

OEEC'.⁸⁵

(b) The Reaction of the Labour Government:

The reaction at home was confined to the feeling that Conservative delegates were speaking with one voice at Strasbourg and with another at home.⁸⁶ The Macmillan-Eccles Plan had no impact whatsoever on the British domestic scene. Labour's studied disdain of the Strasbourg Assembly continued, seen in the government's reluctance to grant parliamentary time to consideration of the Strasbourg resolutions: such discussion should come out of time allotted to the Opposition. The Strasbourg resolutions were finally debated on 13 November 1950 against the background of the Pleven Plan. Labour, stung by Tory accusations of sloth and ineptitude, returned to the theme that Conservatives had carried national political controversy to Strasbourg, with the accusations of semi-sabotage. 'But either because of the political situation at home or for whatever reason the British Government made no further move to take part in this great affair.'⁸⁷ There was small consolation for the Conservative delegates to Strasbourg. In May 1951, there took place the last stage of discussions at the Consultative Assembly on the Schuman Plan, which considered the report of the Committee and the appropriate resolution. According to Macmillan, although it was tragic that the British government had refused to join the initial talks, 'my colleagues and I could take some satisfaction in the final form of the Schuman Plan, since the Higher Authority although still supranational, was not supreme'.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ 15.11.50 *HL Deb.*169.336-37

⁸⁶ see Birkenhead

⁸⁷ Macmillan, p.210

⁸⁸ Macmillan, p.212

The European Army

Long before the Korean War, Conservative politicians had argued for the rearmament of Western Germany within the Western camp. Widespread anxiety about a Communist invasion of Western Germany - the Soviet Union and its satellites already enjoyed an overwhelming superiority in numbers of troops, tanks and divisions in central Europe - had been fuelled with the news of Russia's arming the East German 'police'.

(a) The Conservative Europeanists and The European Army

Churchill raised the topic in the Foreign Affairs debate on 28 March 1950.⁸⁹ Julian Amery chose the subject for his maiden speech in the same debate.⁹⁰ In their view, Europe must be convinced that Britain would come to its aid. Eden preferred to stress the Atlantic Pact (signed April 1949) as the preferred vehicle for a German contribution to Western defence.⁹¹ But for the Labour party, and indeed for many Conservatives, the prospect of a revived German High Command and possible resurgence of Prussian militarism was deeply repugnant. It was still only five years since Hitler's defeat. The Conservative Europeanists' were the targets of accusations of advocating German rearmament when there was no pressing need. Bevin was determined to resist such calls, declaring firmly that 'all of us are against' the rearming of Germany.⁹²

⁸⁹ 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.191

⁹⁰ *HC Deb.*473.218-223

⁹¹ 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.316

⁹² 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.324

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 heightened existing fears. There was a strong feeling among the Europeanists that the Council of Europe was entitled to, and should, discuss defence - an area which the Council of Ministers jealously guarded as their prescriptive right. (Eden and the majority of Conservatives agreed with Bevin on this.) Undaunted, Churchill raised the idea of a European Army at the second Assembly in Strasbourg in August 1950, his second major contribution to the Europe debate. As with other aspects of his European 'policy', Churchill had no well-defined plan; the details were to be provided by his worker bees, in particular Sandys. Insofar as Churchill had conceived the structure of such an organization, he imagined something akin to the Allied Command of World War II. 'His purpose was to throw out general ideas and give impetus towards movements already at work. It was for others to find detailed solutions.' But as Churchill commented, there was a method in his approach: 'I am sure it would be a mistake to get involved in details. The Council of Europe can never at this stage in affairs deal with problems that belong to executive governments. It may point the way and give inspiration.'⁹³

(b) The Reaction of the Labour Government

Although Churchill and his fellow Europeanists were not successful in persuading Bevin of the merits of the idea, it was thanks to the Conservative leader that the idea of German rearmament through a European army entered international debate. The Labour government only very reluctantly acquiesced in the notion of German rearmament upon the insistence of the Americans. America had indicated in the first NATO staff meetings in 1949 that she did not intend to commit any further ground troops to Europe. Her change of position in September 1950 was conditional upon the rearming

⁹³ Churchill to Macmillan, quoted in Macmillan, pp.218-219

of Western Germany: this increase in American troops in Europe was temporary until 12 German divisions had been raised and ready to take up their position. Intent on satisfying American demands, yet determined to contain its former foe, the French Foreign Minister René Pleven outlined his plan to the French National Assembly in October 1950. Pleven acknowledged that his ideas were based on Churchill's plan presented to the Council of Europe earlier that summer.⁹⁴

Churchill's support for Labour's foreign policy generally was 'a powerful reinforcement' for Attlee and Bevin in their decision to support German rearmament against the wishes of most of their Cabinet colleagues. They knew they could rely upon Churchill (despite continuing reluctance inside the Foreign Office and the Parliamentary Labour Party) to bring the Conservatives to support the policy and make it bipartisan.⁹⁵

(c) Conservative Opinion of the Pleven Plan

The Conservative Europeanists themselves were unhappy with the French version of Churchill's original idea. The debate within the Tory party over the solution to the German problem continued between those who saw the need to incorporate Germany into the Western defence system required allaying the fears of the French (the Eden thesis); and those who argued that the extravagant French proposals for European rearmament were doomed to failure, and should be allowed to fail, providing Britain with the opportunity to suggest a practical alternative (the Macmillan thesis: Macmillan felt the Pleven Plan was more likely to soothe the French than to frighten the

⁹⁴ Anthony Nutting: *Europe Will Not Wait*, p.37

⁹⁵ Martin Gilbert: *Never Despair*, p.575

Russians.)⁹⁶ Those who were vehemently anti-European, such as Herbert Williams and Legge-Bourke were firmly opposed to the EDC⁹⁷, stressing a preference for joint command (ie, on NATO lines) for Europe's defence.

Churchill disliked the Pleven Plan intensely, describing the proposed army as a 'sludgy amalgam'. His influence upon other Europeanists was so potent that when he evinced less interest in Europe, they chimed in accordingly.⁹⁸ Faced with the direction Europe was now taking, most of the Conservative Europeanists began to blow 'hot and cold' towards Europe. Sandys persisted, asking the Labour government to reconsider its opposition to the European Army.⁹⁹ In February 1951, he undertook a personal initiative, sending a compromise plan for a European army to ministers of governments taking part in the forthcoming conference in Paris. Sandys was currently the *rapporteur* for the European Army for the European Assembly, but he stressed, somewhat ingenuously, to each recipient that he was acting in a private capacity. His proposal was for the creation of a European army by progressive stages, arguing that arrangements would be confined to practical military co-operation without any political and constitutional implications. Hopefully this would enable all West European countries, including Britain, to participate in the second stage. Sandys envisaged that those nations who wished to conclude 'a closer and more defensive union would together set up the necessary European political institutions on the lines of the Pleven Plan, or any other agreed basis'.¹⁰⁰ This attempt at a functional, inter-governmental halfway house

⁹⁶ Horne, p.322

⁹⁷ 13.11.50, *HC Deb.*480.1458 and 480.1483

⁹⁸ taken from Horne, p.321

⁹⁹ 13.11.50, *HC Deb.*480.1415

¹⁰⁰ Sandys to Bidault, the French President, 9.2.51, Biggs-Davison papers

failed to satisfy French fears, and Sandys' initiative came to nought.

Europe and the Commonwealth

Another minor success achieved by the Conservative delegates to the Strasbourg Assembly was the invitation extended to Commonwealth parliamentarians to attend the Assembly's proceedings. The Conservative delegates were constantly mindful of the tensions within their party on the issues of Europe and Empire and the instinctive mistrust of the continent in Britain.¹⁰¹ The instigators of the invitation to Commonwealth politicians clearly wanted to widen Commonwealth involvement in British links with Europe. 'As long as we are the only members of the Commonwealth present at Strasbourg, we are bound to keep looking over our shoulders to make sure that we are not getting out of step with Commonwealth opinion. But it is difficult to give a lead when you are looking over your shoulder, especially in an Assembly where decisions have to be taken quickly and there is not always time to refer back.' It was hoped that if there were representatives of Commonwealth opinion with them - not officials but politicians who could give broad guidance at every stage - then they would have the confidence to take decisions 'and run the risk that leadership demands'.¹⁰² In May 1951 the European Assembly, on this initiative of the British delegates, issued an invitation to Commonwealth governments to be represented at Strasbourg by official observers. The following month an Empire Commonwealth conference met to consider methods of establishing closer economic relations between Western Europe and the British Dominions.

¹⁰¹ Butler, 1.11.50, *HC Deb.*480.166

¹⁰² Julian Amery to Biggs-Davison 17.1.51, Biggs-Davison papers

Summary

The influence wielded by the Conservative Europeanists in 1950 and 1951 was less potent than in the previous Parliament but their achievements were far from negligible. The Labour government was forced to account for its negative stance towards the Schuman Plan; in the opinion of one junior Labour Minister, Churchill's 'Why not be there?' was devastating.¹⁰³

The Macmillan-Eccles Plan did help influence the final structure of the European Coal and Steel Community, albeit it in a minor way. Their greatest success lay in Churchill's public advocacy of a West German contribution to West European defence through the creation of a European Army, which considerably influenced the Pleven Plan.

The Conservative Europeanists' contribution to international debate was, in the eyes of their continental colleagues in Strasbourg, of great importance. Outside that forum they dwindled in significance. The Attlee government remained resolutely hostile to the Council of Europe proceedings. Not only had there developed a lamentable confusion between official and personal views expressed there,¹⁰⁴ the Consultative Assembly grossly exceeded its brief. By 1951 the British government further sought to undermine any legitimacy of discussion in Strasbourg by refusing to send a senior government minister for the 1951-53 session.

Nor had the Europeanists won over their Conservative colleagues. In May 1950 the Conservatives were faced with an uncomfortable issue which obliged them to examine - for some probably for the first time - what exactly they had envisaged when supporting general sentiments of European co-operation; the partisan process of government provided an convenient escape route for those who could not stomach the Schuman

¹⁰³ Wilson in Charlton, p.110

¹⁰⁴ Attlee, 13.6.51, *HC Deb.*488.2298

Plan's ultimate federalist aim. Once German rearmament became the political issue of the decade, the manifest ambivalence of the Tory Sceptics about the form 'Europe' was taking was increasingly shared by their more enthusiastic Conservative colleagues. Thereafter the difference between the Labour government and the Conservative Europeanists lay in the question of emphasis and tone, not substance. And again it was the impression of Churchill's titanic personality upon his party that was the crucial factor: when he 'reined in' on Europe, so did his supporters.

CHAPTER 5: THE TRIUMPH OF EDEN: 1951-56

With Churchill's return to Downing Street, continental federalists and Conservative Europeanists had high hopes of a substantial shift in Britain's attitudes towards European integration. However, both groups were swiftly disillusioned. The Conservative delegates to Strasbourg found themselves the pariahs of the Assembly after Eden's statement in Rome (November 1951) that Britain would not join the EDC. Thereafter, as Churchill's government adhered to Bevin's foreign policy on Europe, Conservative backbench attempts to foster more positive attitudes to inter-governmental co-operation through the Council of Europe were marginal and very largely ignored. Eden's approach appeared vindicated when, following the French government's refusal to ratify the EDC treaty in August 1954, his suggestion for German rearmament under the NATO umbrella (extending the Brussels Pact arrangements for West European union) was accepted. There was universal Conservative pleasure that the British preference for inter-governmental arrangements appeared to have triumphed over continental enthusiasm for supranationalism.

There was no broad policy change when Eden became Prime Minister, although the new Foreign Secretary, Macmillan, had been an ardent supporter of Europe. However, after 1955 there was growing Conservative backbench support for more involvement with Europe, thanks to the defeat of imperial preference at the party conference in 1954 (an issue which had proved a powerful distraction from European integration in the early 1950s), and the arrival of a younger generation of MPs in the 1955 Parliament. This support was an unexpected and welcome prop to Macmillan's and Thorneycroft's moves to associate Britain with the emerging common market in a free trade area in 1956.

The Effect of the October Election

a) Europeanists:

Departures:

Norman Bower

Nigel Davies

Quintin Hogg

Uvedale Corbett

Sir Cuthbert Headlam

Ernest Gates

John Maitland

John Maude

Stanley Prescott

Robert Thorp

Mervyn Wheatley

Departures (1951-55):

Malcolm Bullock (1953)

Edward Carson (1953)

William Cuthbert (1954)

Edward Keeling (1954)

Sidney Marshall (1954)

Richard Law (1954)

Walter Smiles (1953)

Christopher York (1954)

Arrivals:

John Hughes Hallet

Nigel Nicolson (1952)

(b) Anti-Europeanists:

Departures (1951-55):

Waldron Smithers (1954)

The 'Crunch': Strasbourg, November 1951

The Conservative Europeanists had considerable hopes for a more enthusiastic attitude to Europe, encouraged by Churchill's past advocacy and the presence of leading supporters of closer relations with Europe within the government; Sandys, Eccles and Thorneycroft were ministers, and Macmillan and Maxwell Fyfe held Cabinet posts. Maxwell Fyfe was appointed to lead a strong delegation to Strasbourg; a further fillip came in the week before the Assembly's meetings when, 'despite strong opposition from the Foreign Office', Churchill appointed Boothby to represent the Conservatives, and by implication the government, in a debate in Strasbourg between members of Congress and a delegation from the Consultative Assembly.¹

Although the Conservative delegates concurred with their government that the Pleven Plan was quite unsuitable,² accepting the powerful strategic arguments against British involvement, they were keen that there should be a marked change in tone. They assured the Strasbourg Assembly that the new Conservative government would give more encouragement to the Council of Europe: although Britain could not belong exclusively to any one grouping - considerations of defence³, Commonwealth ties and the economic implications of the sterling area precluded British participation in a purely European community - Britain might be the lynch pin between a wider Atlantic community and 'European arrangements on a supra-national basis'.⁴

They were swiftly disillusioned. 'Maxwell Fyfe spoke in the

¹ Robert Boothby, *Recollections of a Rebel*, p.219

² Lord Amery

³ In 1950 British troops were active in Egypt, Malaya and Korea.

⁴ Boothby, quoted in *Times*, 20.11.51

morning in Strasbourg. The big guns [Winston, Macmillan] were sitting in Whitehall, but Maxwell Fyfe was acting with full Cabinet authority.'⁵ Although the wording of his statement was carefully cautious, Maxwell Fyfe was convinced that he was issuing a positive statement which significantly changed the emphasis of Britain's approach.⁶ He meant 'that we would join the Pleven discussions to remould it. We would take a full and honourable part in negotiations which Britain had refused to do over the Schuman Plan, brushing aside the commitment to supranationalism. We all went off to lunch and came back at 5.00pm when we saw the papers with the headline about Eden's statement in Rome'⁷ ... The whole thing was unbelievably awful.'⁸ 'We were regarded as almost untouchables, and it would be better if we went home.'⁹

On 3 December 1951 the whole Conservative delegation in Strasbourg (Amery, Boothby, Beamish, Horden, Hollis, Mott-Radclyffe and Lady Tweedsmuir) signed a round-robin letter to Churchill saying their position was intolerable.¹⁰ 'It was a desperate message ... saying we must make our goodwill known otherwise Europe would fall apart and form something without us. It was a really strongly worded letter of protest asking if we had gone back on everything that we said.'¹¹ Boothby

⁵ Lord Amery

⁶ Sir Robert Rhodes James interview; see Anthony Nutting, *Europe Will Not Wait*, p.40

⁷ At a press conference following the NATO meeting, Eden suggested that while Britain would not supply formations to the European army she might be able to take part in other ways: *Times* 29.11.51

⁸ Lord Amery

⁹ Ursula Branston

¹⁰ Lord Amery; and see Boothby, p.221

¹¹ Boothby: in Alan Thompson, *The Day Before Yesterday*, p.104

wrote personal letters of protest to Churchill¹² and Eden¹³ during December 1951, stressing American Congressmen visiting Strasbourg wanted Britain to take the lead in European federation to counter the possibility of West German domination, but received no reply. Similarly, Henry Hopkinson, the leader of the British delegation to Strasbourg the following year, wrote to Churchill of the 'ill feeling' Britain's rejection of the EDC was causing in Europe. 'Nothing happened. Thereafter the European Movement rather sank. Although we went on meeting, the steam went out of it.'¹⁴

The Conservative Europeanists and Europe: 1951-1955

The events of November 1951 proved to be a watershed. Thereafter there emerged three lines of approach in Conservative backbench attitudes to Europe:

a) thanks to the distractions of German rearmament and the political form this was taking through the EDC/EPC, and imperial preference, only a hard core of MPs within the Strasbourg delegation and in organizations such as the British Committee of ELEC, worked to counter Eden's indifference to the development of Little Europe, and sought to offer alternative military and economic arrangements: Amery, Smithers and Boothby;

b) the 'centrist line', favoured by those Conservatives who wanted a British lead within the Council of Europe and a

¹² John Young: 'Churchill's "No" to Europe: The Rejection of European Union by Churchill's post-war Government 1951-52', *Historical Journal* 1958, pp.923-937

¹³ see Robert Rhodes James: *Bob Boothby*, p.364

¹⁴ Lord Amery

closer association with the ECSC,¹⁵ and who were profoundly discouraged by the Foreign Office's indifference. These MPs included Beamish, Boyle¹⁶, Hope,¹⁷ Maclay (after 1954),¹⁸ Nicolson,¹⁹ Longden,²⁰ Kerr²¹ and Roberts; and Hay, Foster, Reader Harris,²² Hughes Hallet,²³ Pitman,²⁴ Cyril Black,²⁵ Hugh Fraser,²⁶ and Tilney²⁷ who were closely connected with Federal Union or its parliamentary group;²⁸

c) the 'Eden thesis': Eden's unwillingness to join moves towards European integration was the obverse of his desire for Britain to continue to play a world role. The Foreign Secretary preferred association with Europe not participation - the Atlantic approach, which ignored the Council of Europe. The bulk of the party endorsed his attitude.

¹⁵ Roberts and Hope, FAC 5.5.54

¹⁶ MP for Handsworth 1950-70

¹⁷ MP for Midlothian and Peebles 1945-50; Edinburgh Pentlands 1950-64

¹⁸ MP for Montrose Burghs 1940-50; Renfrewshire 1950-64

¹⁹ MP for Bournemouth 1952-59

²⁰ MP for Hertfordshire South West 1950-74

²¹ MP for Oldham 1935-45; Cambridge 1950-66

²² MP for Heston and Isleworth 1950-70

²³ MP for Croydon 1951-55; Croydon North East 1955-64

²⁴ MP for Bath 1945-64

²⁵ MP for Wimbledon 1950-70

²⁶ MP for Stone 1945-50; Stafford and Stone 1950-83

²⁷ MP for Liverpool, Wavetree 1950-70

²⁸ see John Pinder and Richard Mayne: *Federal Union*

(a) Conservative Europeanists and Military Integration:

'For better or for worse the ideal of a United Europe [became] identified in the public mind with the plan for the European Defence Community.'²⁹ Conservatives were agreed that Britain, with its global military, economic and colonial commitments, could not join a European federation. At first glance, it seems curious that the Conservative Europeanists did not point to French willingness to join such a federation which contrasted so sharply with British animosity, but even the enthusiasts argued there appeared no comparison between British and French circumstances. Although France might have as many extra-European interests and anxieties, 'Britain was a special case with a completely different approach; the French did not have the equivalent of the White Dominions'.³⁰ Their conviction remained, based partly on long-standing Anglo-French colonial animosity and France's defeat in 1940, that Britain was the only other global power, apart from America and the Soviet Union.

Although there was widespread Conservative scepticism about the possibility of European political union and the viability of the EDC,³¹ most Tories endorsed Eden's support of the EDC process in the absence of a French alternative: 'no one was prepared to contemplate the future without the French'³² and the French were adamant in their opposition to independent German rearmament within NATO. Eden was determined that West European plans to federate would not fail for lack of British encouragement, but Britain could not join the EDC. Even those European moderates (eg Hope, Mott-Radclyffe, Longden) who were conscious of the danger of a rearmed Germany allied

²⁹ Amery article, *Daily Telegraph* 9.6.52

³⁰ Lord Thomas interview with author

³¹ Sir Peter Smithers

³² Lord Glendevon

with Russia³³, agreed this country could not surrender sovereignty³⁴ over her armed forces to a European political authority: the Commonwealth, the 'most stable force in the world', remained Britain's first priority.

Only a few Conservative Europeanists argued it was possible to put forward a constructive alternative to the idea of Britain joining a European federation. Boothby vehemently opposed the EDC in favour of German rearmament within NATO, arguing it was indefensible to ask the French and Germans to join something in which Britain was unwilling to participate. He did not believe the French would ratify the EDC, nor that there was any real French support for the idea of a 'Little Europe' federation.³⁵ Smithers, too, saw growing French concern at the possible repercussions for the French Union in European federation and apprehensions that this would lead to German interference in French colonial policy.³⁶ By mid-1953 Smithers was convinced that Germany would dominate the Six and that if the EPC failed, 'Germany would emerge from the subsequent chaos as the leader and still obtain American support'. As Germany was not regarded as stable politically, the situation seemed particularly grave. Britain had to be prepared to intervene with an alternative policy.³⁷

Amery initially argued British association with the EDC, short of full participation, was the correct course. Since a European army was a pre-requisite for West German rearmament and such an army 'will probably not be formed without British

³³ Longden, FAC 5.5.54

³⁴ FAC 7.7.54

³⁵ FAC 29.10.52

³⁶ FAC 29.10.52

³⁷ Smithers, FAC 17.5.53

participation',³⁸ a token British force could be placed under European command. In addition, 'if the British contingent were to include a Canadian unit or units it would be a Commonwealth force, and serve as a symbol of the special Europe-Commonwealth relationship, within what is somewhat nonsensically described as the Atlantic Community'. Britain could help prevent a collapse of the European idea by stating plainly she could join a European union run along Commonwealth lines³⁹; such a proposal might help assert British leadership in Europe.⁴⁰ Amery helped Macmillan⁴¹ draft his submission to Cabinet in January 1952,⁴² but Eden's supremacy in Cabinet quashed this initiative.

By late 1953 an unlikely alliance had developed between pro-Europeans and anti-European Tories: both groups were frustrated at Eden's persistence in propping up the French over the EDC and wanted the government to 'get off the fence'.⁴³ Amery had come to regard the EDC as 'a mistaken policy'; there was a danger the arrangement would tie France and Germany so closely that this would tip the balance against Britain.⁴⁴ Amery appreciated the difficulty in withdrawing support immediately, but questioned the need 'to make active propaganda' in continued support of the EDC.⁴⁵ The anti-Europeans were antagonized by America 'pushing the federal

³⁸ Amery to Biggs-Davison 7.12.51, Biggs-Davison papers

³⁹ *Manchester Guardian* 1.2.52

⁴⁰ Amery to Biggs-Davison 7.12.51, Biggs-Davison papers

⁴¹ Lord Amery

⁴² see Young: 'Churchill's "No" to Europe', p.931-934

⁴³ see Smithers, FAC 1.7.53

⁴⁴ FAC 7.7.54

⁴⁵ FAC 1.7.53

idea'⁴⁶; the government's present 'gutless'⁴⁷ policy must change to a decision for or against EDC - if the decision was against, the Conservative government should do its utmost to defeat the EDC.

There was universal Conservative pleasure over West European Union (WEU) - the extension of the Brussels Pact, permitting the rearmament of Germany within NATO, brokered by Eden in October 1954): this 'magnificent lead'⁴⁸ which 'exemplif[ied] British, rather than continental techniques, allowed for organic growth'.⁴⁹ European enthusiasts hoped the government would now go beyond its prior 'half-hearted support [to] Strasbourg'.⁵⁰ British interests required encouraging a Strasbourg revival now that the federal idea was dead; the moment appeared right to consider advances in economic as well as political integration.⁵¹ The work of the Economic Committee of the Council of Europe should be pushed ahead in co-operation with the new Brussels Treaty organization. Eden was not receptive to these ideas, having no desire to cut across the OEEC's work or to encourage political or economic polarization. Nor did he wish to see an grouping of NATO's European partners which excluded Britain's North Atlantic NATO allies, America and Canada.⁵²

⁴⁶ Legge-Bourke, FAC 5.5.54

⁴⁷ Legge-Bourke, FAC 5.5.54

⁴⁸ Amery, quoted in *Times* 8.10.54

⁴⁹ Smithers, FAC 23.11.54

⁵⁰ see Smithers, FAC 10.11.54

⁵¹ Britain joined the ECSC as an associated member on 21.12.54.

⁵² FAC 23.11.54

(b) Conservative Europeanists and Political Integration:
British Leadership in the Council of Europe:

For the Conservative Europeanists, the debate over the most desirable arrangement for German rearmament was part of the wider debate over the question of British leadership of Europe. They appreciated the need for a strong Europe to earn Washington's respect, to forestall American dictation or abandonment. The unspoken question was 'Who is to be America's principal ally in Europe: Germany in the Six, or Britain in the Fifteen?'

After November 1951 continental Europe was 'no longer comforted by assurances of Britain's "close association" or "warm welcome" or by any other euphemisms for no direct participation'.⁵³ Rudely disabused of the illusion that only Labour's 'selfish' refusal to take part had prevented the Federal Union of Europe, and that a Conservative government could be cajoled into changing policy⁵⁴, henceforth the idea of 'Little Europe' dominated. Eden's acceptance of this, through his support of the French throughout the tortured progress of the EDC treaty and his persistent refusal to support the Council of Europe⁵⁵ despite appeals from the Europeanists,⁵⁶ left the stage free for the Six, and for the Germans to become the Americans' favoured continental allies through US loans and aid to the EDC. The work of those dedicated Conservative Europeanists who strove to ensure that Britain's voice was heard in the forum of 'Big Europe' was relegated to the side lines.

⁵³ *Times* 29.11.51

⁵⁴ *Times* 29.11.51

⁵⁵ The "lowly" level (Lord Colyton) of those ministers appointed to lead the British delegation manifestly demonstrated his poor opinion of the Strasbourg Assembly.

⁵⁶ Boothby, quoted in *Times* 7.1.52

For the Conservative Europeanists it was 'a black period'.⁵⁷ Struggling for Britain to regain the political initiative in Europe, a battle which Eden was content not to fight, they were immensely frustrated at the Foreign Secretary's refusal to exploit an inter-governmental, pragmatic institution which 'was tailor-made for British interests'.⁵⁸ They repeatedly urged Eden to demonstrate the value Britain placed upon the Assembly's deliberations in a vain attempt to counter the development of the Six and the corresponding exclusion of Britain. They feared German domination of the emerging entity, particularly once the issue of German reunification resurfaced as the Soviet Union sought to woo West Germany from the Western camp.

The Europeanists scored one ephemeral success. The combined pressure of pro-European junior ministers, backbench delegates to Strasbourg⁵⁹, and civil servants obliged the Foreign Secretary to put forward the 'Eden Plan' in 1952; drafted by Nutting, the junior Foreign Office minister leading the Conservative delegation 1952-4, this plan was designed to harmonize the emerging institutions of the Six with the Council of Europe, by amending the Statute of the Council of Europe to permit its existing organs to become the institutions of the ECSC and the EDC. The enthusiasts publicly welcomed the Eden Plan as an important advance in Britain's attitude to Europe.⁶⁰ Britain's relations with the ECSC would be 'scarcely distinguishable from full membership'.⁶¹ The Tory delegates worked hard at their

⁵⁷ Ursula Branston

⁵⁸ Sir Peter Smithers

⁵⁹ Lord Glendevon

⁶⁰ Amery article, *Daily Telegraph* 9.6.52; Nutting: *Europe*, p.144

⁶¹ Amery, *Daily Telegraph* 30.9.52

allotted task⁶² of showing the Eden Plan was not simply a ruse to allow Britain to control the pace whilst remaining outside the new political organs. Amery was appointed *rapporteur* of the General Affairs Committee of the Consultative Assembly to resolve relations between the inner Six and the outer Nine. By the end of 1952 'Britain's position had greatly improved and much credit was due to Amery';⁶³ the enthusiasts were boasting 'there seems to be a considerable swing away from "Little Europe" back towards our original ideas'.⁶⁴ But the Conservative Europeanists soon realized that the Eden Plan was merely 'window dressing'.⁶⁵ The political landscape in Strasbourg remained forlorn as the Eden Plan slipped below the surface. It had created a positive impression among the countries of 'Big Europe' but roused the suspicions of the Six, in particular Monnet and 'the Germans who would prefer that there should be no links between the Six and Britain'.⁶⁶ Continental opinion no longer saw Britain as dragging its feet, but instead 'was inclined to suspect that we might be trying through the Eden proposals to mould federal developments our way'.⁶⁷ The Eden Plan failed to divert the continentals from their chosen course.⁶⁸

Nor did the Eden Plan mark a sea change in Eden's and the Foreign Office's attitudes on the value of the Council of Europe and the desirability of British leadership in Strasbourg. 'The policy of the Government was perfectly

⁶² *Times* 24.9.52

⁶³ Nutting, FAC 29.10.51

⁶⁴ Amery to Biggs-Davison 27.11.52, Biggs-Davison papers

⁶⁵ Lord Thorneycroft interview with author

⁶⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 24.9.52

⁶⁷ Amery, FAC 9.7.52

⁶⁸ see Nutting: *Europe*, pp.44-45; Paul-Henri Spaak: *The Continuing Battle*, p.226

clear. They wanted to be in on the act so far as they could be, in order to prevent any excesses which might unify Europe against us.'⁶⁹ To the profound disgust of some Tory delegates,⁷⁰ the British government's line remained that every encouragement should be given to the formation of the projected Little Europe and that if federation should fail, Britain must not in any way be to blame.⁷¹ This led to a public split within the Conservative delegation to Strasbourg.⁷² These and other protests made through the Whips' office and to Eden about the damage caused by the Government's negative attitude were to no avail. 'It was always made clear in one way or another by the Foreign Office people in charge of the British Conservative delegates that we should not "rock the boat", "go native", be too enthusiastic about the pie-in-the-sky ideas of "integration", and above all not to let the Government down. This ... caused even more harm, because "the British are always so negative and they'll always find some way to argue that any progress towards integration is either impossible, impracticable or dangerous [to British interests]".'⁷³ The committed Europeanists

'did advocate in speeches and in Committees of the Council of Europe that we were personally in favour of closer links ... but these views had to be expressed tactfully so as not to upset our British colleagues nor to exceed the bounds of Government declared policy; there would have been no surer way of being dropped from the Delegation for the following year and therefore robbed of what was at the time the best forum for putting forward our opinions. [To say nothing of jeopardising any

⁶⁹ Sir Peter Smithers

⁷⁰ see *Daily Telegraph* 12.5.53

⁷¹ Nutting at Strasbourg, reported in *Daily Telegraph* 9.5.53

⁷² *Daily Telegraph* 12.5.53

⁷³ John Hay

possible elevation to office!]'⁷⁴

(c) Conservative Europeanists and Economic Integration:

The principal division in the Conservative European camp came in the economic sphere: between the 'anti-GATT' MPs (Smithers, Amery, and Boothby), and the 'pro-GATT' MPs (such as Hope, Gilbert Longden, Tilney and Nicolson) who favoured 'Atlantic Union'. To a very great extent, the battle within the Conservative party over Europe in the 1950s has to be seen in tandem with the internal struggle over imperial preference.

(i) Europe and 'Europe Overseas'

Boothby, Smithers and Amery continued to argue vehemently that Europe and Empire were complementary, not contradictory, strongly supported by Leo Amery. 'Entry into a European customs union would not by itself create a better balanced economy ... Europe and the British Commonwealth as a whole can most usefully supplement each other.'⁷⁵ As the 'only practical means by which that end can be achieved' was imperial preference, this campaign was aimed specifically at America and her campaign for 'non-discrimination'.

Between 1951 and 1953 there was strong continental pressure to concentrate on ideas for greater unity of the Six alone (for example, the Pflimlin plan, covering agriculture), particularly for currency union with a European central bank. 'Many of the promoters of [this] did not conceal their intention of waging an economic war against the sterling area and the leadership of the City of London'.⁷⁶ The British section of ELEC felt this would tend to disrupt the European

⁷⁴ John Hay

⁷⁵ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 1.1.52

⁷⁶ Juliet Rhys Williams letter, *Times* 19.10.53

Payments Union (EPU) and might end the greater co-operation in trade and finance between the sterling area and Europe for which it had always worked. A small number of Conservatives strove hard to counter this movement towards the economic federation of the Six. Boothby's and Hollis' proposals for the possibilities of drawing together the economies of Europe and the sterling area, together with their suggestions that exchange markets should be established in some European centres with upper and lower limits controlled by an equalization fund, were reflected in the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Economic Committee in 1951.⁷⁷ Boothby had already called for a world monetary conference to reconsider the Bretton Woods agreement, on the grounds of constant balance of payments difficulties, inadequate stocks of gold at its present price, and of hard currencies, and the restrictions which nearly all the signatories of the Bretton Woods agreement had been forced to maintain. Amery passionately believed that 'the Commonwealth is the ground plan to which all other things must be attached'. His desire for Britain to take a greater lead in European affairs was a reflection of his reluctance to be dependent upon America.⁷⁸

As these Conservatives saw it, no purely European, nor purely Commonwealth solution was possible. The answer was 'the abandonment of the obsolete doctrine of non-discrimination', the extension of the preferential system, and the reduction of dollar imports to the level of dollar income.⁷⁹ 'It is idle to imagine that a united Europe alone, whether it included Britain or not, could ever provide both the guns and butter or escape from dependence on the United States ... Only a Europe which has integrated its economy with that of countries ... [supplying] raw materials in which it is deficient and for

⁷⁷ *Times* 5.12.51

⁷⁸ Amery profile in *The Queen*, 14.7.54

⁷⁹ Boothby letter, *Times* 21.2.52

which it is dependent upon America' was a viable economy, and only the sterling area could provide this.⁸⁰ Intent on retaining the British initiative of the Eden Plan, Amery suggested to the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee that 'we should have some new suggestion for debate' at the Strasbourg Assembly in September 1952, which might develop the idea of the Commonwealth and Europe sharing economic resources as a balancing factor in relation to the dollar world.⁸¹

Thanks to these MPs' efforts - largely on Boothby's initiative as vice-chairman - in 1952 the Economic Committee of the Council of Europe drafted a set of proposals which came to be known as 'the Strasbourg Plan', intended to improve economic relations between the Council of Europe and overseas countries with which these countries had constitutional links. Boothby was building upon the 1951 Commonwealth-Europe conferences in Brussels and London, held under the auspices of ELEC, which had examined the possibility of closer economic co-operation between Commonwealth countries and Western Europe with a view to narrowing the dollar gap. His Strasbourg plan proposed a two-tier preferential system - leaving the existing Commonwealth preferential agreements in place, and developing a second preferential system within the whole group. Its aim was to harness the industrial resources of Western Europe to the raw material of its associated territories and by providing assured markets for both, to increase trade and production.⁸² The Plan was overwhelmingly accepted by the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. Eden sent it round the Commonwealth. It was then pigeonholed.⁸³ These proposals

⁸⁰ Hollis letter, *Times* 2.1.52

⁸¹ FAC 9.7.52

⁸² John Biggs-Davison: *The Walls of Europe* (London 1962), p.66

⁸³ Biggs-Davison, p.66

received scant attention at the 1953 Commonwealth Conference,⁸⁴ and were 'poleaxed' by the British Treasury.⁸⁵ While Conservative Europeanists felt that it was 'understandable' that Britain held aloof from the Schuman Plan, 'much less justified was the British failure to exploit ... [this] scheme ... [which] would have realised Bevin's ambition and brought Europe and "Europe overseas" together in a vast area of preference and development'.⁸⁶

This hard core of MPs persisted in their attempts to foster economic links between the EPU and the Commonwealth. The British section of ELEC devoted its energies to making the British view on European economic integration heard and understood 'against what at one time seemed hopelessly adverse tide'.⁸⁷ At the unofficial monetary conference organized by ELEC in Brussels in February 1953, building upon the shared feelings of influential groups in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and West Germany, the British delegation (which included Leo and Julian Amery) managed to deflect the propensity towards smaller areas of co-operation.⁸⁸ The final resolution welcomed the Schuman Plan, but stated plainly ELEC's preference for a 'truly European market' which was defined as a common market on the widest possible scale. Julian Amery and Boothby also formed part of the British delegation to the European Movement's second economic conference, held in London in January 1954, whose ultimate aim was 'to favour conditions which will lead to the creation of a free world market with the free movement of goods and currencies between Europe, the Commonwealth and the dollar

⁸⁴ Beddington-Behrens letter, *Times* 8.5.53

⁸⁵ Boothby, p.223

⁸⁶ Biggs-Davison, p.66

⁸⁷ *Times* 9.2.53

⁸⁸ *Times* 9.2.53

world'.⁸⁹ In order to deal with immediate problems the conference examined the possibility of closer economic and social ties between countries of Western Europe and their associated overseas territories, and the Commonwealth; this was the natural sequence of events from the Council of Europe's recommendations on the Strasbourg Plan. The economic tide seemed to be turning away from Little Europe.

(ii) Atlantic Union:

'Of course going on at the same time was Atlantic Union. This was quite a considerable movement, although there was not much structural propaganda. NATO was the successful alliance and seen as a thoroughly satisfactory organization. Many people felt this should be kept going and give it more political clout. There was an Atlantic Union Committee, and a lot of people from outside Westminster were interested. It was welcome to the Conservative government for quite a while because the more intrepid people like Amery were so pro-Europe.'⁹⁰

These Conservatives opposed increased protection on the grounds that it would limit the field of economic opportunity, and the remedy of Europe plus Empire was inadequate and unrealistic.⁹¹ They looked to the 'oceanwide partnership of the Commonwealth, Western Europe, and the United States', arguing that those who looked to Western Europe, their overseas territories and the sterling area 'would permanently cut Canada away from the Commonwealth'⁹² since Canada was not

⁸⁹ Biggs-Davison papers

⁹⁰ Ursula Branston

⁹¹ Cyril Osborne letter, *Times* 4.1.52

⁹² Tilney letter, *Times* 23.2.52

in the sterling area.⁹³ Canada was the key - 'so close to America economically, yet linked to Britain by friendship and tradition'.⁹⁴ This group firmly believed in the need for closer integration of policy and action between Europe, the Commonwealth and the USA to form a 'more organic organization'. NATO should be expanded beyond a mere military alliance (NATO from the beginning did have a wide remit), as 'such alliances serve only for limited periods of dire and obvious peril'. Nor could effective arrangements in the economic field be secured through *ad hoc* functional bodies which, like the OEEC and the Economic Commission for Europe, often overlap'. An Atlantic Community should not be restricted to the countries of the Atlantic seaboard, but 'embrace the civilizations of the democracies of free Europe'. To further this, a cross-party group, the 'Friends of Atlantic Union'⁹⁵, was formed which included Ted Leather, Longden, Tilney, Alfred Bossom and Nigel Nicolson.

In 1954 members of the Committee and Council of Atlantic Union founded a European Atlantic group, 'to provide a regular forum for members of existing European and Atlantic societies where they can maintain contact and discuss developments of European and Atlantic Communities'.⁹⁶ Longden and Nicolson were elected Executive members. The aim was to give background information on political and economic co-operation between NATO and various other international associations with the Council of Europe, West European Union, the OEEC and the ECSC.⁹⁷ However, 'in the end people became convinced that Atlantic Union did not matter, because they concluded that

⁹³ Tilney letter, *Times* 9.12.52

⁹⁴ Tilney letter, *Times* 4.1.52

⁹⁵ see Friends of Atlantic Union letters, *Times* 25.9.51 and 9.7.52

⁹⁶ Biggs-Davison papers

⁹⁷ Biggs-Davison papers

America would not divorce herself from the NATO alliance. And as long as they were part of the alliance, with NATO defending Europe, why worry about the European movement?'.⁹⁸

The Influence of the Conservative Europeanists 1951-55:

During Churchill's peacetime administration their political influence was negligible. Backbench pressure obliged Eden to offer the palliative of the Eden plan, but this came to nothing, thanks to French opposition. In essence, Conservative backbench support of 'Big Europe' through the Council of Europe foundered on the rock of Conservative front and backbench indifference.

i) the loss of Churchill's interest and support:

'We all thought at Strasbourg that Winston was fighting a lone and desperate battle against a hostile Cabinet on Europe. Not at all ... There was no battle because nobody in Cabinet put in a word for Europe as far as I can make out. Not even Maxwell Fyfe or Macmillan who had been ardent champions of Europe ... Winston lost interest.'⁹⁹ Churchill's refusal to give the lead, leaving British policy towards Europe to Eden and the Foreign Office (who were) deeply suspicious of all schemes for European union¹⁰⁰, seemed incomprehensible to some.¹⁰¹ Others did not speculate about Churchill's change of stance 'because he had had a thoroughly unreliable political career. We were all aware of his past inconsistencies'.¹⁰² To his personal coterie, Churchill's

⁹⁸ Ursula Branston

⁹⁹ Boothby in Thompson, p.104

¹⁰⁰ Lord Carr

¹⁰¹ Viscount Muirshiel (formerly Jack Maclay) interview, BOAPAH, LSE

¹⁰² Lord Glendevon

absence of interest was easily explained: 'Churchill's idea of a united Europe was more akin to de Gaulle's *Europe des Patries*. [He] always had at the front of his mind the concept of the close relationship of the English speaking peoples, and above all of England and the US.'¹⁰³ The idea of a supranational organization was not his idea of ideal European co-operation.¹⁰⁴

In December 1951 Churchill toyed with the idea that the EDC might be transformed into an 'integrated force' which emphasized national units; he was defeated in Cabinet by Eden, supported by the majority of his colleagues, which 'ruled out the danger of Churchill's idea supported by the pro-Europeans'.¹⁰⁵ Churchill's great age militated against a fight with his Foreign Secretary on Europe. There was an element of not wishing to saddle his successor with a policy of which Eden disapproved¹⁰⁶, and he was also fighting a war against Eden in the Middle East. 'He was tired and his one big idea was a summit with Russia. Therefore he did not push the Europe idea as much as he should have.'¹⁰⁷ 'He concentrated on the few things that interested him.'¹⁰⁸ Boothby too blamed this obsession 'with the idea of going down in history in a final phase of his premiership as a great peacemaker'¹⁰⁹ for Churchill's lack of interest. Whatever their opinion on the reason for Churchill's silence, 'those of us who believed in Europe were left flat. It was very

¹⁰³ Colville in Thompson, p.104

¹⁰⁴ Lord Carr

¹⁰⁵ see Young: 'Churchill's "No" to Europe', pp.930-31

¹⁰⁶ Sir Anthony Nutting

¹⁰⁷ Lord Amery

¹⁰⁸ Lord Carr

¹⁰⁹ Boothby in Thompson, p.104

dispiriting to those of us who saw Europe as the future.'¹¹⁰

The young European enthusiasts were loath to approach the Prime Minister as 'persuading Churchill' (to take a more positive line) was not a promising prospect on any subject, particularly for new backbenchers.¹¹¹ Boothby did try and failed.

(ii) the decisive influence of Eden:

To the ardent Europeanists, Eden was the villain. 'I am sure that there was a sharp division between [Churchill] and Eden on this subject. The latter thought the whole European "thing" was insubstantial and I would guess that it was a condition of his accepting the post of Foreign Secretary that there should be no Europe nonsense. The fact that the first meeting of the Consultative Assembly after the Conservative election victory was ignored by Anthony and that the negative position was stated immediately at it by Maxwell Fyfe, suggests that this had all been definitely settled in opposition.'¹¹² Eden had indeed already indicated there should be 'no Europe nonsense'. 'I remember when the government was formed in 1951 Churchill spoke to Eden, saying, "I want you to have a Minister of European Affairs, and I suggest this should be Duncan." Eden was adamant. He said (a) there was no reason for having such a Minister, and (b) he did not want Duncan. He wanted Selwyn and me.'¹¹³

From the outset, Eden was determined 'not to become involved [in European union] and his decision was vital'.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Lord Glendevon

¹¹¹ Sir Peter Smithers

¹¹² Sir Peter Smithers

¹¹³ Sir Anthony Nutting

¹¹⁴ Ursula Branston

'His position was quite clear: he intensely disliked the idea of European Union in any form other than the Concert of Europe ... He did not believe that there was any political substance in the movement on the Continent. His view of Europe was that of a skilled diplomat - a "Concert" - shades of Metternich. If I sat next to him in the smoke room he would say, "Now, old boy, anything but Europe." His prestige within the Foreign Office was immense. He was indeed a marvellous negotiator. His hostility to any engagement by Britain in the European process was translated into (i) the Maxwell Fyfe speech (November 1951) and (ii) the appointment of a minor official named Gallagher as British Permanent Representative in Strasbourg. In the Committee of Ministers' Deputies Gallagher systematically obstructed every constructive move: he was the most hated man in Strasbourg.'¹¹⁵

The Foreign Secretary was in favour of greater co-operation within Europe, but this should be between nation states. He regarded Britain as 'an active and enlightened European nation with a world role and not as a limb of Europe'. Britain should play a leading part in Europe for three reasons: (i) her history in Europe; (ii) her role in the War; and (iii) the 'three circles'. He and the Europeanists differed in the emphasis they placed on relations with Europe and the clash came because so many of the European enthusiasts' ideas appeared to Eden to underestimate or undermine Britain's role in the world.¹¹⁶ Eden was 'also very conscious of the general public and he was convinced that Europe could not be sold to the country'.¹¹⁷ Eden was right: 'the public attitude was a hangover from the War: after the strain of war,

¹¹⁵ Sir Peter Smithers

¹¹⁶ Lord Carr

¹¹⁷ Ursula Branston

most people were so thankful to be at peace. Foreign adventures were not on the agenda, nor did they like the idea of being tied up with the French and the Germans.¹¹⁸

Personalities also came into play. Accusations that he had personally stifled Churchill's pro-European inclinations rankled.¹¹⁹ Eden was convinced that the Conservative Europeanists 'were not just a policy pressure group, as much as a scheming policy pressure group'.

'The Council of Europe gave them platforms to make speeches with no government backing at all. It was not commonplace then for politicians other than ministers to go abroad to speak in a formal international forum such as the Council of Europe and thereby appear to obtain an international importance for what they said. He had fairly old-fashioned ideas that it was up to the Foreign Secretary to make policy and there should be no free enterprise efforts which made life difficult for him. Even if he had agreed with the content of what they were saying, he would have been tetchy because it was out of his control. People buzzing about on the periphery pretending more influence than they possessed were not welcome. He could not appreciate them, although he could understand them only too well, or at least their motives. Eden was inclined to think it was all much more of a plot than it was, but underlying this was the majority view, which he shared with the Foreign Office, that none of this would come to fruition ... He thought EDC would fail, and that Britain's proper role was to stand back a bit and to use her diplomatic skill to pick up the pieces, knock heads together, generally get all concerned

¹¹⁸ Ursula Branston; see also *Times* 1.9.50, quoted in Hugh Dalton: *High Tide and After*, p.336

¹¹⁹ Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez*, p.18

to see sense and moderation.'¹²⁰

His one concession to backbench pressure on Europe, the Eden plan, 'had a good impact on the backbenches. They knew Eden was not a pro-Europe man, but thought it was a very constructive thing to do. Eden took the idea round the capitals of Europe to gain support, which created a very good impression. Nutting told me later that Eden had not wanted to do so at all, but had been pressured by his civil servants.'¹²¹ But Eden was increasingly less susceptible to such backbench pressure. 'As time passed and Churchill was still in the saddle, Eden was critical of Churchill on an increasing number of matters, and Europe was obviously one of them.' Lord Glendevon recalls 'an upsetting moment' in 1954 when junior Minister at the Foreign Office, in charge of the Europe department: 'There came a critical moment in the Strasbourg context when I sent a minute to Eden saying it would be a good thing if he came to the next meeting. To my amazement, I got a note back, written on my memo, saying, "I am astonished I should be given this advice. Strasbourg is of no importance whatever". Of course he did have a quick temper, and I made allowances, but I was very taken aback.'¹²²

(iii) Whitehall:

With the exception of Nutting, 'Eden worked entirely with and relied upon his civil servants'.¹²³ These civil servants reinforced Eden's natural scepticism. Roger Makins¹²⁴,

¹²⁰ Lord Carr

¹²¹ Lord Glendevon

¹²² Lord Glendevon

¹²³ Lord Glendevon

¹²⁴ see Charlton, p.59

together with a number of other people thought that the American/British partnership was crucial'¹²⁵ and were deeply suspicious of European union; this sentiment pervaded Whitehall: the Board of Trade, under the leadership of Thorneycroft and Frank Lee, the Permanent Under Secretary, was the notable exception.¹²⁶ 'The Treasury and Foreign Office [were] not in favour of us pressing the matter at the time',¹²⁷ and as both ministries 'were a very powerful team, with two very experienced ministers at their head, both of whom were in the running for Prime Minister, and certainly not people Churchill wanted to take on',¹²⁸ Eden's approach to Europe had very powerful backing.

(iv) lack of ministerial support:

'With Sandys at Supply, Maxwell Fyfe at the Home Office, and Eccles relegated to the Ministry of Works - to his chagrin - the champions of Europe were isolated.'¹²⁹ The heavy burdens of office left little time for outside projects. In addition, 'they were on the fringe. Macmillan did produce a paper, but ... he was only Minister of Housing, and did not carry any weight.'¹³⁰ Macmillan who had his fingers burnt¹³¹ thereafter confined his energies to his ministerial brief. Eden's 'stay out' view was supported by the majority of the Cabinet. As Salisbury expressed it, 'We are not a continental nation but an island power with a colonial empire and unique relations with the independent members of the Commonwealth. Though we might maintain a close association with the

¹²⁵ Sir Edward Boyle interview, BOAPAH, LSE

¹²⁶ Sir Anthony Nutting

¹²⁷ Butler in Thompson, p.104

¹²⁸ Lord Thorneycroft

¹²⁹ Lord Amery

¹³⁰ Lord Thorneycroft

¹³¹ see Young: 'Churchill's "No" to Europe'

continental nations of Europe, we could never merge our interests wholly with theirs. We must be with, but not in, any combination of European powers'.¹³² Of the junior ministers, Hopkinson was rapidly promoted to Secretary for Overseas Trade at the Board of Trade, then was made Minister of State at the Colonial Office in May 1952. Hopkinson led the Conservative delegation to the Council of Europe in 1952, but a severe accident (he was badly burned in a fire on a train outside the Nancy tunnel just before Christmas) made this a brief appointment. Thereafter, his ministerial position effectively deprived the Europeanists of his support as he confined himself strictly to his brief. Lord Glendevon's pro-European inclinations were circumscribed by office.

Conservative Europeanists might reasonably have hoped British policy towards Europe to take a more positive turn after Macmillan's appointment as Foreign Secretary,¹³³ especially as this coincided with the Messina conference, 'but ... Eden was Prime Minister'.¹³⁴ In his first speech in the Commons Macmillan referred to the importance of the 'European Idea', but thereafter did nothing to promote it.¹³⁵ Macmillan was only Foreign Secretary for a short time and his tenure was not a success; Eden was determined to guide British policy, this time from No 10. Eden and Butler decided to withdraw Bretherton from the Spaak Committee deliberations in Brussels in November 1955. 'I think [Macmillan] found everything much more of a strain than he had expected, and his health seemed to suffer. Younger people, particularly, had great hopes of Macmillan. He was a good mixer, clever, amusing and had a lot of backing among young people. But he did not make much of

¹³² PRO.CAB128/24 CC(52)30 13.3.52

¹³³ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³⁴ Sir Peter Smithers

¹³⁵ Nigel Fisher: *Macmillan* (London 1982), pp.151-2

[Europe].¹³⁶ Macmillan's own political courage appeared to be lacking: 'He was never anxious to fall out with those in charge, because he did have ambitions. I could not say we had a spokesman at the top for Europe. As Foreign Secretary, he was extremely careful and cautious. His private commitment was there, but he was not prepared to take an heroic part.'¹³⁷

(v) The attitude of the Conservative backbenches:

In the early 1950s generally, 'there was very little in the party's mind, or the House of Commons' mind on the question of Europe'.¹³⁸ 'A certain number of people ... were very keen on it, but I can't say we would find many people going onto street corners and shouting "Hoorah for Europe". They were open to be led in early stages, but as time went on the thing polarized into people being either for or against it.'¹³⁹

There were the distractions of other, seemingly more important issues. When the Conservative party did turn its mind towards Europe, a 'large element' was opposed to closer links. There was a general Conservative distaste for the federal vehicle chosen for German rearmament¹⁴⁰, although many Tories had no greater love for the idea of 'Big Europe': 'An awful lot of decent colleagues thought nothing would come of the Council of Europe and that Strasbourg did not matter. It was a bit of a dog's dinner because Eden had become very much against it.'¹⁴¹ Outright opposition came from the 'right wing' but

¹³⁶ Ursula Branston

¹³⁷ Ursula Branston

¹³⁸ Private information

¹³⁹ Viscount Muirshiel, BOAPAH LSE

¹⁴⁰ see Herbert Williams letter, *Times* 1.12.51

¹⁴¹ Lord Glendevon

'was not very dramatic, nor tiresome, in marked contrast to its behaviour in the Suez Crisis'.¹⁴²

The problems of Big Europe: Conservative attitudes to the Council of Europe:

Most Conservative backbenchers regarded the Council of Europe was an irrelevance, serving no useful purpose.¹⁴³ 'About half a dozen set the pace, people like Julian Amery. But the more serious people, the more conservative moderates never moved from their healthy scepticism ... So much talk on Europe centred on Germany. Germany bounded forward with enormous speed and her reentry into international politics was through France, not through us'. The effect was two-fold: 'Germany was not looking to Britain, so the British people were disgruntled [and] as it was obvious Germany was working with France, a decided feeling grew up that this was not a healthy situation. This instinct in the country was shared to a great degree by both parties in the House of Commons. Therefore Europe struck very few chords back home.'¹⁴⁴ There was also an residue of animosity towards the French. 'Much depended on French behaviour from time to time, which always seemed to be unpredictable. Hostility is too strong a word. The French politicians and Governments always seemed unwilling or unconcerned about the effects of their words and actions on the British, who in turn they distrusted! There is nothing new in all this, and it's been so for centuries ... On the whole I got on pretty well with my French colleagues ... but I was always wary of taking them 100 percent at their word!'¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Lord Glendevon

¹⁴³ Lord Glendevon

¹⁴⁴ Ursula Branston

¹⁴⁵ John Hay

Another part of the problem was that the Council of Europe was 'less frequented than formerly by great parliamentarians of weight' and its method of work - meeting for one month - meant that it was not easy to develop at once into a forum for adequate discussion of large issues of foreign policy.¹⁴⁶ The work of the Conservative delegates was also considerably hampered by the poor view party managers and most Tory MPs took of the Strasbourg Assembly, reflected in the lack of debating time made available to the Council of Europe proceedings.¹⁴⁷ Going to Strasbourg was regarded by many as a 'jaunt' or 'jolly' - 'They've got some marvellous restaurants there, you know!'¹⁴⁸ Trips to the Council of Europe were certainly regarded by Conservative delegates as most enjoyable: Nigel Nicolson recalls serving on the Cultural Committee of the Assembly, and with his fellow committee members agreeing to convene their meetings in some of the beautiful cities in Europe (Florence, Venice, etc).¹⁴⁹ 'It was great fun. It was rather like a Christmas game, only this game was called "Foreign Secretaries". You played the role, pontificated on policy, without power and responsibility. [But] it was not a great honour. The Minister and the rest of the party saw it as a joke, and the constituencies did not understand it at all. We were very frustrated by having so little influence and knowing we were regarded with a certain degree of contempt.'¹⁵⁰ 'As to the value placed on the work and recommendations of the Council of Europe, the House of Commons in the 1950s seemed to pay little, if any attention - nor, I suspect, did Whitehall and Ministers. After all, if you sent people to Strasbourg ... you'd think they were

¹⁴⁶ *Times* 17.5.51

¹⁴⁷ see De Freitas, 2.7.53, *HC Deb.* 517.585

¹⁴⁸ John Hay

¹⁴⁹ Nigel Nicolson interview with author

¹⁵⁰ Nigel Nicolson

probably just having a good time there and you needn't take their reports, etc, particularly seriously.'¹⁵¹

Strasbourg was also seen as a distraction from an MP's work at Westminster. 'Going to Strasbourg made life complicated because of the tug-of-war between the choice of whom was recalled when there was a two- or three-line Whip. If those who had been selected were keen on Europe and had respect for, and hoped to make something of the Council of Europe - we were very reluctant to send people haring back to vote in Westminster, because it looked like a lack of respect for WEU and the Council. Some people found it quite a nuisance because they felt they missed a lot at [Westminster]. The Council of Europe was not a powerful body, but it was immensely interesting.'¹⁵²

Given the pervading Conservative scepticism towards the Council of Europe and the government's desire to forestall any free-lance promotion of closer links with Europe, the selection of delegates to the Assembly in the 1950s cannot be taken as an guide to enthusiasm for Europe.¹⁵³ Recommendations were made by the Whips Office on several grounds:

(i) one was certainly support for closer relations with Europe: 'Quite a few who were able to be included more than once, ie who got more than a year there, became more and more convinced and persuaded that this game was for real - and that the UK having made some bad blunders at the start should buck up'.¹⁵⁴ Another was a facility for European languages. The delegations always included a member of the Ulster Unionists,

¹⁵¹ John Hay

¹⁵² Sir Robin Chichester Clarke interview with author

¹⁵³ John Hay

¹⁵⁴ John Hay

to counter any accusations of Conservative neglect of the province, and criticism from the Irish Republic over the north; and a Whip.¹⁵⁵

(ii) it was a method short of office of rewarding and encouraging promising backbenchers, who might show with Strasbourg experience that they were worthy of junior office;

(iii) an assessment of the MP's reliability not to get swept away by the heady (and 'unrealistic') rhetoric of the continentals;¹⁵⁶

(iv) on the basis of ability and suitability for some area of the Council's work. 'I was asked because I was known to be a solicitor by profession and, as the Chief Whip's secretary put it on the phone when asking me if I wanted to go: 'They've got a Legal Committee which you could be on'';¹⁵⁷

(v) there was an element of 'widening the horizons' of a few Conservatives, to cultivate their interest in Europe. As Chief Whip, Heath asked Ursula Branston who was secretary to the delegation in Strasbourg, whether she had 'any ideas on the composition of the next group, and "What did I think of the way things were going, the feelings of those who were attending?"'

'I myself was not very enthusiastic about how things were going, and pointed out that the Europeans themselves were disappointed because we did not have enough 'stars', our delegation was rather *piano* politically, with no sign of it having much clout back home. Heath thought this was

¹⁵⁵ Sir Robin Chichester Clarke

¹⁵⁶ Mott-Radclyffe was one such delegate 'who came from a much earlier school of thought (and who) was too much a cynic to really believe we Europeans knew what we were talking about.' Sir Peter Smithers

¹⁵⁷ John Hay

rather naïve of me and replied, "the more people we can send who are not stars but likely to become interested in Europe in the future, the better." He persisted in sending [people] with orders to observe and learn; they were to make up their own minds but understand they were to do as directed. Therefore he was a strong force in the Whips' office for Europe behind the scenes. Of course the leader was always appointed by the Conservative leadership. Those who went to Strasbourg learnt an enormous amount, and the seeds of the future were sown but they did not come up to the extent that Heath hoped. It was very much an uphill struggle. None of the British delegates to Strasbourg were very prominent politicians back home. They had no drawing power. Television was not as powerful as it is now. Rippon, Martin Madden, David Price, etc. were all excellent people but Westminster was the only place they could secure an audience. It was no good their going round the country.¹⁵⁸

All in all, 'Strasbourg did not make much impact. It did not get much publicity, although [there was] a certain amount in the universities', but it never got a grip on British public or political opinion.¹⁵⁹

The Distraction of Imperial Preference:

The struggle for Europe in the 1950s must be seen in tandem with the party debate over imperial preference.¹⁶⁰ Once this cause had been defeated by Thorneycroft at the 1954 party conference, with his successful attack on a critical motion on

¹⁵⁸ Ursula Branston

¹⁵⁹ Ursula Branston

¹⁶⁰ Lord Thorneycroft and Sir Peter Smithers

the GATT, the party was free to look beyond the immediate horizon of the Empire and Commonwealth to closer economic links with Europe.

In the first months of the Conservative government, Britain's sterling crisis prompted earnest political debate on the optimum way to solve the country's pressing problems. There was a universal Tory desire to escape from the domination of the mighty dollar, but attitudes varied on how best to construct an economic unit 'which can stand on its own feet, in which the countries of the free world outside the dollar area can live and breathe'.¹⁶¹ For a section of the Conservative party imperial preference was the obvious solution. This cause echoed the moves of those who placed greatest emphasis on Britain's links with her Commonwealth and Empire over and above Britain's commitment to NATO and ideas of Atlantic Union.¹⁶² Approximately 30 Conservative signed an EDM urging the government to remove where possible obstacles to establishment of imperial preference.¹⁶³ Some 'enthusiasts for the Empire [thought] of Imperial unity and European unity as contradictory causes'.¹⁶⁴ For others 'there was no cleavage between the two'¹⁶⁵: Empire and Europe 'were compatible, indeed complementary'.¹⁶⁶

'It is difficult to realise today [1993] just how powerful [the idea of Empire] was right up to the early Sixties. Many of us thought, including myself, that the concept could be revived and indeed could take on a new

¹⁶¹ Boothby letter, *Times* 21.2.52

¹⁶² see Hugh Berrington: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1945-55*, p.172

¹⁶³ *Daily Telegraph* 10.4.52

¹⁶⁴ Biggs-Davison article, *Tablet* 16.7.51

¹⁶⁵ Lord Glendevon

¹⁶⁶ Sir Peter Smithers

and greater dimension in the form of the Commonwealth. This would give Britain a part more in keeping with her post-war capabilities, would free rein to the political aspirations of the Colonial Empire and the Dominions, and would give us a distinctive position in the modern geopolitical scene. It was attractive from every point of view. Some thought that it was a case of Europe or the Commonwealth and, if that were so, there was no doubt which it should be. No one said and I doubt anybody thought that the Commonwealth was a dead duck from the start.¹⁶⁷

The Conservative Party and Europe: 1955-1956

(a) Europeanists

Departures:

Rupert de la Bère

Walter Fletcher

Thomas D Galbraith

Christopher Hollis

Professor Douglas Savory

Gerald Williams

(b) Anti-Europeanists:

Departures:

Sir John Mellor

(c) The Revival of Interest in Europe:

Although 'the great majority of the party did not pay much attention to Messina' (June 1955) as 'we were fully involved on the defence side through Eden's WEU, and through NATO,

¹⁶⁷ Sir Peter Smithers

Germany had come back into "the family"',¹⁶⁸ over the next eighteen months, there was a revival of interest in Europe, thanks to an influx of younger MPs in the May 1955 Parliament. Of these, again there was a hard core. 'Geoffrey Rippon was the main swing of this, and got a group going after his election to Parliament in 1955. There were only a few of us, 6 or 7 in the original group':¹⁶⁹

Richard Body

Keith Joseph¹⁷⁰

Peter Kirk

Martin Maddan

Robert Mathew

Geoffrey Rippon

John Rodgers

Rippon¹⁷¹ had been in local government in the late 1940s, and 'had started organizing linking European councillors and local government - it was the forerunner of town twinning. Martin Maddan¹⁷² got a group around him who used to meet at the English Speaking Union. He was a federalist - there is something about Brasenose!'¹⁷³ Richard Body¹⁷⁴ 'rather went along with some of the federalist arguments. The constitutional significance had not struck me at that point.' Other in-coming Conservatives who were particularly

¹⁶⁸ Private information

¹⁶⁹ Sir Richard Body

¹⁷⁰ MP for Leeds North East February 1956-87

¹⁷¹ MP for Norwich South 1955-64; Hexham 1966-87

¹⁷² MP for Hitchin 1955-64; Hove 1965-73. Deputy Chairman of Federal Union's Council in 1956

¹⁷³ Sir Richard Body

¹⁷⁴ MP for Billericay 1955-59; Holland with Boston 1966-

sympathetic were Frederick Corfield¹⁷⁵ (a barrister in the same chambers as Mathew) whose ideas for greater European co-operation stemmed from his lengthy incarceration as a German POW; and David Price,¹⁷⁶ a close personal friend of Kirk.¹⁷⁷

For the Conservative Europeanists, Messina was the 'result of the Government's refusal to assume its responsibility in an intergovernmental organization, the Council of Europe, in the Fifties. Those such as myself thought of it as just what we expected and thought it would succeed.'¹⁷⁸ Their views differed sharply to those who thought the whole project would fail (Eden, Maudling, Selwyn Lloyd). However, concern that 'Britain would be left behind again'¹⁷⁹ had been growing slowly but steadily on the Conservative backbenches.¹⁸⁰ 'There was a ground swell of opinion'¹⁸¹ between November 1955 and July 1956 in favour of a more positive attitude towards the discussions on a common market initiated at Messina. Backbench concern at EURATOM proposals surfaced in party committees¹⁸² but were dismissed by government ministers, who were convinced that the *rélanche* was 'doomed to failure' because lack of popular support in France for supranational solutions¹⁸³ and because of French

¹⁷⁵ MP for Gloucester South 1955-74

¹⁷⁶ MP for Eastleigh 1955-92

¹⁷⁷ MP for Gravesend 1955-64; Saffron Waldon 1965-74

¹⁷⁸ Sir Peter Smithers

¹⁷⁹ David Renton, 4.7.55, *HC Deb.*542.69

¹⁸⁰ see Smithers 27.7.55, *HC Deb.*544.160

¹⁸¹ Lord Glendevon

¹⁸² Boothby, Smithers and Maclay, FAC 14.3.56

¹⁸³ Macmillan, FAC 30.11.55

protectionism.¹⁸⁴

A group of backbenchers, notably Boothby and Rippon, were determined that Britain should try to direct this 'impetus'. Boothby raised the topic in the House, pointing out it would be 'very unfortunate if a common market were to be formed in Europe with great reciprocal advantages to the countries concerned and we were totally excluded'.¹⁸⁵ Three weeks later Rippon moved an adjournment debate on 5 July 1956 in which he and Boothby pressed the government to give reasons for its policy of indifference towards the Messina process. Edward Boyle, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who was known to be sympathetic to greater co-operation with the Continent, was given the task of replying for the government. He did this 'unsatisfactorily',¹⁸⁶ although Rippon and his group took some comfort from Boyle's assurance that 'the Government have not got a closed mind on the subject'.¹⁸⁷

Faced with an impending important OEEC meeting, and concerned that a decision 'cannot be long delayed' while the government claimed 'that we cannot be sure at this stage that the venture will succeed',¹⁸⁸ Rippon, Mathew, and Rodgers put down an EDM on 10 July 1956, which suggested sending an observer to the Messina Talks. They were anxious Britain should play 'a full and effective part in the preliminary stages'.¹⁸⁹ If Britain took a negative attitude, 'we may well have to face the implications of them succeeding without us'. These MPs conceded that given Britain's special position the government

¹⁸⁴ Thorneycroft and Macmillan, FAC 14.3.56

¹⁸⁵ Boothby, 19.6.56, *HC Deb.* 554.1207

¹⁸⁶ Lord Rippon interview with author

¹⁸⁷ Robert Mathew letter, *Times* 13.7.56

¹⁸⁸ Mathew

¹⁸⁹ Mathew

might have to make a number of reservations, especially on agriculture, and that a common market might be acceptable in some form, but not in another. Above all, they did not want Britain to be in a position in which other West European nations signed a draft treaty, and Britain was obliged either to stand aside, or take part on terms that she had no part in settling.¹⁹⁰

As the enthusiasts admitted, there had been 'remarkably little public interest in the country at large ... focused on the vital question of the establishment of a Common Market'.¹⁹¹ However, they remained intent on demonstrating that there was growing backbench 'recognition of the importance of the issues at stake'¹⁹² and support for British moves towards the Six, rather than merely 'letting them get on with it, as we can join them at any time'.¹⁹³ 'It seems a comparatively timid move today, but at the time it was a brave thing to do.'¹⁹⁴ The motion expressed agreement 'in principle on the establishment by stages of a common market in Western Europe' and urged the government to accept the invitation to participate in the negotiations, 'with a view to ensuring that if, or when, any treaty is signed the way will be open for British participation ... on an acceptable basis and in accordance with the interests of the Commonwealth and Empire'.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Mathew; Boothby, 19.6.56, *HC Deb.*554.1207 and 5.7.56 *HC Deb.*554.1673-74

¹⁹¹ Mathew letter, *Times* 13.7.56

¹⁹² Rippon letter, *Times* 3.10.56

¹⁹³ Lord Rippon

¹⁹⁴ Sir Robin Chichester Clarke

¹⁹⁵ EDM No.101: Common Market: Western Europe. *Orders of the Day and Notice of Motions.* 1955-56 No.188 Vol.5 4747

Sponsored by Rippon,¹⁹⁶ Mathew, Rodgers, Joseph, Harold Steward and the Liberal MP Holt, this EDM was signed by 89 Tory and Liberal MPs (62 Labour MPs signed a similar EDM). 'There is always an element of Smoking Room jollity in signing EDMs, but they are a good expression of growing opinion. Both my EDMs showed a certain pressure to move towards the Community.'¹⁹⁷ The signatures attached to this EDM show age and date of entry into Parliament were closely related on MPs' attitudes to Europe. Of the 1955 entry, 'the Europeans outnumbered the Empire men by nearly 2:1'.¹⁹⁸ Rippon and his colleagues were seeking to nudge the government towards accepting the basic principle of British participation, in the belief that once this had been achieved, there would be ample room for manoeuvre and compromise, provided there were safeguards and exceptions, notably for agriculture and horticulture. British participation would open co-operation on a far wider basis. They argued 'no fundamental conflict of interest or ideology' existed between those who advocated an expanded Commonwealth and those who urged closer integration of Western Europe.¹⁹⁹

(d) The Conservative Europeanists and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA):

By the mid-1950s 'more and more people recognized that the old pattern of trade with the Commonwealth was breaking down, and this involved the exploitation of the European market'. 'The Commonwealth is still our biggest market, [but] it is not the

¹⁹⁶ Sandys' PPS - which 'demonstrates the greater latitude permitted to a PPS in the mid-1950s': Lord Rippon

¹⁹⁷ Lord Rippon

¹⁹⁸ Hugh Berrington: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59*, p.90 and pp.117-119.

¹⁹⁹ Rippon letter, *Times* 3.10.56

market which is expanding the fastest.'²⁰⁰ There was a feeling among younger MPs, with the signs of the eventual break-up of Britain's colonial empire, that Britain could no longer have a captive market. But 'we wanted to keep the sterling area: we attached enormous importance to this.'²⁰¹

Britain's relations with the Commonwealth and Europe were an increasingly popular political topic in the autumn of 1956. The plan for a free trade area - Plan G - which had begun to take shape in early 1956,²⁰² was paraded before the party conference at Llandudno in early October, following Macmillan's and Thorneycroft's proposals to Commonwealth Finance ministers gathered in Washington for the IMF meeting in September 1956.

The main concern at Llandudno, apart from the Suez question, was Britain's links with the Commonwealth and Empire. The new *Expanding the Commonwealth Group*, which favoured widening the Commonwealth rather than widening the Empire, published a pamphlet during the conference suggesting foreign countries 'accepting the fundamental principles upon which the Commonwealth is founded' might be permitted to become members. 'A free association of Commonwealth communities comprised the seeds of a world system for which the middle powers are craving.'²⁰³ A Commonwealth partnership was best suited to a shrinking world threatened by partition between America and Russia.

This free trade area plan offered 'the way out' between the emerging European Economic Community and the Commonwealth, with the proposal for British 'association' with the Six by

²⁰⁰ Maurice Macmillan maiden speech, 26.11.56, *HC Deb.*561.70-74

²⁰¹ Lord Rippon

²⁰² Alistair Horne: *Macmillan 1894-1956*, p.386

²⁰³ *Times* 4.10.56

means of a free trade area. This preserved ties with the Commonwealth by guaranteeing the continued free entry of goods into Britain. Most Conservatives favoured a free trade area.²⁰⁴ It would 'open our export trade to the most rapidly expanding major market in the world'; it would 'prevent the exclusion of the UK from European trade; it would 'preserve the spirit and substance of imperial preference'; it would be advantageous to the Commonwealth, 'both as a growing market ... and a source of capital'; and British association in the early stages would 'enable us to shape and influence the detailed planning'.²⁰⁵

There was a residue of opposition from the diehard imperial wing with arguments for the need of an extensive preferential system outside as well as within the Commonwealth system: Britain should assert her full right to discriminate. Free trade was only beneficial to the creditor and highly dangerous to the debtor.²⁰⁶ There were also decided and persistent Conservative reservations about agricultural and horticultural produce,²⁰⁷ as Macmillan acknowledged with his assurance to the party conference that it would 'be an absolute condition that agricultural products of all kinds ... should be excluded' to preserve the Commonwealth structure and to protect home agriculture.²⁰⁸ Others saw 'great risks in this policy. Some industries would be able to seize the greater opportunities abroad, others would feel keener competition at home. There would have to be changes to the industrial

²⁰⁴ see Rippon letter, *Times* 3.10.56, and Richard Hornby, 26.11.56, *HC Deb.*561.84-88

²⁰⁵ Conservative Research Department paper, 26.10.56, summarizing Conservative Finance Committee meeting 23.10.56

²⁰⁶ Legge-Bourke letter, *Times* 25.9.56

²⁰⁷ see Hornby, *HC Deb.*561.84-88

²⁰⁸ CRD summary 26.10.56

pattern ... and these would not always be welcome.'²⁰⁹

Conservative opinion was divided on the ultimate role of the free trade area: was it a rival to the emerging Common Market, or a halfway house? 'Many saw [EFTA] as a counterweight in the beginning, as well as a stepping stone. I did not see it as a suitable permanent alternative.'²¹⁰ A few saw it as a deliberate wrecking tactic: 'The whole EFTA exercise was meant to throw a spanner in the works [which it, predictably, failed to do]. Encouraged by Eden, the Foreign Office had persuaded themselves that the supra-national idea would fail and they would seek to give it a push in that welcome direction.'²¹¹

At this point the government had not yet come to final conclusions on this very complicated subject. The Commonwealth had been consulted; it was canvassing industry, both the employers and the Trade Union Congress.²¹² Complementing these moves, Rippon and his small band persisted in their efforts to persuade the government to co-operate in the Messina proceedings, acting as parliamentary sponsors for Federal Union's survey of attitudes of members of Commonwealth Parliaments since the Commonwealth seemed to be the main hindrance.²¹³ Rippon, Maddan and Rodgers, together with Spens, Stoddart-Scott, and Braine put down a second EDM on 12 December 1956. This was signed by 110 MPs and urged the government to call a conference with the West European powers to consider further practical steps towards European unity, in the belief that the 'best interests of the UK and the rest of the Commonwealth lie in the closer association of the UK with

²⁰⁹ CRD summary

²¹⁰ Lord Rippon

²¹¹ Sir Peter Smithers

²¹² CRD summary 26.10.56

²¹³ Pinder and Mayne, p.147

Western Europe in conditions which safeguard existing Commonwealth relationships'. Shuckburgh cynically attributed the sizeable Tory support for joining some sort of European confederal system to baser electoral motives as the Conservative electoral prospects were 'at present very dim'.²¹⁴

One effect of the Suez crisis was to increase Conservative support for participation in a new West European community.²¹⁵ Disassociation with America was not in the sponsors' mind,²¹⁶ but 'there was an element of anti-US feeling for people like Hinchingsbrooke ... Some of the converts to our pro-Europe policy were very critical of Eisenhower and Dulles'.²¹⁷ The assumption that 'America would never stand aside if British vital interests were at stake'²¹⁸ had been rudely dispelled. 'As a result we must now turn urgently to consolidating our relations with Europe, for example the creation of a free trade area in association with a common market. By moving closer to Europe we stood the best chance of improving our relations with the United States.'²¹⁹ Amery looked beyond this: a concerted common European policy could be pursued in the Middle East if possible with America, and without her if necessary.²²⁰

²¹⁴ Shuckburgh, p.361

²¹⁵ Berrington, 1955-59, p.106; see Hay, Ramsden and Lindsay letter, *Times* 28.11.56

²¹⁶ Lord Rippon

²¹⁷ Lord Rippon

²¹⁸ Smithers, FAC 14.11.56

²¹⁹ Smithers and Braine, FAC 14.11.56

²²⁰ CRD summary of Consultative Assembly general political debate 8-11.1.57

The Influence of Conservative Europeanists 1955-56:

The British government confidently anticipated that, thanks to Eden's success in rearming Germany through WEU in 1954, the British preference for inter-governmental co-operation had triumphed and the French bid for European leadership had been foiled; henceforth there would be no nonsense about supranational structures. The *rélançe* following the meeting at Messina in June 1955 thus came as a disagreeable surprise. However, this did not fundamentally alter British officialdom's perception of European supranationalism as an irrelevance. Britain could join the track at any time. There was no urgency.²²¹

Rippon's EDMs, although they gathered substantial backbench support had no effect on the government policy on the Messina discussions. The Conservative government did not desire a customs union, for the same reasons that had influenced its Labour predecessors. Treasury officials were convinced that Messina would weaken the OEEC, the British choice for economic co-operation with Europe. However, these backbench gestures did bolster government moves towards Europe through a free trade area, once these had been initiated by Macmillan and Thorneycroft, ably supported by Lee and other civil servants at the Board of Trade. Thorneycroft had concurred that the right way to deal with the problem was not by direct assault but by showing good will and co-operation. 'That had already succeeded in pushing France to one side'²²² and the manifestations of backbench pressure 'encouraged Macmillan to enter Britain into negotiations, with the feeling of well-founded backbench support'.²²³

²²¹ Lord Eccles, recalling Sir Roger Makins' reaction

²²² FAC 14.3.56

²²³ Lord Rippon

Rippon's EDMs did not develop into a concerted backbench campaign. Although neither EDM was uncompromisingly European, both prompted an amendment from Legge-Bourke, denouncing attempts to lure Britain into federal schemes 'incompatible with our free association of sovereign states'. He was supported by Alan Green and Captain Orr; and by Vere Harvey, Lucas, Biggs-Davison, Paul Williams, McAdden, Hirst, Page and - surprisingly - Beamish. Nor did the government welcome the second 'unhelpful' demonstration. The Chief Whip told Rippon if he continued with 'these motions' he might have to give up being a PPS.²²⁴ The government's emphasis remained resolutely on EFTA, not the Messina approach.

Summary:

For the Tories in the 1950s, Europe was the dog that did not bark. After their party's reelection, the Conservative Europeanists were remarkably impotent compared to their influence when in opposition. But they formed neither a coherent nor a sizeable group in Parliament; none was a leading politician; and their cause did not achieve a resonance within the parliamentary party and in the country. For most Tories, the developments of the Six prior to 1954 were merely a 'temporary emotional aberration';²²⁵ There did not seem the need for Britain to strive for leadership in Europe to divert attention from federalism. The majority of those who questioned Eden's approach were the imperial preference stalwarts, who regarded Britain's struggle over the GATT to be of prime importance. Those imperially-minded MPs, who wanted to use Europe to fight multilateralism and domination by the dollar area, were very few. Gradually, the tide turned in favour of the pro-Europeans, thanks in large

²²⁴ Lord Rippon

²²⁵ CRD pamphlet: *Some Reflections on British Foreign Policy*, written by Ursula Branston. March 1959.

part to the defeat of imperial preference. 'Eden's resignation in January 1957 did seem to mark the departure of a generation within the Foreign Office itself, and the arrival of people like Donald Maitland [who went on to help Edward Heath negotiate Britain's entry into the Common Market] who were strong Europeans.'²²⁶

²²⁶ Wilfred Sendall

CHAPTER 6: THE GENESIS OF THE SUEZ GROUP AND THE ANTI-SUEZ GROUP

The formative experiences of the Suez Group were the débâcles over Palestine in 1947-1948 and Abadan in 1951. Although Conservative critics of the Labour Government's handling of these crises were unable to pressure the government either into imposing a settlement in Palestine or despatching troops to protect British lives and property at Abadan, both episodes served to identify those Tory MPs who held passionate views about Britain's place in the Middle East¹ and the best means to sustain her pre-eminent position. The short but intense Conservative party furore over the proposed agreement with Egypt over the Sudan proved the catalyst of the Suez Group.

The Irresponsibility of Opposition vs the Constraints of Power:

In opposition Churchill and his shadow cabinet could evade difficult choices by giving their backbenchers their head, as the Abadan crisis demonstrated. Although Churchill reined in some of the more extreme utterances of his supporters, there was no need for him to worry too scrupulously about the practical effects of the belligerent approach Conservatives were advocating. In contrast, the resumption of responsibility in October 1951 necessarily demanded a coherent and pragmatic approach; the government's slim majority (17) also meant the Conservative party could no longer tolerate internal differences to the same degree.

Despite the constraints of power, there was a greater tendency to rebellion within the party. Certainly the stern instruction to errant backbenchers 'not to rock the boat' had the desired effect in some cases and the first eighteen months

¹ Lord Amery

of Churchill's government was 'touch and go'² which, in itself, instilled party discipline. However, as the economy improved and the party's confidence grew, by the 1953-54 session Conservative stirrings were much more noticeable. The Whips' hope that the government's slim majority would militate against too public and vigorous a demonstration of backbench discontent was not realised as the government faced internal revolts on a wide range of issues: fiscal policy, transport policy, commercial television, MPs' salaries, imperial preference/opposition to the GATT treaty, and foreign policy.³

There were various reasons for this backbench waywardness. Eden's reinstatement as Foreign Secretary, Butler's elevation to the Exchequer, and the despatch of Macmillan to the apparently marginal Ministry of Housing, ensured that Churchill's peace-time government was of a progressive stamp⁴ which was not to the taste of the robust element on the Tory backbenches. Even those who accepted the need for Butler's measures craved a policy distinct from the socialists.⁵ There was also resentment over the rapid promotion of recent newcomers, such as Hopkinson, and jealousy over Sandys' promotion. The non-partisan emphasis of Churchill's administration greatly aggravated party discontent.⁶ Backbench dissatisfaction that Churchill had surrounded himself with old cronies, giving little opportunity to postwar entrants at junior ministerial level, necessarily created a ripple effect onto the conduct of foreign policy; it liberated those able, ambitious younger members who might otherwise have been silenced by ministerial office. In addition, among those

² Lord Fraser

³ see *Times* 15.6.54

⁴ *Times* 15.6.54

⁵ *Times* 10.4.52

⁶ *Times* 10.4.52

senior Tories left out⁷ were Ralph Assheton, a former Financial Secretary and Chairman of the Party, and Walter Elliot, a former Minister for Agriculture, Secretary of State for Scotland, and Health. The exclusion of both these men was to have important consequences for the government's Middle Eastern policy as both men spoke with great political authority and commanded wide respect outside their immediate circle.

In the 1950s there was a growing independence of thought on the backbenches. Whereas most 'pre-war Tories from traditional middle-class backgrounds had had loyalty bred into them'⁸, the 1950 and 1951 elections saw the return of independent-minded pre-war MPs, for example, Waterhouse and Herbert Williams, who interpreted loyalty to the party in a different fashion to the Whips, and the arrival of a number of MPs who felt 'a government should earn the support of its backbenchers, not demand it'.⁹ As the 1950s progressed, there was an increasing tendency to question the authority of those ministers who had made their political reputations before the War. In addition, lack of contact between senior ministers and their backbench colleagues¹⁰ underlined the importance of the party committees as a vital conduit between the front and backbenches, and meant any lack of information available in committee was all the more keenly felt.¹¹ It became increasingly difficult for party managers to maintain the high degree of public unity that had characterized the Conservative party since 1945.

⁷ Richard Law and Austen Hudson were also excluded.

⁸ Andrew Roth: *Heath and Heathmen* (London 1972), p.86

⁹ Paul Williams interview with author

¹⁰ Harold Watkinson: *Turning Points*, p.33

¹¹ see Gomme-Duncan, FAC 25.2.53

THE SUEZ GROUP

Of all the backbench rebellions facing the Conservative government between 1951 and 1956 the Suez Group was the most serious. Butler as Chancellor encountered considerably less difficulty from the backbenches than Eden - undoubtedly because the Suez Group enjoyed the tacit support of Churchill. The economic ginger group enjoyed no such favour from their party leader, although they might have expected more support from a former Chancellor; Churchill's experiences in the 1920s had undoubtedly made him extremely wary of economics.

Unlike the Europeanists, whose cause enjoyed active cross-party support, the Suez Group was a Conservative creation.¹² It comprised approximately 40, with a core of approximately 28. It enjoyed the private support of a far wider circle, but these 'crypto-Suez Group' MPs were not prepared to sign critical EDMs, let alone carry their opposition to Eden's Middle East policy into the division lobby.

Membership:

(a) 1953-54

Julian Amery*

Ralph Assheton* (PC)

Peter Baker¹³

Philip Bell

Walter Bromley-Davenport

Frederick Burden

Terence Clarke

Robert Crouch*

Will 'Y' Darling*

Patrick Donner*

James Duncan*

¹² During the Suez crisis Eden's policy of military intervention did receive unlikely support from the Labour MPs Emanuel Shinwell and Stanley Evans.

¹³ Baker was forced to resign his seat (Norfolk South) in 1954 because a financial scandal.

Anthony Fell
Fergus Graham*
Robert Grimston*
John Hall
Frederick Harris
William Hicks Beach
Lord Hingchingbrooke*
Christopher Holland-Martin*
Ian Horobin*
Montgomery Hyde* (UU)
Captain Kerby* (elected March 1954)
Hamilton Kerr*
Harry Legge-Bourke*
Guy Lloyd*
Fitzroy Maclean
Patrick Maitland*
Douglas Marshall (withdrew February 1954)
Angus Maude*
John Mellor
John Morrison
Gerald Nabarro*
James Pitman*
Enoch Powell*
Ralph Rayner
Reader Harris
William Rees Davies*
Professor Douglas Savory (UU)
William Teeling*
Captain Charles Waterhouse* (PC)
Herbert Williams (died July 1954)
Sir Charles Williams* (PC)
Paul Williams*¹⁴ (elected May 1953)

In July 1954 the Suez Group lost Fitzroy Maclean (who later

¹⁴ * Voted against the Government on the Suez Canal Base Agreement in July 1954

joined the government as Under Secretary of State for War), Bell, Bromley-Davenport and Powell. Powell came to the conclusion over the summer that the British 'empire of positions' which had replaced 'the empire of government of peoples' after Indian independence, was an inconceivable theory if Britain could not hold Suez.¹⁵ When the Suez Group reconvened in November Powell informed his colleagues that 'I would not be taking part in any nonsense over Cyprus'.¹⁶

b) 1955-56:

In the May 1955 election the Suez Group lost a number of supporters through boundary changes (Assheton) and decisions not to stand again (Donner, Mellor, Rayner and Savory). But there were more active recruits:

Richard Body

John Biggs-Davison

Alan Green

Ray Mawby

Neil ('Billy') Mclean (elected to Parliament in December 1954)

Captain Orr

(c) Sympathizers ('crypto-Suez Group') 1953-56:

Sir William Anstruther-Gray

Eric Bullus

Frederick Burden

Beresford Craddock

Lord Cranborne (retired February 1954)

Petre Crowder

Douglas Dodds-Parker (joined government in November 1953)

John Eden (elected February 1954)

Nigel Fisher

¹⁵ Enoch Powell

¹⁶ Enoch Powell

Walter Fletcher (retired 1955)
Richard Fort
Douglas Glover
Alan Gomme-Duncan
John Howard (elected 1955)
Edward Leather
Jocelyn Lucas
John ('Jacko') Macleod
Sir Thomas Moore
David Ormsby-Gore
Charles Ian Orr-Ewing
Norman Pannell
John Peyton
Kenneth Pickthorn
Victor Raikes
Ronald Russell
Christopher Soames
Sir Colin Thornton-Kemsley
John Tilney
Arthur Vere Harvey

The Suez Group MPs

The two prime movers in the creation of the Suez Group were Captain Charles Waterhouse, MP for Leicester South-East since 1950; and the son of his former ministerial colleague Leo Amery, Julian Amery, MP for Preston since 1950.

(a) Captain Waterhouse:

The patrician Waterhouse who was the Suez Group's official leader, had represented Leicester South from 1924-45. He was a member of the Tory old-guard who preferred private meetings with the minister concerned as the means to iron out differences over policy. A former junior minister under

Baldwin and Churchill and a Privy Councillor, he was unfailingly courteous to friends¹⁷ but somewhat distant to the new boys of 1950 and 1951¹⁸ - unless they were the sons of friends, or shared his robust views on the requirements of the continuation of Britain's imperial role. Some of the newer entrants tolerantly described him as 'an old war horse'¹⁹ and dismissed his interventions. Others regarded him as a 'most unattractive character'²⁰, commenting that his retention of the rank 'Captain' in peace-time was revealing²¹, and interpreted his role in the Suez Group 'as a sort of redemption' for his support for Munich.²² However, among Waterhouse's older pre-war colleagues there was greater sympathy and understanding for his outlook²³, even if these MPs did not share his views. Those such as Godfrey Nicholson on the party's liberal wing, recognized that Waterhouse's stance had a resonance in the constituency associations, even if it appeared increasingly outdated in the cold light of Britain's parlous economic position in the early 1950s.

Through his service in the Life Guards and his younger brother, Major General Guy Waterhouse,²⁴ Waterhouse enjoyed widespread contacts with the military; his contacts were reflected and enhanced by his election to the Chairmanship of the backbench Defence Committee in November 1951. Waterhouse

¹⁷ Lord Amery

¹⁸ Sir Gilbert Longden interview with author

¹⁹ John Baldock

²⁰ Private information

²¹ Private information

²² Sir Anthony Nutting

²³ Sir Godfrey Nicholson

²⁴ Former Inspector General and head of the British Advisory Military Mission to the Iraq army 1938-41.

also took a leading position in the backbench ginger group which was fiercely critical of Butler's economic policy. Known as 'Slasher Waterhouse'²⁵ because of his ardent campaign for large cuts in spending - which could only mean slashing social services - in July 1953 he was chosen as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Estimates. Waterhouse had also served as Chairman of the Conservative Conference in Scarborough 1952 and had given 'tacit approval to extremists' demands for a 2/= cut in income tax.²⁶ His detractors held that his widespread business interests in the colonies²⁷ had a direct bearing upon the areas of his political activity. Certainly, Waterhouse did have close business links with the British colonies in Southern Africa (his son also lived in Southern Rhodesia), and he was one of those people who later formed the pro-Rhodesia group in the 1960s.

(b) Julian Amery:

Through his personality and ability, Julian Amery rapidly came to outshine most of the Suez Group rebels, including Waterhouse, the Group's nominal leader.²⁸ Amery was one of the leading Conservative critics of Labour's mishandling of the Abadan crisis, but it was the Conservative government's seemingly imminent grant of self-government to the Sudanese in early 1953 which spurred him and like-minded colleagues to take co-ordinated action. He and Waterhouse had been on civil, if rather distant terms since Amery's arrival in Parliament. A chance meeting in a lift in Cape Town in January 1953 proved decisive. Waterhouse had just visited the

²⁵ *Daily Telegraph* 11.7.53

²⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 11.7.53

²⁷ For example, he was chairman of the Zambezie Exploring Company and the Rhodesia-Katanga Company.

²⁸ *Observer* 20.12.53

Sudan and was deeply disturbed that Eden seemed poised to 'give it away'. Amery replied that what was even more serious was the rumour that, under American pressure, Eden was considering pulling out of the Suez Canal base, which would mean that Britain could not hold the Sudan anyway. They both came home and began talking to friends.²⁹

Amery was a paradox, a true latter-day Social Imperialist: his pronounced liberal views in social policy accorded ill with the Suez Group's older members' more traditional views of the efficacy of capital punishment and the pernicious effect of the welfare state. His passionate advocacy of the compatibility of an expanded Commonwealth and closer links with Europe were compatible, were diametrically opposed to the opinions of many of his chosen colleagues in the Suez Group, (such as Legge-Bourke and Herbert Williams). Highly intelligent, articulate, able, from an impeccably imperialist stable and married to Macmillan's daughter, as a new backbencher Amery enjoyed a multitude of advantages. He was one who had 'enjoyed the habit of power' from an early age, and he unquestionably benefitted greatly from the considerable respect and affection for his father whose connections he exploited with great effect.

However, his energy and drive raised some eyebrows among the more sedate and orthodox members of the party. Amery was respected and his ability was unquestioned, but he and his political methods were not widely liked nor approved. Amery was a natural 'plotter' - an arch plotter in some people's book - with an innate passion for intrigue. Through no fault of his own, he suffered from 'too much political baggage'. His and his father's determination to overcome the tragedy of his brother commanded widespread sympathy and admiration, but there remained a residue of the memory of this family

²⁹ Lord Amery; Legge-Bourke, 16.5.57, *HC Deb.* 570.629-630; Julian Amery: 'The Suez Group: a Retrospective on Suez' in Selwyn Troen and Moshe Shemesh ed.: *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956* (London 1990), pp.110-126

connection; and although in the eyes of many he had had a 'good War', with his exploits among the Albanian partisans being legendary, not all middle-ranking Conservatives approved of the circumstances surrounding his involvement in Balkan resistance to Nazi Germany and regarded him as a youthful adventurer who had manipulated his father's position in Churchill's Cabinet to his own personal glory.³⁰ Nor did his friendship with Randolph Churchill commend him to all, who questioned his judgment of men. In all, he made an exhilarating, if rather exhausting political stable mate.

(c) Lord Hinchinbrooke:³¹

'Treading on Amery's heels'³² on the topic of the future of Suez Canal base, Hinchinbrooke was never shy of expressing his views on any subject. His house in Great College Street had been an important venue for backbench ginger groups since the days of the Tory Reform Committee.³³ A traditional High Tory - or rather 'an old-fashioned Whig'³⁴ - of patrician appearance and always immaculately dressed, he was regarded with tolerant affection by his Conservative colleagues, even though his opinions became more and more 'manifestly mad' with the passing years.³⁵

At first glance there appear glaring contradictions in Hinchinbrooke's thought: his statement 'at home and overseas

³⁰ Private information

³¹ MP for South Dorset 1941-62

³² Andrew Roth: *Enoch Powell - Tory Tribune* (MacDonald 1970), p.114

³³ Paul Williams

³⁴ Michael Foot, in *Daily Herald* 14.11.52

³⁵ Sir Reginald Bennett

our commitments exceed our power'³⁶ seems at odds with his support for retaining a British presence at the Suez Canal. However, this was a question of political perspective. A supporter of a more liberal economy, Hinchingsbrooke advocated a fundamental shift in the government's approach to domestic and foreign policy, based on reducing the burden of taxation and state controls, expanding the frontiers of free trade, reducing tariffs and quotas, while maintaining imperial preference, and seeking peace by negotiation not by threat of force.³⁷ He was vehemently opposed to rearmament, German or British, on economic grounds, arguing vociferously that the burden this would impose would prove disastrously counter-productive and there was no evidence that Communist countries wanted to capture countries by military means; rather they wanted to capture them by policies and processes of the mind. That could be done if Britain reduced her standard of life by too much rearmament and by denuding the country of goods and services.³⁸

The heir to the Earl of Sandwich whose family had been in politics for three centuries, Hinchingsbrooke benefited from his aristocratic political connections. However, he had always avoided the comfortable route in politics. Before entering the political arena he had spent two years working as a Woolwich factory hand, where he had joined a union. In 1938 he had supported the anti-Chamberlain lobby, and had been one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Tory Reform Group, constituted to implement the Beveridge Report, and acted as the Group's first chairman. Some of his colleagues were sufficiently moved by what they regarded as the betrayal of the Conservative *laissez faire* tradition in social policy to establish the Progress Trust the following year,

³⁶ Hinchingsbrooke letter, *Times* 2.7.51

³⁷ letter, *Times* 2.7.51

³⁸ speech, reported in *Southern Times* 6.4.51

specifically to counter such subversive ideas. Ironically, Hinchingsbrooke later became a member.³⁹

Hinchingsbrooke held a decidedly Burkean view of the responsibilities and duties of a MP⁴⁰; he formed 'his views independent of any sort of dictation from any source'⁴¹, and put loyalty to conscience above loyalty to party. He once declared at an Executive meeting of the South Dorset Conservative and Unionist Association that if elected to Parliament he claimed the right to express and act upon his own opinions. The tempers of the good burghers of South Dorset were put to the test; when Hinchingsbrooke's campaigns of criticism against Britain's rearmament programme and the government's transport policy coincided with his part in Conservative backbench moves to oust Churchill⁴², in the autumn of 1952 his local constituency association tried to deselect him on the grounds that Hinchingsbrooke's 'repeatedly publicly expressed opinions ... on foreign affairs [notably the Middle East and German rearmament] and repeated attacks on party leaders, ... [had] gradually built up the possibility, in the opinion of the Executive, that would make a present of the seat to a Socialist if our member were again a candidate.'⁴³ Happily for Hinchingsbrooke, this deselection attempt failed.

(d) Major Harry Legge-Bourke:

Another prominent member of the group, Legge-Bourke was 'the

³⁹ Private information

⁴⁰ *Spectator* 17.10.52

⁴¹ Brendan Bracken, quoted in *Southern Times* 30.4.51

⁴² see *Daily Mirror* 6.8.52

⁴³ *Times* 10.10.52

most popular man in the House of Commons'.⁴⁴ A former regular soldier in the Royal Horse Artillery, who had been ADC to Lord Killearn (the British Ambassador in Cairo during the War) he was a man of great integrity and simplicity, to whom honour was paramount. Legge-Bourke also held decided views on an MP's right to express profoundly held convictions, which might or might not be in accordance with the official party line. In the general elections of 1950 and 1951 he publicly declared on the hustings that he reserved the right to disagree with his party 'on matters such as foreign affairs which ought to transcend party considerations'⁴⁵, and had already disobeyed the party whip on Palestine and the Schuman Plan.

Legge-Bourke's first meeting with Amery on the Egyptian question took place in July 1952, just after the group of radical nationalist officers had seized power in Cairo. 'It was in the following winter recess [1952-3] that Julian rang me up and asked whether I would come to a meeting in his father's house [in Eaton Square] if I was not satisfied with what was happening in Egypt.'⁴⁶ As a long serving officer accustomed 'when the firing is going on [to] concentrate on firing back', Legge-Bourke's membership of a rebellious faction was unusual.⁴⁷ Although he was alone out of the Suez Group in going to the extreme of resigning the party Whip in 1954 following the conclusion of Heads of Agreement on the Suez Canal Zone base, throughout the 1956 crisis he maintained a deafening silence in public, and was very measured in private: 'It was "I told you so". Things were going exactly as he had warned, but he had done all he could [in 1954].'⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Sir Richard Body

⁴⁵ letter, *Times* 20.7.54

⁴⁶ Roth: *Powell*, p.99; also Legge-Bourke, 16.5.57, *HC Deb.*570.629-630

⁴⁷ Paul Williams

⁴⁸ Author's conversation with Captain William Legge-Bourke, Sir Harry Legge-Bourke's son.

(e) Other Members of the Suez Group:

Other vocal members were Patrick Maitland,⁴⁹ the heir to the Earl of Lauderdale, who had 'a distinguished record as a correspondent for the Times' and as an ex-diplomat had had long-standing interest in foreign affairs; and Angus Maude,⁵⁰ a fellow journalist, a leading member of One Nation and a member of the party's backbench Education Committee. Intelligent, articulate and caustic, Maude lent forceful intellectual persuasion to the Suez Group's cause. So did Enoch Powell,⁵¹ intellectually the most formidable of these younger MPs; an original member of the One Nation group, Powell's powerful arguments in the Chamber savaging Labour's policies were the talk of the smoking rooms. Powell was not invited to the original meeting of the Suez Group, but joined the group later.⁵² Paul Williams (whose election for Sunderland in May 1953 provided a great tonic to the Tory party) was a rapid active recruit for the Suez Group's crusade) as were 'Billy' McLean⁵³ and John Biggs-Davison⁵⁴ following their election to Parliament in December 1954 and May 1955 respectively. A long-standing friend of Amery and 'Billy' McLean, Biggs-Davison was well versed in the Suez Group's arguments through his role as secretary to the Foreign Affairs Committee while working the Conservative Research Department, and through his regular attendance of the Suez Group's meetings.

Other important members of the Suez Group were Fitzroy

⁴⁹ MP for Lanark 1951-59

⁵⁰ MP for Ealing South 1950-58; Stratford on Avon 1963-83

⁵¹ MP for Wolverhampton South West 1950-74; South Down (UU) 1974-83

⁵² Roth: *Powell*, p.99

⁵³ Amery's close personal friend and war-time colleague, MP for Inverness 1954-64

⁵⁴ MP for Chigwell 1955-74

Maclean,⁵⁵ Sir Guy Lloyd⁵⁶ (very much a Tory grandee, and one of Eden's few close friends), and the erudite and immensely likeable Hamilton Kerr, Macmillan's PPS. Another larger-than-life character, Fitzroy Maclean had had 'good war' as Churchill's special envoy to Tito's partisans, was a former diplomat, an author and a man of great personal courage and integrity. However, Maclean was not a 'natural politician'.⁵⁷ Macmillan when Prime Minister was to drop him from his government with regret, commenting that sadly Maclean's literary fluency was not matched by any parliamentary oratory. In the party behind the scenes no less important were Christopher Holland-Martin⁵⁸ and Ralph Assheton.⁵⁹ Holland-Martin's name was 'rarely in the news';⁶⁰ a banker who had only entered Parliament in 1951, he had been elected joint Treasurer of the Party. He was also Macmillan's brother-in-law, which gave him an additional connection to Amery. His lack of public eloquence was more than compensated in private where, as the holder of eight directorships, he was a powerful advocate for the City. Tall, bespectacled and retiring, *Crossbencher* described him as a 'chief strategist for the Suez Group'⁶¹ canvassing MPs, organizing two secret memos for Churchill and helping to draft the dissident EDM of December 1953. Assheton and Maclean were both Lancashire MPs whose constituency industries were dependent upon Sudanese and Egyptian cotton. To his bitter disappointment, in October 1951 Assheton was offered a post in government 'in charge of

⁵⁵ until he withdrew in July 1954. MP for Lancaster 1941-59; Bute & North Ayrshire 1959-74

⁵⁶ MP for East Renfrewshire 1940-59

⁵⁷ Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker

⁵⁸ MP for Ludlow 1951-60

⁵⁹ MP for Rushcliffe 1934-45; City of London 1945-50; Blackburn West 1950-55

⁶⁰ *Sunday Express* 20.12.53

⁶¹ *Sunday Express* 20.12.53

a department' which he declined since this would not have offered him the opportunity to shape economic and financial policy. Together Waterhouse, Assheton led a backbench group which was fiercely critical of Butler's fiscal policy.

The Formation and Organization of the Suez Group:

The spur to the formation of the Suez Group was not only Eden's proposed treaties with Egypt over the Sudan and the future of the Suez Canal base. These MPs were fundamentally dissatisfied with the impact of their opinions through the official channels of the party, notably the Foreign Affairs Committee. While the formation of their ginger group was in fact an admission that their influence had failed thus far, these MPs felt that more could be achieved by public dissent.

The first meeting of 'the Suez Canal Committee' was held at Leo Amery's house, No 112 Eaton Square, on 5 October 1953.⁶² Thereafter there was an inner group⁶³ which met regularly, invited by Julian Amery on Waterhouse's instructions,⁶⁴ and an outer group 'that was more amateur'.⁶⁵ Waterhouse also usually invited a Whip to the meetings,⁶⁶ 'so that he could see for himself what views were held and by whom'.⁶⁷ Afterwards Waterhouse would write to Churchill, Eden or

⁶² Leo Amery to Waterhouse, 30.9.53, Waterhouse papers

⁶³ Waterhouse, Julian Amery, Assheton, Robert Grimston, Holland-Martin, Hinchingsbrooke, Lloyd, Morrison, Powell, Horobin, Fitzroy Maclean, Charles Williams and Legge-Bourke. Waterhouse papers

⁶⁴ Lord Amery

⁶⁵ Paul Williams

⁶⁶ Lord Amery

⁶⁷ Amery, in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.111

Buchan-Hepburn (the Chief Whip) reporting the group's views.⁶⁸

Maitland, a journalist with wide-spread connections, was in charge of briefing the press, both formally at press briefings, and by the more devious route of private briefings for a friendly agency stringer, as the Suez Group could then use the foreign date-line report as the basis for embarrassing questions in the House.⁶⁹ Amery also used his contacts in the press to great effect. Derek Marks at the *Daily Express* was an ally (although at times an unreliable one⁷⁰), as were Colin Coote, Ivor Thomas and Peregrine Worsthorpe at the *Telegraph*, Malcolm Muggeridge, the editor of *Punch*,⁷¹ and John Junor.⁷² Inevitably, the Suez Group targeted the Northcliffe and Beaverbrook press which were inherently well-disposed to their cause.⁷³ Biggs-Davison acted on Amery's specific instructions⁷⁴ to ensure that the *Daily Telegraph's* and *Times'* editors were kept up-to-date of the group's meetings and deliberations, drawing their attention to specific points 'to make sure they understand the significance'.⁷⁵ The composite column, *Crossbencher* - "quite an important and influential column; its touch of scandal certainly made it more interesting to read!"⁷⁶ - was particularly useful. To begin with, only British newspaper correspondents were invited to the press briefings which following the Suez Group's meetings.

⁶⁸ Amery in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.111

⁶⁹ Lord Lauderdale interview with author

⁷⁰ Lord Lauderdale

⁷¹ Lord Amery

⁷² Arthur Gavshon interview with author

⁷³ Amery to Biggs-Davison 8.11.53, Biggs-Davison papers

⁷⁴ eg Amery to Biggs-Davison 8.11.53, Biggs-Davison papers

⁷⁵ Amery to Biggs-Davison 8.11.53, Biggs-Davison papers

⁷⁶ Arthur Gavshon

'However, the Group realised then that it was very important to influence opinion overseas, and especially American opinion, and therefore began to see foreign correspondents privately.'⁷⁷

As far as running the Suez Group was concerned, Amery and Powell acted as secretaries.⁷⁸ Amery organized hiring committee rooms for Suez Group meetings⁷⁹, and together with Powell arranged for information to be distributed.⁸⁰ Amery also had the political connections; his father was very active in opposing Eden's policy on Egypt until his death in 1955 and Amery benefited enormously from contacts made through his father, at school (Eton), university (Balliol) and during the War (intelligence service).⁸¹ In comparison, Waterhouse had the 'political form'.

The Continuation of the Suez Group:

'After the conclusion of the 1954 agreement with Egypt although some ... fell away, most of us ... remained convinced that we had been right in our assessment of the consequences of abandoning the base and believed it would still be possible to retrieve the ground that had been lost.'⁸² Anxiety over Britain's future in Cyprus provided the momentum for the Suez Group's continued existence. The Suez Group's dissatisfaction with the Foreign Affairs Committee persisted. It remained

⁷⁷ Arthur Gavshon

⁷⁸ Amery, in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.111

⁷⁹ Room J was usually used. Waterhouse papers

⁸⁰ Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker

⁸¹ see Scott Lucas: *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis* (London 1991), p.101 and pp.193-4

⁸² Amery, in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.112

fundamentally unimpressed with the argument that the Foreign Affairs Committee 'enabl[ed] backbench MPs not only to receive information from the Government but to clear their minds in general discussion'⁸³, and with the information available from the government on, for example, the details of the offer to Makarios.⁸⁴ Indeed this Committee appeared one of the 'organs of party control, registering favourable or unfavourable reactions',⁸⁵ rather than as a means to promote an alternative approach. 'The Committee met more often to learn of decisions already taken instead of helping to make them.'⁸⁶ Pressure from these rebels led to the formation of the Middle East Subcommittee in April 1956, to meet fortnightly: as Hinchingbrooke was elected chairman, 'Billy' McLean served as secretary and the subsequent lists of those attended included Maitland, Legge-Bourke, Paul Williams, Hugh Fraser and Biggs-Davison, this represented the official coming-of-age of the Suez Group.

The Position of the Suez Group within the Conservative Party:

Although the Suez Group was later described as the 'whiff of grape-shot school'⁸⁷, they cannot all be dismissed as 'crusty right-wingers'.⁸⁸ In many ways individual members of the Suez Group were not on the periphery of the party. A considerable number of these MPs held important positions behind the scenes in the official and unofficial backbench committees of the party, which gave their views far greater weight than has been

⁸³ Peter Smithers, FAC 8.2.56

⁸⁴ Amery, Williams and Glover, FAC 8.2.56

⁸⁵ Amery, FAC 8.2.56

⁸⁶ Maitland, FAC 8.2.56

⁸⁷ Anthony Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, p.36

⁸⁸ John Baldock

recognized. In the judgment of their peers, these MPs were not negligible men, which contradicts the received wisdom that the Suez Group could be summarily dismissed as diehard reactionaries.

Assheton was one of the most senior Tories on the backbenches, whose considerable influence was not widely recognized outside Westminster.⁸⁹ His preferred method of political influence was to see the minister directly. Waterhouse was chairman of the party's backbench Defence Committee, Hinchingsbrooke was chairman of the Transport Committee and Holland-Martin occupied the post of Treasurer of the Party. Six of those who signed the Suez Group's critical EDM in December 1953 were executive members of the 1922⁹⁰ and Morrison⁹¹ who had been elected as vice-chairman of the 1922 committee in 1951, went on to become Chairman in 1955. By 1956 Amery, Maude and Hinchingsbrooke were members of the 1922 executive; Hinchingsbrooke was also vice-chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Chairman of the Middle East Sub-Committee. The Suez Group did not conform to a stereotype. Eight were 'political youngsters of 40 or less and nearly half [were] under 50'.⁹² It contained several ardent Europeans, and keen partisans of World Government.⁹³ The group was not synonymous with traditional Conservative thought on domestic issues. Although some Suez Group MPs held decided reactionary views on economic policy and capital punishment, not all were diehard on all fronts. Amery, Biggs-Davison, Hinchingsbrooke, Maude and Powell held progressive views on domestic reform⁹⁴ and,

⁸⁹ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe interview with author

⁹⁰ Duncan, Morrison, Darling, Powell, Legge-Bourke and Hinchingsbrooke

⁹¹ MP for Salisbury 1942-64

⁹² Crossbencher, *Sunday Express* 4.7.54

⁹³ Hugh Berrington: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955-59*, p.110

⁹⁴ Leon Epstein: *British Politics in the Suez Crisis*, p.51

together with Hyde and Reader Harris, had voted for the abolition of capital punishment, In fact of the Suez Group in 1956, approximately half had voted against hanging.⁹⁵ In other spheres they made a considerable contribution to political debate. Enoch Powell was at the forefront of the new progressive Conservatism spearheaded by Butler at the Conservative Research Department. In some cases they were certainly young men in a hurry, anxious to make their political mark.

A considerable number of the Suez Group MPs enjoyed close links with Britain's colonies, both through family connections and through business interests. Herbert Williams, Legge-Bourke and Biggs Davison held important positions on Council of Empire Economic Union, founded by Leo Amery in 1929.⁹⁶ The Suez Group also benefited from individual members' war experience and contacts: many had served in the Middle East, and others profited enormously from their war-time association with the diplomatic and intelligence services - Maitland, Amery, Fitzroy Maclean, 'Billy' McLean, Hyde and Kerby. As a group they were able to tap their social contacts, as well as their army and intelligence links, which meant that they were remarkably well-informed. In the Abadan crisis de Chair was able to use confidential information about the supply of military spares and jets to Egypt, gleaned from his friendship with the South African Chargé d'Affaires in Israel, to attack the Labour government, much to their horror.⁹⁷

In the Suez crisis three former members of the Suez Group played a vital part in Edward Heath's remarkable success holding the party together. 'I doubt [Heath] would have

⁹⁵ Biggs-Davison letter, *Spectator* 21.2.63

⁹⁶ Lord Killearn, another vociferous critic of Eden's determination to negotiate with Nasser, was also a member of the Council.

⁹⁷ Somerset de Chair

succeeded but for the "Tory Squires" ... such as Morrison, Legge-Bourke, [Anthony] Hurd,⁹⁸ etc, who in those days tended to dominate the 1922 executive and who had the great advantage that they were financially completely independent and had no ministerial ambitions to cloud their judgment or in any way inhibit expression of their views'.⁹⁹ While Heath's achievement is admitted and admired,¹⁰⁰ the role of the Chairman of the 1922 in 1956, the large, avuncular, then archetypal Tory squire John Morrison, is frequently overlooked. Morrison and Heath were not natural political bedfellows coming from very different strands of Tory tradition, but they worked together very successfully. Just as Heath's effectiveness as Chief Whip was enhanced because he came after 'a number of bad ones'¹⁰¹, so Morrison's character and style was better suited to his position as the conduit of backbench opinion, than that of his predecessor, Derek Walker-Smith. Formerly an active member of the Suez Group while serving as Vice-Chairman of the 1922, as Chairman of the 1922 Morrison put aside such personal considerations. Just as suspicions of Heath's own private doubts about the whole Suez affair¹⁰² helped him to keep channels open to all factions within the party, feelings that Morrison privately held robust views about the appropriate manner with which Egyptians should be dealt undoubtedly kept his links open with diehard Conservatives. 'Straightforward, fairminded, seen as sufficiently independent, not hand-in-glove with the Whips, he had no desire to seek fame and therefore wielded far greater influence.'¹⁰³ But 'he kept his head well below the

⁹⁸ MP for Newbury 1945-64

⁹⁹ Sir Frederick Corfield interview with author

¹⁰⁰ Sir Frederick Corfield

¹⁰¹ Sir Reginald Bennett

¹⁰² Sir Julian Ridsdale and Nigel Nicolson interviews with author

¹⁰³ Sir Anthony Kershaw interview with author

parapet'¹⁰⁴ for there was no mileage in publicity in his role as Chairman of the 1922.

The Public Perception of the Suez Group:

Members of the Suez Group therefore held a more central place within their party than has generally been recognized, and they had access to important, indeed vital forums for airing their opinions. But, unfortunately for their cause, the Suez Group was not a sum of its parts; the Group did suffer from the image of being composed of 'political lightweights'¹⁰⁵ - backwoodsmen who had an out-dated view of British resources and power. It was true that, although the Group included influential and respected politicians, many of its members remained marginal politicians.

Some cut amusing figures: Bromley-Davenport, whose booming interventions invariably attracted opposition cheers; Brigadier Ralph Rayner, who was greeted frequently with cries of 'Tally ho!' from the Labour benches (a reference to his passion for hunting) when he rose to his feet in the Chamber; William Rees Davies whose raffish air, (heightened by his habit of wearing a cloak) together with the accident during a tank exercise in the Second World War which had cost him an arm, earned him the nickname 'the One-armed Bandit'. And not all MPs lent a particular *cachet* to the Suez Group: Montgomery Hyde (once described as the kiss of death to any pressure group to whom he belonged)¹⁰⁶ was an inveterate member of rebellious factions. Hyde, an Ulster Unionist, was not widely liked, and his occasional salacious interest in more prurient topics was viewed with distaste. Gerald Nabarro was another

¹⁰⁴ Sir Richard Body

¹⁰⁵ *Times* 8.12.56

¹⁰⁶ confirmed by Aubrey Jones and Sir Gilbert Longden

outsider: loud, brash and widely unpopular, his dogged persistence - over the Clean Air Act, for example - was admired, but frequently viewed as misguided¹⁰⁷. Captain Kerby, a quiet, somewhat secretive man, sought to create the aura of diligence with his constituents through his assiduous use of written parliamentary questions and letters to his local press; dining room gossip that he was a Russian spy¹⁰⁸ did not lend weight to his contributions to political debate.

The Philosophy of the Suez Group:

Superficially the Suez Group appear a polyglot 'colourful' group¹⁰⁹ whose common denomination was eccentricity. Certainly, given the disparate nature of the Group which included several ardent Europeans with the 'empire stalwarts', no overall hard and fast philosophy pervaded. But certain important strands of thought on foreign policy were common to all.

The Suez Group's members shared a coherent view about the position of the British Empire and Britain's role in world affairs. They were determined to maintain the Commonwealth as a political and military entity¹¹⁰ and hotly denied accusations that they were chauvinists with an illusory view of Britain's potential influence.¹¹¹ As Amery expressed it, 'our position - power-political as well as geographical - is one of being between Russia and America, or if you prefer to think ideologically, between Totalitarian Socialism and

¹⁰⁷ Lord Orr-Ewing

¹⁰⁸ Lord Orr-Ewing

¹⁰⁹ Lord Orr-Ewing

¹¹⁰ Amery, in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.111

¹¹¹ eg. Biggs-Davison letter, *Spectator* 21.2.63

Liberal Capitalism ... Our survival must depend on our ability to provide a solution for the problems first, of our own people, then of the different grades of the nations drawn naturally into our orbit under the present political constellation, ie, the colonies, Mandates, Dominions, Middle East, the sterling bloc and Western Europe.'¹¹²

This view of Britain's natural position being between Russia and America was key to their beliefs. Britain remained one of the Big Three: she should continue to be and act as America's equal, on the basis of diplomatic tradition and experience and her position as head of the Empire and Commonwealth. Any retreat from Britain's global commitments was viewed as fatal to her prestige: it would destroy the illusion of 'the empire of positions'¹¹³ and admit decline into second class power status. The answer to the erosion of British influence and prestige was seen to lie in the extension and consolidation of imperial preference. Welding the Commonwealth together into a united bloc would ensure continued British influence in world affairs, for as leader of a large unit her wishes and opinions could not be ignored. After the defeat of the imperial preference issue at the party conference in 1954, a considerable number of Suez rebels sought to give cohesion to the Commonwealth through the Expanding Commonwealth Group: Maitland was chairman; other Suez Group members and sympathizers who were involved included Amery, Tilney, Hinchingbrooke, Biggs-Davison, Paul Williams, Craddock, Ronald Russell and Angus Maude.

As the principal enemy of imperial preference, America seemed the relentless foe of British interests. There was a common desire for Britain to assert her independence of the United

¹¹² Amery to Biggs-Davison 17.1.45, Biggs-Davison papers

¹¹³ Enoch Powell

States¹¹⁴ politically and economically. The Suez Group's gut feeling was that Britain had been 'dead wrong'¹¹⁵ to take the American loan in 1945; the British economy should be consciously directed to the Empire and - for the Europeanists within the Suez Group - Western Europe. Marshall Aid was seen as American economic imperialism. The US was 'a young and ebullient nation', so it was essential that Washington should look to London for diplomatic leadership. Britain was fatally cast in that role by her economic and geographic situation.¹¹⁶ The sinister hand of American influence was seen in every British overseas loss, especially in the Middle East where America appeared a dangerous, untutored rival. Everywhere was seen 'the State Department's desire to break the British Commonwealth and establish Britain and Europe as satellites of the US defence network'.¹¹⁷ Their passionate conviction that Britain was America's equal was a recurrent theme - as was their belief that successive British governments had been lamentably subservient to Washington with dire results, and that Britain was being reduced to being America's 'lackey'.¹¹⁸

In the eyes of the Suez Group, there was insufficient concentration on the aims and purposes of British foreign policy generally: for example, with regard to America, did Britain want an unqualified, unreserved alliance or some kind of balance of power? Maitland felt that the Foreign Affairs Committee should discuss 'regularly, seriously, and methodically our objectives around the world'.¹¹⁹ Just as

¹¹⁴ Biggs-Davison to Amery 13.11.45, Biggs-Davison papers

¹¹⁵ Amery to Biggs-Davison 22.5.47, Biggs-Davison papers

¹¹⁶ Hinchbrooke in *Sidcup, Eltham and Kentish Times* 7.3.52

¹¹⁷ Paul Williams to Kenneth Black, his constituency chairman, 12.9.56, Williams papers

¹¹⁸ Paul Williams constituency speech, reported in *Times* 1.12.56

¹¹⁹ FAC 8.2.56

anti-American feeling was engrained in the Suez Group,¹²⁰ so too was a pronounced distrust of the United Nations. Not only had the Labour government lamentably failed to use the new organization as an effective tool in international diplomacy, 'we seem to be the hacks and serving men of the UN, waiting for other nations to act and not exerting our own rights and insisting on united action'.¹²¹ Extensive use of the Russian veto had crippled the organization, therefore Britain should return to traditional methods of great-power diplomacy.

The Suez Group and the Middle East:

The Middle East was 'the new Empire'¹²² for the Suez Group and their supporters. Britain's position there was pre-eminent and should remain so. These MPs continued to regard the Middle East as the strategic gateway to India and the Far East. There was an overwhelming necessity to keep key positions; first and foremost was, of course, the Suez Canal base. Britain's position in the region appeared to be under threat from two fronts: America, whom the Suez Group firmly regarded as Britain's junior partner in the region, on the basis of tradition and Britain's 'superior knowledge'¹²³ rather than raw military power; and Russia. There continued the notion of the London/Delhi axis, despite the independence of India in 1947¹²⁴ - the hope that the two great Indian dominions would go on co-operating with London, as would the old white Dominions.¹²⁵ Ironically they shared this belief

¹²⁰ Enoch Powell

¹²¹ Hinchingsbrooke, reported in *Dorset Daily Echo* 5.10.51

¹²² Lord Amery

¹²³ Amery to Biggs-Davison 29.5.48, Biggs-Davison papers

¹²⁴ Aubrey Jones

¹²⁵ Lord Amery

with Eden. Eden, however, pinned his hopes upon regional treaties and (hopefully) accumulated goodwill to bolster British prestige and influence in the region.

The age and political experience of these MPs was very relevant to their views on Britain's natural position in the world. Just as the Suez Group's older members were of a generation which had never doubted that Britain was great, the younger MPs were the children of the appeasers, to whom Munich had been a sign that, to put it politely, their elders had lost their nerve. This idea of the critical importance of 'holding one's nerve' recurs again and again in the Suez Group's arguments. Throughout Britain's dealings in the Middle East in the decade after the War, the Suez Group was to call constantly for Britain to stand firm - convinced that the other side would eventually come round to the British position, and a satisfactory conclusion could be reached. The Suez Group were not impressed by arguments of the debilitating effect on Britain's influence of British material weakness, echoing Foch's opinion that morale is to matériel 20:1. In the Abadan crisis Legge-Bourke agreed that it was not vast numbers of British troops that were required, 'but an awareness of minds ... that Her Majesty's Government are determined to protect the King's subjects and the nation's treasure, wherever and whenever endangered'.¹²⁶

Throughout this period the Suez Group was united in its opinion that successive British Governments were following a 'policy of drift' in the Middle East. Its consistent view was that Britain 'still has a major role to play in world affairs'.¹²⁷ Its anger was directed at British dependence upon America, frustrated that support for America elsewhere, especially in Korea, had not led to any corresponding support for Britain in the Middle East. Many members harboured a

¹²⁶ letter, *Daily Telegraph* 11.7.51

¹²⁷ Paul Williams to Kenneth Black 2.5.57, Williams papers

long-standing dislike of the Tripartite Declaration (of 1950 which guaranteed the armistice frontiers of 1948), which they felt 'could land Britain in an appalling situation'.¹²⁸

The Whips' View of the Suez Group:

Throughout the internal party debate on the future of the Suez Canal Zone base, the Whips were hard at work to minimize the effect of rebel views on the bulk of the party. 'Patrick Buchan-Hepburn was frightened of the Suez Group; he took a lot of private soundings about them, as he really thought the Suez Group could derail the show. He campaigned very hard.'¹²⁹ Under Buchan-Hepburn, therefore, the Suez Group were not dismissed as a group of embittered ex-ministers and ambitious young men. Assiduous attention was paid to their behaviour, and great efforts made to develop and maintain good contacts with the dissidents.¹³⁰ After his elevation to the Whips office Richard Broman-White's war-time experience in the intelligence services undoubtedly stood him in good stead with Amery, 'Billy' McLean, Fitzroy Maclean and Hyde.

'The Suez Group was not just a "one-off" thing. It was a last glow of Britain's imperial era ... a string of people who were inclined to believe that the government had made a fatal switch of emphasis with the liquidation of the Empire after the War and in throwing our lot in with America. It was too high a price to pay for American support. Therefore the Whips' office paid quite a lot of attention to them. We had endless meetings and debates about it all ... The Suez Group had a resonance within the party and the constituency

¹²⁸ Hinchingsbrooke MES-C 23.4.56; Fraser and Paul Williams, FAC 18.4.56

¹²⁹ Sir Richard Thompson interview with author

¹³⁰ Private information

associations. They were much more than a safety valve.¹³¹ Throughout the on-again, off-again negotiations with Egypt the Whips were pressed hard to keep the party on the rails, as there developed 'an enjoyable cat-and-mouse game ... behind the Westminster scene between the Whips and rebels'.¹³² They were prepared deliberately to limit public debate in the Commons on the issue if the need, and the opportunity, arose.

The Suez Group's EDM in December 1953 attracted even more comment for being published on the eve of two important Conservative backbench committee meetings and a foreign affairs debate; government whips quickly realised Churchill and Eden's interventions might not be enough to head off a public expression of unease and 'glumly resigned themselves to a two-day debate which would allow plenty of time for the Tory malcontents. The Whips were therefore wreathed in smiles when the Socialists decided on their vote of censure on the African muddle¹³³ [since] it gave them the perfect excuse to cut the debate down to a single day.'¹³⁴ Again in July 1954, Buchan-Hepburn left 'nothing to chance',¹³⁵ sending three-line whips by telegram to all Conservative MPs to ensure their presence.

THE ANTI-SUEZ GROUP

This small group of Conservative MPs only emerged in the Suez Crisis of 1956. They did not play any part in the fight Eden encountered within his party in his determination to negotiate the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan, nor the Suez Base

¹³¹ Sir Richard Thompson

¹³² *Daily Sketch* 15.12.53

¹³³ The deposition of the Kabaka of Uganda.

¹³⁴ *Daily Sketch* 15.12.53

¹³⁵ *Daily Telegraph* 29.7.54

Agreement in 1954.

Membership:

Jakie Astor*
Cyril Banks*¹³⁶
Philip Bell¹³⁷
Robert Boothby*
Alfred Bossom
Edward Boyle*
Henry D'Avigdor Goldsmid
Walter Elliot
Sir Lionel Heald
Keith Joseph
Peter Kirk
Hugh Lucas-Tooth
Robert Mathew
Frank Medlicott*
Godfrey Nicholson
Nigel Nicolson*
Basil Nield
Anthony Nutting*
David Price
William Shepherd
Alec Spearman
William Whitelaw
William Yates*¹³⁸

In contrast to the well-organized Suez Group, the Anti-Suez Group had no recognized leader, nor did its members fit easily into any particular category. All of those who publicly abstained had already antagonized their local parties through

¹³⁶ Banks resigned the party whip on 8.11.56 in protest against Eden's Suez policy.

¹³⁷ Bell was a member of the Suez Group in 1953-54.

¹³⁸ * Publicly abstained in the vote of confidence on 8.11.56.

their opposition to capital punishment, but overall they represented a motley collection of independent minded, 'liberal intellectual'¹³⁹ Conservatives. Frank Medlicott, a National Liberal, was one of the 1945 'Brigadier Group'. Astor was a former PPS to Selwyn Lloyd, who had already informed his constituency association that he would not be standing again. Boothby, a political buccaneer, was an ardent European. Nicolson's instincts were not those of a politician at all. 'His adoption of a high moral line - a very difficult thing to do in politics - was that of a member of the intelligentsia.'¹⁴⁰ It was ironic that his political neighbour in Bournemouth West was John Eden, whose warlike utterances caused his uncle considerable embarrassment.¹⁴¹ Paradoxically, the group contained two Jewish MPs, Joseph and D'Avigdor Goldsmid, and included Elliot, who had been a supporter of Zionism since the 1930s, influenced by his relationship with Baffy Dugdale who was an ardent and active Gentile Zionist.

This faction contained varying degrees of antagonism to Eden's Suez policy, ranging from unease to active opposition. In addition to the six MPs who publicly abstained on 8 November 1956¹⁴², the views of Heald, Elliot and Spearman were well known in Westminster. Beyond these were approximately 20-30 Conservatives whose profound concern caused them to contemplate seriously rebellion against the government.¹⁴³ *The Economist* commented at the time of the Suez crisis: 'Most

¹³⁹ Epstein, pp.97-122

¹⁴⁰ Private information

¹⁴¹ Paul Williams

¹⁴² 13 Conservatives were 'paired or absent because sickness or because they were abroad' (*Times* 9.11.56) in this critical vote of confidence; of these Beamish, Bossom, Mathew, and Nield were probably uneasy about Eden's policy, either because of their American connexions or their barrister training.

¹⁴³ Nicolson in Alan Thompson: *The Day Before Yesterday*, p.141.

of the doubters in this group seem likely to stay silent if things go well, and would certainly rally round [Eden] if things go really bloodily badly.' In the end, most kept quiet. Dumbfounded by the news of the initial assault, 'they felt they deserved time to reflect before committing what they assumed would be personal as well as party political suicide and the noisiness of the Opposition benches did not make things any easier since it suggested that any surrender would be surrender to disorder'.¹⁴⁴

The Formation and Organization of the Anti-Suez Group:

The rallying point of the Anti-Suez Group was Sir Lionel Heald's speech calling for a referral of the dispute over the ownership of the Suez Canal to the UNO in September 1956. These rebels' hopes that Heald would thereafter lead their little group were dashed¹⁴⁵ when Heald refused to carry his criticism of the government any further. These MPs developed into a group in a haphazard manner. 'It was a gradually coalescing movement. One would sound out others quite openly in the smoking rooms, who might point out a fellow dissenter, along the lines, "I know old George over there feels as you do".' Spearman came to act as their co-ordinator and quasi-leader in that 'he was the man in whose flat we met'.¹⁴⁶ Spearman was not very senior, but from his seat below the gangway, he had earned the reputation of an independent thinker, and 'respect as one who understood finance'.¹⁴⁷ There was an element of older MPs, such as Walter Elliot, whose unhappy feelings about Eden's policy encouraged their younger colleagues into open defiance; however, once the

¹⁴⁴ *Economist* 10.11.56

¹⁴⁵ Nigel Nicolson

¹⁴⁶ Nigel Nicolson

¹⁴⁷ Sir John Astor

younger men had 'gone over the top', their elders declined to commit what appeared to be political suicide - there was a tendency to shake their heads in sorrow, along the lines of 'Poor fellow, I knew his father'.¹⁴⁸

The 'Philosophy' of the Anti-Suez Group:

The Anti-Suez Group was formed as an instinctive reaction to the government's military intervention in November 1956. Although these MPs did not hold a coherent philosophy on Britain's place in the Middle East, they were on the party's progressive wing; they were traditional Tories who were anti-socialist. With their mixture of ages, political experiences and coming from different political generations, they held markedly disparate views on ideal links with the Middle East. The Group included Boothby and Elliot who had long been supporters of Zionism - and Boothby had advocated arms to Israel to counterbalance the Soviet decision to provide military equipment to Egypt through Czechoslovakia; William Yates, an ardent Arabist, who once appeared at the court in his constituency (The Wrekin) wearing an Arab headdress¹⁴⁹; and Cyril Banks, who had taken a long-standing interest in the problems of Palestinian Arab refugees, and whose objections to Eden's Suez policy were no secret in Westminster. Banks' keen interest in Egypt had been demonstrated by two visits to that country over the previous two years; in December 1955 he had made an unofficial attempt to start talks between Egypt and Israel. Nor was there a common theme of 'anti-appeasement': Boothby and Nigel Nicolson, as the son of Harold Nicholson were in the Churchill camp, and Medlicott had voted against Chamberlain in May 1940. On the other hand, Walter Elliot who was known to have been deeply unhappy about Munich, had not resigned over the issue - much to his later regret.

¹⁴⁸ *Observer*, 18.11.56, confirmed by Sir John Astor

¹⁴⁹ Enoch Powell

Despite their individualist approach to politics, these MPs shared a respect for the rule of law and diplomacy, together with a respect for observance of the Charter of the UNO. Each of them had already courted the ire of their constituencies for their opposition to capital punishment.¹⁵⁰ There was an acceptance of the necessity of the American alliance; many of these MPs had personal and/or business links with America: Price had been educated at Yale, Jakie Astor had an American mother, Keith Joseph an American wife, and Boothby had travelled extensively in America.¹⁵¹ Like the Suez Group, the Anti-Suez MPs jealously defended the right of an individual MP to exercise his judgement on behalf of his constituents. But unlike the Suez Group, all save one (Banks) kept their opposition within the scope of the party. In the violently partisan crisis, they took an extremely courageous stance, politically and personally, faced with trenchant opposition from many of their Conservative colleagues,¹⁵² and outright hostility from their constituency associations. Unlike the more reactionary rebels, the Anti-Suez group MPs did not escape censure by their local parties in the Suez crisis; only Boothby and Boyle survived politically unscathed.

Some political commentators felt that the confrontation between the Suez Group and the Anti-Suez group was a battle within the aristocracy. The comment, 'Suez was lost on the playing fields of Eton'¹⁵³ holds a superficial truth in that some of the protagonists were old Etonians: Amery, John Eden, Hinchingbrooke, Pitman and Sir Charles Williams *versus* Astor, Boothby, Boyle, Nicolson, Nutting, and Price. The bulk of the

¹⁵⁰ see Epstein, pp.97-138

¹⁵¹ see Eldon Griffiths: '"Yanks at Westminster": Our Friends in Commons', *Newsweek Magazine* 3.2.58

¹⁵² One Suez Group MP called Astor a 'degenerate' to his face, and never spoke to him again: Private information

¹⁵³ Brian Inglis, *Irish Press* 7.1.57

party was irate at the lengths to which these rebel MPs were prepared to carry their opposition to the government. 'They feel lately that the division of the party have mostly been the work of the 'aristos'. "Our betters", laments Dr Johnson, "indulge in fratricidal strife while we the party proles look on helplessly at the ruin of our fortunes".'¹⁵⁴

Summary:

Individual members of the Suez Group held a more important place within the party than has been appreciated hitherto. However, despite their excellent contacts and sizeable outside support, skilled organization and lobbying, the Suez Group suffered from the image of being composed of 'yesterday's men', which detracted from the force of their message. It exercised a powerful, but ephemeral influence. Ironically, the Anti-Suez Group, despite its apparent small size and lack of organization and representing a tendency within the Tory party rather than a coherent faction, were remarkably influential and exercised a powerful brake on the Cabinet in 1956.

¹⁵⁴ Inglis

CHAPTER 7: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THE MIDDLE EAST: 1948-1951

The Palestine crisis, Britain's relations with Egypt and the Abadan crisis provided the formative experiences for the Suez Group. While the Conservative party was in opposition, this was an inchoate group - indeed between 1948 and 1950, many of those who later became stalwart members of the Suez Group were not MPs - but their views coalesced with each successive crisis in the Middle East, and their determination to influence their party and the government increased accordingly.

Britain's Position in the Middle East after the Second World War:

Britain's position in the region had been pre-eminent since the First World War, through treaty rights, business interests, the Mandate in Palestine, and part-ownership of the Suez Canal Company. Britain's dominant position was reinforced after the Second World War by a network of treaties, her position as one of the victors in the recent struggle, the huge military base at the Suez Canal, a naval base at Aden, air squadrons stationed in Iraq, and rear bases in Cyprus and Malta. In addition, the commander of the Arab Legion in Jordan was provided and paid for by the British Government; Britain had protectorates over the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms and conducted their foreign affairs through a Political Resident based in Bahrain. As well as this physical presence, Britain had enormous oil investments in Persia through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and a growing interest in the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf.¹

¹ Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez*, p.109

The Position of the Middle East in Conservative thought:

To the future Suez Group and their sympathizers within the Conservative party the Middle East was the 'new Empire', which had evolved from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. Even the less emotional Tories regarded the area as vital to the Commonwealth, demanding firm statements from the Labour government that 'we British are determined to stay in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East'.² Departure 'would be the beginning of the end of the greatness of ourselves as a Great Power and be the beginning of further troubles for that area'.³ The Conservatives persisted in their pre-war view of the strategic importance of the whole region, despite the independence of India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma in 1947. The emotional tie to India had not been severed with the lowering of the British flag on the Indian sub-continent⁴, and this continued belief in the need to protect the route to India was extremely influential upon Conservative opinion.

PALESTINE

Palestine was the bastion in the informal empire in the Middle East. Britain had acquired the Mandate for Palestine in 1922; thereafter the territory was supposed to be the shield of the Suez Canal, the 'Clapham Junction of the British Commonwealth'.⁵ Palestine offered the overland route between Iraq (where there were key British air bases) and Egypt (the Suez Canal Zone base), and the air route to India and the Far East passed through the Mandate territory. In addition, Haifa

² Butler, 5.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1128

³ Butler

⁴ Aubrey Jones

⁵ Amery speech at Margate party conference, 9.10.53

was at the Mediterranean end of the vital oil pipeline from Iraq and Iran (crucial to Britain's oil supply), and was potentially significant as an alternative to the Suez Canal base. This was to assume greater importance for Conservatives when Egypt demanded revision of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.

There were varying currents within the party on the best way to maintain Britain's prestige and influence in the region. Balancing the view of Palestine's strategic importance, which required a continued British presence or controlling influence, was the party's position as the heir to the 1917 Balfour Declaration which had promised a homeland to the Jews. In the Palestine conflict the Tory party was torn, privately and publicly, between moral duty and views of military necessity.

Palestine: Tories United

Whatever their views on the relative merits of Zionism, Conservatives concurred on the vital necessity of maintaining Britain's standing in the Levant. All saw the Palestine problem as 'linked to all the other questions in the Middle East',⁶ especially Britain's future position in Egypt. The Conservative party was also united in its desire to separate the twin problems of what to do with the European Jews and the Mandate. Tories stoutly refused to concede that the Jews' suffering during the War gave them a unique claim upon the world's conscience and entitled them to unlimited immigration into Palestine.⁷ There was universal Tory criticism of extravagant promises made by Labour MPs during the 1945 election campaign in support of the Zionists, which had raised

⁶ Churchill, 23.10.46, *HC Deb.*428.1681

⁷ eg Keeling *HC Deb.*426.1290-1 and Ponsonby *HC Deb.*426.1304-6, 1.8.46; Pickthorn, 23.1.48, *HC Deb.*446.542

hopes yet offered no decided policy.⁸

On the issue of Jewish immigration, Conservatives had tended to side with Arabs, fearing that to do otherwise would forfeit the confidence of the Moslem World and the 90m Moslems on the Indian sub-continent. Just as before the Second World War, the major considerations were military: the need to protect Britain's position in the Middle East when the international horizon seemed likely to continue to be stormy. There was a fervent Tory hope that by keeping the problems of the European Jews and Palestine separate Britain would avoid being put in a position which 'did not permit us to give free and unfettered advice and help to those people who have always looked to us in the past'.⁹ For the most part Conservatives confined themselves to recommending the amount of immigration permitted should be to 'the limits of economic capacity'. It was repeatedly stressed that Britain should prevent 'putting an over-supply of Zionists into Palestine'.¹⁰ Even Churchill, who had taken a highly unpopular line within his party by publicly supporting the Zionists, persistently encouraged the Labour government to investigate other avenues in resettling the Jewish diaspora from Europe.¹¹ There was general agreement that Conservatives must demand from the government a much more firm and positive policy than hitherto¹², and widespread Tory concern at the apparent power vacuum in this key strategic region and its vulnerability to Russian infiltration.¹³ In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, this appeared more serious as 'along all our lines of

⁸ eg. Churchill, *HC Deb.*459.716 and Boothby, *HC Deb.*459.785, 10.12.48.

⁹ Glyn, *HC Deb.*433.1971-5 and Peto, *HC Deb.*433.1975-8, 25.2.47.

¹⁰ Dodds-Parker, 4.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1169; Pickthorn, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1271-9

¹¹ 1.8.46 *HC Deb.*426.1252

¹² FAC 3.3.48

¹³ see Fitzroy Maclean, 9.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.657

communication with the Far East there is a series of [power] vacuums'.¹⁴

Palestine: Tories Divided

Palestine cut 'right across party ... in fact the parties [were] divided within themselves on the matter'.¹⁵ The Conservative party was fractured between the pro-Zionists who favoured a Jewish National Homeland, those who supported partition as an interim measure, and those who regarded the indigenous Arab population as the more important. Varying attitudes to America further complicated the picture.

(a) The pro-Zionists

The post-war Conservative party was at best ambivalent towards the Jews. The party had few Jewish voters and hardly any Jewish MPs. Many Tory MPs were fervently pro-Arab, influenced in part by a romantic idea of the Arab fostered by T E Lawrence¹⁶ which had survived war-service in the Middle East. However, Churchill, Walter Elliot, James Henderson Stewart,¹⁷ Boothby, and Macmillan saw supporting the Jews as their party's moral duty, because of the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

Churchill's position on the Palestine issue was crucial, given his extraordinary position on the opposition benches as a foreign policy expert, world statesman, ex-prime minister, and prime minister-in-waiting. Churchill was a long-standing advocate of a Jewish homeland. His support for Zionism had

¹⁴ Mott-Radclyffe, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.735

¹⁵ Legge-Bourke, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.758

¹⁶ Paul Williams. Earl Winterton had served with Lawrence in the First World War

¹⁷ MP for Fife East 1933-61

led him to oppose the 1939 White Paper which limited immigration into Palestine, and he had persisted in his proposal for partition against the advice of his Cabinet in 1945. Despite this opposition from his colleagues, notably from Eden, Churchill remained committed to the idea of partition.¹⁸ His stand was not popular with his party,¹⁹ and some Tories remained very suspicious of Churchill's Zionist/Liberal credentials. Churchill was always careful to state that his stance was a personal view, and was measured in his support for Zionism in Parliament and his recommendations to Bevin. Henderson Stewart was similarly restrained. Macmillan and Elliot, despite their pre-war support for the Jews, did not express an opinion in Parliament at all. Boothby was the only other prominent Conservative publicly to back the Zionists which earned him opprobrium from his party²⁰ as the Jewish terrorist attacks against British troops escalated.

b) The Optimists

Those who agreed there should be a partition of Palestine ranged between those who advocated the creation of a Jewish state as the end result, either because they supported the cause of Zionism, or because it seemed practical politics, and those who endorsed dividing the territory as an interim measure, on the grounds that it was possible for Arabs and Jews to live together in harmony;²¹ hopefully there would eventually be a united Palestine for both Arabs and Jews.

¹⁸ see Churchill, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1246-1257

¹⁹ Churchill, 23.10.46, *HC Deb.*427.1681

²⁰ Robert Rhodes James: *Bob Boothby*, p.336

²¹ Peto, 25.2.47, *HC Deb.*433.1975-8

(c) The pro-Arabs:

The bulk of the party accepted 'local home rule'²² and were anti-partition. These MPs could use irrefutable geopolitical arguments to back their case. The Arab revolt in Palestine in the 1930s had demonstrated the indigenous population's opposition to unlimited Jewish immigration and partition, and turmoil in the area had offered outside hostile powers the opportunity to meddle. Britain's policy had increased Arab nationalism to Britain's later cost.²³ The Balfour Declaration was seen as 'a mistake'.²⁴ For these Tories, their party's moral duty lay in protecting the interests and desires of the indigenous Arab population who should be consulted first before any decisions were taken about their country's fate.

From the start many Conservatives were deeply concerned that by failing to put down the Jewish revolt, and by bowing to American pressure on immigration, Britain was by implication pursuing too Zionist a policy which would have a catastrophic impact on Arab opinion. The Zionists in Palestine, backed by America, were challenging the *status quo* with potentially disastrous strategic implications for Britain, at a time when Egypt was demanding a revision of the 1936 treaty, Britain's treaty relations with Iraq were under question, and Russia appeared to have revived to her traditional imperial quest for a warm water port.

There was a decided strain of anti-Semitism within the Tory party.²⁵ 'In spite of the Nazi atrocities against the Jews

²² see 31.7.46-1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.957-1075, and 426.1232-1317

²³ see Churchill, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1249, referring to the 1941 pro-German revolt in Iraq.

²⁴ Pickthorn, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1272

²⁵ Sir Robert Rhodes James

in the war, British public opinion and Conservative opinion remained ambivalent.' But when the fight against the British Mandate began in earnest and British troops were being killed 'an ugly Jewish backlash resulted ... Episodes such as the hanging of the two British sergeants and the explosion at the King David Hotel inflamed anti-Jewish feeling in Britain and particularly in the Conservative party'.²⁶ Jewish outrages destroyed any inclination to make further efforts on behalf of Zionists. Conservative MPs recognized the paradox of the British government using armed force to compel the Arabs in Palestine to take more Jews than they wanted and were furious at the 'disgraceful' government policy which had placed British troops in such an impossible position.²⁷ There should be no partition, because it would be 'utterly impossible to enforce partition on an unwilling Arab population without an international police force'.²⁸ There should be no Jewish state, and Britain should hang on until the Zionists' attitude changed completely.²⁹

Conservative Opinion of America

The greatest source of Conservative anxiety derived from the government's failure to secure American co-operation over the Palestine question, despite an apparent affinity of interest in the region. There was frustration at America's refusal to take responsibility for the policy Washington was advocating and contempt for Truman's susceptibility to American Zionist pressure. America seemed unfairly to be forcing Britain to bear the whole weight of Washington's policy, while the

²⁶ Rhodes James: *Boothby*, p.335

²⁷ Brigadier Mackeson, 3.3.47, *HC Deb.*434.37; General Jeffreys, 25.2.47, *HC Deb.*433.1957-1960

²⁸ Beamish, 19.3.48, *HC Deb.*448.2522-3

²⁹ Manningham-Buller, 25.2.47, *HC Deb.*433.1993

Muslims who were so important to the Empire were alarmed and estranged, with America sitting on the sidelines criticizing 'Britain's shortcomings with all the freedom of perfect detachment and irresponsibility'.³⁰

There was a decided Tory ambivalence over America's proper place in the Middle East. Conservatives recognized that American support was vital to underpin any settlement,³¹ but were convinced that the Labour government, if it was sufficiently firm, could persuade America to accept the responsibility for urging partition upon Britain.³² However, America and the United Nations should look to Britain for the lead.³³ Britain was the rightful pre-eminent power in the region and should assert her first-class status: 'nothing is more despicable ... than that with our record, we should go creeping round the world with an inferiority complex'.³⁴ This exasperation with American policy hardened into antagonism among the MPs who later came to form the Suez Group.

Conservative Opinion of the United Nations Organization:

Churchill led calls for the Mandate to be referred to the UNO,³⁵ which initially 'shocked the majority of Members on all sides'.³⁶ Gradually Tory opinion shifted, albeit reluctantly,

³⁰ Churchill, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1253

³¹ see Boothby, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.787

³² Churchill, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.715

³³ see Stanley, 25.2.47, *HC Deb.*433.1926-7; and Head, 4.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1160

³⁴ Gammans, 23.10.46, *HC Deb.*427.1709-10

³⁵ 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1253

³⁶ Macmillan, quoted in Alistair Horne: *Macmillan 1894-1956*, p.145

towards accepting the offices of the UNO.³⁷ Although some had reservations, on the grounds that UNO had already failed because of the attitude of Russia,³⁸ the official Tory line was that whilst there was no complaint against this referral, the Labour government's method and timing of the appeal was lamentable.³⁹ However, Conservative contempt for the role of the UNO grew as the crisis dragged on and permeated the entire party.⁴⁰

The Impact of Conservative Opinion on Labour policy

Had there been a united Tory cavalry charge upon the Treasury bench, a Conservative thesis might have stood a greater chance of influencing the government, for although Labour's parliamentary majority was 146, the party was riven on the issue. However, there was no question of an alliance between the Tory party and Labour backbenchers on the issue. The corresponding impact of Tory opinion on Labour's policy during the Palestine crisis was minimal.

Bevin had to manage dissent within his own party and contend with an outspoken section of his supporters who were ardently pro-Zionist, as well as with an American Administration which was heavily influenced by the vociferous American pro-Jewish lobby, but which stubbornly refused to take responsibility for the policy it advocated. Although there was an overwhelming sense of frustration, manifest in Tory interventions in debates on Palestine, that the government appeared to be drifting at the mercy of outside events, having missed key

³⁷ Stanley, 25.2.47, *HC Deb.*433.1923

³⁸ Gammans, 23.10.46, *HC Deb.*427.1708

³⁹ Stanley, 25.2.47, *HC Deb.*433.1923

⁴⁰ Beamish, 19.3.48, *HC Deb.*448.2523; Pickthorn, 9.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.635, and Legge-Bourke, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.761; Boothby, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.787

opportunities,⁴¹ the Conservative front bench throughout the crisis was careful to support Bevin in his attempts to involve America, and taking the matter to the UNO; criticism was reserved for method and timing. Eden recognized the problems Bevin faced as he struggled to deal with a difficult and emotive issue. More hard-headed on the problem of Palestine than his emotional leader, in a Cabinet paper before the War Eden had argued for limiting Jewish population in Palestine, on the grounds that the Middle East was an organic whole; Palestine in Arab eyes was an Arab country, the most fertile area of which was being handed over to an alien and particularly dangerous invader.⁴² Eden's support, as an ex-Foreign Secretary and acknowledged foreign policy expert, was of great value to the beleaguered Foreign Secretary throughout the crisis.

Bevin's vain attempts to placate the Arab nations whilst reining in the more extreme Zionist demands merely served to alienate both camps in Palestine, and incurred the distrust of Washington. Despite the Foreign Secretary's best efforts, Britain was obliged to relinquish the Palestine mandate without securing a satisfactory settlement between Arab and Jew. Conservatives no matter what their opinions on the ideal solution in Palestine saw this decision to withdraw on 15 May 1948 as a total abnegation of Britain's responsibility to ensure a just settlement to the issue; Labour was charged with 'scuttle', 'too little too late',⁴³ 'a lamentable tale of prejudice and incapacity'.⁴⁴ War was inevitable and almost all Tories expected the Jews to be annihilated.⁴⁵ Churchill

⁴¹ see Butler, 4.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1121-1133

⁴² quoted in John Barnes ed.: *The Leo Amery Diaries*, p.362

⁴³ Beamish, 4.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1210

⁴⁴ Churchill, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.716

⁴⁵ Beamish, 4.5.48, *HC Deb.*450.1210

was the exception: during the War he had asked Lord Wavell his opinion as to which side was the stronger in Palestine, and had received the unhesitating reply that if both sides were left to themselves the Jews would win.⁴⁶

The Conservatives were 'unhappy and divided'⁴⁷ by the outcome of the Arab-Israeli war and differed on the best way to react to the new situation. Boothby was one of the few who drew the obvious conclusion that as that the Israeli army was one to be reckoned with, there should be a realignment of Britain's treaties in the Middle East. King Abdullah, ruling the most progressive of the Arab states, should be encouraged to make a separate peace with Israel,⁴⁸ whatever the objections from Egypt. The two 'strong' states in the Middle East - Israel and Turkey - were being ignored: both were 'modern', 'significantly non-Arab' and firm in their opposition to Russia - all of which should make these two countries the natural pivot of British policy in the region. The pro-Arab section of the Tory party found it difficult to come to terms with the new State of Israel. It had been established by 'completely casting aside the rule of law and the principles of the UN Charter and of the Atlantic Charter',⁴⁹ and unchecked immigration into Israel would be a disruptive force in the region as Israel sought new borders for her burgeoning population. Legge-Bourke suspected King Abdullah of territorial designs which might one day be detrimental to Britain's position and interests in the Levant.⁵⁰

Churchill and Eden permitted this latitude of opinion but

⁴⁶ Churchill, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*450.716

⁴⁷ Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune*, p.149

⁴⁸ Boothby, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.787 and letter, *Times* 3.1.49

⁴⁹ Beamish, 21.7.49, *HC Deb.*467.1634

⁵⁰ Legge-Bourke, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.759

urged dissenters within their own party and the Labour government to 'face the facts'. The Jews had established a government that functioned effectively and which had been recognized by the United States and Russia. Britain 'who still [has] many interests duties and memories in Palestine and the Middle East ... would surely be foolish in the last degree to be maintaining a sort of sulky boycott'.⁵¹ A powerful additional reason was Britain's treaty obligations to Jordan. Conservative criticism of Labour's handling of the Palestine question culminated in their decision to divide the House⁵² in protest at the government's policy of 'folly, futility and fatuity'. It was the first occasion in the 1945 Parliament in which the Conservatives had voted against the government on a major issue of foreign policy. Even though the government's majority dropped to 90, Labour's authority was not gravely damaged, merely shaken.⁵³ Churchill was careful to explain that his party was not withdrawing its support for Bevin's foreign policy in general.

The Influence of the Palestine Crisis upon the Future Suez Group:

For the imperial wing of the party, many of whom became stalwart members of the Suez Group, the Palestine débâcle was an integral part of Labour's disastrous policy of retreat from Empire. Britain's abandonment of India, the jewel in the imperial crown, had immeasurably weakened her position in the Middle East. Not all latter-day members of the Suez Group took this static view of the British Empire. Amery and Biggs-Davison both took a more progressive view of the necessity of Indian independence, but they concurred with their colleagues

⁵¹ Churchill, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.717

⁵² on 26.1.49

⁵³ *Times* 27.1.49

that a line should be drawn thereafter.

For the nascent Suez Group Palestine proved the first in a series of major disasters for British policy in the Middle East. Britain had let down the Arabs in Palestine; she had not ensured a just settlement⁵⁴ and had made enemies without rewarding or strengthening her friends. Britain's position, power and prestige had been damaged, as the British government had not been able to impose its will on the region, unable to hold sway against America, and had inflamed Arab nationalism, to the detriment of Britain's position in other Arab countries. This emerging faction of the party was anti-Israel for the most part, suspicious of American policy and designs in the Middle East and contemptuous of the UNO. The departure of Britain from Palestine without any residual influence strengthened these MPs' conviction that Britain must have a physical presence in the Middle East - and Labour had committed the cardinal sin of opening the question of Britain's withdrawal from the Suez Canal. The Palestine conflict did nothing to alter strategic perceptions that had endured since the 1930s.⁵⁵ The festering conflict between Arab and Jew which offered opportunities for Communist subversion further underlined the need for a secure British presence on the Suez Canal.

BRITAIN'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT 1948-1951

In considering Conservative reaction to later events in Persia in 1951, the history of Britain's relations with Egypt following the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 was of crucial importance. The Conservative party as a whole believed Labour's decision to open the question of the Suez Canal base immediately after the War had placed Britain in an

⁵⁴ Legge-Bourke, 10.12.48, *HC Deb.*459.759

⁵⁵ see Beamish, 21.7.49, *HC Deb.*467.1633

unnecessarily vulnerable position in the Middle East.⁵⁶ Nor did the Tories believe it was justified: Britain would need to import military supplies through Egypt⁵⁷ to protect her position in Palestine. The idea that Egypt 'could ensure by her own resources the liberty and entire security of the Canal' (Article VIII of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty) was frankly laughable. While there was private awareness that the defence of the Canal might be affected by the atom bomb,⁵⁸ more immediate concerns focused upon the possible effect on the Sudan, an Anglo-Egyptian condominium.⁵⁹

Conservative Perceptions of the Strategic Importance of the Suez Canal:

Conservative opinion concentrated upon the strategic importance of maintaining a British military presence in the Middle East: control of this bridge between continents was seen to be of the 'first importance to any aggressive power in the Eastern Mediterranean and Levant' and therefore it was imperative that Britain, through her base at the Suez Canal, continue to hold this keystone in the arch of Western and Commonwealth defence, enabling Britain act as a deterrent to possible Russian military aggression, and to react quickly should a crisis develop.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Churchill, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1256

⁵⁷ FAC 4.5.46

⁵⁸ FAC 4.5.46

⁵⁹ Churchill, 23.10.46, *HC Deb.*427.1681

⁶⁰ Mott-Radclyffe, *HC Deb.*481.1194 and de Chair, *HC Deb.*481.1229, 29.11.50

Economic Importance of the Middle East to the British Economy

By the late 1940s the problem of the future of Britain's substantial base in the Suez Canal Zone was compounded by the Labour government's inability to settle the problem of Arab-Israeli animosity. Egypt refused to permit the passage of Israeli-bound cargo through the Canal, in direct contravention of the 1888 Convention governing international use of the Canal. Cairo's intransigence and the closure of the oil pipeline to Haifa from Iraq following the 1948-9 war meant the Haifa refinery was lying idle at a cost of \$4 million a month to the British economy.⁶¹ Some Conservatives feared that as the British economy became increasingly dependent upon Middle Eastern oil (rising to an estimated 82% in 1951), the success or failure of the European Recovery Programme would be tied more closely to the continued security of the Middle East.⁶² The closure of the Haifa refinery was of particular importance during the Abadan crisis.⁶³

For the Tories, the problem of securing passage through the Canal was two-fold: the need to gain passage for vital oil supplies;⁶⁴ and the danger of British power and prestige being eroded by an inferior nation's ability to flout Westminster's will (and incidentally the rule of law) with impunity.⁶⁵ It was obvious Egypt's success in barring Israeli-bound traffic from the Canal spurred the nationalist clamour for Egyptian sovereignty over the Canal Zone base. Conservatives felt that the Egyptian people should be far more co-operative with the United Kingdom, in gratitude for Britain's sacrifice during

⁶¹ Geoffrey Lloyd, 29.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.514

⁶² Beamish, 21.7.49, *HC Deb.*454.1641

⁶³ see Eden, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.748

⁶⁴ see Eden, 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.310; Arbuthnot, 19.5.50, *HC Deb.*475.1510

⁶⁵ see Low, 21.7.49, *HC Deb.*467.1645

the Second World War, both in terms of loss of life and the considerable cost of defending Egyptian territory from her Nazi-Fascist aggressors.⁶⁶ There was a large element of racism, albeit cloaked in a paternalistic guise, in Conservative attitudes to the Middle East, and in particular, towards Egypt. Many Conservatives were soldiers, or ex-soldiers who had served with the 8th Army in the Middle East, an experience which had done nothing to improve their poor opinion of Egyptians, either as soldiers or as administrators.⁶⁷

General Conservative impatience with Labour's inability to settle these outstanding issues was mirrored by the feeling that Egypt should be concentrating on the wider issue of uniting against the threat of Communism, rather than taking a narrow nationalist view about the Anglo-Egyptian treaty. The outbreak of the Korean war in June 1950 inevitably reinforced Conservative anxiety of Russian encroachment in other areas of the world which were vulnerable to Communist infiltration. Now more than ever the Middle East appeared to be a security vacuum which posed an irresistible target for Russian aggression,⁶⁸ making a substantial British military presence in the region seem all the more imperative. The notion that Egypt could become neutral in any future conflict was simply not practicable.⁶⁹

The Conservative party was united on the need for international solidarity and preferably for active allies in the Middle East to bolster the British position.⁷⁰ Labour's

⁶⁶ see de Chair, 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.295

⁶⁷ Reginald Bevens: *The Greasy Pole*, p.37

⁶⁸ Reginald Bennett, 14.9.50, *HC Deb.*478.1313

⁶⁹ Mott-Radclyffe, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1194

⁷⁰ Earl Winterton, 13.9.50, *HC Deb.*478.1178; Dunglass, 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.302

crowning error was seen to be its persistent failure to persuade America that its vital interests were equally at stake and to secure joint co-operative action.⁷¹ The Tripartite Declaration, signed by Britain, America and France in May 1950 (which guaranteed the armistice frontiers of 1949) was seen as a poor substitute for active co-operation, or even better, an Eastern Mediterranean or Middle Eastern pact - witness the efforts made by Churchill's government to secure a Middle East defence organization in 1951-1952. A very small group of Tory MPs, notably Boothby and (after 1950) Julian Amery and Somerset de Chair,⁷² felt the obvious ally capable of providing effective resistance to Russian aggression, was Israel. From the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948 these MPs were increasingly critical of what they perceived to be the failure by successive British governments to harness Israel as a progressive and stabilizing force in the region.⁷³ Israel was denied arms necessary for its survival, while Britain continued to supply arms to Egypt, a nation that openly flouted British will by refusing free passage through the Suez Canal.

The Suez Group in potentia

This nascent group carried the general Tory low opinion of Egyptians to extremes. Imperial-minded Tories felt Egyptian independence had been an unhappy experience: 'Egyptianization' had been pushed through too rapidly, to the detriment of Egypt's real industrial interests, and misgovernment with the accompanying search for scapegoats - in particular foreign powers, with Britain as the ex-imperial presence leading the pack - had led to a decline in the rule of law and an

⁷¹ Head, 12.2.51, *HC Deb.*484.152

⁷² MP for Norfolk South West 1935-45; Paddington South 1950-51

⁷³ see Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1023

increasing disrespect for international conventions.

The Conservative imperial wing endorsed the strategic arguments for a British military presence in the region and the need for the ability to react to a sudden and unexpected threat.⁷⁴ Convinced that there was no military justification for a revision of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, they firmly contended that the treaty contained a provision for its indefinite continuation (Article X), as Britain had the option to take to arbitration the question of whether Egypt was capable of maintaining full security at the Canal - which most, if not all, Tories felt she was not. After the outbreak of the Korean war, these MPs regarded it as inconceivable that Britain could abandon the base and move it somewhere else in the Middle East, like 'some sort of suitcase'.⁷⁵ The Suez Canal and the Panama Canal were comparable in importance to Britain and America respectively.⁷⁶ Quite simply, Britain had to maintain a position of strength in the area to make an effective contribution to world security.

To these MPs, the Suez Canal base was vital to the maintenance of British leadership of a strong Empire; if Britain was pushed out of Suez the country would be dependent upon America and the Panama Canal for her air and sea communications with Australia and New Zealand.⁷⁷ They had no desire for Britain to be as dependent upon the United States for her defence in the Middle East as Britain was in Europe. Although they agreed with the official Conservative line on the need for Anglo-American co-operation in the region since Britain could

⁷⁴ de Chair, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1229-30

⁷⁵ de Chair, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1229

⁷⁶ de Chair, *HC Deb.*481.1234

⁷⁷ Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1024-5

not act alone,⁷⁸ they felt Britain's pre-eminent position in the region should be maintained and respected.⁷⁹ America should play a supporting and definitely junior role,⁸⁰ while the gap in manpower created by the loss of the Indian Army should be filled by colonial troops recruited from East and West Africa.⁸¹

The emerging Suez Group disliked the Tripartite Declaration which was clearly aimed at eliminating traditional spheres of influence. If Britain was to continue to play its part effectively against Communist aggression in the Middle East, she must retain her sphere of influence⁸² - a clear warning that the government should impress upon the American administration that it interfered with British interests in the region at its own peril. The signature of the ANZUS pact in September 1951 governing the defence of the Pacific, which specifically excluded Britain from a region previously regarded as one of rightful influence, was to reinforce their determination that British influence in the Middle East was not to be eroded in a similar fashion. There was a decided feeling that the US attitude to 'colonialism' should not go unchallenged, and the general effect of regional pacts concluded piecemeal would be to dismember the British Empire.⁸³

⁷⁸ Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1024-5

⁷⁹ eg de Chair, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1233-4

⁸⁰ Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1025

⁸¹ Earl Winterton, *HC Deb.*478.1178 and Hinchingsbrooke, *HC Deb.*478.1198, 13.9.50; Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1024

⁸² de Chair, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1234

⁸³ Gammans and Ryder, *FAC* 25.4.51

Conservative Influence on Labour's Egyptian Policy:

Despite initial Tory hopes⁸⁴ that the return of Nahas Pasha would signal an era of better understanding, negotiations on a revision of the 1936 Treaty continued in a desultory fashion throughout 1950 against a background of increasing Egyptian restrictions on British ships. Tories fumed at Labour's persistence in trying to negotiate with a blatantly unreliable nation⁸⁵ and at Cairo's ingratitude and unreasonableness,⁸⁶ accompanied by strident anti-British propaganda in the Egyptian press. 'If only the government had pushed a stronger line of action our tankers would now be passing through the Suez Canal',⁸⁷ and the Haifa refinery would be going again. Such comments implied it was outrageous that an inferior nation should try to hold the British Empire to ransom. They urged the use of economic sanctions to force Arab co-operation over Haifa.⁸⁸ The incipient Suez Group's calls for the use of military equipment sales to Egypt to extract her compliance with Article IV of the 1888 Convention⁸⁹ enjoyed wider support within the party.⁹⁰ Churchill was in favour of using such pressure⁹¹ whereas Eden was more cautious.⁹² It is interesting that Churchill was already part of this belligerent group and Eden was obliged to counter his leader, running contrary to the alignment one might have assumed of a

⁸⁴ see de Chair, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1231

⁸⁵ Crossthwaite-Eyre, 14.6.50, *HC Deb.*476.191

⁸⁶ see de Chair, 28.3.50, *HC Deb.*473.295

⁸⁷ Arbuthnot, 19.5.50, *HC Deb.*475.1510

⁸⁸ Amery, supported by Geoffrey Lloyd, 10.7.50, *HC Deb.*477.954-5

⁸⁹ Hugh Fraser, 19.4.50, *HC Deb.*474.114

⁹⁰ eg Arbuthnot, 19.5.50, *HC Deb.*475.1510

⁹¹ 12.9.50, *HC Deb.*478.980-1

⁹² 14.9.50, *HC Deb.*478.1377

particular group striving to capture the leadership's attention.

Britain's relations with the Wafd government came to a head with Cairo's call for an unconditional withdrawal of British troops from the Canal Zone and the unity of the Sudan and Egypt under the Egyptian crown on 15 November 1950. This coincided with the Attlee government's decision to resume despatch of jet fighters and tanks to Egypt (suspended in September 1950 because of the demands of Britain's rearmament programme). Thereafter there was a marked swing on the Conservative benches in support of using the obvious levers of sales of military equipment.⁹³ Conservatives were incensed that the government appeared to be selling much needed equipment abroad - and to a suspect nation - ignoring the prior claims of the Commonwealth. Conservatives were also acutely aware of the interaction of events in the Middle East.⁹⁴ London's difficulties with Cairo coincided with problems with Tehran, where the Persian Parliament was steadfastly refusing to ratify the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's Supplementary Agreement of 1949. Thereafter, the Conservative front bench adopted the tactics advocated by their robust backbench colleagues,⁹⁵ with Eden notably in the vanguard of the attack. Political circumstances favoured the Conservatives in the short term. Faced with a knife-edge majority and widespread Labour backbench unease about the wisdom of military equipment to a truculent government,⁹⁶ the government was forced to concede a temporary suspension of arms shipments.

⁹³ de Chair, William Bennett, Gammans, Fisher, 20.11.50, *HC Deb.*482.33; Low, de Chair and Keeling, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1151-4

⁹⁴ Mott-Radclyffe, 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1193

⁹⁵ Eden, 22.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.341 and 23.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.512-3; Churchill, 22.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.344; 23.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.515 and 29.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.1153-4

⁹⁶ see adjournment debate, 22.11.50, *HC Deb.*481.424-468

When Gaitskell announced the conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian financial negotiations on 16 March 1950, the Conservative front bench also took up backbench suggestions of using Egyptian sterling balances in London⁹⁷ as a *quid pro quo* for free passage of British tankers through the Canal. Responding to Conservative disgust at Labour's failure to use a readily available lever, Eden moved an adjournment debate on 20 March 1951. The wider political implications could not be ignored: this lily-livered approach would have serious repercussions on Anglo-Persian relations, currently at a very critical stage with the proposal before the Persian parliament for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's interests. The more the Chancellor gave way to Egypt the more difficult it would be to stand up to Persia.⁹⁸ But despite Conservative outrage and deep misgivings within his own party, 'Mr Gaitskell found votes where he had lacked voices'.⁹⁹

Throughout the Abadan crisis Conservatives saw a continued interaction of events between Britain's positions in Egypt and Persia.¹⁰⁰ Britain's humiliation in Persia led to a stiffening of the official Tory line on Haifa and the Suez Canal. With the two largest British owned oil refineries in the world out of action, the time had come to take steps to ensure that British tankers could go through to Haifa and other countries could have refined oil products to which they were entitled under international law.¹⁰¹ If Egypt still refused to permit free passage of the Canal, Britain should take measures 'that lie within our power to take with our Allies to ensure observation of our rights' such as a tanker

⁹⁷ Amery and Geoffrey Lloyd, 10.7.50, *HC Deb.*477.954-5

⁹⁸ Mott-Radclyffe, 20.3.51, *HC Deb.*485.2358

⁹⁹ *Times* 21.3.51

¹⁰⁰ see Eden, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.* 489.747-54; and see Churchill election speech, reported in *Times* 2.10.51

¹⁰¹ Eden, 19.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.239.241

escort through the Canal.

And as negotiations on the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty stalled, Conservatives repeatedly raised questions on the continued sale of military equipment to the Cairo government, prompted by a fear that the British government had not taken into consideration the demands of the country's own rearmament programme, in addition to a violent dislike of supplying a country which had 'behaved in such a shabby manner' towards Britain.¹⁰² Tories were agreed no further supplies should be forwarded until treaty rights were observed. Their efforts were to no avail; Labour ministers insisted that substantial items of equipment were not being supplied and the complete cessation of all arms supplies might prejudice future talks.

THE ABADAN CRISIS: 1951

The Abadan crisis, sparked by the Mossadeq government's decision to nationalize the holdings of the Anglo-Iranian Oil company, was more straightforward for the Conservatives than the débâcle over Palestine. There were no complicating factors of prior commitments to a an unpopular minority, nor arguments over Britain's moral obligations. Nor was there a problem over the appeal of differing Arab countries. However, again, there were differing currents of opinion on how best to respond to the challenge to Britain's position. In essence the Abadan crisis was the skirmish which determined the battle lines within the party over the Sudan and the future of the Suez Canal base once the Conservatives were returned to office.

The Mossadeq government's action, together with the Persians subsequent refusal to submit to arbitration or to permit the

¹⁰² Vere Harvey, 18.4.51, *HC Deb.*486.1818

export of oil under the old terms¹⁰³, appeared the last straw to Conservatives, whose sensibilities were already flayed by Egyptian truculence over Haifa and the Canal Zone base. All sections of the party concurred it was the culmination of the absence of any effective policy in the Middle East¹⁰⁴ and there was universal concern at the lack of effective protest and policy, seen in the large attendances of backbench party meetings,¹⁰⁵ and their public calls for a determined approach.

The Official Conservative Line:

(a) The Position of Eden:

Throughout the Abadan crisis Eden was the most prominent Opposition spokesman on Persia. Initially Eden had favoured doing 'nothing... in a hurry',¹⁰⁶ but by mid-June he was leading vigorous Conservative calls for firm, effective action: namely a declaration that there would be no evacuation from Abadan.¹⁰⁷ It was the 'inescapable duty of the Government to take any steps that may be necessary to protect [British personnel]. The Government may be sure that whatever those steps may be, we shall be ready to give them our support.' 'Privately, Eden agreed with Labour that the wisest course was to handle the matter calmly and not to get into

¹⁰³ Hugh Berrington: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1945-55*, p.171

¹⁰⁴ see de Chair, Mott-Radclyffe, and Eden, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.746-833

¹⁰⁵ About 200 Tory MPs attended the 1922 committee meeting which discussed Persia on 28.6.51.

¹⁰⁶ Eden letter to *Daily Telegraph*, quoted in David Carlton: *Anthony Eden* (London 1981), p.289

¹⁰⁷ 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.752-3

precipitate action in the volatile Middle East.'¹⁰⁸ His robust line in public was undoubtedly fuelled by his poor opinion of Morrison's performance as Foreign Secretary, and Conservative backbench pressure.

Eden and his moderate colleagues stopped short of calling for the Government to protect lives and property. Nor did they ask for troops to be sent in immediately. Military intervention should 'only [be] in the final resort'; it was hoped that the matter would not be allowed to drift to point where the only choice facing Britain would be complete withdrawal from Persia and sending in troops.¹⁰⁹ More moderate Tories were acutely aware that if British troops moved into the oil fields, it would be very difficult to represent it as protective action, whilst accusing others of aggressive behaviour (ie Korea).¹¹⁰ British intervention might lead to revolt in Tehran,¹¹¹ raising the spectre of Russian inspired intervention. 'Eden also knew the Truman Administration considered Mossadeq as a barrier against Communism who should be supported.'¹¹²

Eden moved to restrain the atavistic jingoism of some Tory backbenchers, ensuring that it was the Shadow Cabinet which led pressure upon the government for debates on the crisis, and in trying to channel backbench agitation. On 7 June 1951 Fitzroy Maclean, Viscount Cranborne, David Ormsby-Gore, Amery, Head and Stanley tabled an EDM which accused the government of failing to provide 'firm or coherent policy in the Middle East' which had gravely endangered British interests in the

¹⁰⁸ Robert Rhodes James: *Anthony Eden* (London 1986), p.337

¹⁰⁹ Edward Wakefield, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.791

¹¹⁰ Richard Thompson, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.807-8

¹¹¹ Edward Wakefield, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.792

¹¹² Rhodes James: *Eden*, p.337

area, especially Persia, and deplored the weakness shown by the government in its dealings with Egypt over the Suez Canal. The EDM went on to urge the government to take immediate steps to 'establish, after consultation with the Commonwealth, the United States of America and France, and in co-operation with the governments of Greece and Turkey, an effective Middle East defence system designed to ensure the maintenance of peace in the area'.

It was signed by 157 Conservative MPs, an extraordinary demonstration of the strength of party feeling on the Abadan issue. There had clearly been a concerted effort by Tory whips¹¹³ to turn this EDM into the party's manifesto on the Abadan crisis, and Middle Eastern affairs. The EDM had been signed by Gridley, the Chairman of the 1922 Committee - an extraordinary addition to any EDM - as well as the 1922 Vice Chairman (Robert Turton) and 8 (out of 12) members of the 1922 executive (Noble, Thorneycroft, Gammans, Walker-Smith, Boyd-Carpenter, Selwyn Lloyd and Eccles), members of the Foreign Affairs (Mott-Radclyffe), Imperial (MacDonald) and Defence committees, members of One Nation group (Alport, Fort, Rodgers, Macleod, Maude); the Scottish National Liberal and Conservative Whip (Niall Macpherson), as well as MPs who were to become prominent members of the Suez Group (Amery, Fitzroy Maclean, Terence Clarke, Mellor and Legge-Bourke), prominent ardent Europeans (Boothby, Eccles, Smithers, Foster and Hollis); MPs young and old (Amery and Sidney Marshall); those who advocated a peaceable settlement by negotiation as well as those whose personal preference was to send in a couple of gunboats to clinch the matter. The list also included those with experience of government and those Conservatives close to Eden (Nutting, Mott-Radclyffe, Lord John Hope); and to Churchill (Soames).

Despite these attempts to ensure that the party spoke with one

¹¹³ 89 names were added to the list on the Order paper on 11.6.51.

voice on the Abadan issue, this became more difficult as events in Persia reached appeared to reach a climax in mid-1951. Such a division would prove potentially damaging to the Conservatives when a general election seemed imminent, prompting swift moves by leading Conservatives to disclaim any such internal strife,¹¹⁴ and to ensure a coordinated party line through the 1922 committee.¹¹⁵

(b) The Position of Churchill:

In the Abadan crisis Churchill was more inclined towards the robust view than his deputy. The presence of two acknowledged experts on foreign affairs on the Tory front bench was increasingly an explosive cocktail.

The informal hawkish faction knew they enjoyed Churchill's sympathy,¹¹⁶ if not his explicit support. At one point Amery, Fitzroy Maclean, Head and Cranborne, along with about 6 other concerned MPs, called on Churchill and urged him to take a vigorous line. Although Churchill enjoyed 'proper backbench pressure',¹¹⁷ regarding EDMs as a legitimate teasing of a weak government, 'he always spoke with two voices on this'. As leader of Her Majesty's Opposition it was perfectly proper to attack the incompetent policy of a disastrous Foreign Secretary, and the opportunity was there to shy away from the unpleasantness of knowledge and the inevitable accompaniment of responsibility. However, as the possible future Prime Minister in an election year, circumstances demanded temperance and statesmanship. Yet, Churchill 'loathed to be drawn into a position where he could

¹¹⁴ Head letter, *Times* 11.7.51

¹¹⁵ Butler, FAC 12.7.51; and see 1922 committee, 28.7.51

¹¹⁶ Lord Amery

¹¹⁷ Lord Carr

be seen as in cahoots with the government'.¹¹⁸

Therefore, for Churchill, the Abadan crisis was something of an uneasy balancing act. Even though he was emotionally drawn to the nascent Suez Group's remedy, Churchill counselled restraint in private meetings and in the party committees. He was noticeably subdued in public; in June Eden made the running on behalf of the Conservative front bench. Churchill opened the debate on the Middle East for his party before the House rose for the summer recess, but in this and in party committees he was manifestly unwilling to demand publicly the use of force for the protection of property. His message was clear: he opposed evacuation, but only if British personnel were physically threatened should the government send in troops.

The Emerging Suez Group:

Since the end of the Arab-Israeli war a group of MPs who were 'critical of the policy pursued generally by the government in the Middle East'¹¹⁹ had been increasingly apparent in the frequency with which certain names recurred on the Order Sheet, and interventions and speeches in debate. Their number was strengthened considerably after the General Election of February 1950 with the return of independent minded pre-war MPs¹²⁰ and the election of younger MPs, whose war-time experiences and interests had given them a wide knowledge.¹²¹

Unlike the later party disagreements over the Sudan and the

¹¹⁸ Lord Carr, and see Churchill, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.978-995

¹¹⁹ *Times* 21.6.51

¹²⁰ de Chair, Herbert Williams, Waterhouse

¹²¹ Amery, Maude, Powell

Suez Canal base, this group of MPs did appreciate and applaud Eden's position on Abadan,¹²² although Eden's robust (but still qualified) stance undoubtedly raised expectations that he would be similarly hawkish in defence of British interests elsewhere in the Middle East. And all Conservatives were aware of the party's conflicting roles: as the party of opposition, 'we were all free to say what we thought, and let fire over Abadan'¹²³; yet in its role of responsible government-in-waiting in a year when a general election seemed imminent, it behoved the party to be cautious, moderate and restrained. 'The Conservative front bench were reluctant to make the running in opposition for fear of acquiring the label of "Warmonger". Therefore it was really left to me [and others] on the second bench to challenge Morrison, and to urge him to put British troops in to protect the British position.'¹²⁴

In the Abadan crisis this remained an 'informal group [who] discussed things among ourselves'.¹²⁵ At the outset, these MPs 'emulated the reserve of the Conservative front bench',¹²⁶ but rapidly came to describe publicly Morrison's policy as one 'of despair'.¹²⁷ Their robust stance on the need to protect British nationals and Britain's commercial and strategic interests enjoyed wider support from senior Tories, such as Lord Salisbury¹²⁸, Lord Dunglass,¹²⁹ Sandys¹³⁰ and

¹²² Lord Amery

¹²³ Lord Amery

¹²⁴ Somerset de Chair

¹²⁵ Lord Amery

¹²⁶ *Times* 2.5.51

¹²⁷ Legge-Bourke letter, *Daily Telegraph* 11.7.51

¹²⁸ 5.7.51, reported in *Times* 7.7.51

Head.¹³¹

The Views and Aims of the Emerging Suez Group

The Persian crisis was not an isolated phenomenon: the 'scuttle' from Palestine and sour relations with Egypt and Iraq had created a background of weakness and withdrawal which went a long way to explain recent events in Persia.¹³² 'The nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's holdings by Mossadeq immediately raised the whole question of British influence in the Middle East. If he was allowed to get away with it, it followed almost automatically that someone [like Nasser] would want to nationalize the Suez Canal Company.'¹³³ They fumed at Herbert Morrison's inadequacies.¹³⁴ Nothing less than the survival of the British Commonwealth and Empire as an independent force in the world' was at stake.¹³⁵ Legge-Bourke was goaded into throwing a penny contemptuously across the floor of the House at the Foreign Secretary, with the instruction that Morrison 'should put on another record'.¹³⁶ This gesture was regarded as particularly shocking and received extensive press coverage.

¹²⁹ 21.6.51 *HC Deb.*489.770; see 1922 committee, 28.6.51, *FAC* 28.6.51. MP for Lanark 1931-51. Dunglass was an unexpected recruit, as a former PPS to Chamberlain, supporter of Munich and Chamberlain in 1940.

¹³⁰ 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.763-65

¹³¹ see Head letter, *Times* 11.7.51. MP for Carshalton 1945-59

¹³² Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1019

¹³³ Somerset de Chair

¹³⁴ eg Rayner, 16.7.51, *HC Deb.*490.842

¹³⁵ see De Chair letter, *Times* 19.6.51

¹³⁶ on 21.6.51

Britain's interests in the Persian Gulf appeared to be under attack from two quarters: Russia and America. Just as Persia was a traditional target of Russian expansion,¹³⁷ now there was a desire to deny Russia control of the oil fields of the Gulf: securing control of this oil would immediately treble Russian oil reserves.¹³⁸ In addition to these MPs' fear that the Tudeh party would triumph and that Persia would become a Russian satellite,¹³⁹ there was also the wider concern for Middle Eastern defence: if Russia swept through Iraq, Persia and the Levant, it would be of no avail that Greece and Turkey were members of NATO.¹⁴⁰

Since a purely British organized defence system in the Middle East was not feasible, reluctantly, they accepted the need for Anglo-American co-operation, but with the US playing a subsidiary role.¹⁴¹ America should realise that 'the defence of the Middle East must primarily be a British responsibility' as 'the Middle East is the backbone of the Commonwealth and Empire: if it goes the sea and air routes to Australia and India will lie not through the Middle East but through the United States and the Panama Canal'.¹⁴² Implicit in this was the belief that Britain should not be constrained in the Middle East by America's attitude; it was, of course, desirable to act in concord, but this was by no means obligatory. (This view surfaced repeatedly in the Conservative party in the 1950s, only to be refuted brutally in the Suez crisis.) Their ideal was for a joint Middle

¹³⁷ Fitzroy Maclean, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1035

¹³⁸ De Chair letter, *Times* 19.6.51

¹³⁹ Legge-Bourke letter, *Daily Telegraph* 11.7.51; Fitzroy Maclean, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1039

¹⁴⁰ de Chair letter, *Times* 31.6.51

¹⁴¹ see de Chair letter, *Times* 19.6.51

¹⁴² Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1024-5

Eastern defence force,¹⁴³ but its composition varied. Amery preferred an arrangement whereby the British and Turkish armies should have primary command, with contributions from Israel and the Arabs nations, together with American and French contingents.¹⁴⁴ Other future members of the Suez Group were decidedly unenthusiastic about the inclusion of Israel; Fitzroy Maclean's stated preference was for a strong Western force, together with troops from the Commonwealth, America and France.¹⁴⁵

Persistent rumours that Persia was in negotiation with US oil companies to take over the AIOC concession¹⁴⁶ fuelled Conservative suspicions of American oil interests over-influencing Truman's policy in the region. The *Times* pointed out that even though there was little evidence of any such negotiations, it was undoubtedly in the back of the Persian government's mind that if agreement with Britain was not reached on Persia's terms, then US technicians could fill the breach. Sandys' comment that if British technicians were thrown out only America or Russia could provide replacement personnel,¹⁴⁷ clearly revealed the view that either alternative was equally unpalatable.

While the incipient Suez Group agreed with its senior colleagues that there should be no evacuation of AIOC personnel, these MPs wanted a declaration that force would be used if necessary to protect British lives and interests. As the crisis progressed, this faction's pressure for the active protection of British personnel and property gathered

¹⁴³ de Chair letter, *Times* 31.6.51

¹⁴⁴ Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1024-5

¹⁴⁵ 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1037-38

¹⁴⁶ *Times* 21.5.51; Crossman, 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.776

¹⁴⁷ 21.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.759-60

momentum, both on their front bench and the government. They felt that if the government were to declare its determination to send in troops this would make war less, not more, likely.¹⁴⁸ They were aware of a Cabinet split on the issue. 'At first Morrison was very friendly and sympathetic ... in his replies. Then I noticed he got increasingly irritated and uncomfortable about the whole matter. I was stopped in the lobby by Hector McNeil [Minister of State at the Foreign Office] who said "You're going for the wrong man. He wants to put troops in. The Cabinet are stopping him on the grounds it would upset the UNO [in Korea] - the Americans would not wear it".'¹⁴⁹ Conservatives were singularly unimpressed by such arguments. In the first place, as Eden had pointed out, they felt entitled to unstinting American support in Persia in return for Britain's loyalty to the US in Korea. Washington should be made to acknowledge that it was in her interests, economically, politically and strategically, to have continued British pre-eminence in the Persian Gulf. In the second place, in this faction's view, Britain did not have to defer to American wishes.

Once aware of the schism within Cabinet, these MPs were relentless in trying to drive a wedge publicly between Morrison and Attlee, pressing the Foreign Secretary to admit that by his earlier statements to the House he had given the impression that he was prepared to use force, and urging troops to be sent in immediately¹⁵⁰ - the principal effect would be psychological.¹⁵¹ They were unimpressed by Morrison's refusal to be drawn on a specific line of

¹⁴⁸ Fitzroy Maclean, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1042

¹⁴⁹ Somerset de Chair

¹⁵⁰ de Chair, 20.6.51, *HC Deb.*489.526

¹⁵¹ Legge-Bourke letter, *Daily Telegraph* 11.7.51

action.¹⁵² They also were determinedly pressing their line on the Conservative front bench, through an EDM¹⁵³ and in the party committees. Dissatisfied with the response to this EDM, and what they regarded as Labour's pusillanimous behaviour, immediately after the Persian oil debate on 21 June 1951 Fitzroy Maclean and 28 Conservatives tabled a further EDM deploring the Foreign Secretary's refusal to give an assurance that the government would take the 'necessary measures to protect British lives and installations'. Unlike the earlier more moderate EDM this motion was phrased in stronger terms, calling on the government to use force to defend property as well as lives. This went further than the Conservative leadership and the more moderate wing of the party were prepared to go, since in the debate Eden specifically had excluded the protection of installations. It was sponsored by Fitzroy Maclean, Amery, Viscount Cranborne, Christopher Soames, Captain Ryder and Richard Fort, all of whom had also signed the earlier Conservative's 'manifesto' on Abadan. It attracted the following signatures:

Michael Astor
John Baker White
Tufton Beamish
Reginald Bennett
Eric Bullus
Albert Cooper
Viscountess Davidson
Nigel Fisher
Hugh Fraser
John Hare
Reader Harris
Edward Keeling
Gilbert Longden
Douglas Marshall

¹⁵² *Times* 21.6.51

¹⁵³ on 7.6.51

David Ormsby-Gore
Peter Smithers
Lady Tweedsmuir
Fletcher Vane
Charles Waterhouse
Sir Herbert Williams
Geoffrey Wilson
Richard Wood¹⁵⁴

Berrington describes these MPs as being predominantly younger, elected since the War who had had 'no share in the pre-war policies of appeasement but would have absorbed its lessons. To such men Labour's policy of imperial retreat, its compliance with the demands of local nationalist leaders may have been reminiscent of what, by then, was regarded as the disastrous course of the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments'.¹⁵⁵ The average age of these MPs was 42, but there were notable exceptions: Herbert Williams, Waterhouse and Davidson were noticeably of a different political vintage. Also these three MPs had certainly had had a share in the 'pre-war policies of appeasement': all three had voted for Chamberlain in the Munich debate of October 1938, and had supported Chamberlain in 1940. Also, as the son of Lord Halifax, Richard Wood was 'guilty by association'.

Although this group 'was still spontaneous'¹⁵⁶ it was increasingly obvious that there was a discrete faction of Conservative backbench MPs who were prepared to take a vociferous interest in Britain's position in the Middle East. Of the above signatures, six went on to be active members of the Suez Group in the 1950s: Waterhouse and Amery were to be the ring leaders; Fraser, Marshall, Fitzroy Maclean and Reader

¹⁵⁴ EDM No. 78. *Orders of the Day and Notices of Motions* (1951) Vol.4. No.122

¹⁵⁵ *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1945-55*, p.172

¹⁵⁶ Somerset de Chair

Harris publicly rallied to their cause, and Ormsby-Gore and Fisher remained firmly sympathetic. The addition of Soames is a conundrum. Was he acting as his father-in-law's spokesman on the backbenches, or on his own initiative? Soames had not impressed his contemporaries with his political acumen at this point.¹⁵⁷ However, any 'instinctive reaction that he may have been performing his bull-in-a-china shop act was probably completely off the mark as we grossly underrated him to begin with because of his superficial behaviour. As Churchill's PPS, he was superb, much more intelligent, reactive, with a degree of sensibility which his earlier impression had totally belied.'¹⁵⁸ Therefore, his contemporary, Lord Carr, feels that the truth lies between the two poles. 'I would guess he would have had Churchill's tacit support. To sponsor an EDM is such a natural action for a backbencher, that I am doubtful whether Soames felt the need to consult his father-in-law. But he could count on his natural feeling of support ... I think it was a question of Churchill letting the backbenchers 'fly the flag', while he looked round in a supportive way - though not actually 'tipping them the wink'.¹⁵⁹

This emerging faction also pressed their front bench in the party committees that a firm line should be taken with both Persia and Egypt.¹⁶⁰ As the AIOC staff were increasingly beleaguered, this nascent group tapped the deep sense of humiliation within the party; Britain seemed to be seen off by a 'Persian jack-in-office',¹⁶¹ and, despite their leaders counselling caution, 'the weight of opinion seems to incline

¹⁵⁷ Lord Carr

¹⁵⁸ Lord Carr

¹⁵⁹ Lord Carr

¹⁶⁰ Ormsby-Gore and Fitzroy Maclean in the 1922 committee, 12.7.51, supported by a "considerable majority of MPs" at the 1922 committee, 26.7.50

¹⁶¹ Maxwell Fyfe weekend speech 7-8.7.51

towards the views expressed by Lord Salisbury. Concern is felt ... at the possible effects on British prestige throughout the Middle East'.¹⁶² Their demand for action would have taken the government a good deal further than it had so far been willing to go, or indeed that the Opposition leaders in the Commons had urged they should go.¹⁶³ The critics seized the opportunity of the debate on the Middle East at the end of the summer session to issue a firm statement of their views. Undaunted by the clear instruction from their front bench that Conservatives should not demand that the installations be protected,¹⁶⁴ Amery and Maclean pressed the Prime Minister to give a declaration that the government would use all means at its disposal to protect British lives and interests. If British objectives were achieved by negotiation so much the better, but the government was urged not to negotiate while AIOC personnel were being harassed.

The Effect of Tory rhetoric:

(a) On the Conservative party:

Although the emerging Suez Group failed in its efforts to persuade Churchill and Eden to press for military intervention, under pressure from the Tory backbenches Eden and his more moderate front bench colleagues demanded that AIOC personnel would not be evacuated from Abadan, and that the Conservative party would support any Labour government measures to defend them at the refineries. The Tory militants did have another, less positive influence upon the public bearing of their party in the crisis. The Conservative front

¹⁶² *Times* 6.7.51

¹⁶³ *Times* 7.7.51

¹⁶⁴ Churchill, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.* 491.994-5

bench needed to promote a responsible, coherent line in an election year, yet was faced with wayward and extremely vocal backbenchers. This, combined with the political luxury of opposition, meant that the party never confronted the question of how a Conservative government would have risen to Mossadeq's challenge. As the *Times* commented,¹⁶⁵ it was never possible to say how the Tories would have handled the dispute.

(b) On the Labour government:

The Conservatives felt they had succeeded in finally wringing an admission from the Labour government that Britain was prepared to stay in Abadan.¹⁶⁶ However, such satisfaction was short-lived. Tory relief at Attlee's decision to call a general election in October was balanced by the fear that events in Persia were moving inexorably towards disaster, while the Labour government wrung its hands.¹⁶⁷ Conservative MPs' pressure during the election campaign was to no avail, and their worst fears were realised. Denied American support and outmanoeuvred by the Mossadeq government in referring the matter to the UNO, the Labour government had no choice but to sanction the withdrawal of the remaining AIOC personnel.

Conservative urgings to use force did not affect the debate within the Cabinet, although this support may have goaded Morrison on since the Foreign Secretary was enthusiastic for intervention, as was Shinwell, the Minister of Defence. The crux of the matter as far as the Cabinet was concerned never surfaced in public debate: namely, the impossibility of using

¹⁶⁵ 22.10.51

¹⁶⁶ see Attlee 30.7.51, *HC Deb.* 491.1072; Lord Chancellor's statement 31.7.51, reported in *Times* 1.8.51

¹⁶⁷ see Fitzroy Maclean letter, *Times* 26.9.51

force in the dispute in opposition to America, given Britain's support for America in the UNO over North Korea's invasion of South Korea.

The outcome of the Abadan crisis revealed Britain could not take military action in the Middle East with impunity. However, a sizeable section of the Conservative party refused to accept the logic of the need to observe the UN Charter and to act only with American support. Britain's humiliation was due to the Foreign Secretary's 'ignorant laziness and lack of understanding of foreigners',¹⁶⁸ his 'flabby diplomacy',¹⁶⁹ not deference to Britain's mainstay in Europe. To a great extent Eden was also guilty of this, with disastrous results in the Suez Crisis. He and Churchill were briefed by Attlee following the Cabinet's decision on 27 September 1951 not to use force without American support, on the grounds that Britain did not have the strength to act alone in defiance of America. In 1956 Eden never asked himself the difficult question of whether America would oppose British military intervention.

Summary:

As far as the Suez Group was concerned, Abadan was the 'preparatory exercise' in the Conservative party's future relations with Egypt. It helped identify people who cared about the Middle East, and who worried about the appeasement of Middle Eastern radicalism.¹⁷⁰ The crisis helped coalesce ideas about Britain's ideal place in the region, and the optimum defence arrangement. Specifically the events of 1951 helped concentrate Conservative attention on Britain's future in the Suez Canal Zone, causing an early declaration of what

¹⁶⁸ Maxwell Fyfe constituency speech, reported in *Times* 22.8.51

¹⁶⁹ Henry Hopkinson constituency speech, *Times* 9.9.51

¹⁷⁰ Lord Amery

was to become the Suez Group's thesis: a request for the reaffirmation of Britain's treaty right under the Anglo-Egyptian treaty to maintain a garrison in the Canal Zone, that all measures be taken to restore free passage through the Canal, and a clear expression of determination from Westminster not to leave the Sudan 'until such time as the Sudanese people can freely determine their own destiny'.¹⁷¹ In the critics' view, Britain had taught that terrorism paid: King Abdullah of Jordan had been 'killed because he was a friend of Britain and the Middle East no longer believed that Britain could or would protect her friends ... For six years the Government have sought to conciliate the Egyptian regime ... It is high time that we turned our backs on any attempt to appease the Egyptian government.'¹⁷² The incoming Conservative government had been warned.

¹⁷¹ Fitzroy Maclean, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1040-1

¹⁷² Amery, 30.7.51, *HC Deb.*491.1021-2

CHAPTER 8: THE CONSERVATIVES IN POWER:

CONSERVATIVE DISAGREEMENTS OVER EGYPT AND THE SUDAN: 1951-53

The relatively short, but very heated party battle over the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan was comparable in importance in Conservative attitudes to the Middle East to the effect of the Schuman Plan on Conservative attitudes to Europe. Both episodes proved a watershed in backbench opinion. In the case of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan, it provided the catalyst for the 'Sudan group',¹ from which grew the active and extremely vocal faction, the Suez Group. The furore over the proposed agreement was the most serious revolt Churchill's peace-time administration had yet faced, coming on top of internal wrangling over transport policy, commercial television and government expenditure. The party was already excited by Egyptian truculence over Britain's future in the Suez Canal base, the strategic importance of which was believed to have increased with the tension of the Cold War, and it was well known on the backbenches that Churchill was at logger-heads with his Foreign Secretary in Cabinet on Eden's Egyptian policy.

The backbench unrest over the issue of Sudanese self-determination equalled the later discontent over the Suez base Agreement; indeed, 'some said Eden had even more of a fight [over the Sudan]'.² Certainly, Eden was on the point of resignation,³ a possibility of which he never hinted in his autobiography when writing about his battle over the future of British troops in the Canal Zone. Churchill, whose own preference was to resist any policy which conciliated Cairo, used the backbench outcry to tell Eden bluntly that only if he could persuade the bulk of the party, would he (Churchill)

¹ Enoch Powell

² Sir Richard Thompson

³ Sir Anthony Eden: *Full Circle*, p.247

agree to the proposed Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan. It was to prove a considerable test of Eden's powers of persuasion, and cost him dear in terms of his support from those who had been persuaded by his vigorous statements in the Abadan crisis that he was 'sound'.

The View of Eden within the Conservative Party

Eden did not command uniform respect in the Parliamentary party, although he was firmly entrenched as a leading member of the pantheon of Conservative gods as far as the party in the country was concerned. There were MPs who muttered that Eden's opposition to appeasement in the 1930s had been half-hearted; the received wisdom was that he had resigned from Chamberlain's Cabinet in 1938 on principle, but some political insiders thought that this had been more for reasons of style than substance. Admittedly in 1951 his parliamentary supporters far outnumbered his critics. However, those Conservative (such as Waterhouse and Herbert Williams) who did not trust his espousal of more progressive domestic policy, came to form an unlikely alliance with those Tories who were at odds with Eden's indifference to Britain's involvement in European integration (Amery, and later Biggs-Davison). This coalesced into the third strand of opposition to Eden: criticism of his Middle East policy.

As questions persisted about Churchill's continuing leadership, the rumbles of discontent grew. The party rank and file felt increasingly ignored by their aging leader,⁴ just as the friction between Eden and Churchill, which belied the public image of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary working in perfect harmony, opened the door for the critics of the government's Middle East policy. As well as being the 'arch appeaser' in the Middle East, Eden was also Churchill's

⁴ see Tom Driberg, *Daily Express* 13.4.52

heir apparent.⁵ His assumption of the party leadership could not fail to affect the balance of power within the Conservative party. This internal political discontent obliged Eden to pay assiduous attention to the presentation of his policy on the Sudan and Egypt to minimize backbench objections, and magnified his conflict with Churchill, since the Foreign Secretary could not count on the good temper of the party in the Commons in his battle with the Prime Minister. Although Eden's policy enjoyed the support of the majority of his Cabinet colleagues,⁶ the existence of a sizeable faction of discontented backbenchers enabled Churchill to conduct his own war of attrition.

The Legacy from Labour in the Middle East

The legacy from the Labour government did not seem a happy one, but there was considerable optimism that Britain's position in the region could be restored after the rout from Abadan, or at least the line held. There were high hopes: Churchill the titan who had fulminated against the scuttle of Palestine, was in charge once more; and Eden was back at the Foreign Office, the man who had originally negotiated with Nahas Pasha the 1936 Treaty, a man of proven diplomatic ability and undisputed knowledge of world affairs, and who had encouraged the Conservative diehards by his strong stand in the Abadan affair. Thus Conservatives hoped that the Persian fiasco would prove merely a setback, and with assiduous attention, Britain's former position and prestige could be recovered; the damage, although acknowledged to be serious, was not seen as irreparable.

⁵ He did not enjoy the position as clear favourite (over Butler and Macmillan) until 1954, his *annus mirabilis*.

⁶ see John Grigg: 'The Crippled Giant', *Encounter*, April 1977, Vol.48, pp.9-16

PERSIA: 1951-54

Persia ceased to be a bone of contention within the Tory party. Eden adopted a 'softly-softly' approach to a settlement with the Mossadeq government over London's outstanding claims for compensation - 'the best policy, now Mossadeq has rejected the latest Anglo-American proposal, is to leave him alone. The trouble is America will never let anyone alone'⁷ - and the issue dropped below the political horizon as far as the mainstream of the party was concerned. Occasional questions were raised in the House and in the Foreign Affairs Committee over the likelihood of a settlement, but on the whole the matter was left to the Foreign Secretary's discretion. For this Eden had to thank private knowledge among MPs⁸ of the contacts between the CIA and MI6 in Persia. The calming effect of their inside information, confirmed by Eden's hint above, was not apparent at the time.⁹

A final settlement of Britain's outstanding claims had to wait until after the fall of Mossadeq in July 1953, following a *coup* inspired by the CIA using the contacts established by MI6.¹⁰

EGYPT: OCTOBER 1951-JULY 1952

Conservative Debate on Egypt

Initial Conservative hopes of an improvement in Britain's position in the Middle East proved over optimistic. The nationalization of the AIOC was merely the harbinger of increased threats to Britain's commercial and military

⁷ FAC 8.1.53

⁸ such as Amery, Kerby, Hyde, all of whom were to become members of the Suez Group

⁹ Lord Glendevon

¹⁰ see Grigg: 'The Crippled Giant'

interests from Arab nationalism. Relations with Egypt over the Anglo-Egyptian condominium of the Sudan and the continued presence of British troops in the Suez Canal Zone proved the main points of contention in foreign policy for the Conservative party between 1951 and 1954. The swell of feeling had been mounting throughout 1951: the negotiation of the Egyptian Sterling Balances Agreement in March had drawn sharp Tory criticism and Conservative feeling throughout the Abadan crisis had been exacerbated by difficulties with Egypt over the 1936 Treaty. The humiliating evacuation from Abadan compounded London's difficulties: encouraged by the spectacle of Tehran's successful defiance of John Bull, Egypt was spurred on to commit further outrages in her war of attrition to force Britain's withdrawal from the Canal Zone base, and to press more fiercely King Farouk's claim to sovereignty over the Sudan.

The Conservative backbenches were united on three points: they supported their government as it held to the outgoing Labour government's refusal to accept Egypt's unilateral abrogation of the 1936 treaty; they concurred with Eden's desire to protect Britain's power and prestige in the Middle East; and it was their universal view that the base remained the best point from which the defence of the Middle East could be conducted. Whatever Tory appreciation of the validity and strength of nationalism in Egypt, the Conservatives, leaders and supporters alike, were united in the view that Egypt was making a tragic mistake if she thought she could remain neutral in an East-West war as long as there remained a threat of Soviet aggression. Convinced that Cairo must be brought to face wider realities posed by the Russian threat to the Northern Tier, to which all requirements of satisfying national feeling should be subordinated,¹¹ these politicians regarded the Wafdist government's arguments of the threat posed by the continued presence of British troops merely as

¹¹ Mott-Radclyffe letter, *Times* 19.2.52

proof that the Egyptian leaders were victims of communist propaganda and misinformation. However, thereafter, the strands of party opinion divided.

(a) The Mainstream of the Conservative Party

The Conservative mainstream accepted Eden's assessment of the requirements of Britain's post-war role balanced against her straightened resources. In Eden's opinion, it was vital for London to reduce Britain's global military commitment, whilst maintaining British prestige. He recognized the danger involved in this retreat and was profoundly concerned that too rapid a reduction of Britain's presence might destroy Britain's credibility abroad. In any case, his party's internecine conflict denied the Foreign Secretary this option since the government could not carry its supporters, let alone public opinion,¹² on a policy of running down boldly Britain's onerous overseas commitments.

But Eden was convinced a contraction of the British presence in the region was imperative, gambling that once the irritant of British troops was removed from the Canal Zone base, Anglo-Egyptian relations would improve sufficiently to allow a regional defence organization to offset this shedding of Britain's responsibilities and encourage America to take the lead.¹³ There was general Conservative support for a Middle East Defence Organization,¹⁴ but the Conservative government's attempts to involve Egypt with Britain, Turkey, France and America in a Middle East defence organization between 1951 and 1952 foundered on Egyptian determination to remove all foreign

¹² Anthony Adamthwaite: 'Eden, the Foreign Office and the Making of Foreign Policy', *International Affairs* 1988 No.64 No.2, pp.241-259

¹³ Adamthwaite

¹⁴ Nutting, 20.11.51, *HC Deb.*494.232

troops from her soil, and Washington's refusal to join except at Egypt's express invitation.

(b) The Emerging Suez Group

Eden's 'supine' view of the vital necessity of removing British troops was not shared by a vocal section of Tory backbenchers, whose opinions enjoyed wider support within the party. From the start of Churchill's peace-time government, these MPs urged the Foreign Secretary to take a 'firmer line' with Egypt.¹⁵ While this incipient group recognized that the number of British troops currently in the Suez Canal Zone considerably exceeded the allocation under the arrangements of the 1936 treaty, they saw no reason to renegotiate the terms; these, they argued, entitled Britain to remain in the Canal Zone beyond 1956, and they entertained an increasingly sceptical view of the benefits to be derived from negotiating with such an unreliable and improvident people. This faction were infuriated by Eden's determination to try to negotiate a replacement treaty with Egypt against a background of continuing guerilla warfare in the Canal Zone, and attacks on British lives and property which culminated in the Cairo riots of January 1952. Increasingly alarmed at possible concessions to Egyptian nationalism, they feared that Britain was incurring the odium of using strength without any of the stability which a policy of strength, if wisely applied, should have secured.

This section of the party regarded as specious in the extreme the argument that Britain's continued presence could only bring about the war which it professed to be aimed at averting. Egyptian nationalism appeared narrow-minded and misplaced; the nationalist movement was dismissed as a motley bunch of pilferers, religious extremists, and communist

¹⁵ eg Legge-Bourke, 19.11.51, *HC Deb.*494.128

agitators bolstered by the Cairo poor and the press, in the face of which the Wafdist government was proving lamentably feeble. Yet, there remained a hangover of Britain's nineteenth century 'civilizing mission', and the assumption that Britain was only acting for the good of the (unworthy and ungrateful) Egyptian populace was deeply engrained in their psyche.

While their opponents criticised them for being 'less solicitous about money and resources',¹⁶ these MPs were far from blind to the parlous state of the British economy. But they refused to accept the logic of wholesale withdrawal overseas, and bitterly resented the passing of Britain's imperial greatness. They were aware through their contacts with the Army that military opinion was 'almost unanimous that the best base for defending the area will always be the Suez Canal because of communications and existing installations'.¹⁷ Therefore for the emerging Suez Group, its sympathizers and the Conservative press (especially the Northcliffe and Beaverbrook Groups) the region remained a vital sphere of influence and nothing should be done which might undermine the country's reputation and resolve. Britain's pre-eminence there was part of the natural order.

(c) Cabinet Dissent on Anglo-Egyptian Relations:

Eden very quickly encountered difficulties with backbench colleagues and the Cairo authorities in his determined pursuit of a negotiated settlement with Egypt - seen in the extraordinary letter written by the Chairman of the 1922, Derek Walker-Smith, to Eden in February 1952, giving the Committee's support to the Foreign Secretary on Egypt and the

¹⁶ Aubrey Jones

¹⁷ confirmed by *Times* 5.8.52

Sudan.¹⁸ By the spring of 1952 he had also aroused the wrath of his leader. Concerned about the 'strong forces within the Tory party which were deeply stirred by the prospect of moral surrender and physical flight',¹⁹ of which he was well aware from reports from the Chief Whip, Churchill himself was congenitally opposed to any imperial retreat and was furious with the conciliatory line his Foreign Secretary was taking with the Cairo government.²⁰ Churchill was in no hurry to renegotiate the pre-war treaty; he was firmly of the view that Britain was in a position of strength and there was no urgency to conclude an agreement 'which sacrificed all Britain had striven for for so many years'.

After the overthrow of King Farouk in July 1952, the majority of the Cabinet concurred with Eden on the need to conciliate the new Neguib regime, in marked contrast to Churchill who felt that Neguib's increasingly critical and hostile statements about Britain as the autumn went on should be met with clear signs that Britain would not appease the new government. Churchill was extremely reluctant to concede that Britain had to withdraw from the Canal Zone base. He wanted Britain to hand over her responsibilities in Egypt to an international organization and he fervently hoped that America would take some share in the responsibility of protecting the waterway.²¹

Division at the top gave backbench critics greater opportunity to press their case, just as the emergence of a vocal backbench faction gave the Prime Minister powerful ammunition

¹⁸ 1922 Committee minutes, 21.2.52

¹⁹ PRO.PREM11/91, quoted in Ritchie Ovendale: 'Egypt and the Suez Base Agreement', in John Young ed: *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peace-time Administration* (Leicester 1988), p.138

²⁰ see John Colville: *The Fringes of Power - Downing Street Diaries 1939-55*, p.645

²¹ see Churchill address to Congress, 17.1.52, reported in *Times* 18.1.52

in Cabinet. The demand by the young Egyptian army officers for serious negotiations for British withdrawal prompted Amery and Waterhouse to take further soundings within the party to form a cohesive group to fight any such proposal; and fortified by backbench support, Churchill conducted a determined rear guard action, both within the Cabinet, and by nods, winks and asides in the corridors of Westminster in support of the rebels on his own benches.

THE SUDAN:

Conservative Backbench Attitudes to the Sudan

The Conservative government's reaffirmation of Britain's commitment to Sudanese self-determination²² had further complicated Anglo-Egyptian relations, already strained by the Cairo government's unilateral abrogation of the 1936 treaty, as King Farouk's ministers were determined to assert sovereignty over the whole of the Upper Nile. Conservatives had been concerned about the future of the Sudan since Attlee's statement in 1946 on the withdrawal of British forces from Egypt.²³ Eden's expressed determination to honour Bevin's pledge of 27 March 1946 to Sudanese self-government, together with his view that the burden of defence could, and should be reduced - ran directly contrary to the beliefs of a sizeable faction of Tory backbenchers, who stoutly advocated that the Sudanese should not be sacrificed to conciliate the Egyptians.²⁴ The emerging Suez Group cultivated links with Sudanese politicians to prevent a 'sell-out'; for example, at a lunch hosted by Leo Amery, Sir Abd al-Rahman Al-Madhi, the head of the Umma party, 'made it very plain that he had no

²² Eden, 15.11.51, *HC Deb.*493.1176-8

²³ FAC 7.5.46, and Churchill, 1.8.46, *HC Deb.*426.1256

²⁴ see Fitzroy Maclean, 7.5.52, *HC Deb.*500.354

intention of accepting restoration of Cairo's sovereignty over the Sudan and gave [his fellow guests Waterhouse and Julian Amery] plenty of ammunition with which to fire questions and write letters to the government'.²⁵

The feeling that the Sudan was being thrown away to appease Egypt went far beyond the emerging Suez Group's apparent numbers in the Commons, and was supported by elements in the Conservative press. Throughout 1952 there was great anxiety lest the government would make extensive concessions to the Egyptians on the Sudan, under pressure from the Americans who were strongly suspected of a pro-Egyptian bias.²⁶ These fears, already buoyed by the behaviour of Caffrey, the American Ambassador in Cairo, were aggravated by press reports covering the arrival of H M Hoskins as Head of the Middle East Department at the State Department: 'Hoskins is understood to have tried to persuade the Sudanese leaders to support the Egyptian demand for Egyptian sovereignty'.²⁷

Negotiations with Egypt prior to July 1952 foundered on Egypt's refusal to separate the issues of the Sudan and the British presence in the Canal Zone. Although the Neguib government proved no more susceptible to the idea of Egypt joining a Middle East defence organization, the July revolution did open the way to a negotiated settlement of Anglo-Egyptian differences, since it finally separated the two contentious issues. The fall of the King removed all legitimate claim by the Egyptian government to sovereignty over the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. However, this did not diminish Cairo's hopes of ultimately controlling the whole of the Upper Nile. Neguib, himself half-Egyptian and educated at

²⁵ Julian Amery: 'The Suez Group', in Selwyn Troen and Moshe Shemesh ed.: *The Suez-Sinai Crisis*, p.113

²⁶ Edward Wakefield, FAC 30.4.52

²⁷ *Times* 12.5.52

Gordon College in Khartoum, hoped to use his origins and the Egyptians' new-found role as comrades-in-arms with the Sudanese to tie an independent Sudan firmly to Egypt. In the meantime, Egypt could pose as the champion of Sudanese independence. Britain could not now renege on her public commitment to Sudanese self-determination.²⁸

Conservative anxiety hardened into outrage when the details of the proposed Anglo-Egyptian agreement over the condominium became known in January 1953. This concern extended far beyond the diehard wing of the party, who opposed self-government on imperial grounds. Others Conservatives sympathetic to Sudanese self-determination, such as Dodds-Parker who had served in the Sudan Civil Service, and Edward Wakefield,²⁹ a former member of the Indian Civil service (both of whom had friends and excellent contacts in the Sudan) were profoundly disturbed. These MPs agreed that the Foreign Office line on the Sudan was correct on the importance of taking the problem of the Sudan out of Anglo-Egyptian relations³⁰, but they were fearful of future independence of Sudan after self-government. Tories were convinced that the interests of the Sudanese had been jeopardised by the proposed agreement;³¹ Britain's administration of the condominium through the Sudan Civil Service was seen as an outstanding feat of government by all sections of the party,³² and the proposed replacement appeared fraught with difficulties. This party discussion on the Sudan was part of the 'gradual decolonization debate ... It struck very deep emotional chords in the Tory party; there was an emotional depth to duty. They

²⁸ Wm Roger Louis: 'The Tragedy of the Anglo-Egyptian Settlement of 1954', in Wm R Louis ed: *Suez 1956 - the Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford 1989), p.51

²⁹ MP for West Derbyshire 1950-62

³⁰ Dodds-Parker, FAC 28.1.53

³¹ Waterhouse, 5.3.53, *HC Deb.*512.593

³² Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune*, p.658

hated the fashionable view which mocked Britain's contribution to development.'³³ In these MPs eyes, Britain was rushing into Sudanese self-government for misguided reasons. Critics questioned Eden's arguments that the deteriorating relations between London and Khartoum justified a speedy resolution to the matter and early elections; Patrick Maitland and Fitzroy Maclean argued that reports of Anglo-Sudanese tension were completely at variance with previous appraisals, and suggested that the government's sources were unreliable. In addition, there was a widespread conviction that Britain was reneging on her responsibility towards the Southern Tribes of the Sudan who were culturally and racially very different from their Arab, Muslim northern neighbours. There was an underlying concern that a mere political settlement could not protect the Southern tribes from incursions from the North.³⁴ They argued that less than 1 per cent of the Southern Sudanese were literate, or had any sort of political knowledge or experience: to talk of self-government for such a people was 'only a mockery, and an abandonment of our trust'.³⁵ The Noble Savage could not protect himself, or if he tried to, the result would be civil war. The memory of the bloodbath that had accompanied Indian independence was fresh in people's minds.³⁶

Deeply worried that Egyptian money would corrupt Sudanese politicians and the electorate, many backbench MPs were unhappy with government assurances that Sudan would be free to seek Commonwealth association with Britain after independence.³⁷ Eden's assurances that the Sudanese could

³³ Sir Richard Thompson

³⁴ Savory, FAC 10.2.53

³⁵ Assheton, 12.2.53, *HC Deb.*512.608-9

³⁶ Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker

³⁷ reflected in Waterhouse's question, 17.2.53, *HC Deb.*511.1067

choose either complete independence, a link with Egypt or a link in some form with Britain were seen as empty promises. As far as his critics were concerned, Eden could promise until he was blue in the face that 'complete independence did not exclude the right of any country to apply, if it so wishes, for association with or membership of the British Commonwealth'³⁸; he had not made this sufficiently clear to the Egyptians³⁹ - as Neguib's swift contradiction of the Sudanese right to associate with Britain once the country was independent, seemed to demonstrate, in the Sudan Group's opinion, that it was 'quite impossible to accept the word or the signature of the Egyptians'.⁴⁰

There had been private Conservative suggestions for Britain 'to make arrangements with the Sudanese even in defiance of the Egyptians if necessary'.⁴¹ These plainly extended beyond Commonwealth status, to include a separate arrangement for the Southern Sudan, whose tribes were known to be profoundly disturbed by the proposed settlement. Eden refused to countenance such suggestions, stressing in his statement on the progress of negotiations concerning the Sudan's future on 20 January 1953, that the Government did not propose to add to the safeguards in the draft self-governing statute which gave the Governor General special powers to protect the interests of the Southern provinces. This and his comment regretting the suspicion Britain had wanted to detach the Southern provinces, were clear indications that the Foreign Office had been under pressure to implement this option. His backbench critics regarded his refusal to make active provision for either Commonwealth status or certainly a special treaty

³⁸ Eden, 12.2.53, *HC Deb.*511.610

³⁹ see Waterhouse, 12.2.53, *HC Deb.*511.609 and 17.2.53, *HC Deb.*511.1067

⁴⁰ Waterhouse 17.2.53

⁴¹ Malcolm McCorquodale, *FAC* 28.1.53

relationship,⁴² was seen as 'a great mistake: it was a passive, not an active foreign policy'.⁴³

In the view of Conservative backbench critics, any settlement should be based on the long-term welfare of the Sudanese. Some interpreted this as an unhurried progression to self government, involving the continued, long-term presence of the British in the country. What was needed was a barrier in the region, not a bridge between Africa and the Middle East, to prevent Middle Eastern disorders spreading south into the East African colonies. The Mau Mau emergency in Kenya merely underlined the argument for the need to protect Britain's air communications with East Africa⁴⁴; and the unrest in the colony undermined the notion that Britain could establish an alternative military base there.⁴⁵

Other backbench critics were convinced that self-government would be detrimental to the security in the area: an independent Sudan along side Egypt with the British administration withdrawn was very likely to be a source of constant friction in the region. They entertained fears of Sudanese claims that Britain had allowed Egypt too much Nile water, with the ever-present threat that the Sudan might interfere to alter the allotment in her favour. Given that the Sudan was sparsely populated while Egypt was manifestly overcrowded on the available cultivated land, Egypt would be subject to immense economic pressure to widen her boundaries; if matters did lead to armed conflict Sudan was unlikely to be able to defend herself, faced with her northern neighbour's industrial and financial potential.

⁴² Wakefield, FAC 30.4.52; Dodds-Parker, FAC 10.2.53

⁴³ Paul Williams

⁴⁴ Amery, FAC 10.2.53

⁴⁵ This formed part of the Bevin-Sidky agreement of 1946: *Times* 4.1.52

For the 'Sudan Group', this untimely withdrawal from the Sudan also had to be seen in the context of Britain's future in the Canal Zone base. By the time of the young Egyptian army officers' *coup d'état* in July 1952, there had been a widespread suspicion in Conservative circles that the question of the evacuation of British troops from the Suez Canal (along with the problem of the defence of the Canal) had been settled in the confidential talks. Reports had appeared in the press at the beginning of May 1952 that it seemed that Britain's acceptance of evacuation from the Canal Zone would be met on the Egyptian side by a willingness to negotiate an engagement of foreign technicians to help the Egyptian Army to make the Canal base safe and to discuss in detail Egypt's part in Middle East Defence. Foreign Office disclaimers of the alternative of Cyprus⁴⁶ seemed highly suspicious. Britain's departure from the Canal base would remove any sanction London possessed over Egypt's continued observance of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan. These critics also questioned the benefit such an agreement would confer on Anglo-Egyptian relations, arguing that Eden was grossly misinformed if he thought that settlement of Anglo-Egyptian differences over the Sudan would improve Anglo-Egyptian relations. Selwyn Lloyd, the Minister at the Foreign Office, was forced to concede that Egypt might negotiate just as hard over the Canal question.⁴⁷ The Conservative stalwarts feared that the termination of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium would only serve to strengthen immeasurably Egypt's hand in their attempts to secure the evacuation of the Canal base: the presence of British administrators were a necessary counterweight to the continued presence of British troops in the Canal Zone.

Therefore, not only was Britain failing in her responsibilities, but the proposed arrangement appeared to

⁴⁶ see *Times* 5.8.52

⁴⁷ FAC 10.2.53

offer boundless opportunities for increased Egyptian influence over a newly independent southern neighbour. Conservative opponents of imminent Sudanese independence feared that the Foreign Office was being seduced into an agreement which, once concluded, would free Neguib and his colleagues to pressure the Sudan by bribery and other means to seek unity with Egypt. They had little hope that Egypt would respect an agreement, and it would be highly dangerous to assume that Cairo would do so.⁴⁸

The Influence of Conservative Backbench Opinion in Cabinet: Eden vs Churchill

Eden was well aware that he had a fight on his hands with his backbenchers. He appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee in December 1952⁴⁹ to inform his backbench colleagues on the progress of the 'tough negotiations on the Sudan', and was obliged to address the committee again at the end of January to ward off growing criticism, assuring his colleagues that two particular points required attention: the power of the Governor General to act in an emergency, and safeguards for the Southern Sudanese. The Foreign Secretary insisted that the Governor General should press ahead with elections, and that if no agreement was reached 'it must not appear to be our fault'.⁵⁰

However, Eden had not anticipated the mammoth battle he faced in the combination of a defiant Churchill in Cabinet and outrage on Tory backbenches. Although he and Churchill had clashed over their preferred approach to Egypt during the autumn, Eden's view had apparently prevailed; and Churchill

⁴⁸ Waterhouse and Harmar Nicholls, FAC 10.2.53

⁴⁹ FAC 10.12.52

⁵⁰ FAC 28.1.53

had 'allowed Eden a pretty free hand'⁵¹ over the Sudan. Although the Prime Minister favoured a more hard-line approach to Egypt, he had no coherent alternative policy to offer his Cabinet colleagues,⁵² who accordingly supported Eden's line of attack. With the publication of the proposed agreement in mid-January 1953 against a background of more press reports of Southern fears of Northern domination, Eden was suddenly confronted with a major crisis: on the backbenches and in Cabinet. The Sudan Group and the Beaverbrook press were 'in full cry'⁵³ and most important, given this ground swell of feeling, he had incurred the animosity of Churchill.⁵⁴ To some political commentators it was comparable to the Bevanite split within the Labour party.⁵⁵ Eden was also in the doldrums politically,⁵⁶ compared to the meteoric rise in the fortunes of his rival Butler.

'He did have a great battle over it'.⁵⁷ Churchill had just returned from his holiday in Jamaica, and was 'passionately interested in the Egypt situation'.⁵⁸ The Prime Minister envisaged the appropriate tactics for dealing with the Egyptians as follows: 'I would like [the dictator] to kick us and show him we did not run ... unless you can show that we have imposed our will upon Neguib you will find it very difficult to convince the Conservative party that the evacuation of the Suez Canal Zone conforms with British

⁵¹ Sir Anthony Nutting

⁵² Eden diary note 22.12.53, quoted in Robert Rhodes James: *Anthony Eden*, p.358

⁵³ Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez*, p.77

⁵⁴ Sir Anthony Nutting; Shuckburgh, p.75

⁵⁵ *Bristol Evening Post* 20.2.53

⁵⁶ Sir Richard Thompson; *Bristol Evening Post*

⁵⁷ Sir Richard Thompson

⁵⁸ Shuckburgh, pp.74-5

interest or prestige.'⁵⁹ 'Churchill was always trying to avoid having to make a decision to "scuttle", as he called it. He did not like the Sudan agreement because it was hauling down the flag, although Sudan was not part of the Empire. Churchill had a romantic concept; the feeling [probably because of his participation in Sudanese history] that we must always hold firm, and that British rule was beneficial [to the Sudanese people].'⁶⁰

Churchill was well aware of the depth of backbench feeling on the issue. The Sudan Group had conveyed the intensity of their wrath up the party ladder⁶¹, and with the party in uproar, the Government was obliged to reveal details of the agreement to its supporters before it was put before the House. Conservative opposition now came out in to the open: Legge-Bourke 'fired the first shot'⁶² with his intervention in the Chamber on 10 February 1953. That afternoon Selwyn Lloyd attended a tumultuous meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and was bombarded with questions. Conservatives across the political spectrum rose to voice their concern at the inadequacy of the agreement. Selwyn Lloyd who 'undertook to convey the feeling of the meeting to the Foreign Secretary'⁶³, was 'so roughly handled that Eden felt obliged to come and defend [the Sudan agreement] himself at a separate meeting'.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ PRO.PREM11/392, quoted in Ovendale in Young ed.: *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration*

⁶⁰ Sir Anthony Nutting

⁶¹ At Eden's suggestion, Waterhouse met Sir James Bowker, head of Egyptian affairs at the Foreign Office, and Nutting on 2.2.53; Waterhouse to Eden 11.2.53. Waterhouse papers

⁶² *Bristol Evening Post* 20.2.53

⁶³ FAC 10.2.53

⁶⁴ *Bristol Evening Post* 20.2.53

The truth was somewhat different to the press reports. Churchill was openly on the side of the protestors: Waterhouse and Assheton had been invited to No 10 by Churchill after they had put down their oral question on the Sudanese agreement in the House. The fact that the Prime Minister saw fit to summon two government backbenchers 'to a personal interview indicates the importance the government attaches to the revolt. It should never be forgotten how slender the Conservative majority is.'⁶⁵ The following day (11 February 1953) the Cabinet considered a draft of the Sudanese agreement with Egypt. Churchill brusquely informed his Cabinet that he doubted whether Eden's proposals on the Sudan as an independent state would have sufficient support from the Conservative backbenches; he charged that it would be seen as 'an ignominious surrender of our responsibilities in the Sudan and a serious blow to Britain's prestige throughout the Middle East'. He believed it would be sharply criticised by the Press. It seemed likely to involve the Government in serious political difficulties which would doubtless be exploited to the full by the Opposition. He would therefore prefer that no decision should be taken until early the following week, by which time it would be easier to forecast the probable reaction of public opinion.⁶⁶

In the Cabinet discussion which followed it was clear that Churchill was in the minority. He was informed that the Sudanese expected self-government and that nothing could be gained by delay. But although Eden secured the support of the majority of his Cabinet colleagues, the Prime Minister was adamant in his opposition to the proposed agreement. 'There was a big row between them. Finally Churchill said he would give his consent if Eden could get the party to accept. Eden asked, "What do you mean?" Churchill replied, "There is a meeting of the 1922 this afternoon. If you can convince them,

⁶⁵ *Bristol Evening Post*

⁶⁶ PRO.CAB128/26.CC(53)9 11.2.53

I will agree to the Agreement." Eden was furious; he said it was totally unconstitutional and how could anyone expect him to operate under such circumstances.⁶⁷ However, he was determined to persevere and thought he could win. In a fury, he went upstairs to the 1922 meeting and stated his case, 'using all of his great charm and persistence'.⁶⁸ The meeting was 'well attended' and he had a stormy reception. Eden knew he was arguing for his political life,⁶⁹ and told his critics that if they did not support the agreement, the remedy was in their own hands.⁷⁰ His impassioned advocacy 'made a profound impression at this meeting ... after all his personal experience of foreign affairs exceeded the collective knowledge of every one else in the room. Even the incalculable Boothby ran ... to his defence.'⁷¹

This was still not quite enough, and Eden was saved - literally -by the bell. 'Just as he finished his speech the division bell rang. I think he would have won the vote anyway, but by the time the division was over, the opposition had melted away. Only his supporters came back, and voted for him.'⁷² The Sudan Group, although they sensed they had Churchill's backing, realized when the division bell rang that Eden had triumphed.⁷³ Eden's successful advocacy enabled him to report to the full Cabinet later that evening that his explanation 'had removed many of the misunderstandings which had been current in the Party and had gone a long way towards

⁶⁷ Sir Anthony Nutting

⁶⁸ Sir Richard Thompson

⁶⁹ Eden, p.247

⁷⁰ *Bristol Evening Post* 20.2.53

⁷¹ *Bristol Evening Post* 20.2.53

⁷² Sir Anthony Nutting

⁷³ Sir Anthony Nutting

allaying the anxieties mentioned in the Cabinet discussions earlier in the day.' Although many Conservatives remained anxious about the situation, 'they now recognized that the course which the Government was proposing to follow was the most satisfactory of the alternatives open to them'.⁷⁴

Thus the Sudan issue was settled with Churchill and the Sudan Group beating a grudging, temporary retreat in the face of Eden's argument, supported in Cabinet and the rest of the party, that the agreement offered Britain the best opportunity to secure the foundations of a stable peace in the area. The signature of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement was announced by Eden in the House on 12 February. Although it was 'widely welcomed for the hope it offered in improving Anglo-Egyptian relations', 'a cold douche of misgiving about the effective self-government of the Sudan was given by Assheton and Legge-Bourke'.⁷⁵ Although the Suez Group MPs had agreed to hold their fire over the Sudan agreement, these critics were determined that the Foreign Secretary's triumph should prove ephemeral. Waterhouse rapidly served notice that he and like-minded colleagues were bloodied, but unbowed.⁷⁶

Summary:

The cost of the Sudan agreement for Eden in terms of political support within the party was severe. The Foreign Secretary had succeeded 'in soothing over his backbench critics [on the Sudan] but only at the cost of awakening the party ... After the Sudan, Suez [was] the issue of the hour throughout the

⁷⁴ PRO.CAB.128/26 CC(53)10 11.2.53

⁷⁵ *Times* 13.2.53

⁷⁶ Waterhouse, 17.2.53, *HC Deb.* 511.1067; Waterhouse FAC 25.2.53; Waterhouse letter to Eden 2.3.53, Waterhouse papers; Fitzroy Maclean and others, FAC 22.4.53

Tory Party'.⁷⁷ Eden had done nothing to dispel Conservative criticism of proposals to evacuate the Canal Zone base. The dissenters were encouraged by the breadth and depth of feeling inspired within the party by the Sudan affair, and the corresponding vulnerability of the government. Those outside the future Suez Group recognized that, given the slender government majority, there was 'a real danger of a minority group in the House of Commons holding the balance of power and forcing the government to dance to its tune'.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Crossbencher, *Sunday Express* 22.2.53

⁷⁸ Jocelyn Simon, MP for Middlesborough West, writing in the Week in Westminster, *Evening Gazette* 14.2.53

**CHAPTER 9: NEGOTIATING THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SUEZ CANAL ZONE
BASE 1953-54:**

The Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan sealed the Suez Group's determination to oppose Eden's 'appeasement' of the Cairo regime. In the succeeding seventeen months, these MPs conducted a highly public campaign aimed at obstructing Eden's answer to the problem posed by Britain's straitened finances on her position in the Middle East.

Conservative Debate and the Suez Base Agreement:

(a) The Conservative Pragmatists and the Suez Base Agreement:

Eden's argument throughout remained that the presence of troops in the Suez Canal Zone was a heavy political and military liability and would achieve nothing. Britain needed to have at her disposal base and transit facilities in peacetime and the right of reentry in war-time, and this could only be done with Egypt's agreement. Redeployment without agreement would be far more damaging to Britain's prestige.¹ While no Conservative liked the idea of evacuation, by 1954 more moderate, younger Tories accepted the logic of seeking an agreement with Egypt, albeit some more reluctantly than others. They appreciated that the present treaty had only two more years to run and that the base, even if it were drastically reduced in size, could only function efficiently with a large Egyptian workforce. In the present circumstances, Britain was being obliged to keep far more soldiers in the Zone than the country could afford, given her other global commitments, and far more than Britain's entitlement under the existing treaty. Yet, even with the enormous garrison there, Britain was being hard pressed to maintain order and the efficient running of the base for lack

¹ Eden to Waterhouse 24.6.54, Waterhouse papers

of Egyptian labour.²

Some Conservatives recognized that Egyptian nationalism should be acknowledged; without Egyptian goodwill the Suez base could only be a heavy liability in time of war. Although it would be unwise to assume Egypt could maintain the base properly, the spectacle of 80,000 British soldiers defending a vast ammunition dump, whilst unable to prevent Egypt denying use of the Canal to Israel-bound cargo, did not impress other Arab nations.³ The pragmatists felt the Suez Group's thesis of contracting the Canal Zone base had not been very well thought out.⁴ The crucial question facing Conservatives was, if no agreement was reached with Egypt, was the retention of the base in peace-time worth its present cost in money and manpower? The base was working at 50% capacity or less, and the installations were deteriorating despite an annual expenditure of £50m.⁵ Agreement was essential; the alternatives were abandonment or the reoccupation of Egypt.⁶

These Tories argued that the enormous Suez Canal base made little sense in the shifting dimensions of the post-war world. If Russia advanced through the Caucasus, the base would be 300 miles away from the line Britain wished to secure.⁷ They shared Eden's hope that once the irritant had been removed, Anglo-Egyptian relations would be restored to their natural alliance. This sentiment underpinned support for Eden's

² PRO.FCO371/102766/JE1052/134 Dodds-Parker personal notes after visit to Egypt 7-16.10.53.

³ Mott-Radclyffe memo to Foreign Office, quoted in *Foreign Body in the Eye*, (London 1975), pp.213-221; Spearman, FAC 25.11.53

⁴ Mott-Radclyffe, p.213-221; Alport, FAC 30.6.54

⁵ Dodds-Parker, FAC 21.10.53

⁶ Dodds-Parker, FAC 21.10.53

⁷ Prior-Palmer, FAC 2.12.53

policy, since Egyptian ill-will meant the Canal Zone was a rapidly depreciating asset.⁸ To most politicians, Britain's right of re-entry was an bargaining point: it was patently a political move - once the treaty was signed, they agreed with the Suez Group that it made no sense as a strategy. But even those who accepted the logic of evacuation firmly believed that the base could not be run without the assistance of British technicians, endorsing the view that Egypt was a second-class nation. There remained considerable concern that these technicians would be all too vulnerable to Egyptian attack⁹, and that Egypt might seize on the evacuation of British as her golden opportunity to attack Israel.

There was irritation that the Suez Group's organization and methods were 'bypassing the party committee dealing with the subject and the 1922'.¹⁰ Some claimed that the rebels, particularly in December 1953, were trying 'to hold a pistol to the government and their colleagues in the House [which] could not be tolerated'.¹¹ Others took a sour view of the dissidents' motivation and felt, as former Whips, Waterhouse's (and Grimston's) behaviour was particularly unbecoming¹²: Lord Lambton's explicit suggestion that some rebels were spurred solely by political pique¹³ greatly angered many of his colleagues, who sympathized with the Suez Group's views.

⁸ *Times* 17.12.53

⁹ see Mott-Radclyffe, p.213-221

¹⁰ Prior-Palmer, 1922 Committee, 3.12.53

¹¹ Derek Marks, *Daily Express* 16.12.53

¹² Lambton to Waterhouse undated.12.54, Waterhouse papers

¹³ 17.12.53, *HC Deb.*522.623

(b) The Suez Group and the Suez Base Agreement:

The following is a précis of the arguments developed by the Suez Group as it strove to prevent the signature of Heads of Agreement with Egypt which involved the complete withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone base. Many of the arguments rehearsed in the previous skirmishes over Palestine, Abadan and the Sudan were re-deployed.

Irrevocably opposed to the total withdrawal of British troops, on psychological, political and military grounds¹⁴, the Suez Group believed that under Article X of the 1936 Treaty, Britain had the legitimate right to remain in the Canal Zone beyond 1956, even if London failed to negotiate a new treaty with Cairo.¹⁵ The Suez Group was not opposed to a negotiated settlement *per se*. It accepted that the number of British troops currently in the Canal Zone grossly exceeded Britain's needs¹⁶, 'eventual redeployment would release much needed forces' and it appreciated the 'deplorable conditions under which many units were serving'.¹⁷ But there was a considerable difference between reducing the garrison and total evacuation, and reducing Britain's commitments would not produce a strategic reserve if this led to new pressures on Britain's position in the region.¹⁸

The Suez Group felt Eden and his supporters were deluding themselves in imagining there would be an dramatic improvement in Anglo-Egyptian relations once the issue was settled. Nor had Britain had any basis whatsoever for confidence in Egypt's

¹⁴ Fitzroy Maclean, FAC 22.4.53; Guy Lloyd, FAC 2.12.53

¹⁵ Holland-Martin, Waterhouse and others letter, *Times* 13.5.53

¹⁶ Waterhouse press statement, *Times* 16.12.53; Hinchingbrooke, in *Dorset Daily Echo* 1.11.53

¹⁷ Suez Group to Eden 17.6.54, Waterhouse papers

¹⁸ Amery to Waterhouse 16.2.54, Waterhouse papers

willingness to abide by a diplomatic settlement.¹⁹ Egypt repeatedly demonstrated her bad faith by attempting to undermine the agreement over the Sudan. Britain as the former imperial power had a continuing responsibility to protect the Sudan from possible Egyptian encroachment,²⁰ and the future presence of British troops in the Canal Zone was rendered imperative by the unstable situation in the Sudan.²¹

The Suez Group argued the Cold War had conferred on the Canal Zone base a significance far beyond its original function as the guardpost for an international waterway. It disputed that the NATO alliance obviated the need for the base: protecting NATO's supply of vital Middle Eastern oil and Turkey, the exposed flank of the alliance, demanded a base in the Canal Zone, with perhaps smaller advanced bases near the battle front. Should Turkey fall, at present there was nothing beyond it to stop Russia from sweeping into Palestine, Egypt or the Persian Gulf. Stalin's death and the hope inspired by Churchill's summit offer (May 1953) did not dispel the rebels' conviction of the necessity of Britain's continued military presence in the Zone. They felt the international climate remained uncertain, and continued to be deeply suspicious of Russia's global intentions; the Middle East appeared one of the most vulnerable sectors in the world-wide front against Communism, vulnerable to political infiltration and to overt aggression. There was also the festering sore of Arab-Israeli animosity; recent frontier clashes and guerilla incursions had only served to underline the dangers of another conflict - anarchy in the Middle East and possibly erupting into a wider conflict with irretrievable consequences. The withdrawal of British troops might encourage Egypt to attack

¹⁹ Fell letter, *Times* 29.7.54; James Duncan to Churchill 15.7.54, Waterhouse papers

²⁰ Waterhouse to Eden 17.6.54, Waterhouse papers

²¹ *Daily Telegraph* 18.6.54; Patrick Maitland letter, *Daily Telegraph* 7.7.54; Suez Group to Eden 17.6.54, Waterhouse papers

on Israel, quite apart from the advantage conferred by the materiel at the base.²²

The importance of the base was not solely in its military value as the spearhead against a Soviet advance and a deterrent to renewed fighting between Arab and Jew. The dissidents felt there was a lamentable tendency to lose sight of Britain's major commitment to protect communications with the Empire.²³ Despite the increase in air-traffic, the Canal remained the main thoroughfare for the Commonwealth.²⁴ There was also the issue of Britain's responsibility for ensuring free navigation of the Suez Canal. There were two crucial considerations: Egypt was not yet in a position 'by its own unaided resources to ensure the liberty and entire security of the Canal', and Britain was in the Canal Zone not only to protect British interests, but to discharge her responsibilities under the 1888 Suez Canal Convention. The critics warned that if Britain evacuated her garrison, Egypt would grab the Canal;²⁵ and Egypt had already 'repeatedly flouted her duties'²⁶ by preventing passage of Israeli-bound traffic. Britain could not unilaterally divest herself of these responsibilities 'without the fullest prior consultation of the other signatories of the Convention and other interested parties', nor before 'adequate alternative provision' had been made for the discharge of those inherited responsibilities.²⁷

The Suez Group argued that there was Commonwealth disagreement

²² Maitland letter, *Daily Telegraph* 7.7.54

²³ see Hankey *et al* letter, *Times* 24.9.53; see Legge-Bourke letter, *Times* 12.11.53

²⁴ Maitland letter, *Daily Telegraph* 17.7.54

²⁵ PRO.PREM11/636 Hankey to Salisbury and Eden 7.2.53.

²⁶ Powell, 5.11.53, *HC Deb.*432.344

²⁷ *Times* 10.7.54

on the correct line to take on the future of the Suez Canal base.²⁸ Through its contacts in the military, the Suez Group was aware of divisions within the Army on the base.²⁹ Conservative pragmatists might argue that soldiers in the base uniformly wanted to withdraw,³⁰ but the Suez Group found a powerful ally in General Sir Cameron Nicolson, Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land forces, who publicly rejected suggestions that smaller bases in Cyprus, Iraq, Jordan, and North Africa were viable alternatives.³¹ As secretary of the Suez Group, Amery also got in touch with the Indian general staff who informed him that although the Indian government felt differently, in its opinion if British troops were pulled out of the Suez Canal base, the Indian Army would have no more use for Britain.³² Therefore, a British presence in the Canal Zone base appeared vital to maintain the London/Delhi axis in the Commonwealth system.

The Suez Group also used arguments of prestige. 'After Britain's withdrawal from India, Palestine and Malta, it was only the Suez Canal Zone base which enabled Britain to exert influence westward in the Mediterranean, including North Africa, and eastward into the Indian Ocean and southward into Africa.'³³ A withdrawal from the Canal Zone would confirm Britain's inexorable retreat from the Middle East; the government had to hold the line at the Canal if Britain was to have any hope of retaining great power status and leadership

²⁸ Legge-Bourke letter, *Times* 6.5.53

²⁹ Lord Amery

³⁰ Mott-Radclyffe, p.213-221

³¹ see *Times* 29.6.53

³² Lord Amery

³³ Julian Amery: 'The Suez Group: A Retrospective on Suez', in Selwyn Troen and Moshe Shemesh ed.: *The Suez-Sinai Crisis*, p.112

of the Commonwealth.³⁴ Withdrawal was 'an act which could result in the complete disintegration of the British Empire'.³⁵ These MPs were convinced that their government's persistence in seeking terms and in permitting commercial and financial deals (eg the sale of aircraft, and the release of sterling balances) in the face of Egyptian intransigence demonstrated a fundamentally misguided, pusillanimous policy.³⁶ In granting favours to a hostile country, whilst not rewarding nor bolstering her friends, Britain appeared to be behaving as a suppliant which ill-suited her great power status. Irrespective of the massive blow that withdrawal from the Suez Canal base would deal to Britain's position in Africa and the Middle East, Britain's standing would be fatally undermined by acceptance of terms negotiated and granted under duress.³⁷ The issue was an acute political one.³⁸ If Britain appeared to be on the run, this would have 'disastrous results' abroad and at home.³⁹

The government's policy should be to withdraw the terms offered to Egypt. With 'firmness and patience', 'it would be possible to come to a reasonable settlement either with this or another Egyptian government'.⁴⁰ The Suez Group hoped that by 'sweating it out' Britain would exert sufficient pressure, persuasion or force to bring to power an Egyptian government

³⁴ Amery, 5.11.53, *HC Deb.*432.379; Powell, 5.11.53, *HC Deb.*432.345-6

³⁵ Legge-Bourke speech at Downham Market, *Sunday Express* 13.12.53 and widely reported elsewhere

³⁶ Legge-Bourke, 17.2.54, *HC Deb.*523.1966

³⁷ Fell letter, *Times* 29.7.54; James Duncan to Churchill 15.7.54, Waterhouse papers

³⁸ Assheton, FAC 2.12.53

³⁹ PRO.PREM11/635 Suez Group letter to Churchill 22.4.53

⁴⁰ Waterhouse press statement, *Times* 16.12.53

who would accept its minimum terms.⁴¹ In the circumstances Britain could not agree to reduce her forces to a mere handful of care and maintenance technicians, merely for the sake of reaching a settlement on paper. The Suez Group conjured the nightmare of British technicians in mufti without sidearms being overrun by fanatics⁴² equipped with British weapons. It remained overwhelmingly sceptical that Egypt could fulfil her promise that the existing base should be efficiently maintained, while talk of Britain's right to reactivate the base was seen as pure fantasy. The critics mocked: 'Will the base and its facilities be open to us at need without prevarication, or demur?'⁴³ 'That right might easily be disputed or unilaterally denounced and we might be met, in the event not only by protest but by armed force.'⁴⁴ Against the 'many dangers of the situation', (a British garrison) was the only guarantee which held the slightest value.⁴⁵

The rebels dismissed arguments on the diminishing value of the Canal Zone base, surrounded (as it was) by a hostile population on whom the efficient functioning of the base depended for its pool of labour; the answer was foreign labour.⁴⁶ They conceded the argument that Britain could not afford to exercise her responsibilities had some merit, but responded that the anti-British propaganda and agitation in Egypt did not reflect the will of the Egyptian people:⁴⁷ if

⁴¹ Amery to Waterhouse 16.2.54; Hinchingsbrooke to Waterhouse 4.3.54, Waterhouse papers

⁴² Fell letter, *Times* 29.7.54

⁴³ Powell, *Truth* 5.3.54, quoted in Patrick Cosgrave: *The Lives of Enoch Powell* (London 1989), p.130

⁴⁴ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 20.2.53

⁴⁵ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 25.9.53

⁴⁶ Hinchingsbrooke, FAC 30.6.54

⁴⁷ see Rennell, Hankey, Vansittart and Killearn, 17.12.53, *HL Deb.*185.189-258

London's determination 'were clearly announced, and supported by such economic and other steps as might be required to show that we were in earnest [noticeably unspecified], Egypt could or would go on indefinitely cutting off its own nose to spite our face'.⁴⁸ Similarly, suggestions that the base was not the only station for operations in the Middle East were brushed aside. But they did not address the crucial problem of fresh water, obtained via the Sweet Water Canal from Egypt.

The rebels also dismissed the menace of the atomic bomb - 'Mr Sandys has told us it can be met by a strong air force on the spot backed by all the most modern anti-aircraft devices' - pointing out that if the Government truly wished to see a continued military base in the Canal Zone, it would not be contemplating handing over responsibility to Egypt since 'in neither respect has Egypt the resources which would enable it to exercise that response'.⁴⁹ They argued a base located anywhere else in the region would be just as vulnerable to possible atomic attack - which was undeniably true. On these grounds, selecting Cyprus as the replacement headquarters for Middle East command made no sense whatever.

The Suez Group was also determined that Britain should not be further dependent on America, and was deeply distrustful of US policy in the Middle East. 'Post-war Governments have paid too much attention to the well-meant, but often unsound, advice of the USA, who have no responsibility and much less experience of these oriental peoples than we have ourselves';⁵⁰ and this untutored rival appeared to be increasingly influenced by US interests in Middle Eastern oil.⁵¹ The critics bitterly resented what was seen as undue

⁴⁸ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 30.9.53

⁴⁹ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 30.9.53

⁵⁰ PRO.PREM11/636 Hankey to Churchill 25.11.53.

⁵¹ Beresford Craddock, FAC 3.3.54

American pressure on Britain to come to terms with Egypt.⁵² Washington's unreasonably sympathetic policy to Cairo seemed part of America's systematic attack on Britain's position in the Middle East and Empire⁵³ using political, commercial and military levers.⁵⁴ Through their contacts, the Suez Group was well aware that 'when the Egyptians had got the British ... out of the Suez Canal Zone, the Americans would step in and give all sorts of help to Egypt'.⁵⁵ The prospect of Britain being 'jockeyed out to enable God's Own Country to take our place'⁵⁶ was deeply galling.

It was Eden's firm hope that once Britain's withdrawal from the base had been conceded, Egypt would be ready to enter into discussions for the maintenance of the base for a Middle East defence organization in which America would play a leading part. All Conservatives remained dedicated to a more coherent organization to provide Middle Eastern defence, but in the rebels' opinion, even if Britain did secure Cairo's adherence to a regional defence organization, Egypt would inevitably be the weak link. Their scant respect for the Egyptian soldier as an opponent had been reinforced by the recent spectacle of the Egyptian army being trounced by the woefully outnumbered Israelis. The Suez Group argued 'the only body which we would be justified in inviting to share our responsibility [to protect the Canal] would be one representing the whole free world including Egypt, but in which we should retain the leading position to which our historical connexion to the Middle East and the security of the whole Commonwealth

⁵² Hankey to Churchill; Suez Group to Eden 17.6.54; Herbert Williams to Buchan-Hepburn 16.7.54, Waterhouse papers

⁵³ Paul Williams

⁵⁴ see Powell, 5.11.53, *HC Deb.*520.342-349

⁵⁵ PRO.PREM11/636 Hankey to Churchill 4.6.54.

⁵⁶ PRO.PREM11/636 Hankey to Churchill 4.6.54

entitles us'.⁵⁷ America's contribution was conceded, but this should be a decidedly junior role.

In the meantime, in the absence of a coherent Middle East defence system, there was only one possible and morally justifiable policy: 'to remain in the Canal Zone in sufficient strength so that it can be reinforced at short notice to meet whatever storms may break upon us.'⁵⁸ The Suez Canal Zone base was the only base which offered equally the opportunity to send reinforcements to the eastern Mediterranean or to the Indian Ocean. Its importance therefore, in peace or in war, lay in its crucial position in the 'strategy of the free nations and the keystone in the structure of imperial defence'.⁵⁹ No other arrangement could substitute for the presence of a British fighting force, deliver the same benefits and enable Britain to exert decisive influence in the region. Eden's proposed formula would create a vacuum, with disastrous consequences for peace and stability in the area. The government's stubborn refusal to grant the same weight in its deliberations to the importance of Britain's other responsibilities to keep the Canal open in the interests of trade and peace of the world and the Commonwealth, appeared a dereliction of duty. In the words of Leo Amery: 'Britain [was] on the point of abdicating her responsibilities to the Commonwealth, the world at large, the peoples of the Middle East.'⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 20.2.53

⁵⁸ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 20.2.53

⁵⁹ Leo Amery letter, *Times* 20.2.53

⁶⁰ letter, *Times* 25.9.53

The Methods of the Suez Group:

(a) The Suez Group as a backbench faction:

The professed aims of the 'Suez Canal Committee'⁶¹ were '(i) to remind public opinion of the true nature of Britain's obligations and interests in the Suez Canal Zone; (ii) to strengthen the hands of all those in government, Parliament and outside who are anxious to resist the unreasonable demands of the present Egyptian government; (iii) to work for an agreement with Egypt under which Britain shall retain in the Canal Zone bases, airfields, port facilities and sufficient British personnel to maintain and operate these; and British fighting units, strong enough to make effective Britain's right to reinforce the base in the event of necessity of which Britain must be the sole judge'.⁶² 10,000 British troops should remain in the Canal Zone base.⁶³

The Suez Group enjoyed an unofficial alliance with a small but extremely influential group of peers: the Lords Vansittart, Rennell, Killearn, and Hankey, who were influential former public servants with 130 years service between them. Hankey was still on the board of the Suez Canal Company, and took his directorship seriously.⁶⁴ A number of other influential peers shared Hankey's views and privately lent support to the Suez Group's campaign.⁶⁵ Leo Amery, who instigated 'the Suez Canal

⁶¹ Leo Amery to Biggs-Davison 23.10.53, Biggs-Davison papers

⁶² draft press release drawn up by Julian Amery, in Amery to Biggs-Davison 8.11.53, Biggs-Davison papers.

⁶³ Rees Davies, 11.3.54, *HC Deb.* 524.2595; Julian Amery letter to Eden, 18.3.53, quoted in Wm R Louis: 'The Tragedy of the Anglo-Egyptian Settlement of 1954' in Roger Louis & Roger Owen ed.: *The Suez Crisis and Its Consequences*, p.59

⁶⁴ see Stephen Roskill: *Hankey, Man of Secrets* (London 1974)

⁶⁵ see PRO.FCO371/102766 Leo Amery to Churchill 7.10.53, signed by 13 peers, including Hailsham, Cromer and Simon.

Committee', remained an active conspirator until his death in 1955. These men also shared strong links through membership of other political organizations and war-time connections; for example, Killearn and his former war-time ADC, Legge-Bourke, were members on the Empire Economic Union. (Herbert Williams also served on this committee.)

(b) The Suez Group MPs as individuals:

The rebels operated as individuals as well as members of a organized, well-briefed committee. 'There were conversations both private and by telephone between members of the group. There were social occasions such as lunches at my father's house. [In addition to attending the Suez Group's meetings] individual members took it upon themselves to ask questions, make speeches in defence or foreign affairs debates and express their views in the ordinary party committees.'⁶⁶ Each MP possessed a different threshold to which he was prepared to carry his opposition.⁶⁷ There were varying grades: 'protest in the party committee; open opposition on the floor of the House; abstention; voting against the government; and lastly, resigning the Whip. It was obvious to me that an awful lot would fall out along the way'.⁶⁸

(c) Foreign vs domestic policy:

There was also the question of whether or not to carry the fight beyond the field of foreign affairs. Government difficulties in the committee stages of the Finance Bill in May 1953, in which the Government's nominal majority fell to

⁶⁶ Amery in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.111

⁶⁷ Paul Williams

⁶⁸ Paul Williams

3, drew some rebels' thoughts towards the use of votes and abstentions on major pieces of domestic legislation,⁶⁹ but this tactic was not considered 'cricket' by their colleagues. There was a marked absence of the same 'so-called right-wing group in domestic policy'⁷⁰ and on other aspects of foreign policy (Europe and the Far East): 'Suez was the glue'.⁷¹

(e) Links with Labour?

The government's small majority (17) offered the rebels the opportunity of coordinating their campaign with Labour. They were not prepared to do this, preferring instead to rely upon the implicit threat that their opposition could bring the government down. This enabled them to proclaim their supreme loyalty to the Conservative tradition (if not the party); they were also well aware that a Labour government would pull out of Suez. In February 1954 a Labour motion sponsored by Mrs Barbara Castle, deploring the government's handling of the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, was amended to exclude the words 'and urges that the withdrawal of our troops and equipment should begin forthwith', offering the Suez Group the chance of inflicting a humiliating defeat on its own side. This ploy to make the motion more acceptable to the critics⁷² failed as the dissidents had 'no intention whatever of supporting a motion which they regarded as a blatant political manoeuvre to exploit internal Conservative dissent'. Similarly, in the division on the Heads of Agreement in July 1954, Amery proclaimed that he was voting against the Government because he 'could do no other'. Amery privately argued even the risk of letting in a Socialist government would only be a short

⁶⁹ Enoch Powell; see John Barnes ed: *The Leo Amery Diaries*, p.1064

⁷⁰ Lord Aldington interview with author

⁷¹ Sir Richard Thompson

⁷² *Times* 10.3.54

term disaster, 'less than the permanent disaster of a Conservative government staying on after our surrender'.⁷³ But for the overwhelming majority of the Suez Group, had Labour decided to join the dissidents to vote the government down, abstaining in the division lobby was the limit of acceptable opposition.⁷⁴

The Influence of the Suez Group: Churchill vs Eden

The principal sceptic of reconciliation with Egypt was Churchill himself.⁷⁵ His was an emotional resistance to the process of 'scuttle' which had begun in India, continued in Abadan and which he feared would end in British retreat from Africa.⁷⁶ His reluctant acquiescence to the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan was an open secret in Westminster, as was his resistance to evacuation from Egypt.⁷⁷ The Suez Group's morale was bolstered by its knowledge of this schism between Eden and Churchill⁷⁸ and by Churchill's private encouragement: three or four times Churchill stopped Amery in the voting lobby and urged him to keep up the 'good work'.⁷⁹

The Suez Group hoped it would be able to exploit Churchill's distaste for the whole business to its own advantage;⁸⁰ in the opinion of Jane Portal, his secretary, Churchill was open to

⁷³ Amery to Waterhouse 16.3.54, Waterhouse papers

⁷⁴ *Economist* 7.8.54

⁷⁵ see Louis in Louis ed., p.53

⁷⁶ Louis in Louis ed., p.53

⁷⁷ Paul Williams and Arthur Gavshon

⁷⁸ Paul Williams; see also Suez Group letter to Churchill 22.4.53, Waterhouse papers.

⁷⁹ Lord Amery

⁸⁰ see Suez Group to Churchill 22.4.43, Waterhouse papers

constant influence - in particular, Soames (now his PPS) egged him on over the Sudan and Egypt⁸¹ - and Labour certainly attributed the strength of the rebels' obstructive influence to Churchill's support.⁸² As matters transpired, it was the other way round: the presence of a sizeable group of disgruntled backbenchers which enjoyed the sympathy of approximately 100 other less committed Conservatives,⁸³ strengthened Churchill's hand as he sought to counter his Foreign Secretary's Egypt policy. In contrast to the Suez Group, Churchill recognized the economic and military logic behind Britain's proposed withdrawal⁸⁴ he was determined to drive a much harder bargain with Neguib. Contemptuous of the Egyptians, he felt that Eden's approach smacked of 'appeasement'.⁸⁵ Perhaps there was also an element of mischief in Churchill's encouragement of the Suez Group - regarding all 'as rather fun, seeing what would come out of it'.⁸⁶

The Activities of the Suez Group

Neither the Suez Group nor Churchill made much progress while Eden remained at his desk, supported by the majority of his Cabinet colleagues. Eden's illness and absence from the political scene from April to October 1953 offered the Prime Minister a golden opportunity⁸⁷ and Churchill was determined

⁸¹ Jane Portal in conversation with Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez*, p.141

⁸² Denis Healey, 5.11.53, *HC Deb.*520.423; Barbara Castle, 11.3.54, *HC Deb.*524.2510

⁸³ Lord Amery

⁸⁴ Churchill wanted American cooperation to set up a joint command in the Middle East. Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune*, p.501 and Shuckburgh, p.77

⁸⁵ Shuckburgh, p.75

⁸⁶ Ursula Branston

⁸⁷ Shuckburgh, p.86

to preside over 'the Egyptian business' himself.⁸⁸ The Suez Group quickly seized its opportunity of a change at the helm to re-iterate⁸⁹ its position to Churchill⁹⁰, pointing out that although Eden had assured the Foreign Affairs Committee⁹¹ that the government had minimum terms on which it would insist, since this meeting there had been press reports which were 'causing anxiety'; the Chief Whip was also alerted to its concern about the course the negotiations might take.⁹²

Buchan-Hepburn realised from his own soundings that the Suez Group's views reflected 'a real anxiety in the Party'.⁹³ This agitation was attributed 'to fundamental strategic facts not being fully understood', but Buchan-Hepburn appreciated that there was a general sense that the government was out of touch with the backbenches on the matter.⁹⁴ At his urging, Churchill addressed the Foreign Affairs Committee on 29 April 1953, and his tougher stance with Egypt⁹⁵, confirmed in the Commons,⁹⁶ was welcomed by the critics.⁹⁷ Robin Hankey's appointment as Chargé d'Affaires in Cairo seemed to hint that Lord Hankey's (and the Suez Group's) views would now have more weight.

⁸⁸ Macmillan, p.502

⁸⁹ PRO.FCO371/102806 Amery to Eden 18.3.53, quoted in Louis in Louis ed., p.59

⁹⁰ PRO.PREM11/635 Suez Group to Churchill 22.4.53

⁹¹ FAC 25.2.53

⁹² PRO.PREM11/635 Mott-Radclyffe to Buchan-Hepburn 22.4.53.

⁹³ PRO.PREM11/635 Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill 24.4.53

⁹⁴ Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill

⁹⁵ FAC 29.4.53

⁹⁶ 11.5.53, *HC Deb.*515.885-889

⁹⁷ Waterhouse note 11.5.53, Waterhouse papers.

This satisfaction was short-lived. Press reports continued⁹⁸ to suggest a basis of agreement with Egypt that cut across Churchill's assurance of minimum demands that would not be conceded. Selwyn Lloyd's remarks to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 12 July 1953 appeared to confirm the disquieting reports that Britain had agreed to the withdrawal of all combat troops.⁹⁹ Accordingly, the Suez Group used the Daily Express¹⁰⁰ to leak Lord Hankey's 'confidential report' sent to Eden in February 1953 which warned that 'if British troops were withdrawn from the Suez Canal Zone, the Canal would be impassable to all shipping in little more than a year'.¹⁰¹ For the government 'the disclosure could not have come at a worse time'¹⁰² - as Amery undoubtedly knew - since it coincided with secret talks in Washington with the Americans and the French about the freedom of the Canal.

Although this leak caused considerable consternation in Whitehall,¹⁰³ the hardliners' initiative was lost with Churchill's continuing indisposition following his stroke in late June. Salisbury, Lord President of the Council, assumed control of the Egyptian discussions and gave an early indication of his determination to pursue negotiations¹⁰⁴, rather than imitate Churchill's procrastination. 'The Government had no real worry of getting parliamentary approval; it was assumed that Labour would not vote against a

⁹⁸ Legge-Bourke, FAC 6.5.53, referring to *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*; Fitzroy Maclean and Legge-Bourke, FAC 17.5.53

⁹⁹ Fitzroy Maclean, FAC 1.7.53

¹⁰⁰ 22.1.53

¹⁰¹ PRO.FCO371/102766 JE1052/137 Ledward memo: 'Lord Hankey and the Suez Canal' 22.7.53

¹⁰² PRO.FCO371/102766 22.7.53

¹⁰³ see PRO.FCO/371/102766

¹⁰⁴ *Times* 29.7.53

treaty and ... [i]t seemed unlikely that the disturbed Tories would go as far as to force a vote against the government; even if they did Socialist non-intervention would ensure a ... government majority.'¹⁰⁵ On this line of reasoning negotiations with Egypt progressed rapidly, and it was tentatively agreed Britain should withdraw all troops except a small force to keep the base in working order. The outstanding issues were reduced to four main points: reactivation; duration of the agreement; uniforms; and a time limit for withdrawal.¹⁰⁶

As the talks appeared to be drawing inexorably towards a highly unsatisfactory conclusion, the dissidents went on the offensive in mid-September 1953. With Parliament in recess, letters to the national press were the most obvious tactic.¹⁰⁷ There ensued a very lively correspondence in the *Times* on the future of the Suez Canal Zone base: the Suez Group had succeeded in touching a nerve among the paper's readership, and the issues were discussed at length. Newspaper coverage of the Margate party conference¹⁰⁸ also paid great attention to Julian Amery's contribution to the debate on defence and foreign policy, which was received with rapturous applause. Salisbury, who found the Suez Group's views 'extremely irritating',¹⁰⁹ replied for the government and directed much of his argument towards rebutting the critics' accusations and seeking to play down expectations of the sort of agreement the government could reasonably achieve. His speech concluded with the clear challenge to the rebels to dare to doubt the sagacity of its leaders.

¹⁰⁵ *Gloucestershire Echo* 17.11.53

¹⁰⁶ Louis in Louis ed., p.61

¹⁰⁷ the Lords Hankey, Vansittart, Killearn and Rennell letter, *Times* 24.9.53; and from Leo Amery letter, *Times* 25.9.53

¹⁰⁸ eg *Times* 9.10.53; *Daily Telegraph* 9.10.53

¹⁰⁹ PRO.FCO371/102826 minute by Salisbury 9.9.53, quoted in Louis ed., p.60

(a) The Suez Group in Ascent:

By the autumn of 1953 the government 'was in serious trouble'¹¹⁰ over its policy towards Egypt. The Suez Group, through letters, private meetings and public speeches, had succeeded in stirring the party. Despite Salisbury's exhortation that the party conference trust its leaders, Conservative MPs became 'highly alarmed'¹¹¹ by the persistent rumours of a total withdrawal from the Canal Zone base which 'went undenied'.¹¹² Many MPs were deeply unhappy at the prospect of leaving Suez; it would be 'foolish to leave a military vacuum; for reasons of both geography and politics they did not see Cyprus as a suitable alternative base'.¹¹³ 'I can only conclude that [Churchill] has found it necessary to shift his ground greatly to our disadvantage.'¹¹⁴

Ministers also began to realise that Labour might 'cash in' on defections of a group of Tories, to whom Eden's announcement of a resumption of negotiations [mid-October] proved most unpalatable'.¹¹⁵ 'It was calculated that if 25 [Tories] went as far as to abstain the government could be defeated, assuming the Liberals and Labour opposed the government.'¹¹⁶ Before the party conference it had been assumed that a general election was 'just around the corner'; then there had been no particular advantage in defeating the government in the division lobby. 'Now Churchill changed all that' by his

¹¹⁰ Paul Williams

¹¹¹ *Gloucestershire Echo*

¹¹² *Gloucestershire Echo*

¹¹³ Reginald Bevens: *The Greasy Pole*, p.39

¹¹⁴ Waterhouse to Leo Amery 1.10.53, Waterhouse papers

¹¹⁵ *Daily Herald* 26.10.53

¹¹⁶ *Gloucestershire Echo*

declaration that there would not be an election until 1955. Labour leaders had no desire to go to the polls whilst their party was racked by disagreements over rearmament, but did not want to wait another two years. Defeat on Suez might 'catch the Tories at a disadvantage'.¹¹⁷

Churchill's continued opposition to Eden's line of approach¹¹⁸ was bolstered by his awareness of the 'stentorian belly rumble!'¹¹⁹ of dissent on the backbenches. Although he reluctantly supported Eden and Salisbury on 15 October 1953 over new proposals to Egypt,¹²⁰ Churchill was determined these should be 'presented to the Egyptians as our last word'. He was equally 'anxious that no final agreement should be reached ... until Parliament had reassembled'. It was of great importance that 'ministers should have that opportunity of preparing the way for the agreement, if it was to be concluded, and doing their utmost to reduce the risk of it being subjected to damaging criticism by their own supporters'.¹²¹

When Parliament reassembled, the Suez Group began to coalesce as Waterhouse and Amery made discreet approaches to certain members.¹²² These moves were matched by 'strenuous efforts'¹²³ by senior Tories to manage the 'very substantial

¹¹⁷ *Gloucestershire Echo*

¹¹⁸ John Colville: *The Fringes of Power*, pp.679-80

¹¹⁹ Paul Williams

¹²⁰ PRO.CAB128/26.CC(58)53 15.11.53

¹²¹ PRO.CAB128/26.CC(58)53 15.11.53

¹²² Waterhouse to Leo Amery 15.10.53, Waterhouse papers

¹²³ Derek Marks, *Daily Express* 16.12.54

swell of opinion' on the issue.¹²⁴ Only Churchill's personal intervention in the 1922 in October prevented an open revolt.¹²⁵ Eden wrote to Waterhouse assuring him that the government was very conscious of the importance of a workable agreement over the Canal base: 'We should not sacrifice our minimum conditions for the sake of Egyptian goodwill, essential though we believe this to be.'¹²⁶ The presence of five members of the government (Churchill, Eden, Lloyd, Salisbury, Nutting) at the Foreign Affairs Committee on 21 October 1953 was eloquent testimony of the government's concern.¹²⁷ Despite Buchan-Hepburn's initial hope that thereafter 'things would be much better',¹²⁸ 'this sledgehammer did not crack the nut'.¹²⁹ Appalled by the confirmation of the government's intention to withdraw all fighting troops, the Suez Group immediately began to increase its pressure.¹³⁰ Powell and Amery were spurred into public criticism.¹³¹ Hinchingsbrooke, widely tipped for the position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport,¹³² let it be known that he declined the offer because of 'differences with the government on the evacuation of the Suez

¹²⁴ PRO.FCO371/1026766 Leo Amery to Churchill 7.10.53; Paul Williams; and *Times* 17.12.53

¹²⁵ *Economist* 9.12.53

¹²⁶ Eden to Waterhouse 20.10.53, Waterhouse papers

¹²⁷ When pressed by the agitated Chief Whip to attend to this committee meeting to support Eden against the Suez Group, Churchill only agreed very reluctantly, adding 'you see, I'm not on "our" side'. Leo Amery diary entry 22.11.53 in John Barnes ed., p.1064

¹²⁸ PRO.PREM11/635 Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill 24.10.53

¹²⁹ Healey, 5.11.53, *HC Deb.*520.423

¹³⁰ *Gloucestershire Echo* 17.11.53; PRO.PREM11/635 Suez Group (27 signatures) to Churchill 22.10.53; Suez Group and Hankey letters to Churchill 25.11.53

¹³¹ Powell, *HC Deb.*520.342-349 and Amery, *HC Deb.*520.369-380, 5.11.53

¹³² eg *Morning Advertiser* 3.11.53; *Sunday Despatch* 8.11.53; *Birmingham Post* 10.11.53

Canal'.¹³³

The Whips realized that the Suez Group had struck a chord of profound unease within the party. In the party committees MPs questioned the logic of complete withdrawal¹³⁴ and relocation to Cyprus; for others the right of reentry was the crux.¹³⁵ Eden was only too well aware of the tightrope he was walking: given the volatile temper of the party, logic might fall prey to national pride and fears of a Middle East conflict. Buchan-Hepburn was warning Churchill there were 'quite enough' members of the Suez Group 'for it to be difficult',¹³⁶ and urged if an agreement was reached 'you or Anthony will have to talk to people alone'.¹³⁷

The political temperature rose dramatically in late 1953 with the news of Egyptian interference in the Sudanese elections. This appeared to confirm the Suez Group's worst fears that Britain had failed in her duty to ensure Sudanese self-determination and could not depend on Egypt's word not to interfere with her southern neighbour. From Eden's point of view, this evidence of Egypt's unreliability came at a highly embarrassing time; he was at pains to address this backbench alarm.¹³⁸ Eden had braved the wrath of his leader and a sizeable portion of his party to force through the treaty for the Sudan; he remained determined to secure a negotiated agreement with Egypt involving British evacuation from the Canal Zone base. Yet here was undeniable grist for the Suez Group's argument that no satisfactory agreement could be

¹³³ *Birmingham Post* 12.11.53

¹³⁴ eg Maclay and Elliot, FAC 16.12.53

¹³⁵ Godfrey Nicholson, FAC 16.12.53

¹³⁶ PRO.PREM11/635 Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill 24.10.53

¹³⁷ Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill

¹³⁸ see Eden's lengthy written reply to Prior-Palmer, 13.11.53, *HC Deb.*102.102-104

reached with the unreliable Egyptians.¹³⁹

Fearful that under American pressure¹⁴⁰, the Government would try to sneak through an 'disastrous' agreement with Cairo during the Christmas recess¹⁴¹, the Suez Group was determined 'to tie [Britain's] hands'.¹⁴² Talks were currently at a standstill, which gave the critics 'an opportunity to make their views heard in time':¹⁴³ the terms offered to Egypt should be withdrawn, so that 'if the circumstances justified a new approach Britain could enter negotiations with her hands free'.¹⁴⁴ Private conversations with the Whips, objections in the party committees¹⁴⁵ and letters to Churchill were not having the desired effect. Therefore, after secretly canvassing support, it warned Churchill and Eden that it was contemplating putting down a critical EDM;¹⁴⁶ this was also designed to press the government to commit to prior discussion in Parliament before it entered into 'any commitment to modify their rights under the Treaty of 1936'¹⁴⁷ - which was 'precisely what [Eden was] not prepared to do'.¹⁴⁸

The Cabinet was aware that as a result of the Sudanese

¹³⁹ Marks, *Daily Express* 16.11.53

¹⁴⁰ PRO.PREM11/636 Hankey to Churchill 25.11.53

¹⁴¹ see PRO.PREM11/635 Waterhouse to Churchill 25.11.53

¹⁴² *News of the World* 13.12.53

¹⁴³ *Daily Express* 16.12.53

¹⁴⁴ Waterhouse to Churchill 25.11.53, Waterhouse papers

¹⁴⁵ FAC 25.11.53 and 2.12.53

¹⁴⁶ PRO.PREM11/635 Minister of State to Eden, telegram 105 3.12.53; Marks, *Daily Express* 9.12.53 and 16.12.53

¹⁴⁷ PRO.FCO371/102766 Killearn notice of Parliamentary Question 15.12.53

¹⁴⁸ PRO.FCO371/10276611 Leward 12.12.53. and Shuckburgh to O'Regan 12.12.53

elections,¹⁴⁹ there was extensive sympathy for the Suez Group's arguments¹⁵⁰ and the critical EDM seemed likely to attract at least 35 signatures.¹⁵¹ The Cabinet was in 'no doubt that [the Suez Group] held very strong views and could not be relied upon to refrain from causing acute embarrassment to the government'.¹⁵² However, government attempts to head off a backbench rebellion¹⁵³ with an exploratory meeting between Butler, Crookshank and Nutting and those Privy Councillors who were not in the government - Assheton, Waterhouse, Charles Williams, Maclay, McCorquodale and Spens - were unsuccessful. At Nutting's urging, Assheton and Waterhouse agreed not to put down an EDM while Churchill and Eden were in Bermuda;¹⁵⁴ but Nutting's refusal to give any undertaking or any new interpretation of government policy goaded the dissidents into briefing the press of their intention 'to carry on their campaign in public by party motions, on the order paper, and public speeches'.¹⁵⁵

On their return from the Bermuda conference on 11 December Churchill and Eden found themselves confronted with a 'serious demonstration'.¹⁵⁶ The Suez Group's threat was not an idle one: a revolt of '37 would be sufficient to bring great pressure on a government with a majority of only 16'.¹⁵⁷ The Whips were warning that 'the strength of the rebellion is

¹⁴⁹ PRO.PREM 11/635 Foreign Office to Bermuda telegram 105 3.12.53

¹⁵⁰ Foreign Office to Bermuda; *Daily Telegraph* 16.12.53

¹⁵¹ Foreign Office to Bermuda

¹⁵² PRO.CAB128/26 CC(53)79 14.12.53

¹⁵³ Foreign Office to Bermuda telegram 3.12.53

¹⁵⁴ Foreign Office to Bermuda

¹⁵⁵ *Birmingham Post* 2.12.53

¹⁵⁶ *Times* 16.12.53; see *Daily Telegraph* 16.12.53; *News of the World* 13.12.53

¹⁵⁷ Marks, *Daily Express* 9.12.53

growing'.¹⁵⁸ 'The big danger for the government is that the Socialists may vote against any evacuation plan which does not safeguard the position of Israel.'¹⁵⁹ Eden immediately set about the business of pacifying restive MPs. On 11 December he held a private meeting with Waterhouse and his fellow critics,¹⁶⁰ aware that if he was not successful they would use the forthcoming foreign affairs debate to air their grievances.¹⁶¹ There was considerable Cabinet discussion over the best way to defuse the incipient rebellion.¹⁶² On Buchan-Hepburn's recommendation, it was agreed¹⁶³ that Alexander should address the Foreign Affairs Committee, rather than the smaller Defence Committee¹⁶⁴, on military strategy and economic facts of the case to detach a large number of restive backbenchers, and isolate the hard core.¹⁶⁵ 'No doubt the hard core is not going to be satisfied with any assurance, but at least an attempt could be made to avoid a large number of Conservative [signatures to the EDM], which might well turn out to be considerably more than the 40-50 quoted in the press.'¹⁶⁶ The forthcoming debate on foreign affairs due on 17 December 1953 was deliberately curtailed.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁸ Marks

¹⁵⁹ *Daily Express*, 16.11.54

¹⁶⁰ Shuckburgh, p.118

¹⁶¹ *Times* 14.12.53

¹⁶² PRO.CAB128/26 CC(53)79 15.12.53; PRO.PREM11/635 Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill 15.12.53

¹⁶³ PRO.PREM11/635 Eden to Churchill 14.12.53

¹⁶⁴ PRO.CAB128/26.CC.(53)79 14.12.53

¹⁶⁵ PRO.PREM11/635 Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill 14.12.43

¹⁶⁶ Buchan-Hepburn to Churchill

¹⁶⁷ PRO.CAB128/26 CC(53)79 14.12.53

When its threat failed to elicit a satisfactory change of tack, the Suez Group publicly placed its objections on the record on 15 December 1953, the evening before Churchill's annual luncheon with the 1922 committee and just before Alexander's appearance before the Foreign Affairs Committee.¹⁶⁸ Described as 'a virtual vote of no confidence',¹⁶⁹ and 'the most serious revolt the government had met on a major policy issue',¹⁷⁰ this rebellion was 'a more serious matter than an ordinary flurry of backbenchers',¹⁷¹ since the list included 'three Privy Councillors, a Joint Treasurer of the Party and many MPs who have expert and specialized knowledge of the Middle East and whose views cannot be lightly disregarded ... [T]he body of opposition which Eden faces is a really formidable one and it is evident that the Cabinet is taking the challenge as seriously as it deserves.'¹⁷² 'Minority movements within parties are usually drawn from a fairly narrow field, but among the 39 are to be found representatives of practically every distinctive Conservative group: the 'Old Guard' [Waterhouse, Herbert Williams, Charles Williams]; One Nation [Maude, Powell]; Ex-Army Types [Clarke, Legge-Bourke]; Rural MPs [Crouch]; Industrialists [Assheton, Mellor]; Veterans [Savory]; New Boys [Hall, Paul Williams].' It was 'probably as complete a cross-section as could be got'.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Alexander was accompanied at this meeting by Butler, Selwyn Lloyd, Lord Reading and Head. FAC 16.12.53

¹⁶⁹ Marks, *Daily Express* 9.12.53

¹⁷⁰ *Daily Telegraph* 18.6.54

¹⁷¹ Diary, *Time and Tide* 19.12.53

¹⁷² *Time and Tide*

¹⁷³ *Yorkshire Post* 17.12.53

(i) The Impact of the December 1953 EDM upon Churchill and Eden:

Churchill's own inclination was to send troops to Khartoum to offset the 'disgrace' of retiring from the Canal Zone, to stop negotiations with Egypt and announce that Britain would leave in its own time, destroying or removing the base before departure (the latter was hardly a feasible proposition given the enormous quantity of stores there).¹⁷⁴ However, he assured Eden, currently in Paris, that he would tell the 1922 committee its members must have faith that the government was 'not animated by fear or weakness'.¹⁷⁵ Churchill was more inclined than his Cabinet colleagues to take a robust view that the EDM would be 'a timely reminder to [Egypt] that Britain had to consider public opinion'.¹⁷⁶ He also hoped to use this lever of a 'disturbed and increasingly angered section which could at any time cancel [the government's] modest majority' to dissuade Eisenhower from granting economic aid to Egypt before agreement was reached.¹⁷⁷

The Suez Group succeeded in wringing two apparent concessions from the government. Churchill's appeal at the 1922 annual luncheon 'for the Suez rebels not to threaten the small Tory majority ... and to argue in the privacy of the 1922 committee, rather than in public' included the specific 'promise that an agreement with Egypt would not be rushed through in the recess'.¹⁷⁸ The previous day the Suez Group had won an admission from the government that any proposed agreement would be debated by Parliament before

¹⁷⁴ proposed in Cabinet 9.12.53: Shuckburgh, p.118

¹⁷⁵ PRO.PREM11/635 Churchill to Eden 14.12.53

¹⁷⁶ PRO.CAB128/26 CC(53)79 14.12.53

¹⁷⁷ PRO.PREM11/699 T.310/53 Churchill to Eisenhower 19.12.53

¹⁷⁸ *Guardian* 17.12.53

ratification.¹⁷⁹ There the concessions ended. The reply given by Eden and Churchill in the foreign affairs debate to 'the restive backbenchers ... was in forthright terms'. Eden 'firmly and flatly' refused to 'break off negotiations with Egypt in the existing circumstances', or to refuse to promise that if the British Ambassador reached heads of agreement that the government would not go on to try to prepare a treaty to replace that of 1936.¹⁸⁰ Similarly Churchill stated that the Government's actions would not be dictated by the violence of our foreign enemies or 'by the pressure of some of our best friends' (a reference either to America, or the Conservative backbenches).

Churchill's personal appeal to the 1922 had succeeded in quelling some dissent on Egypt but the Suez Group remained defiant in debate.¹⁸¹ It regarded Eden's speech as 'a slap in the face',¹⁸² and warned the Whips of its intention 'to appeal to the party in the country with speeches and letters to the press', bolstered by the belief that although military opinion led by Alexander supported Eden, 'an important military element' and some Cabinet members shared its view.¹⁸³ Before the foreign affairs debate the Suez Group had only contemplated abstention; thoughts of voting against the government were now crystallizing.¹⁸⁴ The press was

¹⁷⁹ PRO.FCO317/102766 Ledward 12.12.53 and Lord Reading *HL Deb.* 185.68 15.12.53. Lord Reading refused to commit the government to a debate before entering into Heads of Agreement.

¹⁸⁰ *Times* 18.12.53

¹⁸¹ *Times* 18.12.53

¹⁸² PRO.PREM11/635 Whips note from conversation with (unspecified) member of the Suez Group 18.12.53

¹⁸³ Whips note

¹⁸⁴ Whips note

rapidly appraised of its determination to continue the fight;¹⁸⁵ and it was strongly hinted the EDM would not be withdrawn.¹⁸⁶

The Suez Group continued their campaign to persuade the government to break off negotiations¹⁸⁷ and to withdraw the present offer¹⁸⁸ in the party committees, in Parliamentary debates,¹⁸⁹ in articles in journals¹⁹⁰ and through briefings to the press; it warned of continued Conservative suspicions of 'too tender an attitude towards Egypt were still very much alive within the party'¹⁹¹ and many more Conservatives would now be prepared to back the December EDM. (Darling and Kerby were the only ones who did so.) With the recrudescence of attacks on British troops in the Canal Zone, the dissidents pressed the government to halt all discussions until these disturbances had been firmly crushed.¹⁹² Egypt's failure to put down the violence demonstrated official encouragement for sabotage, while the 'Neguib-out, Nasser-in, Neguib-in again fiasco' in February 1954 demonstrated a dangerous instability in the Cairo government¹⁹³ which vindicated the stand they had taken.¹⁹⁴ Their gathering frustration led them to accuse

¹⁸⁵ see *Times* 18.12.53

¹⁸⁶ *Times*

¹⁸⁷ Amery to Waterhouse 23.2.54, Waterhouse papers

¹⁸⁸ *Daily Telegraph* 26.1.54; *Sheffield Telegraph* 3.3.54

¹⁸⁹ Army Estimates Debate 3.3.54

¹⁹⁰ Powell, *New Commonwealth* 4.1.54, quoted in Cosgrave, pp.130-1

¹⁹¹ Maitland, 3.2.54, *HC Deb.*523.364

¹⁹² see *Daily Telegraph*, 26.1.54, *Sheffield Telegraph* 3.3.54; Maitland, Paul Williams, Bromley-Davenport, Waterhouse, 17.2.54, *HC Deb.*523.1960-1963

¹⁹³ *Sheffield Telegraph* 3.3.54

¹⁹⁴ Powell article, *Truth*; Nabarro, 1.3.54, *HC Deb.*524.827

Eden of a policy of 'appeasement'¹⁹⁵ - the ultimate political insult - and to decide to vote against a Heads of Agreement.¹⁹⁶ While Amery and Waterhouse realised that it was unrealistic to expect to get 40 MPs to vote against the government, this decision¹⁹⁷ was not an empty one. 'No government can lightly disregard a warning of this kind'¹⁹⁸

(ii) The Continuing Struggle over Egypt between Eden and Churchill:

Behind the public united front on the Egyptian negotiations of December 1953, tensions persisted between Churchill and Eden in private. Much to the alarm of the Foreign Office, the pressure of backbench dissent and his own Prime Minister's opposition was beginning to tell on Eden's resolve.¹⁹⁹ Armed with the backing of the Suez Group, Churchill at the end of December told the Cabinet that negotiations should be abandoned if an agreement was not reached in the near future.²⁰⁰ Eden was acutely aware that if he succeeded on getting Egyptian agreement on the present proposals, he would carry the party, but with 20 or 30 voting against this might 'gravely compromise his position'.²⁰¹ Shuckburgh noted in his diary that Eden seemed to be toying with the Prime Minister's 'so-called alternative to agreement with Egypt - ie breaking off negotiations, and announcing that Britain would redeploy her troops in her own time'. Eden, however, remained

¹⁹⁵ Maitland, 3.2.54, *HC Deb.*523.364

¹⁹⁶ Suez Group meeting 15.3.56, Waterhouse papers

¹⁹⁷ Suez Group meeting 15.3.54

¹⁹⁸ Amery to Waterhouse 19.3.54, Waterhouse papers

¹⁹⁹ Shuckburgh, p.125

²⁰⁰ Scott Lucas: *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis*, p.30

²⁰¹ Macmillan, pp.502-3

uncertain, as he did not wish to 'throw over the Arabs altogether and rely on Israel and Turkey' - the Prime Minister's strong choice.

While the Foreign Secretary was racked with indecision over the Egyptian question, his deputy Selwyn Lloyd, seemed even more influenced by the Tory rebels,²⁰² suggesting that 'redeployment' should mean that British troops would stay in Egypt in some force until 1956 and even thereafter.²⁰³ To Eden's consternation, while he was in Berlin for the Four-Power conference on Germany, Selwyn Lloyd gave a lunch in London for the Persian Ambassador to which he invited Assheton, one of the leading rebels. This raised fears in the mind of the highly strung Foreign Secretary that Selwyn Lloyd was plotting against him. Whilst still in Berlin, Eden received a 'rude message' from Churchill, which made it 'very clear that the Prime Minister is doing all he can to thwart agreement with Egypt on the base and Selwyn Lloyd is not playing straight with us'.²⁰⁴ Churchill had again seized the chance of overall control of Egypt negotiations with Eden's absence. Supported by war cries from the backbenches, and 'egged on' by Soames²⁰⁵, in the Cabinet the Prime Minister 'was raring to occupy Khartoum' and giving Eden 'a rough ride'.²⁰⁶

Under these pressures by mid-March Eden was still showing signs of indecision, toying with the idea of breaking off negotiations with Egypt. 'Quivering with sensitivity to opinion in the House, the party, the newspapers', he was

²⁰² Shuckburgh, p.125

²⁰³ Shuckburgh, p.125

²⁰⁴ Shuckburgh, p.132

²⁰⁵ Shuckburgh, p.141

²⁰⁶ Shuckburgh, p.137

'beginning to find the unpopularity of his Egypt policy with the party 'too heavy a burden and is seeking ways to abandon it'.²⁰⁷ The Cabinet, led by Salisbury, was in favour of a new plan of refusing to renew talks until Egypt had done certain things to restore confidence (stop anti-British propaganda, undertake not to upset the Governor General's commission in the Sudan, etc), in opposition to Churchill who still wanted to send troops to Khartoum, keep 10,000 men on the canal, and break off all discussions.

(b) The Suez Group Checked:

To the relief of the Suez Group²⁰⁸ Eden announced on 22 March that negotiations had been broken off.²⁰⁹ However, initial hopes that the severance of negotiations would be followed by 'a material change of approach'²¹⁰ were not fulfilled. Eden persisted with his policy, convinced there was no viable alternative²¹¹ to negotiating with Neguib for the evacuation from the Canal Zone base. Caught between American pressure to concede terms to Egypt and Churchill's pressure to stand firm, backed by the Suez Group, for the beleaguered Foreign Secretary the solution to maintaining Britain's Middle Eastern position after withdrawal from Suez, lay in 'close relations with Jordan and Iraq'²¹² building upon the Turkish-Pakistani pact.

²⁰⁷ Shuckburgh, p.148

²⁰⁸ Waterhouse to Amery 23.3.56, Waterhouse papers

²⁰⁹ before the Suez Group's letter was sent to the Chief Whip. Waterhouse to Julian Amery, 23.3.56, Waterhouse papers

²¹⁰ Waterhouse to Julian Amery 23.3.54

²¹¹ CAB129/66 CC(54)74 25.2.54, Memorandum by Chiefs of Staff, 'Egypt', quoted in Louis in Louis ed., p.64 and p.66; Scott Lucas, p.31

²¹² PRO.FCO371/110819/V1193/8 Eden minute 12.1.54, quoted in Scott Lucas, p.31

By early summer faced with the spectre of an imminent Anglo-Egyptian settlement, the Suez Group and their aristocratic allies were spurred into frenetic activity, despatching articles²¹³ and letters²¹⁴ to the press, to Selwyn Lloyd²¹⁵ and to Eden,²¹⁶ 'warning that the group ... was now even more strongly of the view that British forces must be maintained in the Canal'²¹⁷ because of the situation in the Sudan rendered this imperative. Through informal chats with Eden, deputations to Churchill²¹⁸ and private meetings²¹⁹ it sought to defend Britain's honour as well as her interests.²²⁰ As the process of proposal and counter-proposal was followed avidly in the press, the Suez Group's efforts to broadcast its dissatisfaction were extremely successful, as were its efforts to stimulate wider party unrest.²²¹ As the press picked up this backbench dissatisfaction - 'another Tory civil war warms up'²²² - there was sharp Conservative protest at the reopening of negotiations in mid-July.²²³ Diehard opinion within the party was also enraged by Eden's 'supine attitude'²²⁴ to

²¹³ 'Suez and Why We Must Stay': Waterhouse, *Daily Telegraph* 5.7.54

²¹⁴ Powell, *Times*, 25.6.54; Hankey, Vansittart, Killearn and Rennell, *Times* 10.7.54

²¹⁵ 23.6.54

²¹⁶ Waterhouse to Eden 17.6.54, Waterhouse papers

²¹⁷ *Daily Telegraph* 18.6.54

²¹⁸ PRO.PREM11/635 Waterhouse to Churchill 9.7.54

²¹⁹ see Crossbencher, *Sunday Express* 4.7.54

²²⁰ Suez Group to Eden 17.6.54, Waterhouse papers

²²¹ see FAC 30.6.54

²²² Crossbencher, *Sunday Express* 4.7.54

²²³ FAC 12.7.54

²²⁴ see Walter Fletcher letter, *Times* 21.6.54

China at the Geneva conference convened to discuss Indo-China: there were private fears that America's agreement for Eden's brokered deal in Indo-China was at the expense of British concessions over the Suez Canal base.²²⁵ Yet, again, there was no uniform Suez Group view on Far Eastern matters.²²⁶

The government was considerably alarmed at the prospect of a general backbench revolt over the resumption of negotiations. Eden wrote at length to the Suez Group's leader insisting 'any alternative policy will not give us what we want';²²⁷ and the very considerable weight of senior Tories had to be brought to bear upon the critics to bring them to order.²²⁸ First Selwyn Lloyd, Nutting and Dodds-Parker faced the Foreign Affairs Committee on 12 July 1954, and Churchill met a deputation from the Suez Group.²²⁹ The following day Churchill, Butler and Head addressed the Army Sub-committee convened specifically to discuss the Suez question further before the forthcoming Commons debate. It was Churchill's emotional arguments, rather than strict military logic, that won the day for Eden.

(c) Churchill Admits Defeat:

Churchill had only conceded defeat very reluctantly²³⁰. His favoured solution of an international base, with a few

²²⁵ see Eden to Waterhouse 24.6.54, Waterhouse papers

²²⁶ see Amery vs Legge-Bourke, FAC 26.5.54; Maitland letter, *Daily Telegraph* 7.7.54

²²⁷ Eden to Waterhouse 24.6.54, Waterhouse papers

²²⁸ *Times* 14.7.54

²²⁹ PRO.PREM11/635 Waterhouse note of meeting. Waterhouse to Buchan-Hepburn 13.7.54

²³⁰ see PRO.PREM11/702 CAB CC(54)43 22.6.54 and CC(54)47 2.7.54

thousand British troops and American support²³¹ foundered when America refused to co-operate at the Bermuda conference in December 1953.²³² By March, as the result of grim discussion of Britain's financial position,²³³ the Prime Minister was no longer talking of sending troops to Khartoum. And the American reports of the Eniwetok nuclear test had a decisive effect of Churchill;²³⁴ he was powerfully affected by the scientists' conclusion that this nuclear test had come very close to cracking the earth's crust.

By this point Churchill's ability to stimulate trouble for Eden using the Suez Group was greatly curtailed by the uncertainty of his own future.²³⁵ In addition, Churchill still hankered after a summit with Russia, a notion which his Foreign Secretary heartily opposed. The Cabinet furore in July 1954 over Churchill's private attempts to secure a summit meeting - during which it was noticeable that whereas Salisbury was prepared to resign on the issue of collective cabinet government, Eden was not - demonstrated to Churchill the limits of his authority. A general election seemed highly probable within the next year; Churchill would be 80 in November, and no one expected him to lead the party into the next election. In contrast, Eden's star shone brightly: in 1954 he was acclaimed as Churchill heir apparent and the chances of the Suez Group were necessarily diminished. With Eden's successes (real or apparent) in Indo-China, Trieste, and Persia, never had his standing within the party in the country been higher.

²³¹ Ovendale in Young ed.: *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peace-time Administration*, p.146

²³² PRO.PREM11/699 and PREM11/702

²³³ see Shuckburgh, pp.137-9; Eden, pp.257-9; Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956* (New York 1978), p.14-23

²³⁴ Sir John Colville in conversation with Professor Donald Watt

²³⁵ Macmillan, p.505; Sir Richard Thompson

Despite his sympathy with the Suez Group's stance, outnumbered in Cabinet and awed by the vulnerability of the Suez Canal base to nuclear attack, Churchill bowed to reality. His public support for Eden in the party's committees in mid-July was crucial: 'Conservatives attach great importance to [his] intervention at this stage. Though he produced no new arguments, it is felt he was at pains to align himself personally and unmistakably with a negotiated settlement with Egypt'.²³⁶ However, the Prime Minister still disliked the agreement intensely, and made Eden present it to the Commons.

(d) The Suez Group 'Stalemated':²³⁷

Churchill's change of heart effectively ruled out any possibility of a change of approach. However, the dissidents were still determined to draw as much public attention as possible to their dissatisfaction with Eden's policy. They remained convinced that the proposals currently under discussion with Egypt were an 'unconditional surrender',²³⁸ and were profoundly unimpressed by the Prime Minister's arguments²³⁹: how could Britain hold the Empire together if Churchill's statements about the bomb and the impossibility of holding a base surrounded by a hostile local population were taken seriously?²⁴⁰ As Powell said to his colleagues, 'if Churchill had said Britain could not hold the base and walked out with the flags flying and the drum beating, I for one would have supported [him]; but to argue, as Churchill had done, that Britain could re-enter the base

²³⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 14.7.54

²³⁷ Lord Amery

²³⁸ Amery, FAC 30.6.54

²³⁹ Waterhouse note of Suez Group meeting with Churchill 12.7.54, Waterhouse papers

²⁴⁰ Amery to Waterhouse 4.8.54, Waterhouse papers

because of her position in Cyprus, Jordan and Kenya, was self-delusion.'²⁴¹ At midnight after this meeting the Suez Group formally declared its decision to vote against 'any treaty, which involved the removal of all fighting troops from the Suez Canal area'.²⁴² Legge-Bourke announced his intention to sit as an Independent Conservative on 14 July 1954; Chairman of the Empire Economic Union and with a distinguished war record, he was the second Conservative that year to resign the party Whip (Mellor had resigned over the issue of MPs' salaries). It was a courageous gesture in the face of considerable pressure from the Whips, and one which made the Prime Minister very angry indeed.²⁴³

It is plain that the full weight of the Whips office was brought to bear on the rebels. While Waterhouse's public statements sought to put a gloss of principle on his resignation from the Chairmanship of the Defence committee, the Suez Group's leader was patently forced out by government supporters.²⁴⁴ No other member of the Suez Group was prepared to resign the Whip.²⁴⁵ The resignations of Legge-Bourke and Waterhouse made little impact, though they attracted considerable press comment and there was evidently considerable Tory sympathy²⁴⁶ for their patent sincerity. Sir Thomas Dugdale's resignation as Minister of Agriculture over the Crichel Down affair was a political event of far greater importance, and threw their resignations completely into the shade.

²⁴¹ Enoch Powell

²⁴² *Times* 14.7.54

²⁴³ Robert Jackson: *Rebels and Whips*, p.112

²⁴⁴ see *Daily Telegraph* 15.7.54 and 16.7.54

²⁴⁵ Paul Williams

²⁴⁶ *Times* 15.7.54

The many doubters were swayed by Churchill's personal intervention, if not by his sombre analysis of the vulnerability of the Canal Zone to nuclear attack. Certainly, 'to vote against Churchill was to lose sleep'.²⁴⁷ The Whips' moves to contain the rebellion proved effective as hints emerged that not all the Suez Group were prepared publicly to defy their front bench and risk a government defeat.²⁴⁸ In the event Labour supported the Government, which enabled the Suez Group to register its displeasure in the division lobby, rather than having to take the less obvious route of abstaining to avoid the odium of voting with Labour. Contrary to earlier press predictions of a larger revolt,²⁴⁹ only 26 rebels voted against the government. Of the remainder of the December 1953 rebels, 7 abstained (including Morrison, Hall, Hicks Beech, Rayner and Fell); Burden, Reader Harris, Frederick Harris and Clarke were paired; and Savory and Baker were in hospital. Herbert Williams had died three days before the debate. 'I think two or three others abstained who were not in our group, but sympathetic to us, among them Jocelyn Lucas. We would have done better if Churchill had not been against us.'²⁵⁰

'Fitzroy, Bell and Bromley-Davenport were the only three defections.'²⁵¹ In the debate Maclean declared that he had been sufficiently convinced by the strategic arguments and was now prepared - reluctantly - to accept the government's argument. His former fellow conspirators were livid this betrayal of their cause. Their reason was simple:

²⁴⁷ Lord Amery

²⁴⁸ *Times and Daily Telegraph* 15.7.54; *Daily Telegraph* 30.7.54

²⁴⁹ *Daily Telegraph* 15.7.54

²⁵⁰ Amery to Biggs-Davison 3.8.54, Biggs-Davison papers

²⁵¹ Amery to Biggs-Davison

'At the meeting before the vote in one of the Committee rooms upstairs, ... Waterhouse went round the table, asking us all whether we would oppose the government. He said anyone who wanted to quit could do so; there would be no dishonour. I remember Fitzroy declaring, "I'm certainly not going to support the government. I'm probably going to abstain." Waterhouse then submitted the names of those who would like to be called in the debate. Fitzroy was called ... and supported the government. After our meeting closed he must have trotted down the corridor to the Chief Whip. When Fitzroy was made Under Secretary for War soon afterwards, Julian [Amery] sent him a note: "As you are incapable of shame, accept my congratulations".'²⁵²

The Continuation of the Suez Group

The Suez Group had in essence 'shot their bolt' as a crusade against the withdrawal of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone base.²⁵³ Despite warnings of its continued opposition to evacuation,²⁵⁴ the issue of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement was totally eclipsed at the Blackpool party conference by the party's preoccupation with German rearmament. Legge-Bourke's application to have the Whip restored to him on 19 October 1954, together with the 'quietness' of the Suez Group at the party conference, seemed indicative that 'politically the issue of Suez withdrawal was dead'.²⁵⁵

However, most of the rebels wanted to continue as a cohesive

²⁵² Lord Lauderdale

²⁵³ Amery to Biggs-Davison 3.8.54, Biggs-Davison papers

²⁵⁴ eg *Daily Mail* 3.9.54

²⁵⁵ *Daily Mail* 29.10.54; Amery to Waterhouse 20.10.54, Waterhouse papers

group.²⁵⁶ Their opposition to withdrawal from the Suez Canal base had been symptomatic of a far deeper disagreement with their government: Eden's foreign policy involved 'the surrender of our rights to decide our own actions and reluctance to give a lead to the rest of the Commonwealth in economic and commercial matters'.²⁵⁷ Therefore it was hardly surprising that 'from the débris of the Suez Group now springs a new backbench Empire group'.²⁵⁸ The rebels took steps in the recess to maintain the solidarity of the group, through letters and private meetings, and to sort out an 'after Suez' policy.²⁵⁹ 'The only possible way the Suez Agreement can be lived down is if we could make a reality of all the talk about Middle East redeployment.'²⁶⁰ Henceforth Cyprus was to be 'the glue'.

Summary:

Although the Suez Group was recognized as the most serious backbench challenge to the government's foreign policy since 1951, its primary influence was as the Prime Minister's tool, rather than as an outside agency exerting pressure on the Foreign Secretary. Churchill came to appreciate very clearly the strategic absurdity of a huge base at the mercy of one nuclear bomb, and was haunted by his experience in the 1920s as Chancellor of the Exchequer, when it became apparent that the rearmament programme initiated by the Attlee government in 1950 was making Britain bankrupt. With his defection, the Suez Group's fight became a rearguard action. When the terms

²⁵⁶ *Crossbencher* 4.7.54; *Daily Telegraph* 31.7.54; Amery to Waterhouse 20.10.54

²⁵⁷ Legge-Bourke speech at Empire Economic Union, *Cambridge Times* 24.9.54

²⁵⁸ *Sunday Express* 1.8.54

²⁵⁹ correspondence in Waterhouse papers; see Geoffrey Wakeford, *Daily Mail* 3.9.54

²⁶⁰ Amery to Waterhouse 20.10.54, Waterhouse papers

of the final agreement were announced on 20 October 1954, there was 'no longer much fight left in these dissidents'.²⁶¹ However, as observers commented,²⁶² all depended on the spirit in which the agreement worked, as there remained many possible sources of conflict. Eden was hostage, in the eyes of the Suez Group, to Nasser's continued observance of the treaty.

²⁶¹ *Times* 1.11.54

²⁶² eg *Daily Telegraph* 30.7.54

**CHAPTER 10: THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THE MIDDLE EAST:
1955-1956**

The Suez crisis was the most divisive event to confront the Conservatives since 1940, and very nearly broke the back of the party in the aftermath of military intervention. However, there were several decisive domestic and foreign developments prior to July 1956 which helped the frustrated, angry, yet containable group of July 1954 evolve into the faction that seized the ear of the party and the Prime Minister, setting the parameters of party debate on the best way to deal with Nasser's challenge to British's position in the Middle East. These were Churchill's resignation from the premiership in April 1955, Conservative opinion of Eden as Prime Minister, and developments in Cyprus, Egypt and Jordan.

The Evolution of the Suez Group: 1955-6

(a) Domestic Factors:

(i) The importance of Churchill's retirement in April 1955 was twofold:

(1) the departure of the titan, and the loyalty and respect he commanded, was akin to the lifting of a great repressive force. All kinds of tensions and discontents could and did well up.¹ The Suez Group had long harboured unkind thoughts about Eden's suitability for high office, cemented by their hostility to 'his' treaty with Egypt; their reluctant support of Eden became dependent upon Egypt's continued 'good behaviour'. These MPs wanted a more 'Conservative' foreign policy generally and felt their government's increased majority after May 1955 (60) gave the backbenches greater room for manoeuvre;²

(2) Eden's own personality in the conduct and presentation of

¹ see Phillip Williams ed.: *The Diaries of Hugh Gaitskell 1945-56* (London 1983), p.411

² Maitland, FAC 9.11.55

policy: the political world rapidly filled with rumours of his moods.³ Inordinately sensitive to criticism, particularly to charges of appeasement (the skeleton of Munich still loomed large in the Tory cupboard), he was determined that no future crisis should resemble the events of September 1938.

(ii) Eden's feeble performance as Prime Minister: 'with an increased majority in the May 1955 election 'all looked set fair. Yet within six months there was turmoil within the party'.⁵ By the autumn the economy was in the doldrums. Eden was increasingly under attack for his delay in reorganizing the government and acting against inflation. Tory dissatisfaction with the persistent lack of direction spilled over into the Conservative press.⁶ Critical editorials in the *Daily Telegraph* in December and January culminated in a scathing criticism on Eden's half-measures and 'clumsy courtship of unfriendly and fickle Arab statesmen'.⁷ Eden was cut to the quick, and resolved to strike back at his detractors;⁸ not unnaturally, he turned to the field of foreign affairs where 'he was absolutely the master'.⁹

(b) The Middle East: 1955-56

(i) Egypt:

Eden's honeymoon with his backbench critics came to an abrupt end in September 1955 with the bombshell of Czech arms sales

³ see Lord Moran: *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival 1940-65* (London 1968)

⁴ Reginald Bevins: *The Greasy Pole*, p.37

⁵ Sir Edward Du Cann interview

⁶ see Williams ed: *Gaitskell*, p.421-2

⁷ *Daily Telegraph* 3.1.56

⁸ Anthony Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, pp.25-26

⁹ Robert Allan in Alan Thompson: *The Day Before Yesterday*, p.122

to Egypt. The spectacle of Russia leap-frogging over the Northern Tier confirmed Conservatives' worst fears of the emptiness of Egypt's promise to maintain the Suez base in a high state of readiness. Persistent anti-British propaganda pumped out by Radio Cairo, against the background of mutiny in the Southern Sudan (which reinforced the sense of Britain's betrayal of the Southern tribes), further primed Tory anger¹⁰, and prompted some members of the Suez Group¹¹ to look at possible alternative allies in the Middle East.¹² Amery shared the French politicians' view of the threat posed to Algeria by Egyptian nationalism, and was at the heart of moves behind the scenes to weld a Franco-British alliance in North Africa and the Middle East.¹³ Amery was also central to Tory pressure on Macmillan when Foreign Secretary for a closer alliance with Israel, as a means to counter Nasser's influence and because of Cyprus.¹⁴

(ii) Cyprus:

There was increasing Conservative anxiety over Cyprus¹⁵, where Britain's position was under attack from the Enosis campaign, and EOKA guerillas. Backbench rumblings were growing, orchestrated by the Suez Group¹⁶, calling for a clarification of government policy and decisive action. It was argued that

¹⁰ see Middle East Sub-Committee meetings May/June 1956

¹¹ Amery, Hinchingsbrooke and Hugh Fraser all had close links with Israel: Arthur Gavshon

¹² Amery, who enjoyed excellent contacts in Egypt, was also in touch with a group of rebel Egyptian officers. Julian Amery: 'The Suez Group' in Selwyn Troen and Moshe Shemesh: *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956*, p.121

¹³ Roger Louis seminar on Eden, LSE, 1992

¹⁴ see Legge-Bourke, MES-C 23.4.56.

¹⁵ 5.12.55, *HC Deb.*547.32-156

¹⁶ see *Times* 28.6.56; Suez Group letters to Heath (20.6.54) and to Eden (28.6.54), Waterhouse papers

the arrival of Russia in the Middle East reinforced the need for Britain's continued presence in Cyprus to protect the region from Soviet incursion, to keep the peace within and to underpin Britain's role as the rightful guardian and arbiter in the Middle East, to defend vital supplies of oil, and to sustain her allies in the Gulf, as well as her communications with the Commonwealth. No one was immediately inclined to regard these rumblings as an incipient backbench revolt, but they represented a serious body of Conservative opinion, which extended far beyond the original Suez Group, which was restive and anxious about Cyprus.¹⁷

(iii) Jordan:

Jordan was traditionally an area of British predominance - not only was her army British trained, with British officers, and commanded by the legendary Glubb Pasha, but the country received substantial financial support from London. The Suez Group supported Macmillan's attempt to persuade Jordan to adhere to the Baghdad Pact,¹⁸ since this would successfully pull Amman from Cairo's orbit. Conservatives were already alarmed¹⁹ by Macmillan's commitment to self-determination for Cyprus²⁰ when the furore over the failure of General Templar's (Chief of the Imperial General Staff) mission to Jordan burst upon the party. The blow to British prestige was attributed directly to Nasser; a barrage of Tory criticism erupted that because of Eden's indecisiveness, Britain was being maligned and insulted by an upstart Egyptian. Any image of firm and competent handling of Middle Eastern affairs further dented by the political storm surrounding the export of surplus war stores to Egypt in January 1956.

¹⁷ FAC 27.6.56; FAC 4.7.56; and *Times* 28.6.56

¹⁸ see Randolph Churchill: *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden* (London 1959) p.223

¹⁹ *Times* 16.12.55

²⁰ 5.12.55

The Catalyst: The Dismissal of Glubb Pasha:

Anthony Nutting later described the sacking of General Sir John Glubb as commander of the Arab Legion by King Hussein on 1 March 1956 as the start of the whole Suez episode. Although the Suez Group and its allies in the press were discontented with Eden's handling of foreign policy, they had been 'devoid of argument' until Glubb's abrupt dismissal. Coming hard on the heels of Eden's domestic discomforts, such a set-back in a sphere where Eden was the acknowledged expert, was 'the last straw' for the Prime Minister. Suddenly, 'everything seemed to be going wrong'.²¹

(a) The Reaction of the Suez Group:

The Suez Group were incandescent with rage. It fully shared Eden's view²² that this was another stroke in Nasser's relentless campaign. This was a 'studied affront',²³ the most sinister event since the Czech arms deal, and since the Foreign Secretary was at that moment in Cairo, a 'calculated insult'.²⁴ Britain seemed to be 'marching with dreadful certainty' towards a clash over oil in the Middle East which was more likely than any other event to precipitate a third World War. The Suez Group firmly laid the blame for this body-blow to British influence in the Middle East at Eden's door. The time for concession was past.²⁵ Eden must accept the challenge while the Communist position was still unconsolidated and show that there were points beyond which

²¹ Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, p.27

²² Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, p.27

²³ Waterhouse letter, *Times* 5.3.56

²⁴ Waterhouse

²⁵ Waterhouse

Britain would not be driven. 'Any vigorous action taken by the Government which brings Egypt to her senses and forces her neighbours to assess her true worth will receive general and enthusiastic support in the country. We should at once declare that any further traffic through the Suez Canal, any threat to a Middle East people or any movement of troops towards Palestine, any further plot to disturb the peace and embarrass the government of the Sudan, or ferment trouble in Libya, will be taken as an indication of hostile intent and will be met by sanctions, military and economic.'²⁶

The reinforcement of British ground troops and the air force in Jordan, was merely the preliminary step in the Suez Group's recipe for containing the 'xenophobic upsurge'²⁷ and ensuring a revitalized British presence in the region. 'An all-out effort now, military, then economic and political' was needed; France should do the same, or face the loss of Algeria. Britain should adopt a clear policy of unwavering support for her friends, deemed far more likely to earn the respect of 'neutralist' Arab nations, and counter the influence of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Appeasement stood no chance of stemming the anti-British tide.²⁸

To the critics' amazement, no Cabinet meeting had been arranged to discuss Glubb's dismissal. Determined to rectify this 'supine inattention'²⁹, on Sunday 4 March Amery and Randolph Churchill called on Butler and pressed him to seek an early Cabinet meeting. This was a shrewd move. It was perfectly proper for concerned backbenchers to approach Butler as Leader of the House. He was also still Eden's probable successor, despite his demotion from the Exchequer, was known

²⁶ Waterhouse

²⁷ Stephen McAdden letter, *Times* 7.3.56

²⁸ McAdden

²⁹ Churchill, p.225

to be disturbed by Eden's lack of grip, and represented the progressive wing of the party in Cabinet. Amery had probably approached Butler on Macmillan's recommendation, the other most senior member of the Cabinet. Butler's reputation for 'sitting on the fence' gave his support for convening a Cabinet meeting to discuss the situation greater weight. Randolph Churchill later recalled that Butler was surprised at their urgency since, in his view, 'not much was at stake'.³⁰ However, Butler did contact Macmillan, undoubtedly already primed by his son-in-law, and a Cabinet meeting was held the following morning.³¹

Intent on maintaining the pressure on the Prime Minister, the next day two letters appeared in the *Times*³² outlining the Suez Group's 'strong feelings and serious misgivings'.³³ Eden was pressed further in the Commons by Amery and Maitland demanding an emphatic reassertion of British interests in the area. There appeared an ineluctable correlation between the evacuation of the Suez base and the withdrawal from the Sudan - which had done nothing to secure Egyptian friendship for Britain - and Glubb's humiliating dismissal; significantly, Amery urged that in default of American co-operation, Britain should act for herself - a comment which revealed his knowledge of the outcome of Eden's recent visit to Washington.

For the time being although they were active, the critics were 'mainly content to make their views known and influence felt through the party's foreign affairs and defence committee rather than any independent action'³⁴ - a thinly veiled

³⁰ Churchill, p.225

³¹ Churchill, p.225

³² Amery and Waterhouse *Times*, 5.3.56

³³ Churchill, p.225

³⁴ *Times* 6.3.56

warning to the Whips. Disgusted by Eden's abysmal parliamentary performance on 7 March 1956, they maintained their pressure through letters to the press, and the normal party channels, hotly disputing as a dangerous fallacy the argument that the Arab/Israeli conflict was to blame for Britain's humiliation.³⁵ 'The crux is this: do we stay in the Middle East or do we go?' Their demand for the restoration of Britain's position in Jordan was justified on the need to uphold the Baghdad Pact, to sustain Britain's allies in the Persian Gulf, and to maintain access to vital oil supplies.³⁶

(b) Eden's response to the Conservative outcry:

Eden too was incensed by Glubb's dismissal. He wrongly attributed the blame to Nasser, but he correctly assessed the enormous blow to Britain's prestige. Significantly, Eden's main concern was that he would be jeered in the Chamber of the House.³⁷ With the Suez Group and at least half the national press insisting that 'a lost grip ... had to be recovered', in the view of Nutting, this was enough to stampede Eden, a man relatively unaccustomed to harsh criticism.³⁸ Crucially, now the bulk of the Conservative party endorsed the Suez Group's attitude. In the party committees, there were 'especially vigorous demands that action should be taken immediately to restore British prestige in the Middle East'.³⁹ Eden was also under considerable pressure from his Cabinet colleagues for a dramatic reassertion of British might; the majority were in favour of withdrawing the remaining British staff from Jordan

³⁵ Amery and McAdden letters, *Times* 7.3.56

³⁶ Amery, *Times* 7.3.56

³⁷ Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez*, p.340

³⁸ Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, p.32

³⁹ *Times* 7.3.56

without notice. Fearful of driving Jordan further into Egypt's embrace, Eden cast round in his desperate need to flex British muscle to silence his vociferous critics; he initially toyed with the idea of reoccupying Suez,⁴⁰ but then decided on Cyprus to provide the check for the apparent slide, banishing Archbishop Makarios to the Seychelles on 10 March 1956.

The Suez Group and its sympathizers were jubilant.⁴¹ Eden received a great ovation when he addressed the 1922 Committee and in the debate on Cyprus, when he asserted that Cyprus must be held to defend the oil of Arabia. In Sir Edward Boyle's view, Eden's gesture to placate the Suez Group 'unleashed certain emotions in the party that were dangerous and which could easily recoil on him in a few months time'⁴², as he raised expectations that henceforth whenever Britain was slighted he would take resolute action. In Nigel Nicolson's opinion, from this moment Eden became convinced that his role was to be 'that of a strong man who was going to speak up for England and for the Empire, for this is what the Tory party in the country really wanted, and in a sense he was perfectly right, they did want it'.⁴³

The immediate result of the Glubb episode was a toughening of British policy everywhere in the Middle East and East Mediterranean.⁴⁴ 'We and the Americans really gave up hope of Nasser and began to look around for means of destroying him.'⁴⁵ Eden made overtures of friendship to Israel and

⁴⁰ Shuckburgh, p.341

⁴¹ *Times* 13.3.56

⁴² Sir Edward Boyle in Thompson, p.125

⁴³ Nigel Nicolson in Thompson, p.125

⁴⁴ Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, p.36

⁴⁵ Shuckburgh, p.345

France, ended his objections to French secret arms sales to Israel⁴⁶ and lent support to France's policy of suppression in Algeria. The Suez Group welcomed this toughening of Britain's policy. Convinced by its intelligence sources that Nasser was increasingly under Communist influence and that his regime represented Britain's main enemy in the Middle East, it seemed logical to overthrow Nasser; 'this is indeed where Britain's anti-Nasser policy is already tending'. The inner core of the Suez Group gave considerable thought was given to the chances of a Wafdist counter-revolution supported by dissident Egyptian officers. Amery informed Waterhouse that Wafd spokesmen gave the strongest assurances that if in power a Wafd regime would be more co-operative.

'Much might depend on the extent to which Britain helped them return to power. Prospects of a counter revolution in Egypt will depend on foreign encouragement as much as on domestic circumstances ... Moreover, should the attempt succeed, a Restoration regime is likely ... before it is securely established to feel more than usually dependent on outside support and goodwill. During this period and perhaps beyond it Egypt might once again be very much under our influence. Even if a Restoration government ultimately proved a disappointment a good deal might still have been gained. The Nasser myth would have been broken, a communist coup forestalled and the immediate threat to the Baghdad Pact removed. At best therefore Restoration would seem to offer a chance of getting off to a fresh start in Anglo-Egyptian relations and at worst a means of paralysing a country which, under its present rulers is a real danger to our vital interests.'⁴⁷

Glubb's dismissal exacerbated the general mood of apprehension

⁴⁶ Williams ed.: *Gaitskell*, p.493

⁴⁷ Amery to Waterhouse 14.6.56, Waterhouse papers

that had built up over Eden's leadership. His government was struggling in more than mid-term doldrums. After disappointing results in four by-elections in February 1956, the dramatic drop in the Conservative vote at the Tonbridge by-election on 7 June delivered a further blow. The party was restive with Cyprus providing a rallying point for those profoundly concerned at the erosion of Britain's pre-eminence in the Middle East. Significantly, the issue had attracted far wider backbench support than the 1954 Suez Group rebellion. Eden's political future - given that he had 'virtually railroaded' the evacuation strategy through Churchill's cabinet in 1954⁴⁸ - became inextricably linked with Egypt's continued observance of the spirit of the 1936 treaty. The embattled Eden had no choice but to respond forcefully to Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956. However, the immediate use of force was not possible.

THE SUEZ GROUP

The Suez Group and the Suez Crisis: July-September 1956

The Suez Group felt Nasser's action vindicated its stand that withdrawal from Suez would lead to a rapid decline of British influence in the region.⁴⁹ Before Parliament rose for the summer recess, it became the most vociferous section of the party. Its reaction was a combination of an atavistic surge of the past (Suez as the fulcrum of the Empire) and a hard-headed and sober response⁵⁰ to the threat to Britain's

⁴⁸ Sir John Colville interview with Anthony Howard: *RAB*, p.228

⁴⁹ Amery, in Troen and Shemesh ed., pp.116-117. In July 1954 Amery received an intelligence report from Egypt which warned that the present Egyptian regime had decided to nationalize the Canal if it stayed in power: Amery to Waterhouse 4.8.54, Waterhouse papers

⁵⁰ Paul Johnson: *The Suez War* (London 1957), p.x-xi

position in the Middle East, and vital access to oil.⁵¹ Nasser's act posed a calamitous precedent for British investment overseas. He should be made to revoke his nationalization decree and restore the Suez Canal Company to its former rights - indeed, most people did not see it as 'nationalization', just plain theft.⁵²

Thereafter the Suez Group's moves behind the scenes were those of a three-pronged attack:

- (i) to create and maintain a political atmosphere that would deny Eden a diplomatic solution that did not ensure the permanent removal of the Canal from Egyptian control by an international body and Nasser's abject humiliation⁵³;
- (ii) given that the Anglo-French invasion force would not be ready until mid-September, to rally domestic support for the use of force if necessary; and
- (iii) to forge an alliance in the Middle East that would effectively halt Russian direct encroachment and check Moscow's stooges in Damascus and Cairo.

Once Parliament had risen for the summer, the Suez Group used the correspondence columns of the *Times*, and speeches in the constituencies to maintain its pressure upon the Government. From the outset these MPs harboured no doubts about the required firm action. 'The challenge to Nasser has to be met ... with a direct uncompromising negative. Never is Egypt, and least of all Nasser's Egypt to be allowed unfettered control of the Canal.'⁵⁴ Nasser had modelled himself on pre-war dictators: he had deliberately 'sown discord between Britain and the Arab world,' and had already delighted in flouting, whenever convenient to himself, free passage of the

⁵¹ Amery letter, *Times* 30.7.56

⁵² Anthony Fell letter, *Times* 2.8.56

⁵³ Waterhouse, MES-C 30.7.56

⁵⁴ Waterhouse letter, *Times* 8.8.56

Canal in defiance of the 1888 Convention. In the absence of an UN police force, 'the free nations themselves must redress the wrong ... and teach Nasser, any other aspiring dictator that crime does not pay'.⁵⁵

The Suez Group's principal arguments were emotional ones. Nasser should be forced to hand back 'our' canal in as humiliating a fashion possible. While not all went as far as Hinchingsbrooke's argument that the Suez Canal was an integral part of Britain,⁵⁶ the Canal's strategic importance to Britain, her Empire and Commonwealth, was thought to give Britain inalienable rights. But these MPs were not only concerned that the world's neck was being encircled by 'unpredictable hands'. There was an acute awareness if Nasser 'got away with it', his stock would rise inordinately,⁵⁷ and the situation in the Middle East would become extremely dangerous. Britain's ally, Nuri-es-Said of Iraq would be more vulnerable, as would Israel.

The Suez Group was firm: there should be no negotiation with Nasser until the decree had been revoked. 'Britain and France with or without America should present an ultimatum to Egypt with a time limit attached to it'.⁵⁸ The economic sanctions (freezing Egypt's sterling reserves; and blocking the Suez Canal Company's assets) were insufficient - the example of Europe's failure to bring Mussolini to heel after the Abyssinian war was cited. Stronger measures were needed. While it was the government's duty to determine exactly what these should be,⁵⁹ armed force, in this case, was fully

⁵⁵ Fell letter, *Times* 2.8.56

⁵⁶ Hinchingsbrooke speech, reported in *Dorset Daily Echo* 3.10.56

⁵⁷ Killlearn letter, *Times* 4.8.56

⁵⁸ Hinchingsbrooke, 2.8.56, *HC Deb.*557.1640

⁵⁹ Amery letter, *Times* 30.7.56

justified. Bolstered by its contacts with French politicians, who saw this as their chance to confront Nasser⁶⁰, the Suez Group was intent on preventing any capitulation to transatlantic pressure.⁶¹ It was well aware that the American administration in a Presidential election year could not tolerate anything which might lead to war, let alone defend Britain's oil interests and her lifeline with the Empire, but the Suez Group had no doubts that Britain could act independently in her traditional sphere of influence⁶²: Nasser 'must be taken down a peg or two', and Britain and France were the ones to do it.⁶³ 'It is really a question of whether the government has the necessary willpower.'⁶⁴

(a) The Influence of the Suez Group upon the Conservative Party:

Kenneth Love suggests that 'the rebels had no official standing and little organization'.⁶⁵ This is inaccurate. The Suez Group was united by a firm sense of purpose, held regular closed meetings, and many of its members occupied key positions within the backbench structure of the party. Ministers were very concerned about the critics' activities: 'It was not just what they might do, it was what they were doing! They effectively converted the Prime Minister to their point of view.'⁶⁶ Although the Suez Group was unable to keep

⁶⁰ Amery to Waterhouse 3.8.56, Waterhouse papers

⁶¹ Many feared an ignominious conclusion to the affair - see Harold Nicolson: *Diaries and Letters, 1945-62*, p.306

⁶² see Hinchingsbrooke, 2.8.56, *HC Deb.*557.1640

⁶³ Hinchingsbrooke, reported in *Dorset Daily Echo* 27.9.56

⁶⁴ Amery to Waterhouse 3.8.56, Waterhouse papers

⁶⁵ *Suez: The Twice Fought War* (London 1969), p.401

⁶⁶ Sir Anthony Nutting

'bellicosity on the boil' once the House had risen, the cumulative effect of its political sabre rattling raised Conservative backbench expectations of a swift and crushing diplomatic victory.⁶⁷

Throughout the protracted crisis, the Whips paid close attention⁶⁸ to its meetings and those attending. A young backbencher curious about the brouhaha, joined one such meeting at the Carlton Club. His innocent inquiry of 'why was it all so secret since surely the Whips had a good notion of the goings on' was quelled by a terse 'Shut up!' from one of the Group's leaders. 'But I was right, for when we came out of the room, there in an armchair at the end of the corridor sat one of the senior Whips, ostentatiously holding a copy of the *Times* in front of his face. He had, however, cut a large hole in the middle of the paper, and was busy writing down names as we came out'.⁶⁹

The Suez Group no longer represented a minority view within the party. Its demands for resolute action received widespread support; the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee commented, 'I would prefer a government supported by pashas or bandits to what we have got now, this Nasser fellow'.⁷⁰ At least five officers and members of the 1922 executive in 1956 were privately sympathetic to the Suez Group's views: Morrison, Charles Ian Orr-Ewing, Alan Green, Vere Harvey, and Legge-Bourke. In addition, the Suez Group had now grown well beyond its original number, who harboured 'latter-day imperialist thoughts'⁷¹. It was now approximately

⁶⁷ *Economist* 8.8.56 and 18.8.56

⁶⁸ Sir Richard Thompson

⁶⁹ Private information

⁷⁰ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe

⁷¹ Sir David Price interview with author

100 strong (out of a total of 345 Conservative MPs); the new adherents 'did not necessarily respond to some of the Suez Group's vibrations, but felt in terms of defence they were right'.⁷² Nor were the Suez Group MPs seen as political pariahs, indulged for their eccentricity and outdated view of the world. The national press was united in its indignation at Nasser's 'grab', apart from the *Manchester Guardian*.⁷³

Although some political observers did not regard the entire party as seduced by the Suez Group's rhetoric⁷⁴, the Group's views had acquired a remarkable reverberation.⁷⁵ The danger Nasser posed was felt to be greater by 'middle and older generations,⁷⁶ the inheritors of an imperial sense of military geography and an experience of a Middle East in which Britain held positions of power and influence' - a sense that Nasser was upsetting the natural order of things. There remained a residue of their guilt in accepting the appeasement of dictators in the 1930s which spurred some pre-war MPs into a determination not to countenance appeasement again in any form. However, the sense of the critical danger Nasser posed to the West, and to Britain and her imperial possessions in particular, was not confined to Tories over 40. 'In the 1950s on the backbenches there were far more aspiring Foreign Secretaries, than Chancellors or Defence Ministers! Most had been in the forces, and this had marked them.'⁷⁷

⁷² Sir David Price

⁷³ 28.7.56

⁷⁴ see *Economist* 18.8.56

⁷⁵ see Alfred Bossom letter, *Times* 10.8.56

⁷⁶ Iverach MacDonald: *History of the Times 1939-1966* (London 1984), p.260

⁷⁷ Sir David Price

(b) The Influence of the Suez Group upon Eden:

Although the extent to which Eden was bent on a vengeful war from the outset is disputed⁷⁸, Eden was determined that Nasser should be humiliated as publicly as possible. Importantly, backbench pressure for a firm line came not just from the Suez Group and their allies within the party. Nigel Nicolson reported to his father that 'most Tories are breathing fire and slaughter against the Egyptians'.⁷⁹ 'After Suez, we became the party'⁸⁰ may seem an exaggeration, but to a very great extent the Suez Group had educated the party to accept that something now had to be done.⁸¹

Although Eden's first statement on the Suez question in the House was measured, he soon appeared to be swept up by the hue and cry.⁸² Selwyn Lloyd had privately sought the Suez Group's endorsement of his 'extremely strong statement' before his address to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 31 July 1956.⁸³ The enthusiastic backbench reception of this belligerent message was of crucial importance in the hardening of Eden's rhetoric.⁸⁴ Although the Prime Minister was initially 'much

⁷⁸ Nutting vs Iverach MacDonald

⁷⁹ Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, pp.306-7

⁸⁰ Lord Amery

⁸¹ 120-130 MPs attended the MES-C on 30.7.56. 'Every speaker supported our general view. No one indicated dissent at all'. Waterhouse note 'Events Following Canal Seizure' 3.8.56, Waterhouse papers.

⁸² see Eden, 2.8.56, *HC Deb*.557.1602-1608

⁸³ Lambton (Selwyn Lloyd's PPS)/Waterhouse conversation before FAC meeting. Waterhouse notes 3.8.56, Waterhouse papers

⁸⁴ William Clark: *From Three Worlds* (London 1986), p.167; Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, pp.306-7

disturbed ... and thought Selwyn Lloyd had gone too far'⁸⁵, thereafter Eden certainly gave the impression in party meetings that he was determined to 'have a go at Nasser' to achieve a crushing victory. One young backbencher, 'catching sight of the look in Eden's eye', came to the immediate conclusion that Britain would be embroiled in a war over Suez by mid-August and he hurriedly changed his holiday plans to avoid the Eastern Mediterranean.⁸⁶

The Suez Group's behaviour prevented the party from cooling down sufficiently to let Eden climb back down to a position which gave him more room to manoeuvre.⁸⁷ As Eden had little contact with his backbenchers, either before or after the crisis erupted, '[this] distance strengthened the influence of our dissident group'.⁸⁸ By the end of August some political insiders thought the Prime Minister would listen to calmer counsels and might succeed in finessing his belligerent supporters.⁸⁹ But the political pressure was on Eden to avoid any suggestion that he might be compelled to negotiate for a long time.⁹⁰ The strain on the Prime Minister was beginning to tell.⁹¹ There was mounting restiveness among the reservists whose morale was plummeting; and impatience in sections of the press and Conservative party was hardening, with calls for immediate action and renewed talk of indecision

⁸⁵ Eden/Raikes conversation in the division lobby, 31.7.56: Waterhouse notes 3.8.56, Waterhouse papers

⁸⁶ John Baldock

⁸⁷ *Economist* 11.8.56

⁸⁸ Sir Richard Body

⁸⁹ Williams ed: *Gaitskell*, p.587

⁹⁰ *Economist* 18.8.56

⁹¹ Clark, p.178

at the top.⁹² Amery was actively hawking the slogan: 'Either Nasser, or Eden, must go before October'.⁹³ Faced with the prospect of protracted negotiations which might not achieve the desired end, or one that could be sold to the party as a triumph for Britain, by the end of August Eden was pressing Cabinet for immediate decision on the use of force if Nasser refused to accept the internationalization of the Canal.⁹⁴ Selwyn Lloyd relayed Eden's intention to 'go through with it' to Hinchingsbrooke, with the warning that 'there would be some diplomatic diversions to gain time, which we must not misunderstand'.⁹⁵

The Suez Group in Temporary Eclipse: September 1956

The Suez Group were confident at the beginning of September that the government was 'still firm', much encouraged by the landing of French troops in Cyprus. 'There comes a point of no return in military preparations and we may be fairly close to it already. All the same ... [Eden] will need more nerve than he has shown hitherto if he is to act in what is by now rather cold blood.'⁹⁶ The Suez Group still regarded getting rid of Nasser of equal importance to getting a satisfactory solution to the Canal problem, underwritten by a Anglo-French force permanently stationed in the Zone. 'There is always a danger that Nasser will climb down, I cannot help thinking the only surrender we could now accept would be too humiliating for him to survive. But plainly this is the danger and one on which we cannot count much on America.'

⁹² Robert Rhodes James: *Anthony Eden*, p.510

⁹³ Williams ed: *Gaitskell*, p.588

⁹⁴ Clark, p.180

⁹⁵ Hinchingsbrooke to Waterhouse 28.8.56, Waterhouse papers

⁹⁶ Amery to Waterhouse 3.9.56, Waterhouse papers

Much to Amery's amusement 'the Foreign Office have suddenly discovered they have no friends among the anti-Nasser forces and have accordingly come, slightly cap in hand, to me of all people to help'. Amery put them in touch with the opposition in Cairo.⁹⁷ He undoubtedly knew MI6 had concluded assassinating Nasser would make him a martyr; instead it was hoped an Anglo-French military operation against Nasser would arouse so much popular discontent that dissident Egyptian officers and politicians could seize power. With Britain and France in charge of the Canal and a new Egyptian government, the prospects of 'a new plan' for the Canal looked rosy.⁹⁸

The Suez Group's hopes of Eden's resolve were soon 'belied by events'.⁹⁹ The failure of the Menzies' mission¹⁰⁰ was not followed by the desired British action against Nasser; instead there were renewed cross-party demands¹⁰¹ for Britain to take the dispute to the Security Council. The Suez Group was firmly opposed to this¹⁰² and was already discussing an amendment for the party conference 'should we need one'.¹⁰³ Initial pleasure over the Suez Canal Users Association¹⁰⁴ (SCUA) as the opportunity for 'an incident ... of sufficient size to justify dramatic action'¹⁰⁵ with America's backing,

⁹⁷ Amery to Waterhouse 3.9.56, Waterhouse papers

⁹⁸ Amery, in Scott Lucas, p.193-4

⁹⁹ Amery to Waterhouse 18.9.56, Waterhouse papers

¹⁰⁰ 3-9.9.56 to persuade Nasser to accept the proposals of the London Conference for the internationalization of the Canal.

¹⁰¹ PRO.PREM11/1123 Oliver Poole to Eden 29.8.56; Fraser to Poole 11.9.56

¹⁰² Lawrence Turner to Biggs-Davison 7.9.56, Biggs-Davison papers; PRO.PREM11/1123 Poole to Eden 29.8.56

¹⁰³ Biggs-Davison to Amery 5.9.56, Biggs-Davison papers

¹⁰⁴ proposed by Dulles on 10.9.56.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Williams letter to his constituency chairman 2.9.56, Williams papers

rapidly gave way to disgust: when he saw news of Dulles' press conference on the tape, Amery exclaimed, 'We've been double crossed!'¹⁰⁶ With SCUA rendered bankrupt, there were renewed calls for recourse to the UNO, an organization for which the Suez Group had scant respect.¹⁰⁷ It was convinced that any claim by the UNO to superior moral authority was nullified by the membership of nations who openly flouted international convention. The consequence would undoubtedly be a Russian veto¹⁰⁸ - whereupon Britain would be faced either with not acting at all, or acting in default of a Security Council mandate, which would contravene international law. The UNO was failing to measure up to the needs of a grave situation, therefore Britain should not be constrained from taking independent action: 'Hitler was not stopped by the League, but by the will of free nations.'¹⁰⁹

The Suez Group made its opposition plain in the 1922 Committee, fearing the matter would become bogged down in a mire of legal language and irresolution. But it lost this round: when faced with the pressure from the 'wet' wing of the party, Eden 'failed to give leadership' and agreed to take the matter to the Security Council. This 'went much too far for the Suez Group'¹¹⁰ but little could be done to promote a belligerent policy before the party conference.¹¹¹ 'The military plan has apparently been changed and no effective action can be taken for several weeks; 4-5 weeks is the figure I heard today ... I hear the Jordanians are already asking us to withdraw from air bases there. I also had an indication

¹⁰⁶ Lord Amery

¹⁰⁷ Poole to Eden 29.8.56

¹⁰⁸ Turner to Biggs-Davison 7.9.56

¹⁰⁹ Donald McI. Johnson, Henry Kerby and Robert Crouch letter, *Times* 18.9.56

¹¹⁰ Churchill, p.252-3

¹¹¹ Amery to Biggs-Davison, Biggs-Davison papers

from the French side that they are beginning to despair. If the rot sets in Paris it will spread very quickly.'¹¹²

The Suez Group in Ascent:

(a) The Party Conference

'The general malaise which followed the abortive September debate fuelled Eden's difficulties with the backbenches who felt he had lost his touch.'¹¹³ The pretexts for military force seemed to be slipping away. It was becoming clear that, contrary to all expectations, Egyptian pilots could run the Canal. Nasser appeared to be getting away with his theft.

The Suez Group was determined to act to prevent the issue going 'off the boil'. With Parliament in recess until 23 October 1956, the party conference was the obvious venue. The government was on the defensive in foreign and domestic policy, with the party restless and impatient, and widely reported to be so,¹¹⁴ while the Labour party was 'in buoyant spirits' under its newly elected leader, Hugh Gaitskell. The clear undercurrent at Llandudno was that unless the government could pursue policies that were 'distinctly Conservative'¹¹⁵, Labour was going to win the next election.¹¹⁶ Therefore Conservative unity behind the government was of vital importance.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Amery to Waterhouse 18.9.56, Waterhouse papers

¹¹³ Lord Watkinson

¹¹⁴ eg *Economist* 29.9.56

¹¹⁵ *Times* 11.10.56

¹¹⁶ *Economist* 13.10.56

¹¹⁷ *Times* 11.10.56

To halt backsliding by their front bench and in defiance of the Chief Whip¹¹⁸, Waterhouse and Amery, ably abetted by Angus Maude, drew up an addendum which 'put teeth' into the original anodyne resolution in the foreign policy debate, put forward by crypto-members of the Suez Group.¹¹⁹ This addendum which was accepted (in itself an extraordinary occurrence) immediately¹²⁰, pledged support for a solution 'designed to ensure international control of the canal in accordance with the proposals of the London conference'. In the debate Waterhouse's robust message that at all costs and by all means Nasser's aggression must be resisted and defeated met with his audience's wholehearted approval. Amery's explicit warning to Eden received an equally enthusiastic reception: 'If the discussions at the Security Council do not bring Nasser to his senses, then I believe the process of negotiation will be exhausted. Every day strengthens the Soviet grip on the Middle East.' Any further compromise would mean surrender. Amery too played upon Conservative resentment of Dulles: 'We must go forward with American approval if we can get it, without it if they withhold it, and against their wishes if need be.' The debate was televised which provided a further fillip for the Suez Group's cause.

(b) The Impact of the Suez Group upon the Cabinet:

(i) at the Party Conference:

The Suez Group's concerted effort at Llandudno was crucial in the Prime Minister's later decision to use force. Eden saw the possibility of a triumph over Nasser had receded now the

¹¹⁸ Lord Amery

¹¹⁹ Churchill, pp.260-1

¹²⁰ *Times* 12.10.56

dispute had been taken to the UNO.¹²¹ While the party conference was proceeding, the Foreign Secretary was negotiating in New York with the Egyptian Foreign Minister; and Selwyn Lloyd, whose own instinct was for a diplomatic solution¹²², was sending optimistic telegrams about the prospect of a negotiated settlement.¹²³ Eden, who remained convinced in the very last resort action would be necessary¹²⁴, was increasingly fearful that Britain's position was being eroded.¹²⁵ Egypt appeared confident the crisis was 'burnt out'; therefore it was imperative that 'we should not be inveigled away in negotiations with the fundamentals to which we have held all along'.¹²⁶ He was insistent that Britain 'should not be parted from the French'.¹²⁷

The Cabinet plainly hoped to regain the initiative from the Suez Group which was riding on the crest of the wave. Butler and Lennox-Boyd were closely involved in the Chief Whip's frantic manoeuvres to reduce the impact of the Suez Group's addendum.¹²⁸ Whatever the later debate over Nutting's integrity, his speech¹²⁹ 'left little, if anything for the

¹²¹ Sir Anthony Nutting interview with Richard Lamb: *The Failure of the Eden Government* (London 1987), p.228

¹²² Sir Anthony Nutting in Lamb, p.228

¹²³ see PRO.PREM11/1102

¹²⁴ PRO.PREM11/1102 Eden to Selwyn Lloyd telegram T.440/56 7.10.56

¹²⁵ PRO.PREM11/1102 Eden to Selwyn Lloyd T.445/56 8.10.56

¹²⁶ Eden to Selwyn Lloyd 7.10.56

¹²⁷ PRO.PREM11/1102 Eden to Selwyn Lloyd telegrams 7.10.56 and 12.10.56

¹²⁸ Waterhouse notes on 'Suez Canal Comings and Goings at the Conservative Conference 16.10.56', Waterhouse papers

¹²⁹ Nutting delivered Salisbury's speech, the text of which was cleared by the Cabinet beforehand.

Suez Group to say against the Government'.¹³⁰ However, this proved a high-risk approach. 'The conference ... permitted the party's fretful to blow off steam' but the audience's support of the Suez Group's strident rhetoric from the platform created the fear in the minds of many in the Cabinet that if the government did not act on the brave words uttered by ministers at the conference, these would be shown up as 'rhetorical verbiage'.¹³¹ Eden did nothing to defuse the charged atmosphere at Llandudno. The Prime Minister, who had just risen from his sick bed, wound up the conference on 13 October 1956 with a pugnacious speech.¹³² To tremendous applause, he echoed Nutting's commitment that the government meant business and 'will stand firm'. He concluded that Britain would continue her military preparations in the Eastern Mediterranean: 'I have always said force is the last resort, but it cannot be excluded'. The day after the end of the conference, Eden received a deputation from General Challe and Acting Foreign Minister, Albert Gazier.

(ii) upon Eden: the French Siren 'Marianne':

The importance of the French government's links with the Suez Group cannot be exaggerated. The French feared Eden would weaken and not seek the desired confrontation with Nasser¹³³, leaving France isolated.¹³⁴ The Foreign Minister, Pineau, had long argued Britain and France should press ahead firmly on their 'chosen path' - military action against Nasser by no later than the end of October;¹³⁵ talking to the Americans

¹³⁰ Nutting: *No End of a Lesson*, p.82

¹³¹ Selwyn Lloyd: *Suez 1956*, p.191

¹³² *Times* 15.10.56

¹³³ see PRO.PREM11/1102 Eden to Lord Privy Seal T.415/56 27.9.56

¹³⁴ The French-Israeli military operation was dependent upon British logistical support.

¹³⁵ 'They allege the weather will preclude it later.' PRO.PREM11/1102 Eden telegram to Lord Privy Seal T.415/56 27.9.56

was a waste of time as 'they will never authorize any action likely to prove the fall of Nasser at any rate until after the US presidential elections'.¹³⁶ Throughout the crisis Guy Mollet, the French Prime Minister, maintained contact with Amery who was also aware of the French contacts with Israel¹³⁷ and had long kept in very close touch with the Israeli Ambassador in London. 'Amery was remarkably well informed, as the Israelis through their own intelligence network were aware of top level exchanges between Russia and America, and passed all this on to their man in London.'¹³⁸ Just before the conference Mollet urged Amery to keep up the pressure on Eden at the Party Conference 'as it may be our last chance to fuel the fire'.¹³⁹

Therefore it was a question of national and international pressure working in close communion on Eden whose judgment was affected by the strain of overwork, poor health, and a highly strung temperament. The Suez Group had educated the party to the point that after Nasser had grabbed the Canal something had to be done. The August recess had provided 'a breathing space for the government',¹⁴⁰ and inevitably had taken steam out of the issue. The rebels' role at the party conference was all-important in re-injecting this steam into public debate when the issue was 'going cold'¹⁴¹ and in demonstrating that the party as a whole would not accept anything that smacked of retreat. 'Their accumulated criticism did, therefore, have an effect on Eden.'¹⁴²

¹³⁶ PRO.PREM11/1100 Sir Gladwyn Jebb telegram to Foreign Office No.295, 9.9.56

¹³⁷ Lord Amery

¹³⁸ Arthur Gavshon

¹³⁹ Lord Amery

¹⁴⁰ Lord Amery

¹⁴¹ Lord Amery

¹⁴² Sir Edward Du Cann

Eden's own beliefs would have made him more susceptible to the Suez Group's arguments: he was personally less inclined than Churchill to work to secure American co-operation in all areas.¹⁴³ Like the Suez Group,¹⁴⁴ Eden was concerned at the extent of Soviet infiltration in the Middle East, and believed that there was an alternative government to Nasser.¹⁴⁵ And the pressure on Eden for a tough stance was strong: from the Suez Group; from Mollet and Pineau; from Clarissa Eden, who was 'eager that Eden should assert himself against the calumnies of Conservative newspapers and drawing rooms that he was a man of straw'; and from the pressure of his memories of the First and Second World Wars.¹⁴⁶ Personal factors were involved: given the 'rocky autumn',¹⁴⁷ the bumpy spring and the warning of the Tonbridge by-election, it was inevitable the Prime Minister should be concerned about the reception of his actions on the benches behind him, quite apart from his own hyper-sensitivity to criticism. Eden's leadership of the party was not yet seriously in question, but he would not have been human if he had remained impervious to the rip current of opinion within the party.

By 16 October Eden had opted for war. 'If it had not been for the Suez Group, Eden would have hesitated for a long time before he undertook such a dangerous manoeuvre.'¹⁴⁸ Despite Selwyn Lloyd's encouraging telegrams, Eden was faced with the stark prospect of undoubtedly protracted and possibly inconclusive negotiations; weighing very heavily in the scales was his knowledge, gained first hand at Llandudno, that his

¹⁴³ witness his willingness to oppose American action in Guatemala in July 1954.

¹⁴⁴ Amery to Waterhouse 14.6.56, Waterhouse papers

¹⁴⁵ Scott Lucas, p.101

¹⁴⁶ Hugh Thomas, *Sunday Times* 4.9.66

¹⁴⁷ Sir Anthony Nutting

¹⁴⁸ Sir Anthony Kershaw

party as a whole would not accept a less vigorous policy. Indeed, the party conference probably appeared to confer a mandate for military action against Egypt, which the Cabinet had been most reluctant to seek in Parliament.¹⁴⁹ To the increasingly ill Prime Minister, the French plan seemed miraculously to cut the Gordian knot.

(iii) on Macmillan:

The Suez Group also served to bolster the Chancellor's resolve at a critical time. In a private conversation with his son-in-law at the end of August,¹⁵⁰ Macmillan expressed reservations about the wisdom of an alliance with Israel¹⁵¹ and was upbraided by an irate Amery. The Chancellor's renewed determination to confront Nasser rendered him deaf to the crucial hints he received in Washington that his optimism of ultimate American benevolent neutrality was wildly misplaced; Macmillan assured Eden that 'Ike was really determined, somehow or other, to bring Nasser down'.¹⁵² In the view of his biographer, Alistair Horne, the effect of Macmillan's conviction that 'Ike would lie doggo' can hardly be exaggerated'.¹⁵³ Macmillan threatened to resign in September unless the government played its hand 'to the end'. The feverish Eden had just returned from Paris where the French government was agitating for immediate action, and the Chancellor's hawkish views enjoyed the support of a third of the backbench party.

¹⁴⁹ see PRO.PREM11/1099 Salisbury to Eden 9.8.56; CAB.CM CC(56)59 14.8.56 and Egypt Committee minutes 9.9.56. In both World Wars Britain had responded to an act of aggression.

¹⁵⁰ recorded in Amery's diary: Louis seminar on Eden and Suez, LSE, 1992

¹⁵¹ proposed to Eden by Macmillan in early August: Alistair Horne: *Macmillan 1894-1956*, pp.400-401

¹⁵² PRO.PREM11/1102 Macmillan to Eden 26.9.56

¹⁵³ Horne, p.422

Macmillan was also a rival for the premiership. Eden had 'a very deep distrust of Macmillan' and their rivalry, especially since 1953, had been a very important factor in their relationship.¹⁵⁴ The ill-disguised menace of the Suez Group for Eden¹⁵⁵ was that it would not have to look far for a satisfactory replacement. It was recognized in political circles that should Macmillan put himself at the Suez Group's head he would pose a potentially lethal threat to Eden's authority in Cabinet; thus Macmillan did not need to take any such crude action. This could not fail to influence Eden's assessment of the options open to him.

The Suez Group and Operation Musketeer:

Although the Suez Group had no official knowledge of British collusion with the French and the Israelis, its members certainly had a very fair idea of what was in the wind. Mollet, the French Premier, had assured Amery a week or two before the invasion 'it is going to be alright. We are going ahead, America will be intolerable but if we see it through, not only will Britain and France benefit. If we can win against America and Russia, I will make a good European of your Anthony Eden yet!'¹⁵⁶

Amery continued to question Eden's resolve to obtain and, if necessary, impose a satisfactory solution to the Canal crisis - that is, 'one that gets rid of Nasser'.¹⁵⁷ Determined 'we cannot go on giving the government a blank cheque', he was

¹⁵⁴ Lord Carr

¹⁵⁵ see Macmillan diary 13.9.56, in Horne, p.416-417

¹⁵⁶ Lord Amery

¹⁵⁷ Amery to Waterhouse 29.10.56, Waterhouse papers

debating with Waterhouse¹⁵⁸ the best means to increase party pressure on Eden when Eden announced the Anglo-French ultimatum to Israel and Egypt on 30 October. The Suez Group was jubilant at the outcome. Fears that Britain's standing in the Middle East had been weakened to the point that Jordan might demand a immediate revision of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty and Britain's withdrawal from bases there, her ally, Nuri, murdered or even revolution in Khartoum,¹⁵⁹ were forgotten. 'The Suez Group's policy is at last accepted. Here is our great chance to restore our position in the Middle East and build for the future.'¹⁶⁰ Britain and France in possession of the Canal would be able to make satisfactory terms for both the future regime of the Canal, and the establishment of an international, or better still, an Anglo-French base to police the area and prevent future hostilities between Israel and Egypt.¹⁶¹

Eden's announcement of an Anglo-French intervention received most Conservatives' hearty endorsement.¹⁶² Immediately before the Israeli attack on Egypt, there had been Conservative fears that the Tripartite Declaration could result in Britain fighting Jordan in a future Middle Eastern conflict (which appeared imminent), or even with Egypt against Iraq;¹⁶³ Britain was now fighting the 'right' war. Many, who were fed up with the humiliations, had little time for niceties; they wanted Nasser toppled and 'our' canal back. 'Eden striking a blow for world order. Nasser had to be checked - it was important for the whole trading world and the

¹⁵⁸ Amery to Waterhouse 29.10.56

¹⁵⁹ Amery to Waterhouse 29.10.56

¹⁶⁰ Amery diary entry 1.11.56, quoted in Louis seminar, Eden and Suez, LSE 1992

¹⁶¹ Amery, in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.121

¹⁶² Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.312

¹⁶³ see Longden, FAC 29.11.56

continued threats to the new state of Israel were intolerable'.¹⁶⁴ 'We asked ourselves, when was the last time the Egyptian Army won an engagement? It was the second act of Aïda.'¹⁶⁵ Resolutions of support for Eden's policy were flooding into Central Office, as were letters from constituents and Labour voters.¹⁶⁶ Once the expedition was launched, the military operation held a cross-party appeal. 'That weekend I went round the some of the pubs of my constituency [Hendon North]. Life-long Labour supporters were coming up to me saying, "I'm against the Tories, but you're right on this one. We know these Gyppos". Of course they were all ex-8th Army, and had no respect for Egyptians'.¹⁶⁷ 'Their jingoism was coloured by a general feeling, a hangover from the last War, that the Egyptians should be thumped regularly.'¹⁶⁸ Others attributed constituency support to more of a visceral reaction - 'Our boys are in danger' - rather than a thinking response.¹⁶⁹ The widespread antipathy to Dulles reinforced this further: 'anything which simultaneously hit Nasser for six, and Dulles for six, must be good'.¹⁷⁰

Whatever their private doubts about the morality of the venture,¹⁷¹ Tories were scornful of Labour's arguments: letting 'things rip until the UNO could intervene' was seen as both unrealistic and impractical. It was glaringly obvious

¹⁶⁴ Sir Bernard Braine

¹⁶⁵ Sir Reginald Bennett

¹⁶⁶ Lord Amery

¹⁶⁷ Lord Orr-Ewing

¹⁶⁸ Sir Anthony Kershaw

¹⁶⁹ Lord Watkinson

¹⁷⁰ Nigel Nicolson in Thompson, p.141

¹⁷¹ Godfrey Nicholson, FAC 21.11.56

that the UNO could not assemble a force immediately, quite apart from the problems of language and channels of command. The sceptics accepted the Suez Group's arguments that Britain and France had the base and all the necessary equipment, and concluded 'those who pretend a UNO force would function effectively as a fire brigade conveniently forget that the first object of any fire brigade is to deal with the fire before it gets out of control'.¹⁷² However, the sceptics questioned the aims of the military operation; if it was just to secure the Canal, they doubted whether Nasser would necessarily fall - which would in turn reproduce all the old problems which had led to the 1954 agreement. 'If, on the other hand, the objective was to topple Nasser, this could only [be] achieved by a direct onslaught on Cairo and Alexandria'¹⁷³ - an argument with which both the Suez and Anti-Suez MPs agreed.¹⁷⁴ MPs on all sides were well aware that continued political support for Eden was dependent upon a quick and overwhelming success against Egypt.¹⁷⁵ The initially strong Conservative support eroded when it was realised just how long the military operation would take.¹⁷⁶ The lack of information was immensely frustrating. It rapidly became apparent to the backbenchers that even a sizeable proportion of the government were equally in the dark.¹⁷⁷ All the signs were that Eden was running a very personal policy,¹⁷⁸ although this was not in fact the case.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Charles Mott-Radclyffe: *Foreign Body in the Eye*, p.225

¹⁷³ Mott-Radclyffe, p.224

¹⁷⁴ Sir David Price

¹⁷⁵ Sir Gilbert Longden interview; Christopher Hollis in *Punch* 7.11.56

¹⁷⁶ Sir Anthony Kershaw

¹⁷⁷ Mott-Radcliffe, p.222

¹⁷⁸ *Economist* 3.11.56

¹⁷⁹ see David Carlton: *Anthony Eden*, and Louis seminar, LSE

All wanted a rapid conclusion to the crisis.¹⁸⁰ '90% of the party were ex-servicemen'¹⁸¹ and the incompetence was baffling.¹⁸² Sensing support for Eden was slipping away, the Suez Group stepped up its pressure. But the support of the Suez Group and its sympathizers and the growing impatience of the French government (who had given up all concern with appearances and wanted to launch an attack on the Canal with open Israeli support) could not match the heavy artillery trained upon the beleaguered Eden. He was under mounting pressure to stop from all sides - from the White House, in the United Nations, from the Commonwealth, from Labour MPs whose sustained vitriolic attack on the Prime Minister created tumultuous scenes in the House, and from within his own party.

The Influence of the Suez Group: Cease-fire to Withdrawal

(a) On the Conservative Party

The Suez Group were aghast at the cease-fire on 6 November, a 'fiasco not through lack of power, but lack of guts. Eden [had] left the war unfinished to satisfy his pacific critics'.¹⁸³ 'Another 48 hours and we would ... have toppled Nasser and seen the emergence of a new [pro-Western] Egyptian regime ... [This] would have offered a new treaty over the Canal and the whole question of the base would have been up for discussion again.'¹⁸⁴ Indeed most Tories were first

¹⁸⁰ Mott-Radclyffe, p.222

¹⁸¹ Sir Edward Du Cann

¹⁸² Sir Anthony Kershaw

¹⁸³ Hinchingsbrooke speech on BBC Northern Region February 1957

¹⁸⁴ Amery in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.120-121

stunned and then infuriated by Eden's capitulation.¹⁸⁵ Having had the audacity to take such a terrific gamble, and having withstood the venom of the Labour party, Eden had then not had the courage to see the venture through. 'We thought the whole thing was thoroughly botched. Churchill's comment: "I would never have dared ..." was doing the rounds.'¹⁸⁶ For the Suez Group, Eden's abrupt departure to Jamaica on 23 November 1956 sealed his fate.

It had not occurred to the Suez Group that America would throw a spanner in the works. Perhaps their inside knowledge of MI6's liaison with the CIA in the coup which ousted Mossadeq had lulled them into a mistaken belief that America accepted the legitimacy of force, whereas America, hypocritically, drew a distinction between covert and overt action.¹⁸⁷ They certainly thought Jewish domestic pressure would muzzle America,¹⁸⁸ and Amery was undoubtedly aware of his father-in-law's conviction, following conversations with American officials in late September, that 'Ike would lie doggo'. There had been no thought that Britain would, or could, be constrained in the Middle East.¹⁸⁹

The Suez Group continued to meet¹⁹⁰ and prepare its strategy. Having concluded that 'while America regarded Britain as a major ally in Europe against the threat of Soviet expansion, they were equally concerned to destroy the British Commonwealth and Empire' and break British predominance in the Middle East, these MPs became increasingly anti-American, even

¹⁸⁵ *Economist* 8.11.56

¹⁸⁶ Sir Anthony Kershaw

¹⁸⁷ Diane Kunz: *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* (Raleigh 1991), p.33

¹⁸⁸ see Churchill, p.296

¹⁸⁹ see Amery's Llandudno speech, *Times* 11.10.56

¹⁹⁰ Lord Amery

to the extent of 'informal contacts with Russian representatives, to try to persuade Moscow that a British and French presence in the Middle East was preferable to an American take over of these areas'.¹⁹¹ Now intent on keeping British troops on the Canal, either independently or as part of the UNO force, the critics' clamour was for British provision for clearing the Canal, an international settlement of the Canal dispute and a resolution of the Arab/Israeli conflict.¹⁹²

Having 'hi-jacked' the Prime Minister, the Suez Group now appeared to do the same to the party.¹⁹³ Despite warnings in the press,¹⁹⁴ most Tories had thought that the Americans would be 'benevolent neutrals'¹⁹⁵ in the Anglo-French action. 'We agreed with the Suez Group that the humiliation of being 'seen off' by the Egyptians was appalling'.¹⁹⁶ Most Tories felt cheated by Washington,¹⁹⁷ even those who had harboured doubts about military intervention.¹⁹⁸ The Whips' initial fears of embittered Conservatives abstaining in the crucial vote of confidence on 8 November did not materialize, but press speculation of a revolt grew as the Suez Group tapped Tory disgust at Washington's policy. At first backbench opinion attributed American antipathy to Dulles - 'We all said that this would not have happened if Eisenhower were

¹⁹¹ Amery in Troen and Shemesh ed., p.119

¹⁹² Amery, FAC 7.11.56

¹⁹³ Sir Anthony Nutting

¹⁹⁴ see *Economist* 11.8.56

¹⁹⁵ Robert Allan in Thompson, p.145

¹⁹⁶ Sir Reginald Bennett

¹⁹⁷ Sir Bernard Braine

¹⁹⁸ Sir Gilbert Longden

alive'¹⁹⁹ - but with Dulles incapacitated after an operation for stomach cancer, the unpalatable truth dawned that Eisenhower was intent on forcing a British withdrawal.

It was the prospect of an ignominious unconditional withdrawal which 'really excited the hostility of the Tory party ... Many of them were quite ready to see the UN come to Suez ... the difficulty was that the force was not strong, was not ready; it was not really competent and would come in very slowly'.²⁰⁰ This reinforced the sentiment that Eden 'had failed all along the line': the Canal was blocked and likely to remain so for weeks; Nasser was posing as a hero and martyr; Britain's oil supplies were severed and this country had not 'a friend in the world'.²⁰¹ Nor were there guarantees 'that the Suez Canal will be cleared and maintained as an international waterway'.²⁰² Conservative resentment of American policy²⁰³ had been festering since the early days of the crisis.²⁰⁴ The rumours that 'Ike' was threatening Eden with economic sanctions, and the 'hint of military sanctions'²⁰⁵ were enough to convince excitable Conservatives, already apoplectic at American behaviour in the UNO, of Washington's iniquity.²⁰⁶

'The ruling emotions of Tory backbenchers are an amalgam of

¹⁹⁹ Sir Reginald Bennett

²⁰⁰ Butler in Thompson, p.143

²⁰¹ Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.318

²⁰² *Times*, reporting on FAC 21.11.56

²⁰³ *Economist* 10.11.56; see Peter Smithers letter, *Times* 12.12.56, Frederick Bennett letter, *Times* 14.12.56; FAC 14.11.56

²⁰⁴ Dudley Williams to Waterhouse undated.8.56, Waterhouse papers

²⁰⁵ Biggs-Davison private letter 3.1.57, Biggs-Davison papers

²⁰⁶ see *Times* 29.11.56

all the emotions that make the worst counsellors - hurt national pride, a desire for party unity by those MPs who never wanted Britain to go in in the first place, but who are now more inclined to agree with the militants that there was more danger in getting out precipitously and the desperate urge of the militants to prove the military operation was in some way a success.'²⁰⁷ With the party in this mood, no political observer would predict what sort of compromise the government might be able to sell its disgruntled supporters. The Suez Group stalwarts, bolstered by reports from Wafdist sources which suggested 'if we hold on Nasser may crack'²⁰⁸ were discussing resigning the party Whip; Heath was warned that they would feel compelled to do so if there was 'any withdrawal of British troops before the Canal was cleared and international control of the Canal has been established'.²⁰⁹ Angus Maude²¹⁰ warned of a massive Conservative revolt if Britain was 'humiliated, betrayed by her friends abroad, forced to crawl to the Americans for every drop of oil,' while Nasser triumphed. Outspoken constituency support for the rebels' stance²¹¹ removed much of the Whips' clout.

The danger of mutiny grew, manifest in the tabling by 112 Conservatives of an EDM deploring the UNO resolution and the attitude of America. Sponsored by Sir Robert Grimston, Evelyn Emmet, Ian Horobin, Hinchingsbrooke, Martin Lindsay and Angus Maude, the signatures came from both the Suez Group and 'the larger body of members who represent moderate opinion

²⁰⁷ *Economist* 24.11.56

²⁰⁸ Amery to Waterhouse 26.11.56, Waterhouse papers

²⁰⁹ Hinchingsbrooke to Heath 20.11.56; Williams to Heath, Biggs-Davison to Lennox Boyd: 21.11.56, Biggs-Davison papers

²¹⁰ constituency speech 21.11.56

²¹¹ Lord Watkinson

within the party'.²¹² Although Grimston was one of the core of the Suez Group, he was also a very loyal party man²¹³ and former junior minister: the front bench knew he 'could be relied upon to make a speech to rally MPs round when the government was in difficulty'.²¹⁴ Other members of the Suez Group signed the EDM, but 'if [the Suez Group] alone had framed it the motion would have been in more extreme terms'.²¹⁵ The sponsors had deliberately drafted by the motion to attract the widest possible support to increase its impact on the government. The list comprised approximately one third of the Government's supporters,²¹⁶ and represented an extraordinary cross-section of new members and old; of keen Europeans (Hughes Hallet, Longden) and ardent advocates of Empire (Braine, Fisher); and of members (Langford-Holt, Vaughan-Morgan, Peyton, Linstead), 'who prided themselves on their rugged independence of thought'.²¹⁷ Pickthorn, a member of the Suez Group in 1953-54, had had profound doubts about the wisdom of acting with the Israelis for fear that it would antagonise the entire Arab world.²¹⁸ It was an extraordinary manifestation of the upsurge in anti-American feeling within the party, and lent credence to Maude's threat of a massive revolt over withdrawal.

At approximately the same time Geoffrey Rippon, Sandys's PPS and the most youthful member of the 1922 executive committee, put down a motion recommending that Britain should default on

²¹² *Times* 28.11.56

²¹³ He had been absent from the vote on the Heads of Agreement in July 1954.

²¹⁴ Sir Anthony Kershaw

²¹⁵ *Times* editorial 29.11.56

²¹⁶ *Daily Telegraph* 28.11.56; *Times* 29.11.56

²¹⁷ Sir Reginald Bennett

²¹⁸ MES-C 29.11.56

the US loan. 'I got over 100 signatures. I was called to see a Treasury minister who made me withdraw it. Julian [Amery] was furious: my motion had been chosen for Friday's adjournment debate and we could have had approximately 100 Tories standing up calling for reneging on the US loan. I withdrew because of government pressure - that did me a bit of good with Macmillan: "That young man knows when to make a point but knows when to withdraw".'²¹⁹ Amery was so incensed at this pressure that he approached Sandys (Minister of Housing and Local Government) urging him to consider resigning and leading a reconstructed Government. 'Duncan's reaction was sphinx-like.'²²⁰

Matters appeared to have reached a crisis during the weekend of 1/2 December: 'Is there a Tory Revolt? Yes says Hinch. No says Heald'.²²¹ The impression was overwhelmingly of a party 'confused and disunited'²²², compounded by rebels' speeches in their constituencies warning Britain could 'become the lackey of the US and the whipping boy of the UN'²²³, the 49th state²²⁴ and that if a decision to withdraw was taken by the Government, 'the Conservative party will be split from top to bottom'.²²⁵ The government's future was indeed at stake.²²⁶ In the end, the Suez Group were unable to maintain the support of the majority of their backbench colleagues. Following the

²¹⁹ Lord Rippon. In the event there was an agreed deferment of a payment on the American loan.

²²⁰ Lord Amery

²²¹ *Daily Mail* 1.12.56

²²² *Times* 1.12.56

²²³ Paul Williams, quoted in *Times* 1.12.56

²²⁴ Gerald Nabarro

²²⁵ Hinchingbrooke, reported in *Times* 1.12.56

²²⁶ *Sunday Express* 2.12.56

'bitter pill' of the announcement of withdrawal on 3 December 1956, there was febrile press speculation of a possible rebellion with estimates of the number of rebels ranging wildly from approximately 20²²⁷ to between 40-50.²²⁸ But, thanks to the herculean efforts of Heath, with the invaluable support of John Morrison, Chairman of the 1922, and other party grandees (Hurd, Guy Lloyd, and Legge-Bourke), the Suez Group's threatened schism did not materialize. 'The majority, brilliantly manoeuvred or alternatively cajoled by the Chief Whip with a sensibility for dealing with the Tory party and its coalition of awkward squads, held firm between the critics of the whole adventure and the critics of the cease-fire.'²²⁹ The high profile of the Suez Group was not to everyone's taste; there was a feeling that these MPs 'were carrying things to extremes. They were a very self-conscious, publicity seeking crowd, who loved pontificating at press conferences and giving interviews.'²³⁰ Hinchingbrooke was forgiven everything, but some saw in such people as Paul Williams and John Biggs-Davison 'too much of glint of satisfaction in their eye as they were tearing the party to pieces. And the press were loving it.'²³¹

Opposition jeers at Conservative discomfort served to bring the party closer together.²³² A large-scale backbench revolt would only serve to wreck the government, letting in Labour. Although diehard Conservatives felt that a small majority

²²⁷ *Sunday Express* 2.12.56

²²⁸ *Times* 4.12.56. With the current majority of 58, if a dozen Tories voted against the government, it would survive comfortably, whereas if the larger number were to abstain it would be a much more serious matter: Sir Thomas Moore, 1922 6.12.56.

²²⁹ Peter Rawlinson: *A Price Too High* (1989), p.70-1

²³⁰ Sir Reginald Bennett

²³¹ Sir Reginald Bennett

²³² *Times* 4.12.56

would 'hasten the reconstruction of the government, which they would welcome under a new Prime Minister',²³³ the prevailing Tory mood remained that there was no feasible alternative to withdrawal²³⁴; the only sensible way forward was for the Conservative backbenchers to back their leaders in pressing for effective UNO action. Heath reached a deal with the rebels²³⁵ and only a small number (15) abstained in the vital division, well aware that by the time the vote was taken their demonstration would not have serious consequences for the government²³⁶, as Waterhouse publicly admitted. Four of the original number dropped out, but three unexpectedly joined.

Julian Amery
John Biggs-Davison
Terence Clarke
Anthony Fell
Hinchingbrooke
Ian Horobin
Montgomery Hyde
Patrick Maitland
Angus Maude
'Billy' McLean
Gerald Nabarro
William Teeling
Lawrence Turner
Charles Waterhouse
Paul Williams

It was a much smaller group than that which had abstained in 1954, and only contained one 1955 entrant, Biggs-Davison. These MPs were unrepentant and 'ostentatiously remained seated

²³³ *Times* 4.12.56

²³⁴ see *Daily Telegraph* 4.12.56

²³⁵ Andrew Roth: *Heath and Heathmen*, p.111

²³⁶ *Economist* 15.12.56

during the division, which was thought to be very bad form'.²³⁷ Complete subjugation was too high a price to pay for American help, and the alliance could only continue on the basis of Britain being an equal partner. American policy amounted to the piecemeal breakup of the Commonwealth. To permit Nasser's victory was to assure a victory for communism.²³⁸

The vote marked the climax of the immediate political war over the Suez crisis. The mass of the party including all the 'crypto-Suez men' trooped gloomily through the Government lobby.²³⁹ This was not because they viewed the government's performance any more favourably; they had come to the conclusion that 'any further action which demonstrated the government to be insecure, would have repercussions abroad and on the Chancellor's efforts to defend sterling, particularly with the pound under such heavy pressure'.²⁴⁰ Once the division was over, 'parliamentary tension expired like a punctured balloon'.²⁴¹

(b) On Government Policy

Faced with American obduracy and threatened with schism on its backbenches, the Cabinet careered through November 1956 as 'the driver of a fast car, with no eyes except for the next bend in the road'.²⁴² The influence of the Suez Group on the content of government policy was negligible. Despite the

²³⁷ Paul Williams

²³⁸ Fell letter, *Times* 7.12.56

²³⁹ *Economist* 15.12.56

²⁴⁰ *Times* 6.12.56

²⁴¹ *Economist* 15.12.56

²⁴² *Times* editorial, 21.11.56

backbench tumult, it became increasingly clear that the Cabinet had little choice but to withdraw.²⁴³ Britain was hoist on its own petard: having gone in ostensibly to separate the combatants, London could not change its stance now. Ministers came to the conclusion that Britain must capitulate to American demands.²⁴⁴ 'To sit at Port Said with a UN force and a blocked canal in front of you and the threat of oil sanctions behind you seems a high price to pay for the smiles of the Suez Group.'²⁴⁵ The most the Cabinet could offer its backbenchers was an assurance about the competence of the UNO force to discharge its tasks and the prospect of a very early start on clearing the canal along its whole length - the sop was to be the British naval task force under UN direction. Butler and his colleagues were relying upon backbench political hard-headedness and devoutly hoped that the rebels would not make life any more difficult by withholding their support. In the end, a British contribution to the UN force clearing the Canal was denied and there were no arrangements to settle the Arab/Israeli conflict nor to secure an international settlement for the Canal dispute. Nasser seemed to have triumphed.

However, the influence of the Suez Group on the government's presentation of policy was considerable. In his rearguard action against unremitting American pressure for a complete British withdrawal, Butler was obliged to tread extremely carefully. At one point Julian Ridsdale stressed to Robert Allan, Eden's PPS, 'For God's sake, don't let's fall out with the Americans', whereupon Allan pointed to Waterhouse and said, 'We have to take care of these people first'.²⁴⁶ Heath also consulted the Suez Group for recommendations for

²⁴³ PRO.PREM11/1107 CAB CC(56)92 29.11.56

²⁴⁴ PRO.PREM11/1107 CAB CC(56)92 29.11.56

²⁴⁵ Birch to Butler, quoted in Howard: *RAB*, p.240

²⁴⁶ Sir Julian Ridsdale interview with author

the replacement of Boyle as Economic Secretary and to discover whether Derek Walker-Smith had its support; Ian Harvey, who had supported the Suez venture, was promoted to Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Supply.

The Cabinet was acutely aware that 'there would be an outburst of public indignation against the government if there were anything that smacked of a "scuttle" from Egypt before the objectives of the original intervention had been reasonably achieved,²⁴⁷ which would 'seriously weaken the government'.²⁴⁸ There were reports that approximately 70 MPs were seriously contemplating withdrawing their support if the government announced the withdrawal of British troops from Suez, which 'implied the demolition of what remained of a special British position in the Eastern Mediterranean and ultimately the whole of the Middle East'.²⁴⁹ Determined to 'expose the smallest possible flank for criticism',²⁵⁰ the Cabinet decided that the interim statement to the House on 29 November should be one of fact, not policy. 'If the immediate Parliamentary situation could be held in this way',²⁵¹ a more detailed statement of policy could be deferred until Monday 3 December, offering the opportunity for further approaches to the UN Secretary General and America for more definite undertakings²⁵² - 'so as to strengthen the case for presentation to Conservative opinion here'.²⁵³ 'The government must be able to demonstrate that they had secured

²⁴⁷ *Times* 22.11.56; PRO.PREM11/1107 CC(56)91 Minute 2 29.11.56

²⁴⁸ CAB CC(56)91 Minute 2 29.11.56

²⁴⁹ *Economist* 24.11.56

²⁵⁰ PRO.PREM11/1107 CAB CC(56)91 Minute 2 29.11.56

²⁵¹ CAB CC(56)91 Minute 2 29.11.56

²⁵² PRO.PREM11/1107 CAB CC(56)92 29.11.56

²⁵³ PRO.PREM11/1107 Norman Brook telegram to Eden T.592/56 No.64 30.11.56 and CAB CC(56)92 29.11.56

... the most positive assurances about clearance of the Canal which it was practicable to obtain in the present circumstances, and their policy in the UN had been designed to protect vital interests of Britain in the Middle East as these were interpreted by a large section of Conservative supporters.²⁵⁴

The turmoil within the Conservative party, whipped up by the Suez Group, worked to Butler's temporary advantage in his efforts to avoid a specific date for withdrawal.²⁵⁵ Washington was so alarmed at the outburst of feeling which seemed to threaten the survival of the Conservative government, (it was particularly loath to see a Labour government as Aneurin Bevan had just been appointed Shadow Foreign Secretary), that Eisenhower offered assurances of American oil and loans, and of 'America's intention to work towards clearing the Canal and the need to proceed to a final settlement of the problems of the area as speedily as possible',²⁵⁶ to sweeten the announcement of withdrawal, instead of waiting until Britain's physical departure.²⁵⁷ It was a small concession, but reflected how close Washington thought the Suez Group had come to bringing down the government.

THE ANTI-SUEZ GROUP:

In July 1956 even those Conservatives who were to be the most ardent opponents of military intervention, deplored Nasser's

²⁵⁴ PREM11/1107 CC(56)91 Minute 2 29.11.56

²⁵⁵ PRO.PREM11/1107 Foreign Office to Washington Telegram 5670 1.12.56; Notes of Butler/Humphries conversation 2.12.56 and Butler/Aldrich conversation 3.12.56

²⁵⁶ PRO.PREM11/1107 Note of Conversation. George Humphries to Butler 2.12.56

²⁵⁷ Sherman Adams: *First Hand Report* (New York 1961), p.267-70. PRO.PREM11/1107 Foreign Office to Washington telegram No.5612 29.11.56

action - that 'impetuous expropriation', which ignored proper safeguards and did not offer prompt, adequate and effective compensation'.²⁵⁸ However, decided second thoughts soon appeared on Conservative backbenches²⁵⁹ as cooler heads came to the conclusion that Eden had missed his chance. 'If we had possessed the requisite force of the right type to take action within a matter of hours after Nasser had seized the Canal, all would have been well. There is only one rule and it is a golden rule that should govern any action in the Middle East: it must be quick and it must be successful.'²⁶⁰

Conservative misgivings remained subdued until after the failure of the Menzies mission; as the *Economist* pointed out, 'no Tory wanted to sound pacific if the Government happened to be bellicose' while no backbencher could hurt 'his conscience or his personal prospects in the party by urging the government towards stronger action'. There was nothing to be gained in the constituencies by openly denouncing the Suez Group's rhetoric. Although Eden was very reluctant to take the matter to the Security Council,²⁶¹ he was warned of a 'general feeling that it would not be right to resort to military force without further conversations' including a referral to the UNO.²⁶² Salisbury was urging Eden that under the UN Charter, Britain could not resort to force unless the matter had been referred to the UNO.²⁶³ The Cabinet was conscious that if matters did lead to war, and a war that entailed bombing, this could alienate a large section of Tory

²⁵⁸ Boothby, *Times* 11.8.56

²⁵⁹ PRO.PREM11/1099 CAB CC(56)59 14.8.56 and PREM11/1123 Poole to Eden 29.8.56

²⁶⁰ Mott-Radclyffe, p.222

²⁶¹ PRO.PREM11/1100 Eden to Selwyn Lloyd M.191/56 26.8.56

²⁶² Poole to Eden 29.8.56

²⁶³ PRO.PREM11/1100 Salisbury to Eden 27.8.56

voters who held liberal views on foreign affairs.²⁶⁴

Parliament Recalled: The Influence of the Anti-Suez Group:

Well aware of the growing division in political opinion over the use of force,²⁶⁵ the Cabinet was extremely reluctant to recall Parliament.

'If we are likely to have unhappily to proceed to extremes, a debate in Parliament is going to put us in an impossible position. Yet in such circumstances and before action of the utmost gravity is taken it will surely be very difficult to maintain the position that Parliament has no right to be consulted at all ... In a situation such as this we should certainly not want to disclose our intentions and plans.'²⁶⁶ 'It would be highly embarrassing to invite Parliament to approve a proposal to launch a military operation against Egypt ... In both World Wars the Government acted in response to aggression then invited Parliament to endorse' its action.²⁶⁷

With the failure of the Menzies mission, Eden yielded to pressure to recall Parliament on 12 September. Conservative opposition to the use of force against Egypt before recourse to the UNO²⁶⁸ reached a peak in this short session. With misgivings about the progress of negotiations, and alarmed by

²⁶⁴ Clark, p.144

²⁶⁵ PRO.PREM11/1099 Salisbury to Eden 9.8.56

²⁶⁶ Salisbury to Eden 9.8.56

²⁶⁷ PRO.PREM11/1099 Egypt Committee minutes 9.9.56

²⁶⁸ PRO.PREM11/1123 Fraser to Poole 11.9.56, forwarded to Eden

the influence of the Suez Group, the 'Heald group'²⁶⁹ (as it was dubbed by some newspapers) began to coalesce. When Dulles' 'bombshell' effectively torpedoed SCUA²⁷⁰, backbench pressure mounted on Eden to refer the matter to the Security Council; the Cabinet also knew that the Commonwealth was in favour of this move.²⁷¹ Eden faced a critical meeting of the 1922 committee on 13 September 1956 held immediately before the resumption of the Commons debate on SCUA. Feelings were running high, and the rift between the supporters of recourse to the Security Council and the 'blood and thunder boys'²⁷² came out into the open. The whole mood of the party had changed from July: those in favour of taking the matter to the UNO were in a majority, and 'were not at all pleased with the Government's attitude'. Well aware that the Security Council would prove ineffective, these MPs appreciated that to say so in advance would alienate opinion at home and abroad. 'No one except France agrees we should [go to war against the wishes of the Opposition] ... if we went to war in defiance of our allies we should do terrible harm to all our alliances [NATO, SEATO and the Commonwealth]'; it would wreck any chance of making the UNO an effective force if Britain defied its rulings. There was a classic opportunity to demonstrate economic pressure could be more effective than military action.²⁷³

Heald and Nigel Nicolson insisted that any action against

²⁶⁹ named after Sir Lionel Heald, the former Attorney General who was well liked and respected, MP for Chertsey 1950-70

²⁷⁰ For the Cabinet the attraction of SCUA had been as a means to bring the issue as a head, with American backing: PRO.PREM11/1101 CAB CC(56)64 11.9.56. SCUA also 'should satisfy your colleagues that we need not, for the time being, go to the UN': PRO.PREM11/1101 Brook to Eden 10.9.56

²⁷¹ PRO.PREM11/1101 CAB CC(56)64 11.9.56

²⁷² Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.309

²⁷³ Nicolson private letter 21.9.56, Nicolson papers

Egypt (which Tories had concluded was now merely a matter of time) must be taken only after a referral to the Security Council; and unless Eden gave such an undertaking they were prepared to abstain in the division lobby that evening. The Whips understood that approximately 23 other Members supported this view. As the debate resumed in the Chamber amid confusion on the government benches²⁷⁴, Heald made another impressive contribution that commanded a 'wide measure of agreement on both sides of the House'²⁷⁵. This backbench pressure was decisive in persuading Eden to take the matter to the UNO²⁷⁶, despite American opposition.²⁷⁷ This gesture also appeared to strengthen Britain's hand in any future confrontation with Nasser since the Russians would undoubtedly use their veto (hence Dulles' opposition).

Over the next six weeks, from their private soundings within the party and contacts with the Cabinet,²⁷⁸ the Anti-Suez Group MPs were increasingly worried about the direction of government policy. The overwhelming impression they gained was 'the Suez Group are driving [Eden] into a corner, from which the only escape is either a humiliating climb-down or ... war'.²⁷⁹ Nicolson believed that Eden was 'only too anxious to hear a more moderate voice raised within the party' but he feared, at best, 'it will mean a row like Munich'.²⁸⁰ This impression was reinforced by the party conference.

²⁷⁴ Rhodes James: *Eden*, p.516

²⁷⁵ *Times* 14.9.56

²⁷⁶ see Macmillan diary 13.9.56, quoted in Horne, p.416

²⁷⁷ PRO.PREM11/1101 CAB CC(56)64 11.9.56

²⁷⁸ Private information

²⁷⁹ Nicolson private letter 21.9.56, Nicolson papers

²⁸⁰ Nicolson private letter 21.9.56, Nicolson papers

The Anti-Suez Group and Operation Musketeer:

The Anti-Suez Group saw military intervention as the triumph of the Suez Group. These Conservatives felt the diplomatic options had not been exhausted and the six principles thrashed out between Selwyn Lloyd and Fawzi in New York had offered a real chance of a peaceful and honourable settlement. While they had no liking for Nasser, it seemed insanity to have attacked him 'when for the first time in his career he appears to have been wronged, instead of being the wrongdoer'.²⁸¹

'The political aims appeared incomprehensible. The argument that Britain had gone in to separate the combatants? The thing was a nonsense ... I remember the night Israel invaded. I was doing the week in Westminster - it was a quiet week and not many were around. When I saw this story coming over the tape, I went with Hinch to the Library and together we got out maps of Lower Egypt. We both agreed that if we were going to intervene we had to take Alex and Cairo - these were vital to control Lower Egypt. The Canal was a side-show. The question was "What do we do then?" Install a puppet government? How long do we stay? How do we get out? There we disagreed. I was arguing we should do nothing and let Israel get on with it. Hinch saw that and curiously was as cynical; he was quite Old Testament about it. Hinch and I were both agreed about one thing - we saw it as a political operation not a military one. It was back to Clausewitz: war as an extension of politics.'²⁸²

Over the week Price became progressively more unhappy. He and others were deeply distressed at the split with Washington and

²⁸¹ Nicolson private letter 1.11.56, Nicolson papers

²⁸² Sir David Price

the talk in the military that 'you could not trust America'.²⁸³ The stupidity of acting without American support was seen as 'suicidal',²⁸⁴ particularly so close to an American election. 'It put an intolerable strain on the American alliance'.²⁸⁵ To alienate Britain's principal ally in NATO seemed the height of stupidity. The military intervention had disrupted to British oil supplies crucial to NATO defence and Britain's sustained economic growth.

Appalled at the damage to Britain's international position, they were mortified by the spectacle of British bombing. The proffered reasons for British intervention (the protection of British lives and property, and to stop the fighting) appeared specious. British lives were in greater danger because of British action; it could not be argued that it was intended to keep the Canal open for British shipping since the first action had been to order British shipping to stay 1,000 miles clear of the Canal; and it was odd, to say the least, to intervene against the military interests of the victim.²⁸⁶

Given the post-war emphasis on respect for international law, the whole reason for intervention in Korea, the violation of the UN Charter, particularly by one whose public reputation had been built upon the myth of championing respect for international law and the League of Nations, appeared cynical in the extreme. The Anti-Suez Group were in an extraordinarily invidious position in the eyes of their constituents. Most were members of the UN Association (UNA) and were occasionally invited to address their local branches,

²⁸³ Sir David Price

²⁸⁴ Lord Boyd-Carpenter interview with author

²⁸⁵ Nicolson undated letter to constituent, Nicolson papers

²⁸⁶ Nicolson private letter 1.11.56, Nicolson papers

yet they represented a government who defied the Charter.²⁸⁷ While these MPs recognized the UNO's limitations, they still believed that it represented a force for international political stability. Their opinion that Britain was in breach of the UN Charter found an undercurrent of support among the Tory barrister MPs. To flout openly the UNO's dictums was to threaten a return to the uncertainties of the 1930s.

Deeply disillusioned that a man of Eden's reputed integrity could act in so underhand a fashion, they had private confirmation of the extent of Eden's collusion with the Israelis, first from William Clark, Eden's Press Secretary,²⁸⁸ and from General Lyne, Chairman of the UNA, who had been aghast at Macmillan's conspiratorial wink to his private question whether the government had invaded Egypt to intervene between Jew and Arab, or to get its way with Nasser over the Canal.²⁸⁹ They were fearful that collusion with Israel would merely serve to unite Arab feeling, which was already inflamed against France and would cause irrevocable damage to British interests in rest of the Arab world. The Anti-Suez rebels were prevented by discretion from telling their detractors, like the Bournemouth Tories, that Eden and Selwyn Lloyd had lied to the House.²⁹⁰

They were horrified that the Suez expedition coincided with Russian intervention in Hungary²⁹¹, since it denied Britain (and France) any moral authority in seeking to restrain the Soviet Union. To risk war with the country divided seemed politically suicidal and morally indefensible. Similarly,

²⁸⁷ Nigel Nicolson

²⁸⁸ Nigel Nicolson

²⁸⁹ Nicolson private letter 6.2.57, Nicolson papers

²⁹⁰ Nigel Nicolson

²⁹¹ Sir David Price

there was deep disquiet that the Commonwealth had not be advised nor consulted. Not only was Britain at odds with her former Dominions; the public division within the Commonwealth itself threatened to rend the organization in two. MPs were fearful that although fundamental goodwill could restore the damage to relations with the old White Dominions, the position with the Asian member countries was very different.

These critics were in a fearful dilemma: how to make their views known forcefully enough without risking the appearance of being disloyal to their leader. Any open criticism would imply that Eden's reasons for military intervention were false and hypocritical; to adoring Conservatives in the country this would be tantamount to treachery. They were also confronted with the very real abilities of Heath, who was an extremely persuasive Chief Whip; and the trenchant views of their constituency parties - indeed any outright opposition raised the very real spectre of deselection.²⁹² During the first weekend anxious private meetings were held under the direction of Heald and Elliot. It was decided to make their views known through private channels. Over the week they became aware that the Cabinet was far from united. The Anti-Suez Group's position became increasingly difficult with Nutting's resignation (made public on 4 December 1956), because they had previously declined to criticize Eden personally. Nutting's resignation was a very personal attack, and was closely followed by that of Boyle, with his reputation of being the only one at the Treasury who had a real grasp of economic matters.²⁹³ Admittedly, neither of these two ministers held Cabinet portfolios. However, Nutting's resignation was an enormous embarrassment for the government.²⁹⁴ But whereas the departure of one of the men most closely involved in

²⁹² Nicolson private letter 10.11.56, Nicolson papers

²⁹³ *Economist* 10.11.56

²⁹⁴ see Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.315

Middle Eastern policy strengthened some people's doubts on the morality and wisdom of the military venture, to many others the spectacle of Eden being stabbed in the back by his protégé seemed positively Roman. 'Thanks for Nutting' ran the popular political quip.²⁹⁵

Anxiety about the wisdom of Eden's action extended far beyond the six public opponents of his policy. 'Most seriously consider what they should do and came unanimously to the conclusion they must tell the whips privately of their strong feelings, but support the government in the lobby for the sake of our troops'²⁹⁶ as 'it is not very easy to risk your life when you know that even the government's own party believe you should never have been asked to do'.²⁹⁷ 'Some could see that things were shaping up for a national disaster, but felt duty bound to support the government'.²⁹⁸ There was considerable concern where all this would lead; it was all very well to give Nasser a bloody nose, but it would reproduce all the old problems of the Canal Zone which had led to the 1954 agreement.²⁹⁹ If Eden's aim was really to topple Nasser, this could have only been done by a direct onslaught on Cairo and Alexandria which was not a practical proposition in 1956 - or by allowing Israel to advance to the east bank of the Canal, and there were great doubts whether this was logistically possible.

Israel was seen by many as a dangerous ally who 'would exploit the situation for her own purposes and we were mugs to get

²⁹⁵ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe

²⁹⁶ Nicolson reply to Balliol dons' telegram 2.11.56, Nicolson papers

²⁹⁷ Nicolson to UN Students Association 2.11.56, Nicolson papers

²⁹⁸ Private information

²⁹⁹ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe

involved'.³⁰⁰ Many seriously questioned the wisdom of launching a military venture when the country was so clearly deeply divided, appreciating that the recent World War could not have been won without the wholehearted support of the British people. The big shock for many came with the news that Britain's first military action had been to drop bombs. As the Cabinet had foreseen,³⁰¹ 'for many it revived unpleasant memories'.³⁰²

Gaitskell's apparent vacillation and the manner and brutality of Labour's attack and contempt for parliamentary order closed Tory ranks. There was widespread Tory disgust at Gaitskell's appeal (repeated in his broadcast on 4 November 1956) for Tory waverers to take action. It served to rally support to Eden's banner³⁰³; in Nigel Nicolson's view, Gaitskell clearly did not understand the Conservative party and its bond of personal loyalty to its leader. While the 'ferocious atmosphere in the House did decide doubters to support Eden',³⁰⁴ as the week progressed the continuing spectacle of 'a particularly bloody prize fight'³⁰⁵ daunted the stoutest heart.

Despite the tensions within the party, until the announcement of the cease-fire on 6 November 1956, the Tory ranks were still closed³⁰⁶, a tribute to Heath's skill. The Anti-Suez MPs were very slow to organize themselves, but gradually did so 'as the dragging international failure brought them into

³⁰⁰ Lord Watkinson

³⁰¹ see Clark, p.179

³⁰² private letter to *Times* 3.11.56

³⁰³ see *Times* 6.11.56

³⁰⁴ Sir Anthony Kershaw

³⁰⁵ Rawlinson, p.61

³⁰⁶ Rawlinson, p.70

the open'.³⁰⁷ Nigel Nicolson had approached Heald to discover whether he would lead the dissidents, but Heald emphatically refused to do so.³⁰⁸ Under the direction of Sir Alec Spearman, the group began to take shape. Nicolson, Elliot, Boothby, Heald, Foster, 'Jakie' Astor, Philip Bell³⁰⁹ and David Price met twice at Spearman's flat at 32 Queen Anne Gate to draft their protest letter to the Prime Minister.³¹⁰

The Influence of the Anti-Suez Group on the Government

The influence of the Anti-Suez Group in the week before the cease-fire announcement was more passive than active, but it did have a bearing upon the Cabinet's decision. The Whips' office was acutely aware that the government did not enjoy a massive majority, and of the likely impact of a public split in the British ruling party upon international and Egyptian opinion. There appeared the strong possibility that these rebels would vote against the government; given the circumstances, even the threat of 20 abstaining became critical.³¹¹

Although in retrospect it is possible to see the pressure from Washington, the UNO and the Commonwealth as the major factors in the Cabinet's decision, the rumour around Westminster³¹² was that Eden had been told that 30 Tories would vote against the government unless a cease-fire was ordered in the very near future. Certainly the threat of open revolt from so many

³⁰⁷ *Economist* 3.11.56

³⁰⁸ Nigel Nicolson

³⁰⁹ MP for Bolton East 1951-60, and a member of the Suez Group 1953-54

³¹⁰ Nicolson diary entry 5.11.56 in Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.317

³¹¹ Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.315

³¹² see Serge and Merry Bromberger: *Secrets of Suez* (London 1957)

Conservatives would have constituted vital pressure. The possibility of a majority as low as 10 in the division lobby in time of armed conflict invoked memories of May 1940. Eden himself denied that either reports of this dissident minority³¹³, of contacts between one or two Tories and the Opposition leaders played any part in the Cabinet's decision to call a halt. But he conceded that 'all were in our minds in varying degrees'.³¹⁴

Certainly in the turmoil of the time, the Anti-Suez Group's influence appeared to be decisive. In a political crisis when events moved and changed at bewildering speed, fact had little part to play, particularly as the whole affair appeared to be shrouded in such secrecy and intrigue. The very rumour of 'weak sisters' threatening to pull the rug out from underneath Eden was enough to condemn the Anti-Suez Tories in the eyes of their diehard colleagues, who regarded their dissent as typical of the 'soft underbelly of the party' that had been responsible for Munich. Rumours of contacts with Labour MPs firmly branded the Anti-Suez Group as 'quislings'³¹⁵; these MPs rapidly joined America and the UNO in the demonology of the Suez Group and their sympathizers.³¹⁶ In reality, 'largely by informal personal communication to parliamentary leaders, the Anti-Suez Group did add its pressure to the international forces seeking to stop Eden's military intervention ... They were helped by several factors: a powerful moderate group within the Cabinet; a general uneasiness among a wider section of Tories and perhaps the haunting memory in the Prime Minister's mind of how

³¹³ Sir Anthony Eden: *Full Circle*, p.557

³¹⁴ Eden, p.557

³¹⁵ Nicolson private letter 16.11.56, Nicolson papers

³¹⁶ see Amery, *HC Deb*.561.889-90 3.12.56; Robert Crouch refused to open a bazaar in Nigel Nicolson's Bournemouth constituency: Nicolson private letter 9.11.56, Nicolson papers

Chamberlain had fallen'.³¹⁷ 'Eden could have dealt with America if he had had a united party; and could have dealt with a divided party with Washington's support.'³¹⁸ But he had neither.

The Influence of the Anti-Suez Group: Cease-fire to Withdrawal:

The Anti-Suez group certainly claimed no public credit for influencing Eden. But their private boast was that once their protest had been lodged 'which they believed had achieved its objective',³¹⁹ theirs was a constructive influence in rescuing Britain from her diplomatic isolation. They saw no profit in continuing their protest.³²⁰ Under Spearman's leadership, a nucleus of about a dozen MPs were hopeful of salvaging something from the wreckage. The Anti-Suez Group prepared a letter to Eden calling on the government to place troops in Suez under the UNO.³²¹ Two further meetings followed, which led to the submission of two more joint letters to the Government. The Anti-Suez Group certainly recognized the danger to the government from the Suez rebels as

'the bulk of the ... party realize that the operation has been a disastrous flop and as usual in such circumstances, they are looking round for a scapegoat. They have found one in America which is now their central target rather than Mr Gaitskell and the Tory "traitors". The Government is in an awful hole: if they withdraw

³¹⁷ *Economist* 17.11.56

³¹⁸ Private information

³¹⁹ *Economist* 17.11.56

³²⁰ Nicolson private letter 7.12.56, Nicolson papers

³²¹ Nicolson diary note 5.11.56, in Harold Nicolson: *Diaries*, p.317

their troops at once they cannot survive the diplomatic humiliation and the anger of their backbenchers. If they stay we shall seriously risk the imposition of a form of economic sanctions on us by the USA.'³²²

The Anti-Suez group's determination to improve Anglo-American relations received a severe battering during November. Disillusioned with Washington's unyielding policy, Ridsdale and Sharples were to sign the critical EDM at the end of the month. The fact that 'the whole Conservative party [was] on the side of the Suez rebels'³²³ was one of the great difficulties of the Anti-Suez Group's position, for it rendered these MPs' 'opposition' as displeasing as Gaitskell's stance. 'This will not prevent us from flying our flag bravely in the breezes of committees. But little is to be gained by bringing down on our heads publicly the rage of the entire Conservative party inside and outside Parliament ... [but] the time may soon come when we must make another public demonstration of support for the moderate policy'.³²⁴

Older Tories, who were profoundly concerned at the possibility of lasting damage to the NATO alliance, were spurred into action by Grimston's critical EDM. On 28 November 1956 a group, 'including several former ministers and a number of members who have criticised the Government's Middle East policy in public,' tabled a motion urging the government to do all in its power to restore active co-operation with the American Administration. Elliot, the principal sponsor, had been very active in the Committee rooms and behind the scenes to temper the mood of the party. He had just led an all-party parliamentary delegation to the NATO Parliamentary conference in Paris, where he and others had had the opportunity to

³²² Nicolson private letter 29.11.56, Nicolson papers

³²³ Nicolson private letter 28.11.56

³²⁴ Nicolson private letter 28.11.56

discuss the frayed state of Anglo-American relations with members of Congress. The message they had received was that in spite of the strains, NATO must be maintained. Members of Congress appeared to have a better appreciation of British motives and problems in the Middle East than the Washington Administration. The thought was encouraging that 'greater attention would be paid to this more understanding approach'³²⁵ when Congress met in January.

The EDM's other sponsors included Heald, Sir Hugh Lucas-Tooth³²⁶ and Sir Edward Boyle. It was intended as a demonstration to Washington, where very close attention was being paid to Tory internal strains, that the party as a whole was not being carried away by the slogans of anti-Americanism; and to convince Butler and his colleagues that there was influential backbench support for 'the most vigorous action by the government to do their part in restoring the traditional ties of co-operation and friendship with the US and Commonwealth alike'.

It was signed by:

'Jakie' Astor

Humphrey Atkins

Philip Bell

Richard Body³²⁷

Alfred Bossom

Roger Conant

John Cordeaux

Frederick Corfield

Henry D'Avigdor Goldsmid

Edward Du Cann

³²⁵ *Times* 29.11.56

³²⁶ MP for Isle of Ely 1924-29; Hendon South 1945-70 and a former Under Secretary of State at the Home Office

³²⁷ An interesting addition, since by his own admission, he had been swept along by the Suez Group. *Times*, 29.11.56

John Harvey
Richard Hornby
Anthony Hurd (had also signed the critical motion)
Keith Joseph
Anthony Kershaw
Peter Kirk
Frank Medlicott
Godfrey Nicholson
Nigel Nicolson
Sir Ian Orr-Ewing
David Price
William Shepherd
Jocelyn Simon
Alec Spearman
Douglas Spencer-Nairn³²⁸

These signatures represented the sizeable body of Conservative MPs who, although sharing the widespread dismay at the state of Anglo-American relations, felt that America was not the only culprit. These MPs included those who publicly and privately had grave misgivings about Britain's policy of intervention, 'not least of which about the Government's failure to consult America and the Commonwealth before the die was cast. Members who hold this view were deeply concerned that ... there was a time after the Anglo-French landings when the Commonwealth was on the verge of dissolution.' They deplored any further fanning of this virulent anti-American feeling, since it was a fundamental requirement of British foreign policy that Anglo-American relations should be

³²⁸ Five later withdrew their names: Atkins, Corfield, Du Cann and John Harvey (who had been sponsors of an EDM on 28 November 1956, congratulating the Foreign Secretary on his efforts to secure a just and lasting settlement of all the problems of the Middle East, including immediate clearance of the Suez Canal, and the establishment of permanent international control of the Canal under the auspices of the UNO); and Kershaw. Body and Conant later added their names to Grimston's EDM, patently exasperated by American behaviour.

maintained on as close an understanding as possible.³²⁹

This voice of moderation and expediency was most welcome to Butler and his Cabinet colleagues in their battle with the Suez rebels. After the announcement of withdrawal, the Anti-Suez Group's efforts to improve the glacial state of Anglo-American relations were aided by an unofficial grouping of Conservatives with American connections who set about trying to improve relations with America: Beamish, Bossom, Joseph, Edward Leather, Price, Rawlinson, Ridsdale and Richard Sharples. Sharples had opposed America's stand on Suez and signed Grimston's critical EDM; however, he had telephoned friends in America to explain his action. Beamish, Joseph and Rawlinson all had American wives; Allan and Price had been educated at Yale and Tories with American business connections included Bossom, and Joseph.³³⁰ These MPs offered considerable support to Macmillan's efforts when Prime Minister to rebuild the Anglo-American 'special relationship' after January 1957.

Summary:

Transient pressures are difficult to measure precisely at this distance since so much of the Suez Group's and the Anti-Suez Group's lobbying was done in informal private conversations, and in the party committee meetings, the minutes of which make scanty reading. But the Suez Group and the Anti-Suez Group were not inconsiderable factors in the decisions of the day, and their influence was discernible at the time, both to political players and observers. 'I did see the Suez Group as

³²⁹ *Times* 29.11.56

³³⁰ Eldon Griffiths: 'Yanks at Westminster': Our Friends in Commons', *Newsweek* 3.2.58

goaded Eden on in the crisis.³³¹; but once the cease-fire had been announced the British government was forced on the defensive by an implacable American administration, backed up by the United Nations; there was nothing the Suez Group could do to sustain Britain's presence in Suez. The Anti-Suez Group played an important part in persuading the Cabinet to take the dispute to the UNO in September; however, these Conservatives' preference for diplomacy did not restrain Eden from colluding with the French and Israelis in October. Although the Anti-Suez Group's contribution to the political debate was not in itself decisive, the fact that these MPs represented a wider undercurrent of acute dismay within the party was an important factor in the Cabinet's decision to halt the military operation. Thereafter they offered constructive support to the beleaguered Cabinet.

³³¹ Arthur Gavshon

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

Conservative backbenchers in the period 1948 - 1956 had more opportunity to influence British foreign policy than has been generally appreciated. On both the issues of Britain's relations with Europe and with the Middle East, Conservative backbenchers as individuals and acting in concert influenced the climate of political debate and helped to set the parameters of acceptable policy.

The Europeanists

(a) The Europeanists in Opposition 1948-51:

There was no Conservative pressure group on Europe comparable to the Suez Group.¹ Those Conservatives who supported European integration formed a loose affiliation of about 60 MPs. They were motivated primarily by a desire for security against a resurgence of Franco-German antagonism and to provide a bulwark against the advance of Soviet Russia in Western Europe; European unity was also designed as an encouragement to the East European nations under Russia's control. In their view, Western Europe must be seen to earn American financial and military support. For some Conservative Europeanists, underlying this sentiment was also a thread of anti-American feeling; while they did not endorse 'Third Force' arguments (that Western Europe could form an independent bloc between the two superpowers), British leadership of Western Europe offered the attraction of bolstering Britain's position at the top table. The emerging European institutions should be directed according to British interests to offset American encouragement for West European federation.

¹ Sir Anthony Nutting

^{Re}
Europeanists in opposition enjoyed considerable success, despite their individualist approach, slender parliamentary numbers, an overwhelming Labour parliamentary majority and Bevin's antagonism. The strength of this Conservative tendency lay in the support of highly respected and influential MPs, above all in the unrivalled advantage conferred by Churchill's advocacy and the attention his views commanded. Indeed, as former prime minister and world statesman, Churchill constituted a pressure group in himself. The influence of the Conservative Europeanists was also enhanced by the cross-party support for Churchill's crusade, their membership of external organizations (such as the British Committee of ELEC) and above all, the stage later provided by the Council of Europe.

By mid-1948 both sides of the Commons were infected by Continental enthusiasm for European union, stimulated by Churchill's campaign and Sandys' invaluable work behind the scenes. Despite Bevin's determination to ignore moves towards European integration not initiated by governments, he was obliged to yield to a considerable degree to the momentum generated by Churchill and Sandys, ably supported by Churchill's 'private army', at the Congress of the Hague and thereafter, and to accede to the creation of a Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. At this new assembly, the Conservative delegates scored again against Labour, both in the manner in which they dominated the proceedings, and in Churchill's determination to secure West German participation. They contributed to the transformation of the Council of Europe from an inter-government debating forum (envisaged by Bevin) into the venue for discussion on political integration. Thanks to Churchill's initiative in the Strasbourg Assembly, the idea of a European Army gained currency and credibility in 1950, as it seemed to offer a solution to Western Europe's need for manpower while avoiding the nightmare of a revived, rearmed West Germany free to play the West off against Russia in her quest for reunification.

As continental federalists set the pace of the debate, backed by the Conservative Europeanists who were frustrated by what seemed to be Labour's dilatory approach to continental developments, there developed a two-track approach to European integration. The British government firmly favoured inter-governmental arrangements and its tactics, in response to continental pressure for federation, were to delay while appearing to be constructive.² However, as Bevin and the Foreign Office made no attempt to regain the initiative from their opponents to ensure that moves towards Europe were not travelling in parallel, public debate on political integration was concentrated on the Council of Europe, rather than developing the available machinery of the Brussels Treaty; similarly, discussion on economic integration with Europe was distracting from the work of the OEEC, the inter-governmental organization preferred by Bevin, the Foreign Office, Eden and the Conservative Sceptics.

There were important limits to the Conservative Europeanists' influence between 1948 and 1951. Bevin's hostility ensured that any success was piecemeal; indeed, Churchill's campaign reinforced Bevin's determination to pursue inter-governmental links. Wider Conservative support for closer links with Europe was lacking, beyond general agreement that 'better relations with Europe were a good idea.'³ Very early on senior Tories were noting the profound doubts within the party of the wisdom of Churchill's activities. Although the Conservative Europeanists strove hard to convince their colleagues that the causes of Empire and Europe were complementary, not contradictory, seen in their work at the Westminster Economic Conference of April 1949, they were not aided by confused and sometimes contradictory statements on Britain's role in a united Europe.

² Michael Charlton: *The Price of Victory*, p.63

³ Lord Thomas

Eden's resistance to the lure of Europe was of considerable importance, coming from the other recognized Conservative foreign policy expert. In the Sceptics' view, the Europeanists were placing excessive emphasis on Britain's relations with Europe, and paid insufficient attention to Britain's global position, and above all her responsibilities to her Commonwealth and Empire. This was underlined by a residue of animosity towards the French. To most Tories, France appeared a power of the second rank; she owed her permanent seat on the Security Council to Britain's insistence, not to her own efforts in the War. The continuing political instability in Paris did nothing to enhance the appeal of European integration. There was also irritation that West Germany was looking to France for her international rehabilitation, rather than Britain, together with disdain for what was seen as the emotional appeal of Churchill's campaign to excitable continentals. Most Conservatives shared Eden's opinion that the whole 'Europe thing' was insubstantial, while a small section of the Tory party carried this scepticism to the extreme of opposing European federation with or without Britain.

Conservative debate was concentrated in private in the party committees as the electoral advantage of seeming to offer a positive response to continental developments, compared to Labour's apparent resistance, outweighed the desire to stymie emerging ideas of European federation. As the Conservatives moved closer to power, considerations of the actual electoral wisdom of Europe weighed heavily in the scales. The Schuman Plan caused a crisis of conscience for many Tories who had previously been vaguely pro-European and fermented the backbench debate about the direction in which the supranationalism of the French was leading. The indication that Europe was no longer looking to Britain's lead does not seem to have percolated through to the bulk of the party. In all the arguments surrounding Labour's refusal to attend the Paris discussions, no Conservative addressed the fundamental

point that British participation was not acceptable to the French without the prior acceptance of the principle of supranationality. There seems to have remained the conviction in one part of the party that the French did not have the political courage to proceed in discussions with the West Germans without Britain's backing; and if the French did go ahead without Britain, that the talks were doomed to failure. Conservative Europeanists' arguments that every treaty involved a piecemeal surrender of sovereignty, and that Britain must attend the talks to direct the discussions in her interests, did not sway the majority of their colleagues. The Sceptics recognized the validity of Attlee's argument that it would be sharp diplomatic practice to join the Paris discussions, only then to pull out, and stayed quiet.

(b) The Europeanists in Power: 1951-56

Churchill's campaign in opposition between 1947-1950 had aimed at harnessing the emotional appeal of 'Europe', in marked contrast to the Bevin (and Eden) school of thought. By the time Churchill was returned to Downing Street, the whole question of European integration had become inextricably entangled with the explosive issue of German rearmament, and the EDC had become the chosen vehicle. None of the Europeanists possessed any enthusiasm for British participation in such a clumsy organization. The differences between the Conservative and Labour parties on European integration had become those of emphasis and tone, not substance.

Despite high hopes, the Conservative Europeanists failed to follow up their success in opposition once their party was returned to power. This appears a contradiction, given the mighty authority of Churchill and the manner in which he embodied the spirit of Europe, the presence of pro-Europeans in the government and Cabinet, and the quality of those on the

backbenches who supported his message. However, in the early 1950s the Conservative Europeanists who strove to educate their party faced overwhelming odds: the loss of Churchill's leadership and support; the growing animosity of leading continental politicians, such as Spaak and Monnet, who had been rudely disillusioned over Conservative policy on Europe in November 1951; the supremacy of Eden in Cabinet, compounded by Foreign Office jealousy of any free-enterprise efforts in Strasbourg; and the powerful distraction of the internal Conservative debate over imperial preference. The active Europeanists remained a tiny minority in Parliament. Crucial public and media support was lacking, and the 'bumpy first 18 months'' of Churchill's peace-time administration enhanced a general Conservative desire not to rock the boat. The presence of powerful sceptics in the Cabinet continued to act as a brake on their backbench colleagues who urged using the Council of Europe to counteract moves by the Six towards federation, and reinforced a visceral Conservative desire to stand aloof from the continent.

Those Conservatives who struggled for Britain's voice to be heard in the Council of Europe to counter the development of Little Europe and Britain's consequent exclusion, fought a losing battle to encourage the Foreign Secretary to offer a more positive approach in the council of the Fifteen. Eden's ascendancy at the Foreign Office, supported by key civil servants whom Eden consulted almost exclusively, meant there was little hope for the few who possessed a different view. Eden dismissed suggestions for an alternative to his restrained support for the EDC and was content to watch the efforts of the Six to weld Little Europe, confident that their enterprise would fail. The Eden Plan proved a temporary aberration. Eden did not see the need, nor did ministers at the Foreign Office see Europe as on the political agenda.⁵

⁴ Lord Fraser

⁵ Lord Glendevon

As far as the Foreign Secretary and the mainstream of the party were concerned inter-governmental moves towards European co-operation were proceeding most satisfactorily, seen in the reform of NATO in the spring of 1952, the expansion of West European Union in October 1954 and British association with the ECSC (signed 23 December 1954). Association not participation remained the name of the game. To the bulk of the party, the Council of Europe seemed a supreme irrelevance: 'it was like an engine without a gear-box; there was no method of implementing the plethora of plans'.⁶ It merely appeared to duplicate the functions of existing European institutions (WEU, the OEEC and the ECSC).⁷ The demise of the EDC in July 1954 reinforced their views of the inefficacy of the continentals.

It was not until the 1955 election, which saw the advent of another political generation, with different political experiences and connections, that attitudes towards Europe began to shift within the body of the party, aided by the defeat of imperial preference at the party conference in 1954. Only then was the Conservative party as a whole was prepared to consider closer links with Britain, the Commonwealth and Empire, and Europe, reflected in the growing backbench support for Macmillan's and Thorneycroft's moves to develop a European free trade area in the summer of 1956. The Europeanists were responsible in part for this re-education: in the 1950s key Conservative supporters of Europe had concentrated much of their efforts on the form economic integration of Britain and Europe could take. Thus they contributed towards laying the foundations in 1951-54 of the later EFTA bloc, through the Economic Committee at the Council of Europe, the British Committee of ELEC, and conferences of the European movement.

However, as in 1950, the Conservative Europeanists were

⁶ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe

⁷ see Smithers, FAC 30.5.56

singularly unsuccessful in pressing their government to participate in the negotiations for the common market in 1956, hoping that Britain could thereby ward off the creation of an economic bloc which excluded her. British governments proved remarkably consistent in their refusal to join the negotiations of the Six in the 1950s, from the Schuman Plan to the Spaak Committee deliberations of 1955-56. But by this point more and more Conservatives were coming to the conclusion that Europe was something which could not be ignored. It was not going to go away.⁸ Although Whitehall officials remained convinced the *rélanche* would fail, in 1956 - unlike 1950 - the British government 'was ready to take an initiative of its own, to forestall a continental trading bloc'.⁹

The Suez Group

The formative experiences of the Suez Group were in opposition: the Palestine crisis, Britain's humiliation at Abadan, and Anglo-Egyptian relations prior to the Cairo government's unilateral abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936. The backbench storm over the proposed Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan proved the catalyst for this backbench faction determined to fight what it had come to regard as Eden's appeasement of Egypt, and the threat posed to Britain's rightful, pre-eminent position in the Middle East by Arab nationalism and American policy. In a sense, the formation of the Suez Group was an admission by its members that their attempts to exercise informal influence had failed. The rebels concluded, however, that overt pressure would stand a greater chance of success as party managers could not ignore the cumulative effect of backbench criticism on the political

⁸ Sir Edward Boyle interview, BOAPAH LSE

⁹ John W Young: *Britain and European Unity 1945-1992*, (Macmillan 1993), p.47

atmosphere.¹⁰

(a) The Suez Group: 1951-54

The Suez Group was a Conservative phenomenon. It represented a clearly identifiable faction within the party. It possessed a named leader, held organized regular meetings attended by invitation only, and enjoyed considerable support in the Conservative national press (contacts which it also ruthlessly manipulated) and within the country at large, articulated through constituency associations. This exercise of influence was very public. No less important was the influence the Suez Group exercised behind the scenes, through membership of important backbench committees, official and unofficial. Although many political commentators placed the Suez Group on the fringe of the party - an 'irritant minority'¹¹ - these positions placed these men and their beliefs far more centrally within the pattern of the party than has been appreciated. Thus in the judgement of their peers, members of the Suez Group were not necessarily the negligible men some writers would have one believe.

The Suez Group vehemently opposed first a specific treaty (which in itself was unusual), and thereafter sought to promote a more hard-line approach to British relations in the Middle East, and specifically towards Egypt. This was a policy of confrontation. Despite the trenchant criticism from its opponents inside and outside the Conservative party, the Suez Group's adherents possessed a coherent philosophy related to Britain's position and role in world affairs. Significantly, this faction's activities did not extend into domestic affairs; many of its members held progressive liberal

¹⁰ see Richard Hornby: 'The Influence of the Backbencher: A Tory view', *Political Quarterly* Vol 36, 1965, pp.286-294

¹¹ *Times* 7.10.54

views on social and fiscal policy, and capital punishment. In this sense they were the heirs to Social Imperialism.

The Suez Group, in the inchoate form it took when the Conservatives were in opposition (Palestine and the Abadan crises), failed to win the day. It also lost the battles over the Sudan and the Suez Base Agreement; this was a paradox for, in addition to the sympathy it commanded within the party outside its immediate number, the Suez Group enjoyed Churchill's tacit support, which gave it considerable influence. But 'when Churchill accepted what Eden wanted, the Suez Group lost a lot of influence,'¹² which reveals its true factional strength as a backbench cabal manipulated by the Prime Minister to his own advantage against his Foreign Secretary in Cabinet.

Throughout the course of his dealings with Egypt and his battles with Churchill in Cabinet, Eden was obliged to pay assiduous attention to the presentation of his policy to his backbench colleagues, to the extent of giving private briefings to the Suez Group. The rebels exercised a discernible brake on Eden's pursuit of an agreement with Egypt through the weapon they provided their Prime Minister, their positions on backbench committees and the Progress Trust, their allies in the press, and, not least, through the prevailing attitudes towards backbench dissent. In the 1950s there was a greater independence of thought - as Churchill once commented, 'A tame Tory is no Tory at all.'¹³ - and the management of the Conservative party was more tolerant¹⁴ than it is today. The very fact that dissent was not stamped on but was aired in public, gave it greater influence on public debate. Admittedly, the feeling that the party could afford

¹² Lord Amery

¹³ quoted by Lord Lauderdale

¹⁴ Lord Carr

some dissent was encouraged by the 'friendly wind that is blowing in economic and general affairs'¹⁵, and by the far more critical Bevanite division within the Labour ranks. However, in 1954 the government's difficulties over the future of the Canal Zone base were greatly aggravated by their irresolution in two other politically emotive matters: MPs' salaries and the Crichel Down affair. In both these cases 'backbench pressure ... played a decisive part in the government's change of heart', whetting backbenchers' appetites for assertions of parliamentary authority.¹⁶

The views of their contemporaries vary on the actual influence exercised by the Suez Group MPs in 1953 and 1954. At ministerial level, Lord Aldington credits them with 'little actual influence, but they had to be taken into account and handled in debate'. Churchill's behaviour greatly compounded this nuisance factor. In the opinion of the mainstream backbenchers the Suez Group 'certainly slowed things down: Eden was always looking over his shoulder at Suez Group objections, always asking would this or that be acceptable to the Suez Group'.¹⁷ 'They had a substance because they appealed to a gut feeling in the Tory party and country. A lot more people wished they could have agreed publicly with their attitude. They mattered.'¹⁸ And in their own estimation? Some former MPs are inclined to be somewhat flippant: 'I don't know whether we had any decisive influence, but we certainly gave them a run for their money!'¹⁹ Others take a more measured view: 'We had considerable influence as long as Churchill was resisting Eden. When he accepted what

¹⁵ *Times* 7.10.54

¹⁶ *Times* 30.7.54

¹⁷ Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe

¹⁸ Lord Carr

¹⁹ Lord Lauderdale

Eden wanted, we lost a lot of influence'.²⁰ Although, by July 1954, the Government was not in danger of defeat on the issue of the Suez Canal base, the topic had been 'a long continuing headache for them'.²¹ 'But the seed was sewn so when we had Glubb's dismissal and the Canal nationalization, the Suez Group became THE party.'²²

Despite their best efforts and favourable circumstances, the Suez Group failed to carry their party up to 1954. It was hampered by the public perception of the calibre of its membership and its leadership.²³ Although its members included several ex-ministers, Privy Councillors, holders of important backbench posts, several very able and ambitious young MPs and respected older members, it appeared that the Group was comprised of predominantly yesterday's men.²⁴ This was in marked contrast to the Conservative Europeanists, many of whom seemed and were indeed the party 'heavyweights'. Therefore overall the Suez Group was not the sum of its parts. The limits of the influence of the Suez Group also reflected the shift in the party since the 1930s. Both Captain Waterhouse and Assheton would certainly have wielded great power within the pre-war Conservative party. Their power in the 1950s was more strictly circumscribed, partly because of the strengthening since 1945 of the power of Conservative Central Office over the Conservative Unionist Associations.²⁵ The effect was a strengthening of the party leadership at

²⁰ Lord Amery

²¹ *South Wales Argus* 24.7.54

²² Lord Amery

²³ A Cummings cartoon in *Punch* on 21.7.54 depicted Waterhouse in a glass box, holding an umbrella and fuming, 'By Gad, Sir'. The box's label read, 'Vintage Tory'; the button underneath was marked 'Press for Sound'.

²⁴ Lord Orr-Ewing

²⁵ *Times*, 15.6.54

Westminster. In addition, in 1953-54 the Suez Group did not secure wider support in the Cabinet. Churchill was supported by Maxwell Fyfe and Monckton, but other members of the Cabinet (Salisbury, Macmillan and Sandys) whom one might have expected to have condoned their campaign either supported Eden or were silent. In particular, Macmillan was noticeable in his reticence; he did of course, discuss the issue with his son-in-law, giving the advice: 'Don't assert, ask questions!'²⁶ Part of the problem was the great divide between those in government and those on the backbenches;²⁷ another was Eden's undeniable authority in foreign affairs.

The Suez Group sought to revive the imperial traditions of the Tory party of old, but the mood and character of the party had also altered since the War. By the mid-1950s the Conservative party at Westminster was far more a party of 'the professional middle-class', with the temper of this class. It was thus less susceptible to appeals to the doctrines and traditions of Empire; the rebels did not strike a contemporary chord among their younger colleagues, although their cause did possess a important visceral appeal to the party in the country. 'Having so many young MPs also dampened radical fervour. Many of them were too hungry for preferment to want to sacrifice their chances on the altar of rebellion.'²⁸ Here the importance of a competent 1922 Chairman was shown; Derek Walker-Smith worked closely with Patrick Buchan-Hepburn which helped channel backbench opinion. The small size of the Conservative majority from 1951-54 increased potential backbench influence, but also raised the fear of a bringing the government down and forcing a general election. Therefore powerful forces militated against 'rocking the boat' too much.

²⁶ Lord Amery

²⁷ Sir Anthony Nutting

²⁸ Anthony Seldon: 'Churchill's Post-War Government' in Peter Hennessy ed.: *Ruling Performance*, p.83

(b) The Suez Group: 1956

Paradoxically, the Suez Group appeared much more influential under Eden when he became Prime Minister, even though Eden was seen as the architect of the detested Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1954. Backbench concern over the future of Cyprus had provided the fuel for the continuation of the Suez Group after October 1954; domestic setbacks, dissatisfaction with Eden's premiership and Glubb Pasha's abrupt dismissal saw the Suez Group evolve into the faction that seized the ear of the party in July 1956. And importantly, by July 1956 Eden was on probation with an increasingly sizeable section of his party.

Convinced that the Egyptian leader was increasingly under communist influence and posed the greatest threat to British interests in the Middle East, the Suez Group were determined to see Nasser crushed - by swift diplomacy if possible, by force if need be; it was hoped that this would provoke a counter-revolution in Cairo, and the subsequent reopening of the question of a British garrison at Suez. Its influence became critical in the Suez crisis when larger sections of the party lined up with this core of opinion, as Conservatives concurred with the Suez Group's arguments of the need for a vigorous reassertion of Britain's position in the Middle East.

In the Suez crisis Eden was not pulled along passively in the wake of the Suez Group's rhetoric; but nor did the Suez Group follow in Eden's slipstream as he headed for confrontation with Nasser.²⁹ In Sir Anthony Nutting's opinion, Eden all along wanted 'to have a fight with Nasser' because of his sense of personal betrayal, but this was not necessarily a physical fight; Eden certainly wanted Nasser to be humiliated, and as publicly as possible. The weight of the Suez Group

²⁹ see Robert Rhodes James: *Anthony Eden*, p.456

upon the Prime Minister was considerable as it limited the options open to Eden: it 'had to be taken account of ... Eden had to tread warily because the Suez Group might well be able to start a fire burning in the party'.³⁰ Concern over his standing in the party, and his party's chances in the next election could not but feed Eden's fears of being thought indecisive in a crisis, particularly as he was now 'wearing the robes of Churchill' - as his wife repeatedly reminded him.³¹ With this came the corresponding feeling he had to make a mark on his supporters.

The Suez Group, both actively and passively, influenced the Prime Minister, by fanning criticism to which the Prime Minister was extraordinarily sensitive³², and as a support and a weapon in Macmillan's arsenal, helping to reinforce the expectation that America would tacitly condone any British action. The Party conference at Llandudno was crucial in Eden's decision to collude with the French and Israelis. Any possibility of a short, sharp diplomatic triumph over Egypt appeared to be receding into the mists of the UNO: Nasser seemed to be 'getting away with it'. Now the Suez Group brought home to Eden and his Cabinet colleagues what the party within the country would and would not stomach; the implicit threat was that anything less than a vigorous assertion of British's power would be unacceptable. To intensify this, and knowing that Eden was adamant Britain must not be divided from the French, the Suez Group was able to co-ordinate its pressure at Llandudno with the French government which was equally determined to see Nasser crushed. 'The Suez Group could not have done any more than they did. They effectively converted the Prime Minister to their point of view.'³³

³⁰ Lord Carr

³¹ Sir Anthony Nutting

³² Sir Anthony Nutting

³³ Sir Anthony Nutting

After the Cabinet's decision to launch the military operation, in Lord Aldington's view, the Suez Group did provide 'an extremely useful safety valve with the Conservative party on a major venture that had not been discussed and was kept close to the Prime Minister's chest'.³⁴ But the support of the Suez Group was insufficient to encourage Eden to press ahead with military action in the face of the international outcry, and its opposition to withdrawal could not withstand the realities of Britain's isolation; however, the outcry the Suez Group orchestrated in November and early December 1956 forced the Cabinet to 'play for time'³⁵ and pay assiduous attention to the presentation of policy.

Was the Suez Group right in its argument that any retreat from Britain's position in the Middle East would have disastrous results? The alternative thesis was Eden's policy of phased withdrawal, and dependence on the Baghdad Pact. Both sides correctly assessed the problem of the British garrison at Suez Canal Zone as a political one, but both arguments were based on a fallacy. Egypt saw Britain as an occupying power and regarded the Canal Zone base as theirs by right. Although Eden was correct in his appreciation of the need to remove the irritant from Anglo-Egyptian relations, he was mistaken in his hopes of the future benefits that would accrue from this, and in his belief in the future efficacy of the Baghdad Pact.³⁶ The profound animosity harboured by Arab nations towards Britain³⁷ as the perpetrator of the state of Israel was all-embracing; there was no appreciation of British attempts to take a middle line. By permitting the existence of the Tel Aviv government Britain was supporting the enemy. On the

³⁴ Lord Aldington

³⁵ Alec Cairncross ed.: *The Robert Hall Diaries 1956-61* (London 1991), p.79

³⁶ Shuckburgh feared Eden was using 'instruments that would break in our hands': Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez*, p.326

³⁷ Shuckburgh, p.311 and 314

other hand, the Suez Group's arguments of the need to stay in Suez to sustain British prestige were based on the assumption that if Britain sat tight, eventually either Cairo would see reason, or the Neguib-Nasser regime would fall and a more amenable government would take its place. Legge-Bourke might reasonably argue in 1956 that the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company was the logical outcome of Britain's withdrawal from the Canal Zone base, but in the Middle East in the 1950s Britain was damned if she did, and damned if she did not.

The Anti-Suez Group:

In stark contrast to the Europeanist tendency within the party and the Suez Group, this group had a short history. Although only six Anti-Suez Conservatives were prepared to criticize the government openly by abstaining, the Chief Whip estimated between 20 and 30 Tories shared their deep unhappiness.³⁸ In all, they represented an amorphous pressure group, whose defiance gave expression to general unease within the party. In the main they were traditional Tories, who were anti-Left, that is, anti-socialist - not that this necessarily made them 'Right'. Their small number and disparate outlooks and personalities, together with their mixture of ages and backgrounds hardly merit the description 'group', even if they appeared to have an organizer in Alec Spearman.

The nascent Anti-Suez Group was influential in pressing the Cabinet to refer the dispute to the United Nations in September 1956. However, this expressed preference for diplomacy provided an insufficient brake on the Prime Minister in his decision to collude with the French and Israelis to launch a punitive war against Nasser. As Julian Amery commented to Anthony Nutting following the latter's resignation, 'You are accused of deserting your leader; it was

³⁸ Private information

a case of your leader deserting you'.³⁹ When the cease-fire was announced on 6 November, none of the Anti-Suez Group claimed credit for influencing the Cabinet's decision. The widespread speculation that Eden had done so because of Butler and 40 'weak sisters', was misplaced but it was not wholly wide of the mark. In that the Anti-Suez Group represented wider Conservative anxiety over the wisdom and morality of military intervention, Eden acknowledged that the Anti-Suez Group was a factor the Cabinet's decision to halt the military operation.⁴⁰ After the cease-fire, the Anti-Suez Group helped to off-set the rabid anti-American feeling that swept the party in November 1956 and exercised a minor but beneficial influence in the work to repair the damage to Britain's international relations.

Rebel factions were usually temporary *ad hoc* arrangements, but of the above three groups, only the Anti-Suez Group conforms to this stereotype. The Europeanists represented an continued desire within the Conservative party to foster a more positive approach in Britain's policy towards European integration to harness European developments to Britain's advantage, whereas the Suez Group was a manifestation of the constant spring of reactionary pressure within the party over the decades. The Conservative Europeanists, the Suez Group and the Anti-Suez Group fared very differently. Both the Conservative Europeanists and the Suez Group aroused the ire of their peers, but the supreme anger of the party was saved for the Anti-Suez Group. 'The Tories never mind revolts on the right, since they know perfectly well such demonstrations are the inevitable concomitant of progress: a number of members can always be relied upon to mistake progress and sanity for bloody revolution. But revolts on the Left can be dangerous, as the only successful one they have had this century

³⁹ Sir Anthony Nutting

⁴⁰ Sir Anthony Eden: *Full Circle*, p.557

demonstrated fairly conclusively to the late Neville Chamberlain. For at the eastern gate the lone and level sands stretch far away; but at the western portal stands the enemy, hungry for rapine, loot and office.'⁴¹

⁴¹ *The Spectator* 24.5.57

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

*Parliamentary Debates (Hansard). Fifth Series. House of Commons
Official Reports 1946-1956*
Public Records Office, Kew
Orders of the Day and Notice of Motions, British Library
The Times Guide to the House of Commons 1945, 1950, 1951 and 1955
Who Was Who 1951-1960, 1971-1980, 1980-1990 and Who's Who
annually

Newspapers and Periodicals:

The Daily Telegraph Cuttings Library
The Economist
The Times

Private Papers:

John Biggs-Davison papers, House of Lords archive
Lord Hinchingbrooke private papers
Sir Harry Legge-Bourke private papers
Gilbert Longden papers (South-West Herts Conservative and
Unionist Association topical commentaries)
R W Mackay papers, London School of Economics archive
Nigel Nicolson private papers
Captain Charles Waterhouse private papers
Paul Williams private papers

Conservative Backbench Papers 1948-56:

Minutes of the Conservative Party Foreign Affairs Committee,
Bodleian Library, Oxford
Conservative Research Department briefs, Bodleian Library, Oxford
Minutes of the Conservative 1922 Committee, Bodleian Library,
Oxford

Transcripts of Interviews in the British Oral Archive of Political and Administrative History, London School of Economics:

Lord Carr
Sir Edward Boyle
Viscount Muirshiel

Interviews:

Among the former parliamentarians, party workers and journalists

who kindly agreed to be interviewed were the following:

Lord Amery (interviewed on 2.5.91)
Lord Aldington (24.4.91)
Sir John Astor (19.4.93)
John Baldock (3.3.91)
Sir Reginald Bennett (22.4.91)
Sir Richard Body (20.3.91)
Lord Boyd-Carpenter (1.5.91)
Sir Bernard Braine (20.5.91)
Miss Ursula Branston, Conservative Research Department, (13.1.93)
Sir Paul Bryan (11.2.93)
Lord Carr (23.5.91)
Sir Robin Chichester-Clarke (29.3.93)
Lord Colyton (8.5.93)
Sir Frederick Corfield (17.3.93)
Sir Geoffrey Cox, former editor of the News Chronicle (21.4.93)
Somerset de Chair (6.3.91)
Sir Douglas Dodds-Parker (15.5.91)
Sir Edward du Cann (23.4.91)
Lord Deedes (15.4.91)
Lord Eccles (26.3.91)
Lord Fraser of Kilmorack (22.4.91)
Arthur Gavshon, former Political/Diplomatic Correspondent,
Associated Press 1946-81 (12.1.93)
Lord Glendevon (18.3.93)
Sir Edward Heath (11.3.93)
Aubrey Jones (20.4.91)
Sir Anthony Kershaw (15.5.91)
Lord Lauderdale (7.12.91)
Sir Gilbert Longden (20.3.91)
Lord Margadale (21.5.91)
Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe (25.4.91)
Sir Godfrey Nicholson (6.3.91)
Nigel Nicolson (6.3.93)
Lord Nugent (13.5.91)
Sir Anthony Nutting (21.2.93)
Lord Orr-Ewing (30.4.91)
Enoch Powell (19.3.91)
Sir David Price (21.5.91)
Sir Robert Rhodes James (25.1.93)
Sir Julian Ridsdale (6.5.91)
Lord Rippon (4.9.91)
Wilfred Sendall, former Political Correspondent, Daily Express
(11.1.93)
Lord Thomas (20.2.93)
Sir Richard Thompson (9.2.93)
Lord Thorneycroft (11.3.93)
Lord Watkinson (18.3.91)
Paul Williams (11.2.93 and 17.3.93)

Correspondence:

Sir Peter Smithers (30.3.93 - 14.6.93)

John Hay (12.7.93)

Published Memoirs and Diaries:

Dean Acheson: *Present at the Creation*. (London 1970)

Sherman Adams: *First Hand Report*. (New York 1961)

John Barnes and David Nicholson eds: *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-45*. (London 1988)

George Ball: *The Past has Another Pattern. Memoirs*. (New York 1973)

Edward Beddington Behrens: *Look Back Look Forward*. (London 1963)

Reginald Bevins: *The Greasy Pole: A Personal Account of the Realities of British Politics*. (London 1965)

Robert Boothby: *I Fight to Live*. (London 1947)

Robert Boothby: *My Yesterday Your Tomorrow*. (London 1962)

Robert Boothby: *Recollections of a Rebel*. (London 1978)

John Boyd Carpenter: *Way of Life*. (London 1980)

R A Butler: *The Art of the Possible*. (London 1971)

Alec Cairncross ed.: *The Robert Hall Diaries 1954-61*. (London 1991)

William Clark: *From Three Worlds. Memoirs*. (London 1986)

Aiden Crawley: *Leap Before You Look*. (London 1988)

John Colville: *The Fringes of Power: The Downing Street Diaries 1939 - 1955*. (London 1985)

Hugh Dalton: *High Tide and After: Memoirs 1945-60*. (London 1962)

Douglas Dodds-Parker: *Political Eunuch*. (Ascot 1986)

Sir Anthony Eden: *Full Circle*. (London 1960)

Paul Einzig: *In the Centre of Things*. (London 1960)

Ian Gilmour: *The Body Politic*. (London 1969)

Lord Hailsham: *A Sparrow's Flight. Memoirs*. (London 1990)

Sir George Harvie Watt: *Most of My Life*. (London 1980)

Denis Healey: *The Time of My Life*. (London 1989)

Christopher Hollis: *Seven Ages*. (London 1974)

Earl of Kilmuir: *Political Adventure*. (London 1964)

Selwyn Lloyd: *Suez 1956*. (New York 1978)

Harold Macmillan: *Tides of Fortune 1945-55*. (London 1969)

Harold Macmillan: *Riding the Storm 1956-59*. (London 1971)

Janet Morgan ed.: *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*. (London 1981)

Herbert Morrison: *An Autobiography*. (London 1960)

Charles Mott-Radclyffe: *Foreign Body in the Eye: Memoir of the Foreign Service New and Old*. (London 1975)

Harold Nicolson: *Diaries & Letters 1945 - 62*, edited by Nigel Nicolson. (London 1968)

Nigel Nicolson: *People & Parliament*. (London 1958)

Anthony Nutting: *Europe Will Not Wait*. (London 1960)

Anthony Nutting: *No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez*. (London 1967)

Peter Rawlinson: *A Price Too High*. (London 1989)

Evelyn Shuckburgh: *Descent to Suez, Diaries 1951 - 56*. (London 1986)

Paul-Henri Spaak: *The Continuing Battle - Memoirs of a European 1936- 1966*. Translated from the French by Henry Fox. (London 1971)

James Stuart: *Within the Fringe - An Autobiography*. (London 1967)

Sir William Teeling: *Corridors of Frustration*. (London 1970)

Alan Thompson: *The Day before Yesterday (An Illustrated History of Britain from Attlee to Macmillan)*. (London 1971)

Ian Trethowan: *Split Screen*. (London 1984)

Denis Walters: *Not Always With the Pack*. (London 1989)

Philip M Williams ed.: *The Diaries of Hugh Gaitskell 1945-1956*. (London 1983)

Harold Watkinson: *Turning Points: A Record of Our Times*. (Salisbury 1986)

Earl Winterton: *Orders of the Day*. (London 1953)

Lord Woolton: *The Memoirs of the Rt Hon The Earl of Woolton.*
(London 1959)

Secondary Sources:

Biographies:

Stephen Ambrose: *Eisenhower.* (London 1990)

Lord Birkenhead: *Walter Monkton: The Life of Viscount Monkton of Brenchley.* (London 1969)

Alan Bullock: *Ernest Bevin - Foreign Secretary.* (London 1985)

John Campbell: *Edward Heath - A Biography.* (London 1993)

David Carlton: *Anthony Eden.* (London 1981)

Randolph Churchill: *The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden.*
(London 1959)

John Colville: *The Churchillians.* (London 1981)

Colin Coot: *Companion of Honour: The Story of Walter Elliot in Scotland and in Westminster.* (London 1965)

Patrick Cosgrave: *The Lives of Enoch Powell.* (London 1989)

John Dickie: *The Uncommon Commoner - A Study of Sir Alec Douglas-Home.* (London 1964)

Tom Driberg: *Beaverbrook: A Study in Power and Frustration.*
(London 1956)

Nigel Fisher: *Harold Macmillan.* (London 1982)

Martin Gilbert: *Winston S Churchill, Vol III. Never Despair: 1945-63.* (London 1988)

W Gore Allen: *The Reluctant Politician: Derek Heathcoate Amory.*
(London 1958)

Alistair Horne: *Macmillan 1894-1956.* (London 1988)

Anthony Howard: *RAB - The Life of R A Butler.* (London, 1987)

G Hutchinson: *Edward Heath.* (London 1970)

Margaret Laing: *Edward Heath - Prime Minister.* (London 1972)

C E Lysaght: *Brendan Bracken.* (London 1979)

Roy Lewis: *Enoch Powell: Principles in Politics.* (London 1979)

Donald McI. Johnson: *Ted Heath: A Latter Day Charlemagne*. (London 1971)

Frank McLynn: *Fitzroy Maclean*. (London 1992)

Lord Moran: *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival 1940-65*. (London 1968)

John Pomian ed: *Joseph Retinger: Memoirs of an Eminence Grise*. (London 1972)

Stephen Roskill: *Hankey, Man of Secrets Vol III 1931 - 63*. (London 1974)

Robert Rhodes James: *Bob Boothby*. (London 1991)

Robert Rhodes James: *Churchill, A Study in Failure 1900-39*. (London 1970)

Robert Rhodes James: *Anthony Eden*. (London 1986)

Andrew Roth: *Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune*. (London 1970)

Andrew Roth: *Heath and the Heathmen*. (London 1972)

Anthony Sampson: *Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity*. (London 1967)

Douglas Schoen: *Enoch Powell and the Powellites*. (London 1977)

Alan Wood: *The True History of Lord Beaverbrook*. (London 1965)

Europe:

Max Beloff: *Europe and the Europeans*. (London 1957)

John Biggs Davison: *The Walls of Europe*. (London 1962)

Miriam Camps: *Britain and the European Community 1955-63*. (London 1964)

Michael Charlton: *The Price of Victory*. (London 1983)

Uwe Kitzinger: *Diplomacy and Persuasion*. (London 1973)

Walter Lipgens: *A History of European Union. Vol 1: 1945-47*. (Oxford 1982)

Walter Lipgens: *Documents on the History of European Integration Vol.II. Plans for European Union in Britain and in Exile 1939-45*. (New York 1986)

Jeremy Moon: *European Integration in British Politics 1950-63: A Study in Issue Change*. (London 1985)

- Roger Morgan: *West European Politics Since 1945: The Shaping of the European Community*. (London 1972)
- Roger Morgan and Caroline Bray ed: *Partners and Rivals in Western Europe: Britain, France and Germany*. (London 1986)
- John Pinder & Richard Mayne: *Federal Union: The Pioneers - A History of Federal Union*. (London 1990)
- John W Young: *Britain and European Unity, 1945-1992* (London 1993)
- John W Young: *Britain, France and the Unity of Europe 1945-51*. (London 1984)
- Arnold J Zurcher: *The Struggle to Unite Europe 1940-58*. (Westport, Connecticut 1958)

The Middle East:

- Russell Braddon: *Suez: The Splitting of a Nation*. (London 1973)
- David Carlton: *Britain and the Suez Crisis*. (London 1988)
- Michael Devereux: *The Formulation of British Defence Policy Towards the Middle East 1948-56*. (London 1990)
- Leon D Epstein: *British Politics in the Suez Crisis*. (London 1964)
- Leon Epstein: *Britain - Uneasy Ally*. (Chicago 1959)
- Douglas A Farnie: *East and West of Suez: the Suez Canal in History 1854-1956*. (Oxford 1969)
- Herman Finer: *Dulles over Suez*. (London 1964)
- Mohamad Hassanein Heikal: *Nasser - The Cairo Documents*. (London 1972)
- Paul Johnson: *The Suez War*. (London 1957)
- Keith Kyle: *Suez*. (London 1991)
- Diane Kunz: *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis*. (Raleigh 1991)
- Wm Roger Louis and Roger Owen eds: *Suez - The Crisis and Its Consequences*. (Oxford 1989)
- Kenneth Love: *Suez - the Twice Fought War*. (London 1969)
- W Scott Lucas: *Divided We Stand: Britain, the US and the Suez Crisis*. (London 1991)

Terance Robertson: *Crisis - the Inside Story of the Suez Conspiracy*. (London 1965)

Selwyn Troen and Moshe Shemesh ed.: *The Suez-Sinai Crisis 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal*. (London 1990)

British Politics:

Max Beloff & Gillian Peele: *The Government of the UK: Political Authority in a Changing Society*. (London 1980)

Hugh Berrington: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1945-55*. (Oxford 1973)

Harry Boardman: *The Glory of Parliament*. ed by Francis Boyd. (New York undated)

Marjorie Bremner: *Analysis of British Parliamentary Thought Concerning the USA in the Post-war Period*. unpublished thesis. University of London 1950

Ronald Butt: *The Power of Parliament*. (London 1967)

S E Finer, H B Berrington, D J Bartholomew: *Backbench Opinion in the House of Commons 1955 - 59*. (Oxford 1961)

F N Forman: *Mastering British Politics*. (London 1985)

Norman Gash, D Southgate, D Dilks, and J Ramsden: *The Conservatives: A History from their Origins to 1965* ed. by Rt Hon Lord Butler KG PC CH. (London 1977)

Philip Goodhart: *The 1922 - The Story of the Conservative Backbenchers' Parliamentary Committee*. (London 1973)

Peter Hennessy and Anthony Seldon ed.: *Ruling Performances*. (Oxford 1987)

John D Hoffmann: *The Conservative Party in Opposition: 1945-51*. (London 1964)

Robert J Jackson: *Rebels & Whips. An Analysis of Dissention, Discipline and Cohesion in British Political Parties*. (London 1968)

Richard Lamb: *The Failure of the Eden Government*. (London 1987)

Zig Layton-Henry ed: *Conservative Party Politics*. (London 1980)

Richard Leonard & Valentine Herman: *The Backbencher & Parliament*. (London 1972)

L J Macfarlane: *Political Realities Issues in British Politics*

Since 1945. (London 1981)

John MacIntosh: *The Government and Politics of Britain.* (London 1970)

Robert McKenzie: *British Political Parties.* (London 1963)

P J Madgwick: *Introduction to British Politics.* (London 1984)

Philip Norton: *Dissension in the House of Commons 1945-74.* (London 1974)

Glyn Parry: *British Government.* (London 1979)

Peter Richards: *The Backbenchers.* (London 1972)

Anthony Seldon: *Churchill's Indian Summer. The Conservative Government 1951-56.* (London 1981)

Donald Watt: *Personalities & Policies. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century.* (London 1965)

Parliamentary Reform 1933-1960. Cassell, for the Hansard Society

British Foreign Policy:

Michael Dockerill & John W Young: *British Foreign Policy 1945-56.* (London 1988)

Joseph Frankel: *British Foreign Policy 1945-73.* (London 1975)

Paul Kennedy: *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy 1865 - 1980.* (London 1981)

H G Nicolas: *Britain & The United States.* (London 1963)

Avi Shlaim, Peter Jones and Keith Sainsbury: *British Foreign Secretaries Since 1945.* (Newton Abbot 1977)

C M Woodhouse: *British Foreign Policy Since the Second World War.* (London 1961)

John W Young ed: *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's peacetime Administration 1951 - 55.* (Leicester 1988)

John Zametica ed: *British Officials and British Foreign Policy 1945-50.* (Leicester 1990)

General:

- Robert Blake: *The Decline of Power 1915-64*. (London 1985)
- Townsend Hoopes: *The Devil & John Foster Dulles*. (London 1974)
- T O Lloyd: *Short Oxford History of the Modern World. Empire to Welfare State English History 1906 - 1985*. (London 1986)
- Iverack McDonald: *History of the Times 1939 - 1966. Struggles in War and Peace, Vol V*. (London 1984)
- Manfred Michel: *German Rearmament as a Factor in Anglo-West German Relations 1949 - 55*. Unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics 1963
- C A Monk: *Britain 1945 - 70*. (London 1976)
- Keith Robbins: *The Eclipse of a Great Power 1870-1975*. (London 1983)
- Alan Sked & Chris Cook: *Post-war Britain: A Political History*. (London 1979)

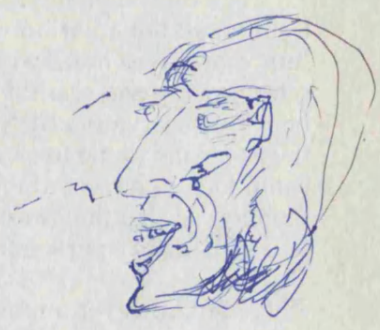
Articles:

- Anthony Adamthwaite: 'Eden, the Foreign Office and the Making of Foreign Policy, 1951-55'. *International Affairs*, Vol 64. No. 2 Spring 1988
- Richard Hornby: 'The Influence of the Backbench MP: The Tory View'. *Political Quarterly*, Vol 36. July-Sept 1965
- John Grigg: 'Churchill, the Crippled Giant'. *Encounter*, April 1977
- Leon Epstein: 'The Politics of British Conservatism'. *American Political Science Review*, Vol XLVIII 1954
- Leon Epstein: 'British MPs and their Local Parties'. *American Political Science Review*, Vol LIV 1960
- Leon Epstein: 'Partisan Foreign Policy: Britain in the Suez Crisis'. *World Politics*, Vol 12 (Jan 1960) Pg. 201-24
- Eldon Griffiths: 'Yanks At Westminster: Our Friends in Commons'. *Newsweek*, 3.2.58
- Nigel Nicolson: 'Long Life'. *The Spectator*, 7.11.92
- John Young: 'Churchill's "No" to Europe: The "Rejection" of European Union by Churchill's Post-War Government, 1951-1952'. *The Historical Journal*, 28,4. (1985) pp.923-937

1. 1956 = Dec 56 ... discovery in 1957 = Jan 57 - initially Maxwell Fyfe & Colin...

2. Memoirs ... activity longer recourse to work ...
???

3. Benn Diaries how was
Eden Papers was influenced by Eden's party
Rob Barker Papers Geoff Stewart shift



4. No reference to pol. or literature or paraphrase - Some times
John Stewart

5. Removal ... of source
of what is not that has become of source Eden + Heather Diaries - Clive Wing Papers - Cambridge ...
+ Blacks book -
+ Lindsay Harrington book -
+ Bing John Lloyd
Adrian Clive on Fyfe's Papers

(ii) Evidence as to who backbone of party paraphrase did; based on own view -
p.63 ... on Eden ...
156 - Maxwell Fyfe / Eden discovery - both thought Eden had done
it ...

6. Chap II seems to contradict most of thesis ...

351 'most serious work of architect'

7. Structure - Temporal ...
chronology -

Preliminary Report on Ph.D. thesis by Sandra D. Onslow by Dr.J.A.Ramsden

This is a thorough and assiduously-researched piece of work which sheds interesting light on all the areas on which it touches, and which will need to be consulted in the future by any scholar working in the field - not least because of the author's extensive interviewing and skillful use of the personal evidence of a very large number of back-bench Conservative MPs (for whose views there is no other satisfactory source). The thesis seems to me to satisfy clearly enough the basic requirement of a doctoral candidate, to have gathered much new material and organised it in a scholarly manner, so that the award of the doctorate should probably be made, subject of course to a satisfactory performance in the viva.

There are however a number of methodological problems, which are paradoxically most severe in connection with the central argument of the thesis, and these prevent this from being regarded as a thesis of the highest quality. The candidate has not used many rather obvious primary and secondary sources in her field, especially from historians and political scientists working on the general question of the working of the Conservative Party - on which the thesis claims to be concentrating. There is no use of the works of either of the candidates' examiners, nothing from any Nuffield Election study, and no use of the writings of Robert Blake, while some remarkably minor works (including a GCSE textbook) get full citation in the bibliography. The largest gap is the fact that the candidate has not consulted the easily available and well-catalogued private papers of the Ministers and Party Leaders - the Eden Papers in Birmingham and the R.A.Butler papers in Cambridge being the most obvious examples, but the papers of Woolton and Crookshank (Oxford) and the Boyle papers in Leeds are almost equally obvious. This is important because of the candidates' recurrent claim that the backbenchers she has studied were a major influence on the Party's leaders. All too often we are left with only their own word for it (recollected forty years after the event, though underpinned by their own private papers, which is a saving strength of the thesis). There are also Party papers in Oxford open to scholars (as, say the Advisory Committee on Policy) which might sensibly have been used. Since these various additional resources would have needed no more than six weeks or so of research, I shall want to explore the reasons for this rather extraordinary gap at the viva. There are also rather too many textual errors to allow the thesis to pass in this form, especially in the bibliography, and these will have to be put right.

However, the strengths seem to me to outweigh these problems. A reader is given a real 'insider's feel' to the way in which Conservative MPs thought and operated (absorbed from the interviews in general terms as well as in specific quotations). There is a consistently authoritative feel for the way in which foreign policy issues were debated and this significantly adds to our knowledge, both of the way in which the integration of Europe was viewed at a critical time, and in the evolution of policy towards the Middle East before and during the Suez crisis.

Subject to the viva I would expect to recommend the award of a doctorate with the proviso of minor textual corrections.

John Ramsden,
3 January 1995

This is an interesting thesis, well worthy of a doctorate. The author seeks to identify the tendencies and groupings among Conservative backbenchers in the eleven years after the war and to explore the way in which they influenced the party's foreign policy.

She has worked exhaustively through published and unpublished sources and she has interviewed many of the key figures who have survived. She writes a clear and readable narrative that seems free from vulgar error (though I am giving her a short list of almost wholly trivial misprints).

She does show a feel for the changing nature of the Conservative party in successive generations and she conveys much about the fetid atmosphere of party manoeuvring in her period.

If the thesis were to be published it could however be greatly improved.

-- At times there are difficulties in the narrative sequence as the text jumps forward and backward between the story of the factions and the story of public events.

-- A simple chronology would, one suspects, have helped the author as well as the reader.

-- More allowance needs to be made for the reactive nature of politics: it would be easier to understand the behaviour of Conservative backbenchers if we were told a little more about what Labour MPs were doing in the

Chamber and in the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet. The role of Gaitskell in 1956 seems much underplayed.

-- A special gap seems to lie in the treatment of R.A. Butler and his loyal following from the Conservative Research Department.

-- The oddest feature is the ending of the story in December 1956. There is no reference to the decision in January 1957 to prefer Macmillan to R.A. Butler, even though it was plainly the climax of the events of the previous four months, which she so fully describes.

A significant omission from the bibliography is any reference to the literature on pressure groups- Finer's Anonymous Empire or the works of Richardson and others. This is, of course, a history thesis not one in political science. But the material is of wider interest. It is not fair to criticise a thesis completed some months ago for missing the opportunity to draw analogies between the Conservatives in 1945-56 and their successors in 1994. But the parallels are quite extraordinary. If the purpose of history is to throw light on the present, this thesis has enormous potential for exploitation in the current scene. But of course a thesis is a thesis is a thesis. So let it pass. It certainly deserves to.

David Butler