

From
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PAPER ON STRATEGY
FOR DEALING WITH THE LABOUR PARTY

THE SCENE

1. The current struggle within the Labour Party is being fought out on at least three levels:
 - (a) The struggle for power between rival political personalities.
 - (b) The constitutional struggle which is essentially also a struggle for power between "The Party" and "The Parliamentary Party".
 - (c) The policy struggle between left and right.

THE POSSIBILITIES

2. The outcome of the struggle will not be quickly apparent. Few of us participating are likely to opt for permanent compromise, though a majority of party members inside and outside the House of Commons are probably praying that something can be patched up to obscure the present spectacle of disarray.
3. In the fairly near future we could see one of perhaps four possibilities.
 - (a) A victory for the Left. A combination of Shore/Silkin votes might secure this.
 - (b) A compromise in which Foot took more votes than expected. Though he would claim that he intended to stay, few would regard him as valid in such a role
 - (c) A victory for Healey. Healey is at once the most powerful, most dangerous and the most uncertain of the candidates. He is also the

most likely at least in the short term to succeed, and much of what follows is directed to an analysis of what this could entail.

- (d) A right wing candidate. No right wing candidate who stands unambiguously for maintaining or achieving the authority of the Parliamentary Party over the Party in the country is at present in the field. William Rodgers and David Owen are possible names but their impact as candidates would be more likely to spoil Healey's chances than to achieve success.
4. If the Party clearly swings to the left the tactics of the Conservative Party are pretty plain. We will be contesting the policies of the left: Unilateral nuclear disarmament, large scale state intervention, leaving Europe, abolition of the Second Chamber. The issues though grave will at least be clear. Such a situation might be followed by a split in the Labour Party with the Social Democrats going out on their own. This would be a new situation to be dealt with as it develops and does not look like an immediate possibility.
5. If Michael Foot becomes leader there will be a compromise situation with the main issues unresolved. Such a posture will do nothing for the reputation of the Labour Party but raises no immediate problems for the Conservatives.
6. A Healey victory in the Parliamentary Leadership Election remains a strong possibility. We need to think out the general strategy for the Conservatives in such an eventuality.

IMPACT OF A HEALEY VICTORY

7. A Healey success in the Parliamentary leadership Election will be popular in the country. He has the reputation of being tough, intelligent and patriotic, with personal views on defence, monetary policy, and Europe probably not far removed from those of the Government. He conceals most of this under the arm-waving image of a political boffer boy intent only on the assassination of

Margaret Thatcher. The media however are well capable of seeing through the smoke screen and portraying the very powerful individual behind it. I would expect them to draw widely on the Dame Sara Barker Memorial Lecture given and discussed by Healey on September 8th, 1979 (attached), in a perceptive article by Malcolm Rutherford (Financial Times, October 17th, also attached).

HEALEY'S PROBLEMS

8. Healey would no doubt face many problems but high among them must be:
 - (a) That the left will rumble him too well for him to be able to lead the Party effectively even if he can achieve the nominal leadership of it.
 - (b) That in order to lead the Party he will be driven to adopt the same basic approach as Callaghan so well discussed by Brian Magee and Bernard Levin (Times, October 20th and 21st, attached).

THE CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

9. The Conservative Party needs to think most carefully about its attitude in the event of a Healey success in the P.L.P. Poll. Healey himself is likely to seek to cover his problems in the Labour Party with a ferocious knockabout exhibition of booth fighting while concealing his own views on policy to the maximum extent. "Our principal objective must be to defeat the Government" etc., etc.
10. Conservatives would be well advised to ignore the fireworks and seek to pin Healey into serious discussions on policy, not ignoring his own past failures and lack of judgement. Little purpose will be served in reiterating his past membership of the Communist Party. He is certainly not a Marxist today and the fact that he was is almost his only card for bringing the left along with him.
11. In the main, therefore, we should be pressing our own policies with vigour and seeking the common ground in

debate. We need his views on Europe and on the Labour Party policy on Defence. We want from him a reiteration of the need to control the money supply. (Is not his real criticism that we have not held it tight enough?) We should encourage him to say what his attitude is to pay restraint in the public sector. If he believes in norms what norms has he got in mind? If he believes in intervention would not intervention be easier with the country less heavily in debt as a result of his own policies in Government? Above all we should probe his attitude to the great constitutional issues facing Labour next January: The nature of the term democracy in Labour's thinking; the responsibility of a Member of Parliament; the role of the N.E.C. Our aim should be to ignore the smoke screen of political abuse, to penetrate the real policy issues, and to divide the enemy.

12. A discussion might usefully take place on the basis of this paper in order to secure that Party and Ministerial thought are running along similar lines.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Choosing a successor to Mr Callaghan

From Mr Bryan Magee, MP for Waltham Forest, Leyton (Labour)

Sir, Mr Callaghan's leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party has taught some of us that it is not enough for the leader to hold the right views on political and constitutional questions: he must give a clear lead on them, and fight to uphold them inside as well as outside the party. Jim Callaghan failed to do this. His method was to let an unrepresentative minority within the party make the running in public debate while he slipped round quietly to the back room and tried to fix the votes against them; and if the fixing failed he either compromised or accepted defeat.

We need an entirely different kind of leadership from now on. The new leader, whoever he is, must clearly and unequivocally uphold the traditional principles of the Labour Party against internal as well as external assault (in the same sort of way as Attlee and Gaitskell both did).

Chief among these principles are a commitment to the supremacy of the democratic institutions of our country, and the immunity of the elected representatives in them from direction from outside bodies; a commitment to collective security and multilateral, not unilateral, disarmament; a commitment to a mixed economy in Britain, with enthusiastic support from the Government for the private as well as the public sector; a commitment to the freedom of the individual, and an unwillingness to sacrifice this trivially for advances in social equality; and a commitment to the rule of law.

In the Labour Party there is a minority which openly proclaims its disbelief in each of these things. The candidate who most convinces me that he will fight that minority and not appease it is the one who will get my vote for the leadership. (Incidentally, too, such a course

would not only be right in itself, it would also be popular in the country.)

Yours, etc,

BRYAN MAGEE.

House of Commons, SW1.

October 17.

Bernard Levin

For Labour's sake, may the best man lose

You will, I hope, have noted the almost incredible self-restraint that I have hitherto displayed in the matter of the Labour Party leadership. I confess that my silence has been based to a large extent on the well-known fairy-story principle that if a mysterious gnome offers you a bag of gold you would be ill-advised to ask him where he got it and what his name is, since in those circumstances gnome and gold are apt to vanish simultaneously, while the rash questioner is likely to find himself turned into a toad as well. The truth is that I was enjoying the glories of the show so much, and was so afraid that an ill-timed word from me might somehow cause it to become less glorious, that I held my peace. But now that all the hats are in the ring, and the gentle hiss of stiletto between shoulder-blades is vying for the audience's attention with the more robust thwack of club on pate, I can no longer resist. I do not propose to mark anybody's card, and the time for pointing out that this is one hell of a way to run a railroad is long since past. I shall not even draw attention to the curious incident of the Benn in the election-time. Instead, I propose to point out that the most likely outcome, which on the face of it is the best, is in fact the worst.

There was a letter in yesterday's paper from Mr Bryan Magee MP, which set out, as clearly, honestly and concisely as you (or at any rate I) would expect from a Wagner-lover, what the struggle is about and exactly where the line of battle is drawn. There could not, to start with, be a better summary of Mr Callaghan's career as leader than this:

His method was to let an unrepresentative minority within the party make the running in public debate while he slipped round quietly to the back room and tried to fix the votes against them; and if the fixing failed he either compromised or accepted defeat.

Mr Magee went on to say that that kind of conduct will not suffice in

a Labour Party leader any longer, and he set out an admirable charter of democratic principles (. . . collective security . . . mixed economy . . . freedom of the individual . . . the rule of law . . .) to which the new leader ought to adhere. (I have to say in passing that if these principles are dear to Mr Magee's heart it is difficult to see what he is doing in the Labour Party at all, whoever its leader may be, and I might as well, while I am on the subject, ask him, in the light of the rule-of-law bit, where he was when a Labour Attorney-General was inventing the delightful concept of "lawful intimidation".)

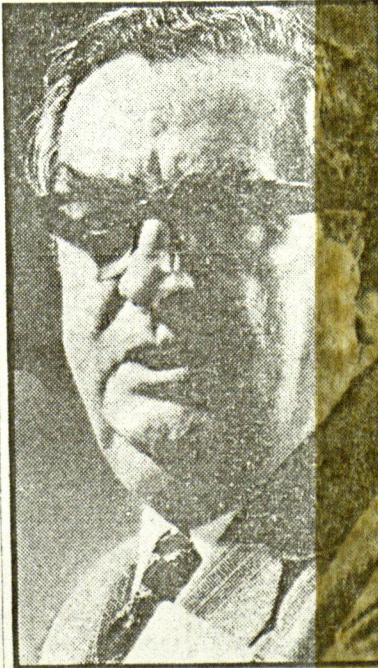
But Mr Magee, after observing that there is a minority in the Labour Party "which openly proclaims its disbelief in each of these things", concluded by saying that he will vote for the candidate who "most convinces me that he will fight that minority and not appease it".

Very well, then; we know where Mr Magee stands, and we know where those he condemns stand. And assuredly it must be clear that the Labour Party cannot follow simultaneously the Way of Magee and the Way of the Left.

. . . and think not, Percy,
To share with me in glory any
more:

Two stars keep not their motion
in one sphere;
Nor can one England brook a
double reign . . .

Or so most of us would assume. Now, however, look here upon this picture, and on this. Last week there was a letter on the same subject from Mr Magee's Parliamentary colleague Mr Jeremy Bray, who appears, to judge from its contents, to be descended from the Vicar. Indeed, the mantle of Mr T. C. Skeffington-Lodge himself seems to have fallen on his shoulders, so eager is he to demonstrate that everybody involved in the battle for the Labour Party is right, everybody admirable, everybody necessary, everybody animated solely by the noblest ideals. "It is entirely



Mr Denis Healey: compromise?

reasonable for some of my colleagues . . . to make continuing representations about the form of the wider franchise . . . just as it is for others to insist that the PLP must accept that a fundamental shift has taken place. . . . I hope both groups will bear in mind that . . . the new leader will have to put together the team. . . . Blackpool conference demonstrated the vitality and ability within the party . . . plenty of ideas around . . . double-barrelled election . . . need not prove quite the handicap some fear. . . . Whoever is elected . . . will have to unite the party.

For such a man (and the Labour Party woodwork is full of them) the

Foot solution is of course ideal. Mr Foot, burnt-out case though he undoubtedly is, is a decent enough stick. He is a man who can turn in a stirring speech on Jarrow or the Spanish Civil War at the first hint of the danger that the problems the country actually faces might be placed high on the agenda; a man held in genuine affection by many of his colleagues who disagree with his views; a dissentient Cabinet Minister who remained loyal to his leader and to collective responsibility while Mr Benn was conducting a campaign of unremitting treachery against both; a left-winger who can plausibly be presented as a true democrat; a once deeply suspect figure who has largely shed his image as the Wild Man of Borneo; in short, he can be held to represent what Mrs Patrick Campbell, on making a belated marriage, called "the deep, deep peace of the double bed after the hurly-burly of the *chaise-longue*".

There may be enough Jeremy Brays in the PLP, eager to embrace a solution that will enable them to go on pretending that there is no fundamental difference between democrats and totalitarians, or for that matter between cowards and brave men, to elect Mr Foot. But I do not believe it now, though not long ago I would have done. No; I think that Mr Healey will be elected by the PLP, and that in whatever system of election emerges from the forthcoming shambles he will, by the help of enough grudgingly-given union votes, win in the electoral college also.

At which, with the exception of the left, everybody, starting with Mr Bray, will say "That's all right, then." Or, to put it another way, I am afraid that Mr Magee may have to abstain in the PLP election, since he is now publicly committed to voting for the candidate who will lead the totalitarian minority and not appease it.

When Sir Robert Mark was appointed Commissioner of Police he made it clear that his first task was to root

out corruption from the force under his command. That astonished many; should not the first task be the fight against crime? But Sir Robert knew that a bent sword is of no use in a fight, and the man Mr Magee is looking for is the man who knows the same about the Labour Party, and is willing to act upon the knowledge.

"And is willing to act upon the knowledge." Does that describe Mr Healey, do you think? I do not believe it. I think Mr Healey's first speech upon donning the crown will be of a distinctly Bravian nature, all about binding up the wounds and uniting to fight the real enemy, the Conservative Government. Some would say that this does not matter, that if Mr Healey is apprised of the danger (as of course he is) he will work behind the scenes to avert it, so that it is unnecessary for him to do so beneath the proscenium arch.

But that is what Mr Callaghan did, wasn't it? He, in Mr Magee's eloquent words, "let an unrepresentative minority make the running while he tried to fix the votes against them". But the important matter was in the consequence: "if the fixing failed he either compromised or accepted defeat". And what reason have we to suppose that Mr Healey is any different? What reason have we to suppose that he would rather not be Prime Minister one day if he can only achieve such an ambition by allowing himself to be politically emasculated?

To be sure, he will not embrace so painful a fate willingly or without resistance; but neither did Mr Callaghan. He knows who the enemy are, and what they are after; but so did Mr Callaghan. For all his thuggishness, he is on the side of decency; but for all his flabbiness, so was Mr Callaghan. And in the end, I believe that he will "compromise or accept defeat"; as did Mr Callaghan.

That is why the Healey solution, as well as being the most likely, is

the worst. For if Mr Healey does win, and is subsequently confirmed in his victory, a false reassurance will be spread, to the effect that all is well, that Denis will stand no nonsense, that the left are now going to be beaten at their own game, that the fight for the future of the Party is now truly joined, that the man to save it is now leading it, and that no more needs to be done other than stick with Denis, who will see it through.

But if that is true, or if Mr Healey is Mr Magee's hypothetical hero, why has Mr Healey so far said nothing along those lines? Why has he not spoken as plainly as Mr Magee, or indeed as Mr Chapple? Because, comes the answer, he would thus jeopardize his chances of winning, either in the electoral college or in the PLP, or both.

At which I rest my case. A candidate who fears to publish an election address lest the voters should discover from it where he stands, is unlikely to be bloody, bold and resolute in office. If Mr Healey will not declare himself now, in unequivocal terms, then he has already started the Callaghanite process of compromise and accepting defeat.

In which case, of course, and in order that Mr Magee and the other honest men may have someone to vote for, Mr Rodgers had better be heard from fairly soon. *Somebody* had better be heard from, anyway; somebody who will speak the words that stick in Mr Healey's throat, and who, though he will not win, will demonstrate that, when the crash comes, there will be a raft for the honest men to climb upon.

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,

That palter with us in a double sense,

That keep the word of promise to our ear,

And break it to our hope.

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