



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

Please see attached the texts of the Hugo Young interviews first with you and then with Michael Foot in successive issues.

B. INGHAM

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'Every shake of Mrs Thatcher's head costs tens of thousands of jobs'

In an exclusive interview, Hugo Young explores the mind and mood of Michael Foot

MICHAEL FOOT, in character, entered the room brandishing a well-thumbed work of literature. Before our interview began, he prepared himself by flicking through some pages, in the margins of which I could see many agitated markings. It was a volume from the Collected Works of John Maynard Keynes. Vol IX: Essays in Persuasion.

He appeared still not to have recovered from a weekend of incandescent fury. In this space last Sunday, Mrs Thatcher made the startling claim that her economic policies were in line with Keynesian teaching. "I would say that I really am the true Keynesian", she said, "when I'm taken as a whole".

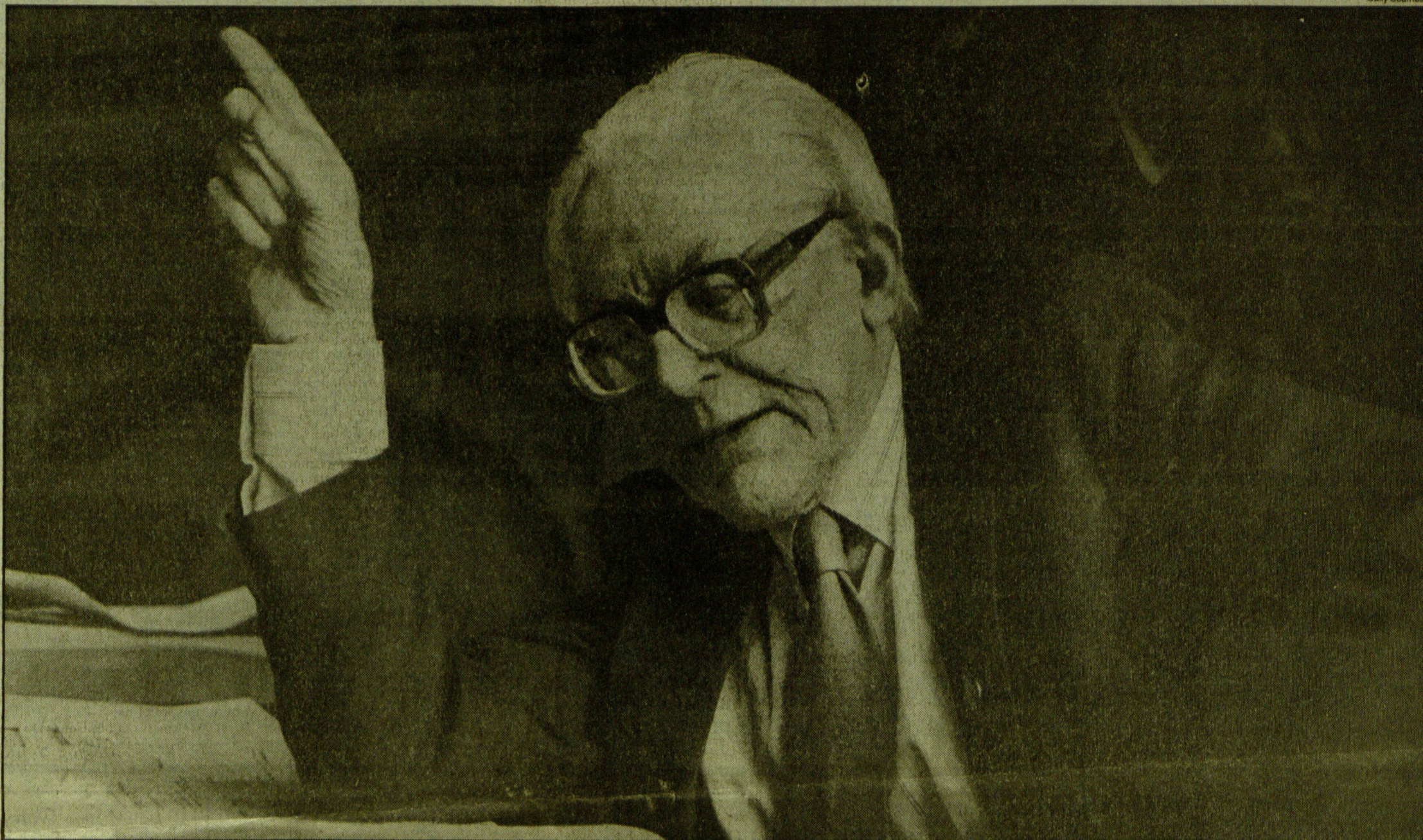
Mr Foot, who has taken a great deal from Mrs Thatcher in his time, seemed now to have been driven to some outer limit of incredulity. "To claim that what she's doing is in any way blessed by Keynes, or Keynesianism, is an insult to the memory of Keynes", he said. "One only wishes he were here himself to write exactly what he thought of any such comment of that nature".

Luckily, however, Keynes had already written it. "Page after page," said Mr Foot, "is a denunciation not only of what happened in the Thirties but of what is happening now. His writings burn and boil with feeling about what was happening, and the outrage of allowing us to pour money down the drain".

Foot fingered the book and found what he wanted. "He said, for example: 'There is the incalculable loss of retarding for a decade the economic progress of the whole country.' That's what's happening to us now. The wealth-creating capacities of the nation have been massacred by what she's doing. And apparently she doesn't even know what's happening, doesn't even listen to anybody who suggests to her that something different is happening".

"She", it turned out, was to crop up a great deal in our conversation. I didn't mention Mrs Thatcher once, because I'd come in the hope of finding out what we could expect from the first Foot Administration. But for Mr Foot, she has plainly become an inescapable obsession.

She had had her antecedent, Stanley Baldwin. "Baldwin said exactly what she's saying now, that you can't do anything about it, and there's no possibility of interfering with market forces. When Keynes attacked him, Baldwin made exactly the same negative reply".



Gally Soames

The pages were indignantly turned again. "Here, Keynes wrote: 'Every puff of Mr Baldwin's pipe costs us thousands of pounds'. Well, every shake of Mrs Thatcher's head costs this nation tens of thousands of jobs, many of them jobs that are never going to be recovered. What has happened in this country over the past three or four years is the biggest industrial catastrophe we've had in this century".

Some people had compared it with the damage done by Hitler's bombs, and this was exaggerated.

"But what is happening is an attempt by many people, headed by the Prime Minister, to conceal the scale of the industrial catastrophe that has befallen us. There is a way out. Keynes helped to show us".

WHAT, THEN, was this way out? Such a question, I thought, should be a relief from Mr Foot's present travails. It presupposed, for a start, that there would be a Labour government, an eventuality which the leader has had little chance to refresh himself in contemplating. Imagine it's Day One of the Foot Government. What happens?

There was quite a long pause. "Well, day one, we'll start on our emergency programme. The emergency measures we will be taking to try and deal with the national crisis".

"What are these measures?" "We'll be publishing them in a few weeks' time in our campaign document, which will be the basis for our manifesto. I'm not prepared to set it out now".

"Give us a hint". "First of all we'll get into operation a new budget, which will start on the road to expansion and stop all this nonsense that is going on. A full-blown Keynesian budget, with expansionary protections built in".

"Do you have to begin by imposing exchange controls?" "We will have to do something very swiftly - if indeed the government beforehand hasn't taken any steps to deal with the situation".

Mr Foot, not surprisingly, has disposed of the thought, to his own satisfaction, that the mere possibility of a Labour government might send the pound through the floor. He thought the "hullabaloo" last year, when Peter Shore announced his devaluation plan, had been helpful. It meant that "the more hysterical newspapers have got this thing out of their system".

But weren't global market forces sometimes irresistible? "She" now made an early appearance.

"I know the government tries to pretend that market forces are the only forces they're prepared to acknowledge. But when they do something the present Prime Minister doesn't like, she squeals and tries to pretend she doesn't agree with them in those instances. And she goes and berates the bankers for following the market forces she said they should always faithfully follow".

But might not Labour be a victim of market forces too, perhaps even more so, as in the past?

"We must try and take measures to deal with them. To ensure our expansion programme is not

massacred or mutilated. That's one reason we've got proposals for controlling imports, as well as for devaluation".

Import controls were essential, to protect industry, but "they don't mean we're going to embark on a protectionist policy for saving the nation".

And how would this affect our export markets? He was decidedly evasive. "We are told by the people who advise the prime minister that we can't have an expansion programme because it will suck in imports so much. But that condemns us to long-term unemployment. This is what the government is saying. No escape, year after year after year. Right. If that's the argument, we have to have import controls".

I suggested to him that all his references to the 1930s, and Keynes's role then, could be said to give Labour remedies, insofar as he was prepared to itemise them, a distinctly conservative feel. He was all the time going back to the past.

"No, I don't. Not at all. Some may say so, but they would wrongly say".

It was all a question of learning from experience. "Experience is the answer. She's talked about experience. She hasn't got any idea about experience. She wiped off the slate the whole real experience that the British people, and other people, have had".

The Tories kept saying that nothing could be done, there was no alternative. "What I'm saying is that, if you look at experience, it proves that Keynesianism works. As long as it's carried out over a long enough period, and with a determination not to allow it to be swamped and brushed aside".

"So don't say I'm looking back to the past. I'm looking at the experience we've had. Contrasting what was done when Thatcherism was all on its own. Through the 1920s and 30s. We had all Thatcherism then. It nearly destroyed this country then, and if she gets there again, it's going to destroy us in the 1980s".

ANOTHER EFFORT had to be made to wrench us round to some specifics about this golden future I had invited Mr Foot to contemplate. A provocative assertion seemed called for. "There's no way your government will get unemployment down below two million".

"Oh yes, we will", he said. "Oh yes, we will. Let me give some examples". Pause. "First of all we'll start by..." Pause. He re-started the sentence. And made a generous qualification. "It will take a bit of time to put all the people back in employment in industry". And a further concession. "I'm not saying it's ever

going to be as big, proportionately, as it used to be, because a lot of manufactures are going to be produced by smaller numbers of people. We all know that".

But, after this useful start, he slid away into comfortable incoherence. "Some of the basic industries, for a start, utterly deny the doctrine that Mrs Thatcher has swallowed hook, line and sinker, and a few other items too, she's swallowed entirely the doctrine that the basic industries of the land are... you know, you don't have to worry much about them because if they show signs of decline, who worries?"

Mr Foot's example, coming from him, was arresting. Take the steel industry. The country could never afford to halve domestic steel output over the next ten years. "If you just take it on the military argument, I suppose we're going to import the steel we're going to use to manufacture the aeroplanes Mrs Thatcher will be making, if she gets the chance to do it. From Korea or Brazil or somewhere. Even on that limited argument, it's nonsense".

Once again we should look to the past to understand the true colour of modern times. This time, the mentor is one Nicholas Ridley, currently a Treasury minister. Mr Foot recalled a conversation he had had with Ridley during the time of the Heath government, from which he had resigned.

"He said bingo made a bigger profit than steel, so it was better for the country to put its money into bingo than steel. I never dreamed, when he said it ten years ago, that these people were going to come along and put it into practice. And it's happening. The people who build up the bingo get the peerages and the knighthoods. They're the people honoured in our bingo society".

He wasn't against bingo, or any other pleasures. But it was no good pretending you could run Britain on a bingo society and bingo newspapers. Bingo had already "destroyed a considerable part of the honesty of journalism". The idea that it should elbow out of the way the real industrial basis of the nation was nonsense.

The country would turn against it. "Against the market economy. The cash-limits society. The cash-nexus society, which used to be talked about by wiser philosophers than Mrs Thatcher's, who understood that it couldn't work in the end".

And here, I sensed, we were building up to the biggest question facing the leader of the Opposition. People would not tolerate the market economy being allowed to dictate everything that happens in Britain in the next ten years. "They will revolt against it", said Mr Foot.

But will they? "Why haven't they done so yet?"

"They haven't done it yet, but they will in the end. They may be a bit slow-moving. But they're not going to see their basic industries destroyed, with a prime minister who says it doesn't matter".

But why should they fight back? He reeled off the threads that led straight back to 1931. "They've cut the unemployment pay. They've cut the amount going in child benefit. They're shaving the amount that goes to the pensioner. And of course they've increased

enormously the people who are living on supplementary benefit, the people who are actually hit by poverty".

Worse was in store. The cost of keeping unemployment high was so much greater than anything the Tories had calculated - £16,000m a year - that they would have to take more drastic steps. "They will turn even further, as the Thatcherites did in the 1930s, and start cutting the standard of life of this great army of people they are keeping unemployed. They've

continued on next page



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FOOT

continued from previous page

already started on it, but they will carry it much further.

"You ask why hasn't it caused an explosion. That's the question a lot of people ask."

"Would you like it to?"

"No, I don't want it to cause an explosion, but I think it will. If such gross evils continue in our society, and such a shameful way of treating the poorest people in the community and those who can least protect themselves, I think there will be an explosion. And no one will be more responsible than Mrs Thatcher herself."

She, however, was almost to be pitted. "I don't think she does it out of wickedness. More likely because she hasn't got the imagination to understand what's happening outside Finchley, or wherever it is she goes. But I do believe there will be an explosion because the British people are not going to be subdued by this situation."

They had been subdued in the 1930s, mainly because the trade union movement had been battered, and its membership had fallen to 3½ million. The 1927 Act had taken away union rights and powers. But the unions were much stronger today and, despite all the assaults on them, would be there when the explosion came - "but I just want to make it quite clear I am not inviting an explosion or eager for it or anything of that sort."

The unions, ah, the unions, Mr Foot has often said that they are integral to any Labour government. In the Callaghan cabinet he was the embodiment of this thinking. Unions would be high in the councils of any Foot government. Yet wasn't one of the profounder changes wrought by Mrs Thatcher the fact that she's shown you could run Britain without the unions?

"No, I don't think so. She may think she can do it."

"She has done it."

"Well, she has continued to run it without a revolution."

"Without the unions?"

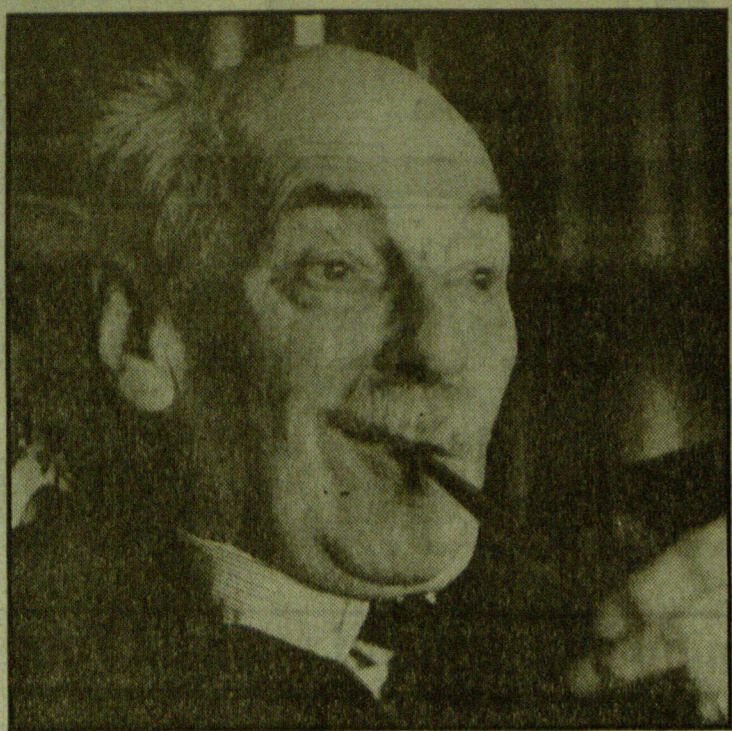
"No, I don't believe you can run a democratic society just by the government or the cabinet."

"Parliament?"

"Parliament, plus, I suppose, 90 per cent of the newspapers. Yes, majorities in parliament. But I don't believe in neglecting or rejecting despising the other great democratic institutions."

"But the unions are deeply unpopular, and their leaders rather discredited?"

He explained this by saying that unions go through periods of unpopularity. But many, many people were proud to be members.



Clement Attlee: most people thought he wasn't going to win. But he did win.

Their strength was a key to democracy. So were the local authorities. "If you are going to get back to anything comparable to full employment you've got to have the co-operation of the trade unions and the local authorities to do it."

"On incomes policy?"

"No. Through a proper system of co-operation. What we call a National Economic Assessment. That is, working with the unions instead of looking for ways of fighting them."

All these rows were purely destructive. They would bring doom. Disraeli in his book on Lord George Bentinck had described a Conservative party which destroyed everything. The modern Tories were doing exactly the same.

"If the Conservative party, under Mrs Thatcher's leadership and the guidance of such great philosophers as Mr Tebbit, embark on a policy of saying that because the unions are unpopular we will deride them, we will bully them, we will denounce them, we will push them into a corner, I tell you a lot of people up and down the country are going to find their loyalty is to their workmates. Which is a very proper and decent instinct. As British an instinct as any instinct."

If the Thatchers and Tebbits challenged this instinct, things would be bad. "We're going to have some very, very rough times in this country. But we are not going to accept it". Besides, it

could not last for ever. "The labour movement isn't going to be wiped off the map by Mrs Thatcher. She will vanish. The labour movement is going to go on."

THERE REMAINS a possibility, however, that Mr Foot may vanish some time before Mrs Thatcher. His leadership is one of the questions of the hour. Some people say he's not up to the job, and collective leadership has been adumbrated as the likely style of a Foot government.

He did not demur. This was how things should be done, he said. "I won't be distracted with discussing the present government for more than half a minute", he went on apologetically (at last), "but one of the things wrong with them is that they're all afraid of the prime minister, and most of the ones with intelligent ideas have been drummed out. That's a very good example to us. We won't run a cabinet by those means."

But collective leadership has its problems, surely. "Your cabinet will be full of people who disagree with each other."

"No, I don't think so", he said, and added somewhat irrelevantly that, man for man and woman for woman, his team was "better" than hers.

"But they do disagree. Look at defence."

Once again, transposing into a delicate area produced an unsatisfying response. "You will see when we publish the document that

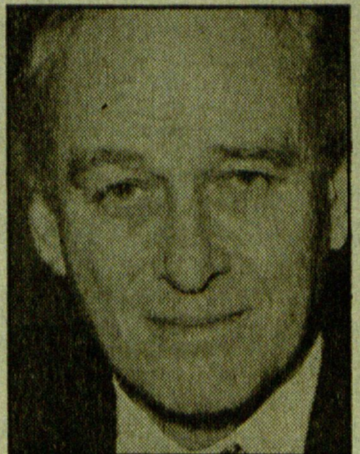
we've applied our minds to it properly". But the public, I ventured, wanted to know what it would be voting for if it voted Labour. To disconnect from Washington? To get rid of American bases? For a Healey version of multilateral disarmament? Or a Foot version of unilateral disarmament?

"That's the way you would like to see it", he said. "But that is not the way the document will be presented."

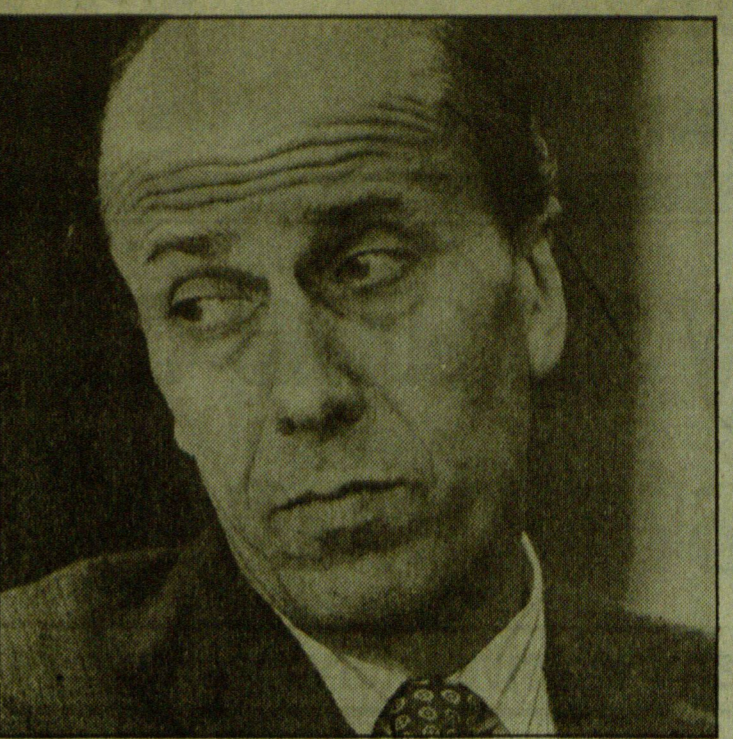
And as Mr Foot and I both know, this is very true. It is now clear that so stark a choice will not be presented; the document will delicately fudge the language - which, indeed, is the whole reason why its publication has been so long delayed, and why the leader declined to commit himself to any kind of language in a free-ranging conversation.

I made one attempt to nail him down. Let's just take the bases, I said. "Let's take the bases then", he said promisingly - only to add a beautiful little escape-clause: "and the defence situation". So the future of the US bases in Britain, one of the more fundamental questions about a Labour government, somehow eluded us. Instead, there followed a discourse on disarmament, in terms familiar to anyone who has followed Mr Foot's utterances on the subject over the last 30 years.

Labour backed a non-nuclear policy. It would stay in Nato. It opposed the government's unflinching support for everything President Reagan did. The Tories were not interested in disarmament. Labour cared passionately about it. Labour would have more influence on American policy. Americans have even voted for a nuclear freeze. "Our government cannot even utter the words. The words stop on her lips. She won't even go for that. It's an illustration



Nicholas Ridley: put money into bingo because it is more profitable than steel



Norman Tebbit: one of the Conservative party's "great philosophers"

of how much out of touch she is. She hasn't got an inkling."

He conjured up an unlikely scene. "Why doesn't she sit down and watch John Pilger's programme [the anti-nuclear film, The Truth Game, screened on ITV last week]. That would shake some idea into her mind of what nuclear warfare really means. Einstein said it: the nuclear age changes everything except the mind of man - and, we must add, the mind of woman. We cannot afford to risk having a prime minister in power over the next five or ten years who hasn't the imagination to see what this means". All this may be more relevant to Mr Foot's own future than is commonly supposed by those of us who try and assess his intention of remaining leader.

I had been told by one senior shadow cabinet member, friendly to Mr Foot, that his chief motive for staying might be his commitment to unilateral disarmament. Publication of the document, enshrining this as formal party policy, might conceivably be enough for him. But more probably, after 25 years in CND, the thought of leading a unilateralist party into an election as the major alternative government would prove overwhelmingly seductive.

Certainly, when I asked with subtle indirection how he weighed his position, his reply showed a modest resilience.

"How do you feel about yourself standing so extraordinarily long on

the opinion polls, and in public estimation?"

"Well, I'd naturally prefer to have a few more points, but I dare say that the more you print of what I actually say, this will have good effects."

But did he accept that the criticism was not all got up by the press? I had had conversations with several shadow cabinet colleagues who spoke of him very critically indeed.

"I am sure there are some people who speak critically. And they are perfectly entitled to do so. It is a free country, and a free party. But if you say to me the press doesn't have any effect..."

"I didn't say that."

"No, I know you didn't. But from the very day I was elected there were some newspapers who bitterly attacked the whole proposition. I think maybe that has some effect on the country."

As an old journalist, he was even prepared to believe that leading articles affected some sections of the community. When the attacks were piled on week after week and day after day, with politics discussed entirely in terms of personalities, it was bound to have an effect.

Decently, I refrained from pointing out how carefully he had avoided discussing policies, and how preoccupied he seemed to be with a certain personality. Instead, I sat back and admired his politician's stoicism.

"The business of politicians is to

survive such moments. There have been quite a lot of predecessors of mine who've survived such moments and come out successfully. I see Denis Healey was quoting 1945 the other day, when most people thought Attlee wasn't going to win. But he did win. Any politician worth his salt must go through periods of unpopularity and survive them."

Would the Darlington by-election, then, make no difference?

"Well, no, no. That's a ludicrous way of putting it. All these matters have an influence on people. I intend to carry out what I was elected to do. But also I am in touch with the Labour party and take all things into account."

This sounded as though the leadership remained an open question. Was this a sudden chink in his armoury? After all, he'd talked as though he would certainly lead Labour into the election.

"No, I'm not talking as if it's an open question. I'm replying to your question as politely as I can. I must take into account what people say. But I'm not going to be misled. I trust, by what is said in some newspapers. Aneurin Bevan used to say that politics is a blood sport, and sometimes I'm inclined to agree with him."

MOST PEOPLE, looking at Mr Foot though the press, through television, through his photographs and through the extremely uncharitable comments of some of his most powerful colleagues, must see him as the quarry in this sport, at bay and about to be devoured. Looking at his predicament, ineluctably trapped between a dominant prime minister and a collapsing Labour machine, they could hardly doubt that he is on the point of expiring; relieved, even, to be so near the end.

Of almost anyone except a Labour party leader, this would have to be true. But Labour leaders are very special, protected by a particular and necessary hubris. They spend a lifetime being vilified by the press, torn apart by the wings of the party, assailed by politically-motivated malcontents. They grow leathery in the service of the party. They do not react like normal, sensitive human beings. They cannot afford to.

Talking to Mr Foot, I felt him more durable than he had any right to be. If the party's going down, he was possibly saying, let it go down respectfully. Let it have a true socialist leader. One with his roots where socialism began to grow in the 1930s; and one who is the prophet of its social duty in the 1980s, to advance the cause of unilateral disarmament.

One also who can prove, from the shelves of his own library, that nothing has changed since John Maynard Keynes.

Overseas Travel

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