

Ernest Bevin's Third Force Memos

Editor's Introduction

In this issue of *Democratija* we reproduce four memos written by Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, and circulated to the Labour Cabinet in January and March 1948. [1] The 'Third Force' memos diagnosed the threat posed to democracies by totalitarian Stalinism and outlined a distinctive social democratic response.

By 1948, Russia's transformation of Eastern Europe into a series of satellite countries was well advanced. Two years previously, on February 22 1946, George F. Kennan, charge d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, had sent his subsequently famous 8,000 word Long Telegram to Washington, setting out the strategic doctrine of containment that would be followed for the next half century. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan had been proclaimed in 1947 (Bevin playing a vital role in shaping the latter, and ensuring support for it in Europe). In April 1949, the NATO Treaty was signed and the Atlantic alliance hunkered down for the long cold war.

The 'Third Force' memos can be read either as an attempt by the Labour Government to insert a social democratic component into the emerging cold war structures and sensibilities, or as a cynical ploy by permanent officials at the Foreign Office – to which Bevin may have been party – to sell a pro-American and anti-Soviet foreign policy to a reluctant Labour party by exploiting the attractiveness of the 'Third Force' idea (see the discussion in Wilford 2003).

Evidence for the latter view is the testimony of Christopher Mayhew: 'We only dealt with the Third Force idea frankly because I was Parliamentary Under-Secretary and I didn't want Bevin to be defeated and humiliated inside the Labour Party.' [2] The historian Dianne Kirby goes further: 'Bevin lacked any conception of what a Labour, let alone a socialist, foreign policy should involve, and being in general agreement over fundamentals with his officials, it was the Foreign Office in its individual and collective judgement which pronounced on most questions.' In Kirby's view the 1948 memos were nothing more than a 'clever Foreign Office response to Truman's anti-Communist crusade.'

But Kirby's thesis – that Bevin was an amanuensis for cynical officials – pays insufficient attention to three factors. First, the legacy of Bevin's social democratic loathing of Stalinists, developed over a life spent fighting them in the British and international labour movements. Second, the educational effect of Russia's brutal post-war takeover of Eastern Europe. Third, the existence within the Labour Party of a block of social democratic antitotalitarians whose views were embodied in this March 3 statement of the National Executive Committee:

...in Czechoslovakia, so in Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, individual Socialists, by permitting or abetting Communist attacks on democracy, have connived at their own destruction. The issues before us no longer permit of any prevarication. Socialism is meaningless without democracy ... Any attempt to achieve Socialism by means which deny democracy and human rights, particularly by the operation of an all-powerful secret police, must lead inevitably to a dictatorship, indistinguishable in its impact on the common man from Fascism.

Questions of authorship and intent aside, contemporary antitotalitarians cannot treat the 'Third Force' memos, or the person of Bevin himself for that matter, [3] as models. It is not just that our times are palpably not his. More than that, there were serious failings in Bevin's policy – of design and execution – which must be registered alongside the strengths.

Peter Weiler (1993) points out that Bevin's policy to contain an imperialist Soviet Union was never separated from his own 'neo-imperialist agenda' for Britain. The hubristic goals of the maintenance of 'Great Power' status and of parity with the USA and the USSR were to be attained in part by the retention of the colonies. These goals, implicit in Bevin's memos, were at odds with the construction of a 'Third Force' of international social democracy. (Bevin even tried to persuade Attlee not to grant Indian independence – Attlee wisely ignored him.) The lingering colonialist mind-set influenced Britain's tragic retreat from a serious engagement in the post-war process of European co-operation, and its increasing reliance on the 'special relationship' with the USA, which Bevin over-estimated the UK's ability to control.

This neo-imperialist agenda explains, at least in part, why the Labour government failed to pursue the 'Third Force' policy with any determination. [4] Hugh Wilford, in his finely balanced study of the British left during the early cold war, shows that

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the 'Third Force' policy was quickly shelved. A propaganda unit, The Information Research Department (IRD) had been called into existence by Bevin's 4 January memo, 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy,' but social democracy 'barely featured as a theme in IRD output during 1948.' 'The Department's negative anti-communist function,' notes Wilford, was increasingly 'taking precedence over its positive, Third Force mission ... [t]he escalation of the Cold War, the increasing economic weakness of Britain and, ironically, Labour's objections to greater involvement in Europe, all combined to throw Bevin back on the Atlantic alliance as the chief means of securing Britain's status as a Great Power.' Weiler concludes his short book on Bevin harshly. '[H]is career as Foreign Secretary put a social democratic gloss to a traditional goal – preserving Britain's position as a world power and its predominance in areas such as the Middle East.'

Social Democratic Antitotalitarianism

Nonetheless, Bevin's achievement in the 'Third Force' memos was to grasp three truths about Russian totalitarianism which swathes of western intellectuals and politicians contrived to hide from themselves, not only in the 1940s but subsequently.

First, Bevin understood that totalitarianism was imperialist and so must be confronted and not appeased. Bevin spurned the neutralist position because, in the (disapproving) words of John Saville, he had 'a comprehensive and all-embracing hostility towards the Soviet Union and all its works.' [5] As such, his notion of a 'Third Force' was very different from that proposed by many on the Labour Left. Bevin was not interested in an isle of rectitude from which passive propaganda would be broadcast in a spirit of neutrality between the democracies and totalitarianism. He never understood a 'Third Force' policy to be an alternative to *choosing sides* because he had already grasped the large truth of the twentieth century – that there are times when either/or must replace neither/nor as the strategic compass of the left. (See 'Threat to Western Civilisation,' March 3). Bevin's hope, in the 1948 memos at least, was rather that a distinctively social democratic politics would *win the leadership* of the antitotalitarian forces and so render a civilisational fight also one for social justice.

Bevin had to veil his hostility to Stalinism from a Russophile Labour Party left-wing until events, such as the 1948 Czech coup, could educate it. In 1947 the party pressure group *Keep Left* had declared collective security against Communist

expansion to be ‘a betrayal of socialist principles,’ while the leading socialist intellectual, Harold Laski, warned that hostility to the Soviet Union would ‘split the party from top to bottom.’ (As late as 1953, a non-fellow-travelling left-winger, the future Labour Party leader Michael Foot, wrote an obituary of Stalin that included these lines: ‘the achievements of the Stalin era were monumental in scale ... who, in the face of these colossal events, will dare to question Stalin’s greatness, how superhuman must be the mind which presided over these world shattering developments?’)

Second, Bevin grasped that totalitarianism was advancing by *political warfare*. He grasped the new role played by front organisations – popular social movements, political parties, captured trade unions, ‘action committees,’ magazines, and myriad other forms of ideological and cultural combat. And he understood that none of these political forms – not even participation within a coalition government – made totalitarianism one jot less predatory.

If Bevin’s first two insights were diagnostic, his third was prescriptive. To resist totalitarianism, a new politics was required. This too would be a form of political warfare, with the ‘third force’ playing the distinctive role, within the larger western democratic alliance, of yoking the antitotalitarian fight to the pursuit of social justice. [6]

Bevin and Us

Policies designed in the mid-1940s, and which were barely implemented even then, can hardly be dusted off for use in 2007. We live in a post-Westphalian world and face a radically different threat: transnational and stateless networks of totalitarian theocrats supported by authoritarian states, indulged within democratic states and lodged in the circuits of cyberspace. Today, a ‘Third Force’ must be a global rather than a ‘western’ alliance of social democracies, shorn of any hint of colonialism, waging political warfare, pursuing global development as freedom. And it must be composed of networks of people and ideas as dense and wired as the enemy’s, social movements as combative, intellectuals as dedicated, and political leaders as able to educate and impart élan.

We lack virtually all of this at the present time. As such we are in no position to dismiss Bevin’s ‘Third Force’ memos out of hand. For in their cold-eyed realism about the predatory nature of totalitarianism; their appreciation of the importance

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of political warfare to its spread; their understanding that the projection of force is part of a serious antitotalitarian response; their clear-sightedness about the need to educate the party and the public for the long haul; their ceaseless pursuit of alliances between democracies, on the one hand, and between social democratic internationalists on the other (for these are the twin-tracks of antitotalitarianism); their boldness about institution-building; their canny prudentialism; and their good sense that while totalitarianism may be contained by security it will be defeated by ideas, Bevin's 1948 'Third Force' memos may still usefully stimulate the thinking of antitotalitarians.

Alan Johnson is the Editor of *Democratija*.

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Notes

- [1] The memos reproduced in this issue of *Democratija* are 'The First Aim of British Foreign Policy' [4 January 1948], 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy' [4 January 1948], 'The Threat to Western Civilisation' [3 March 1948] and 'The Czechoslovak Crisis' [3 March 1948]. All are available at The National Archives, Kew, in England. Bevin's Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the young anti-Communist intellectual Christopher Mayhew, wrote 'Future Foreign Publicity Policy,' and Gladwyn Jebb, a Foreign Office official, drafted 'The Threat to Western Civilisation.' Bevin's private secretary Nicolas Henderson recalled that his secretaries came 'to pride themselves on their technique of ghost-writing' for Bevin (Weiler 1993, p. 146, Wilford 2003, pp. 51-2).
- [2] Cited in Wilford 2003, p. 52. Alan Bullock, Bevin's biographer, noted that Bevin had to deal with 'a Labour Party always reluctant to listen to open criticism of the USSR' (1983, p. 514). In 1948, the US ambassador in Britain, Lewis Douglas, detected 'an undercurrent of feeling here against the US in and out of government ... At times their attitude toward the US borders on the pathological' (cited in Kirby, 2000, pp. 398-9). Some maladies, it seems, have always been with us.
- [3] Although his biographer Alan Bullock disputes this (1983, pp. 563-4), it seems plain that Ernest Bevin held anti-Semitic views. At issue is not his refusal to allow 100,000 Jews to enter Palestine immediately after the war, nor his hostility to the establishment of the State of Israel, and certainly not his sympathy for the Palestinians. It is rather a matter of anti-Jewish prejudice. Christopher

Mayhew confided this to his diary in May 1948: 'must make a note about Ernest's anti-Semitism ... There is no doubt in my mind that Ernest detests Jews. He makes the odd wisecrack about the 'Chosen People'; explains Shinwell away as a Jew; declares the Old Testament is the most immoral book ever written ... He says they taught Hitler the technique of terror – and were even now paralleling the Nazis in Palestine.' The Labour MP Ian Mikardo wrote in his memoirs of the 'pejorative and often vulgar language of many of Bevin's references to Jews.' (See Weiler 1993, pp. 170-1)

- [4] The nadir was the Labour Government's policy in Greece (see Weiler 1993, p. 159; Saville 1984).
- [5] 1984, p. 98. Saville (an historian who left the CP in 1956 over the invasion of Hungary and who helped form the New Left) vilified Bevin as an obsessive anti-Communist dolt. But Saville simply bracketed the reality to which Bevin was responding – the threat to Western European democracies from a totalitarian power that had already turned Eastern Europe into a prison-house of nations. This mental bracketing was common among western socialist intellectuals. It resulted in their failure to face the scale of the crimes of Stalinism, or to develop a serious political and military strategy to contain Stalinism, or to engage in fair dealing with those who did see Stalinism plain and responded accordingly. It accounts for much of the shameful sentimentality one finds to this day in many quarters about 'the socialist countries.'
- [6] Bevin understood that social democrats must be, and be seen to be, *independent* partners within the alliance of democratic nations. When he met Bevin at the 1945 Potsdam conference, the American Secretary of State, Byrnes, noted 'his manner was so aggressive that both the President and I wondered how we would get along with this new Foreign Secretary' (cited in Weiler 1993, p. 146).

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Document 1

Top Secret

C.P. (48) 6

4th January, 1948

Cabinet

THE FIRST AIM OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

It must be recognised that the Soviet Government has formed a solid political and economic block behind a line running from the Baltic along the Oder, through Trieste to the Black Sea. There is no prospect in the immediate future that we shall be able to re-establish and maintain normal relations with European countries behind that line. As I have explained in a separate paper these countries are dominated by

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the Communists, although they are only a minority in each country. Indeed we shall be hard put to it to stem the further encroachment of the Soviet tide. It is not enough to reinforce the physical barriers which still guard our Western civilisation. We must also organise and consolidate the ethical and spiritual forces inherent in this Western civilisation of which we are the chief protagonists. This in my view can only be done by creating some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americas and the Dominions.

The Situation

In another paper I have attempted to give my colleagues a sober and factual account of Russian policy. It is clear that from secure entrenchments behind their line the Russians are exerting a constantly increasing pressure which threatens the whole fabric of the West. In some Western countries the danger is still latent but in German, France, Trieste, Italy and Greece the conflicting forces are already at grips with one another. In each country the issue is still in doubt and we must act resolutely if we are to prevail. The Soviet Government has based its policy on the expectation that Western Europe will sink into economic chaos and they may be relied upon to place every possible obstacle in the path of American aid and of Western European recovery. Our course is equally clear. I have done and will continue to do all I can to bring the Marshall Plan to fruition. But essential though it is, progress in the economic field will not in itself suffice to call a halt to the Russian threat. Political and, indeed, spiritual forces must be mobilised in our defence.

The Western Union

I believe therefore that we should seek to form with the backing of the Americas and the Dominions a Western democratic system comprising, if possible, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, France, Portugal, Italy and Greece. As soon as circumstances permit we should of course wish also to include Spain and Germany, without whom no Western system can be complete. This may seem a somewhat fanciful conception, but events are moving fast and the sense of a common danger drives countries to welcome tomorrow solutions which appear unpractical and unacceptable today. Almost all the countries I have listed have been nurtured on civil liberties and on the fundamental human rights. The recent proceedings of the Human Rights Commission at Geneva have shown that of the eighteen States represented, all except Russia and three satellites were in substantial agreement with the British draft of an International Convention for the protection of these civil liberties and human rights. Moreover, most Western European countries

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have such recent experience of Nazi rule that they can apprehend directly what is involved in their loss. All in a greater or lesser degree sense the imminence of the Communist peril and are seeking some assurance of salvation. I believe therefore that the moment is ripe for a consolidation of Western Europe. This need not take the shape of a formal alliance, though we have an alliance with France and may conclude one with other countries. It does, however, mean close consultation with each of the Western European countries, beginning with economic questions. We in Britain can no longer stand outside Europe and insist that our problems and position are quite separate from those of our European neighbours. Our treaty relations with the various countries might differ, but between all there would be an understanding backed by power, money and resolution and bound together by the common ideals for which the Western Powers have twice in one generation shed their blood.

I am aware that the Soviet Government would react against this policy as savagely as they have done against the Marshall Plan. It would be described as an offensive alliance directed against the Soviet Union. On this point I can only say that in the situation in which we have been placed by Russian policy half measures are useless. If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time, we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence and energy on the one side and inspire respect and caution on the other. The alternative is to acquiesce in continued Russian infiltration and helplessly to witness the piecemeal collapse of one Western bastion after another.

The policy I have outlined will require strong British leadership in order to secure its acceptance in Europe on one hand and in Dominions and the Americas on the other. Material aid will have to come principally from the United States, but the countries of Western Europe which despise the spiritual values of America will look to us for political and moral guidance and for assistance in building up a counter attraction to the baleful tenets of communism within their borders and in recreating a healthy society wherever it has been shaken or shattered by the war. I believe that we have the resources with which to perform this task.

Provided we can organise a Western European system such as I have outlined above, backed by the power and resources of the Commonwealth and of the Americas, it should be possible to develop our own power and influence to equal that of the United States of America and the U.S.S.R. We have the material resources in the Colonial Empire, if we develop them, and by giving a spiritual lead now we

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should be able to carry out our task in a way which will show clearly that we are not subservient to the United States of America or to the Soviet Union.

I have already broached the conception of what I called a spiritual union of the West tentatively to Mr. Marshall and M. Bidault, both of whom seemed to react favourably without of course committing themselves. I now propose, if my colleagues agree, to ventilate the idea in public in my speech in the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Debate and thereafter to pursue it, as occasion demands, with the Governments concerned.

E.B., Foreign Office, S.W.1, 4th January, 1948.

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Document 2

Top Secret

C.P. (48) 8

4th January, 1948.

Cabinet

FUTURE FOREIGN PUBLICITY POLICY

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

In my paper on *'The First Aim of British Foreign Policy'* (C.P. (48) 6) I have shown that the Russian and the Communist Allies are threatening the whole fabric of Western civilisation, and I have drawn attention to the need to mobilise spiritual forces, as well as material and political, for its defence. It is for us, as Europeans and as a Social Democratic Government, and not the Americans, to give the lead in spiritual, moral and political sphere to all the democratic elements in Western Europe which are anti-Communist and, at the same time, genuinely progressive and reformist, believing in freedom, planning and social justice – what one might call the 'Third Force.' Equally in the Middle East and possibly in certain Far Eastern countries such as India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Indonesia and Indo-China, Communism will make headway unless a strong spiritual and moral lead on the above lines is given against it, and we are in a good position to give such a lead.

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In many countries of Western Europe the forces of Social Democracy will be the mainstay, but even in Western Europe and obviously in the Middle East and Far East our appeal could not be only to Social Democratic Parties.

Soviet propaganda has, since the end of the war, carried on in every sphere a vicious attack against the British Commonwealth and against Western democracy. Our publicity has hitherto been confined to supporting and explaining the current policy of His Majesty's Government in foreign affairs and at home, to advocating our way of life, and publicising our social-democratic programme and achievements. Except in the Middle East, where we have allowed ourselves more latitude, our propaganda where Russia and Communism are concerned, has been non-provocative, and we have not attempted systematically to expose the myths of the Soviet paradise. Something far more positive is clearly now required. If we are to give a moral lead to the forces of anti-Communism in Europe and Asia, we must be prepared to pass over to the offensive and not leave the initiative to the enemy, but make them defend themselves.

Recommendations

1. We should adopt a new line in our foreign publicity designed to oppose the inroads of Communism, by taking the offensive against it, basing ourselves on the standpoint of the position and vital ideas of British Social Democracy and Western civilisation, and to give a lead to our friends abroad and help them in the anti-Communist struggle.
2. The only new machinery required would be a small Section in the Foreign Office to collect information concerning Communist policy, tactics and propaganda and to provide material for our anti-Communist publicity through our Missions and Information Services abroad. The fullest co-operation of the B.B.C. Overseas Services would be desirable; but this and the provision of the necessary material by the Central Office of Information would be arranged through the usual channels.

Our anti-Communist publicity material should also be available to Ministers for use, when convenient, in their public speeches; and also to British delegations to conferences and – on an informal basis – to Labour Party and Trades Union delegations.

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3. We should develop visits by important Trade Unionists from abroad and other influential, non-Communist foreigners, and set up a 'Wilton Park' in which we could offer them courses on British life and institutions, and make available to them material and ideas useful for the struggle in their own countries against Communism. In short, we should seek to make London the Mecca for Social Democrats in Europe.

Considerations

Soviet propaganda has, since the end of the war, been directly hostile to this country, and for many months past has reverted to its old pre-war line of direct antagonism to Social Democracy. As my colleagues are aware, the Prime Minister and I, and other members of the Government, are often directly attacked. The propaganda of the Soviet satellites now, of course, follows exactly the same line, and is apparently to be co-ordinated by the Cominform. We can no longer submit passively to the Communist offensive; we must attack and expose Communism and offer something far better. What we have to offer in contrast to totalitarian Communism and laissez-faire capitalism, are the vital and progressive ideas of British Social Democracy and Western European civilisation.

I suggest that the following are the principles which should guide our publicity:-

- (a) We should advertise our principles as offering the best and most efficient way of life. We should attack, by comparison, the principles and practice of Communism, and also the inefficiency, social injustice and moral weakness of unrestrained capitalism. We must not, however, attack or appear to be attacking any member of the Commonwealth or the United States.
- (b) Our main target should be the broad masses of workers and peasants in Europe and the Middle East. We should, therefore, use the arguments most likely to appeal to them. First amongst these is the argument that, compared with Social Democratic countries, such as Britain, Sweden and New Zealand, the standard of life (wages, food, housing &c.) for the ordinary people is extremely low in the Soviet Union, where 'privilege for the few' is a growing phenomenon. Russia's pretence to be a 'Workers' Paradise' is a gigantic hoax. We can fairly ask why the Communists, if life under Communist rule is so enviable, should shut themselves off so completely. Social Democracy on the other hand, gives

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higher living standards for the masses and protects them against privilege and exploitation, whether Capitalist or Communist.

- (c) Equally important is that we should stress the civil liberties issue, pointing to the many analogies between Hitlerite and Communist systems. We cannot hope successfully to repel Communism only by disparaging it on material grounds, and must add a positive appeal to Democratic and Christian principles, remembering the strength of Christian sentiment in Europe. We must put forward a positive rival ideology. We must stand on the broad principles of Social Democracy which, in fact, has its basis in the value of civil liberty and human rights. Examples should be given in order to show what the loss of civil liberties and human rights means in practice. This is specially necessary in countries where the loss of these rights and liberties has never been experienced and therefore is not appreciated.
- (d) We should represent Communism and the foreign policy of Communist countries as a hindrance to international co-operation and world peace. We should expose the immorality, militancy and destructiveness of Communist foreign policy, and diplomatic methods, their manoeuvres to divide and impoverish Western European countries and to exploit their control of Europe's main food-producing areas. We should represent the satellite countries as 'Russia's new colonial empire,' serving Russia's strategic and economic interests at the cost of the freedom and living standards of the Eastern European peoples. The myth that the Russians never break treaties should be exposed and Communism portrayed as the stalking-horse of Russian Imperialism.
- (e) Finally we should disseminate clear and cogent answers to Russian misrepresentations about Britain. We should not make the mistake of allowing ourselves to be drawn into concentrating our whole energy in dealing with those subjects which are selected for debate by Russian propaganda. On the other hand we must see to it that our friends in Europe and elsewhere are armed with the facts and the answers to Russian propaganda. If we do not provide this ammunition, they will not get it from any other source.

In general we should emphasise the weakness of Communism rather than its strength. Contemporary American propaganda, which stresses the strength and aggressiveness of Communism, tends to scare and unbalance the anti-Communists, while heartening the fellow-travellers and encouraging the Communists to bluff

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more extravagantly. Our propaganda, by dwelling on Russian's [sic] poverty and backwardness, could be expected to relax rather than to raise the international tension.

We must not, of course, exaggerate the effects which can be produced by publicity alone. But I am convinced that in the interests of this country, the British Commonwealth and of our friends abroad, we must now take this more definitely anti-Communist line in our publicity. I ask for the active support and co-operation of my colleagues.

E.B., Foreign Office, S.W.1, 4th January, 1948.

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Document 3

Top Secret

C.P. (48) 72

3rd March, 1948.

Cabinet

The threat to western civilisation

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

The fast increasing threat to Western civilisation which Soviet expansion represents impels me once again to examine the extent to which the Soviet Government appear to be achieving their aims, together with the steps we should now take in order to frustrate them.

2. As my colleagues will recall, I circulated four papers to the cabinet at the beginning of January (C.P.(48) 5 – Policy in Germany; C.P.(48) 6 – The First Aim in British Foreign Policy; C.P.(48) 7 – A Review of Soviet Policy; C.P.(48) 8 – Future of Foreign Publicity Policy).
3. It will be remembered (as set out in the Annex and in C.P.(48) 7) that ever since the European Recovery Programme was devised, the Soviet Government have

been carrying on a war of nerves and behind it resolutely using the Communist party to achieve dictatorship. It is their intention to endeavour to expand their activities to cover the whole of Europe at the earliest possible date. So far as we are concerned, we have been proceeding on the basis, which we made quite clear to Stalin, that just as the Russians had built up in the east what they called security, we intended to develop a good neighbourly policy in the west, not aimed against Russia but inspired by the sheer necessity of economic revival and development and of security. I made all this clear in my speech on 22nd January. But, as we foresaw, events have since moved quickly and aggressively, most recently in Czechoslovakia and now in Finland, and I am convinced that we have to go wider than the original friendly intent of our more limited approach to the Benelux countries, with France, on the basis of the Dunkirk Treaty. It has really become a matter of the defence of western civilisation, or everyone will be swamped by this Soviet method of infiltration. I ask my colleagues, therefore, to give further consideration to the whole situation and decide whether our policy should not now be broadened so that we can proceed urgently with the active organisation of all those countries who believe in parliamentary government and free institutions, and devise methods which will cope with this quickly moving stream of events.

I have set out in the Annex headed '*Considerations*' in greater detail than in my earlier paper (C.P. (48) 7) the steps that have been taken by Soviet Russia from the days of the war-time conferences until the present.

There is only one conclusion to draw. After all the efforts that have been made and the appeasement that we followed to try and get a real friendly settlement on a four-Power basis, not only is the Soviet Government not prepared at the present stage to co-operate in any real sense with any non-Communist or non-Communist controlled Government, but it is actively preparing to extend its hold over the remaining part of Continental Europe and, subsequently, over the Middle East and no doubt the bulk of the Far East as well. In other words, physical control of the Eurasian land mass and eventual control of the whole World Island is what the Politburo is aiming at – no less a thing than that. The immensity of the aim should not betray us into believing in its impracticability. Indeed, unless positive and vigorous steps are shortly taken by those other states who are in a position to take them, it may well be that within the next few months or even weeks the Soviet Union will gain political and strategical advantages which will set the great Communist machine in action, leading either to the establishment of a World

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Dictatorship or (more probably) to the collapse of organised society over great stretches of the globe.

4. All our evidence indeed points to the probable staging by the Soviet Government of further efforts in this direction during the next few weeks or months. We cannot be sure exactly where this showdown will take place nor even that it will not occur in several places at once. All we know for certain (since the Cominform has proclaimed it openly) is that its object will be the frustration by one means or another of the European Recovery Programme and the consequent development of a situation in which the Communist cause will triumph in many countries largely as a result of a process of economic decay. But this does not mean that the Soviet Government are determined to have their way whatever the outside world may say or do. There is no reason even now to suppose that it could possibly welcome the World War which would undoubtedly result from its overstepping the mark. It is commonly accepted Communist doctrine that no issue should be forced until the moment is ripe and victory almost certain. If, therefore, the upholders of true democracy and opponents of dictatorship can present a really united front, and if the necessary economic means are made available by those who have them, the danger of war is, in my opinion, not imminent. Indeed it is my considered view that the only danger of war arises from the non-fulfilment of these two conditions. Provided they are fulfilled I believe that Communism will be forced onto the defensive and that for many years at any rate we may look forward to a period of relative calm.
5. On these two 'ifs,' however, everything depends. As for the second one we can only do our best to assist the passage of the European Recovery Programme through Congress by continuing to warn the Administration of the dangers of delay. The first 'if' depends very largely on ourselves. If we here, as a nation, are united on the main issue, then additional strength to resist will be imparted to our friends on the continent and, indeed, to our friends all over the world. If, on the contrary, we show evidence of irresolution and divided counsels, there will be a corresponding lack of the will to resist which may have terrible results even if aid should eventually be forthcoming under the European Recovery Programme.
6. Recent events have only brought to a head a fundamental contradiction which has been inherent in European politics at least since the formation of the Third International. It is the contradiction between an imposed solution of social difficulties, which in the last analysis can only mean Dictatorship, and a

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voluntary, reasoned and human solution which is summed up in all that we mean by the word 'Democracy.'

7. With a view to stemming any further infiltration of dictatorship, I make the following recommendations to my colleagues:-

Recommendations

- (1) We should pursue on as broad a basis as possible in co-operation with our French allies, the conclusion of a treaty or treaties with the Benelux countries. We should aim as a matter of great urgency at negotiating multilateral economic, cultural and defensive pacts between the United Kingdom, France and the Benelux countries, which would be left open for accession by other European democracies. (This will be done on the basis of the cabinet decision approving the recommendations in my earlier paper (C.P. (48) 6).)
- (2) Simultaneously with this, the whole problem of the co-ordination of efforts for the cultural, social, economic and financial revival and development of the west and for the defence of the western civilisation with the support of all friendly western Powers and of course of the Commonwealth should be proceeded with at once. Having in mind Soviet tactics from Yalta onwards, we should decide what common arrangements can be made and what consultations should be entered into to prevent Soviet tactics succeeding on an even wider basis than hitherto and to halt any further expansion of Soviet dictatorship. The issue upon which we should consult with like-minded countries is not so much that of Communism as of the establishment of dictatorship as against parliamentary government and liberty. In this connection we cannot limit ourselves to Europe. We must bring in the Commonwealth and the Americas, and eventually every country outside the Soviet group.
- (3) This would include at an early stage Italy, which is at present the weakest link in the chain of anti-Communist states, but which – if we are to get a really effective western Union – must be brought in. But whether steps should be taken in advance of the April elections, or afterwards, is a matter to be determined. In the meantime we should do everything in our power to assist the parliamentary government of Italy.

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(4) If my colleagues agree to this as a policy, then I would ask to be authorised to proceed to discussions with the Commonwealth and, through the diplomatic channels and in every way open to me, with other countries sharing our western conception of democracy and liberty in order to build up the organisation necessary to give effect to such a policy. In these discussions it would be essential to decide what is required of each western country collectively and individually. This would affect, among other things, defence, the budgetary position, the supply of food and the building up of our economics on an entirely new basis. The division between us at the moment is so deep because Communism is playing such a part in the west, interfering with its economic revival and making consolidation so difficult.

E.B., Foreign Office, S.W.1., 3rd March, 1948.

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Document 4

Secret

C.P. (48) 71

3rd March, 1948.

Cabinet

The Czechoslovak Crisis

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Conclusions

Czechoslovakia is in process of being absorbed into the Soviet Orbit as a result of a *coup d'Etat* on typical Communist lines. Action Committees have seized all strategic points in the State with the connivance of the police and armed forces and a purge of the whole country is in progress. We must expect trumped-up charges against our Czech friends and possibly against members of the Western Embassies.

2. This outcome is highly detrimental to our interests, but there is nothing we can do about it in Czechoslovakia itself except to express our disapproval. The

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French and United States Governments have joined His Majesty's Government in the issue of the declaration of 26th February.

3. Subject to the views of the United States and French Governments, we propose to preserve frigid but correct relations with the new Czechoslovak Government and to maintain our contacts with the Czechoslovak people so far as we can. In pursuance of this policy we should not remove our Ambassador from Czechoslovakia any more than we have from other Eastern European countries. We have now heard from the United States Government that they wish to recall their Ambassador from Prague. I intend to discourage this. We should mark our disapproval of the Social Democratic Party who, by joining the Communists, made it possible for the latter to seize power, lest we encourage other continental Socialists (e.g., Signor Nenni) to think they can also aid and abet the Communists with impunity.
4. We should organise our publicity with a view to appearing as strong as we can, lest other friends of Great Britain (e.g., the Scandinavian countries) should be encouraged to think they must compound with the Russians while there is yet time. In the long run we shall only retain our friends if we are strong.

Course of Events in Czechoslovakia

5. The crisis in Czechoslovakia came to a head on 17th February, when M. Gottwald, the Communist Prime Minister, suspended a meeting of the Coalition Government after certain non-Communist Ministers had complained that the Minister of the Interior (also a Communist) had failed to carry out a Cabinet decision annulling the appointments of Communists to positions in the Police Force by which that force was in effect being packed with Communist nominees.
6. On 20th February the Czech Socialist Party, People's Party and Slovak Democrat Ministers, having received no satisfaction, refused to attend a Cabinet meeting and submitted their resignations to President Benes.
7. The Communist Party then issued a statement to the effect that the crisis, which the non-Communist Parties had provoked, involved a threat to public security and they had discovered a plot against the State. They alleged that the resigning Ministers had put themselves in the position of a subversive opposition. The

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Communist Party had therefore decided to mobilise all the forces of the working people in support of the Government.

8. In actual fact, the non-Communist Ministers had of course resigned on the broad issue that majority decisions of the Cabinet were being blocked by the Communists when unacceptable to them.
9. Meanwhile, Communist 'Action Committees' were formed all over the country and seized a number of Ministries, public offices, the Prague radio station and the administration of certain towns. Arms were issued to the committees in large numbers. The Communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior has published an edict to the effect that any member of an Action Committee can be dismissed by a higher committee if this is recommended by the local committee concerned. Thus the whole machinery of Action Committees can in effect be directed from above. In Slovakia, the non-Communist members of the Slovak Board of Trustees, i.e., the local administration, were arrested and Slovakia thus also came under Communist control through a virtual coup d'Etat. In both Slovakia and the Czech lands those Trade Unions which were under Communist control were mobilised for action, and in particular the Printers' Union refused to be a party to the printing of any but pro-Communist publications, in this way helping to stifle the free and democratic expression of opinion. The newspapers of the Czech Socialists and People's Parties have been informed that no more paper will be allocated to them. The Communist Minister of Information was able to control the radio. For instance, he successfully prevented the Minister of Food (a Social Democrat) and the Minister of Posts (People's Party) from broadcasting.
10. On 23rd February it was announced that the Czech Social Democrat Party had decided to accept M. Gottwald's offer to them to join the Communists in forming the nucleus of a reconstituted coalition which would not include the resigning Ministers. But this decision was, according to reliable press reports, only announced after the police, under the orders of the Communist Minister of the Interior, had occupied the Party's premises and thrown out those of the leaders who did not wish to co-operate with the Communists.
11. On 25th February it was officially announced that President Benes had accepted the resignations of the non-Communist Ministers and that he had approved a new Government under the leadership of M. Gottwald. In this Government the Communists have taken over all the remaining Ministries necessary to make

their control complete, including those of Justice, Foreign Trade and Education. They already held the key Ministries of the Interior (including control of the police), Information, Social Welfare, Finance, Agriculture and Internal Trade. Minor remaining posts have been allotted to the Social Democrats and to some renegade members of the People's Party, and the Czech Socialist Party. The Government includes two 'non-party' men, namely M. Masaryk and General Svoboda, who remain at their posts as Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Defence respectively. General Svoboda has promised the Communists the support of the armed forces throughout the crisis.

12. A full-scale purge affecting every branch of Czechoslovak life is in progress. President Benes has resisted so far as he could, but he has been powerless, and may, it is rumoured, resign. There has been little or no attempt by the population to resist. The Czechoslovak people were hypnotised by the danger approaching them from the east. M. Masaryk, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, had already lent himself to the Russian manoeuvre by advertising the alleged revival of the German danger and by criticising the plans of the Western Powers in Germany, and has finally taken office in the new Government. The leading Social Democrats, including both M. Lausman and M. Fierlinger, have also joined the new Government, though they have little, if any, power.
13. There is no open sign in this of Soviet interference, but we have known for some time that trouble was to be expected from the Communists in Czechoslovakia and the sudden arrival in Prague just before the crisis broke of M. Zorin, a Deputy Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, and former ambassador in Prague, can hardly have been a coincidence, more especially as he returned to Moscow immediately it was over.
14. It will be seen from the foregoing that the crisis has been artificially and deliberately provoked in Czechoslovakia. The same methods of force and intimidation already exploited in the other Eastern European countries have been used to bring about the suspension of free parliamentary institutions and the establishment of the disguised dictatorship of a single party under the cloak of a Government of National Union. This last point has been made clear in the joint declaration issued on 26th February by the Governments of the United States, France and Britain. It is impossible to regard this as in any way a democratic or parliamentary solution, and the violence of the methods used by the Communists is more than ever significant, seeing that elections to enable

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the Czechoslovak people to express their real opinions freely were due to be held in the next three months. Some further reflections on the crisis and on the policy which we should now pursue are contained in Mr. Dixon's telegrams No. 19, Saving, and No. 179, of which copies are to be found at Annexes I and II.

The Lessons of the Czech Crisis

15. Czechoslovakia is now lost to Western Democracy and the Western world except in so far as the Russians, acting through the Czech Communists, allow contacts and trade to continue. If this process is not to be continued still further West it seems desirable that we should analyse the lessons to be drawn from the case of Czechoslovakia in the hope that it may save us from a similar defeat in the case of Italy and perhaps later in France, where our interests would be vitally endangered.
16. The first and most fundamental error of the non-Communists in Czechoslovakia was made two years ago. After the last elections, when the Communists gained over 30 percent. of the seats in the Czech Parliament and were the strongest party, the non-Communists pushed the Communists forward into the leading positions, assuming that they would be sure to make a mess of government in the difficult post-war period and would be discredited. How they could believe this after what had happened in Poland in 1945 has always been a mystery. The Communists naturally made their control of the Ministry of the Interior a condition for their co-operation and from the moment that the police fell under the control of a Communist Minister the die was cast. It is only fair to say that as the Communists at the elections in the spring of 1946 obtained 30 percent. of the seats in Parliament, were the largest party, and controlled the principal trade unions, it would have been a difficult decision for President Benes to take to exclude them from the Government, especially as the understanding reached with the Russians before liberation had been that a National Front to include all the parties would be formed. However, the lesson is there for all to see.
17. In all the countries within the Soviet orbit, including Czechoslovakia, the essential key which the Communists were able to use in order to gain control of the situation has been control of the Police and to a lesser extent of the Armed Forces. Experience shows that it is absolutely impossible for the ordinary processes of democracy to continue if the Communists are able to use the Police to intimidate their opponents and to trump up charges of plots and

conspiracies. Therefore the control of the Ministry of the Interior by reliable non-Communists is a primary necessity for any further attempt to resist the spread of Communism elsewhere.

18. Even if the Police and Gendarmerie are under non-Communist control, it is equally essential to ensure that they are not penetrated, or, if some degree of Communist penetration is unavoidable, that the key positions are held by reliable men and that the nerve centres for controlling the forces concerned are definitely secure and can be relied upon in an emergency.
19. Control of the Armed Forces is also essential. In the Czech case, President Benes would no doubt have been able to regain control of the situation in spite of the police being under Communist control if General Svoboda, the Minister of Defence, had not thrown in his lot with the Communists, and prevented the armed forces from taking any part in the crisis when the Communists took direct action to seize Ministries, towns &c.
20. The Communist control of the Ministry of Information is another key which the Communists have used with great effect, since it controls broadcasting and the press.
21. The open political methods of the Communists when they are in a coalition government are shown from the Czechoslovak example to be no less dangerous than their subversive and penetration methods. Even the apparently *bourgeois* M. Gottwald turns out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. The Communists used their position in the Czechoslovak Government, as they have done elsewhere, in order to create dissension in other parties, and by spreading and exploiting slanders and false accusations against individual Ministers gradually to eliminate from power all those who were not their stooges. Their current aim in all the countries of Eastern Europe is the creation of a People's Front, which means a Government in which the key positions are held by Communists and in which representatives of other parties who are reliable stooges or fellow travellers take part and give an air of respectability to the whole combination. The Communists attain this state of affairs by various methods, but the result is always the same. Therefore the cardinal error is ever to let them into a Government in the vain hope that they will play the game according to Westminster rules. In countries within the Soviet orbit this has been difficult to avoid, but there is no reason

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why we should encourage it elsewhere or encourage or countenance parties (such as Signor Nenni's) which persist in playing the Communist game.

22. One of the points which have gone most against us in Eastern Europe has been the fact that we cannot help our friends there, and that the Russians had armed forces on the spot or in the vicinity and could act whenever they wished to do so. The fact is that continental electorates are impressed by power, and in the East of Europe we have not had power. In Western Europe it may be different. Nevertheless, I think we should draw the lesson from the Czechoslovak crisis and perhaps also from the incidents in the Gulf of Mexico and the Antarctic and avoid emphasising our weaknesses. It may be economically and even in some respects politically necessary to stress the economies we are making in the armed forces of the Crown, but in foreign affairs it is a very grave disadvantage. If we are strong we shall have friends, and if we are not strong our friends will make the best terms they can with our enemies.

E.B., Foreign Office, S.W.1, 3rd March, 1948.