

Briefly, Taylor observes the British in the key year of 1945 sensing a danger that the post-war world was going to be divided into three major spheres of influence; a world in which the third sphere, a losing sphere, would be that of Britain and its Empire, while the winners would of course be the USA and the USSR. Therefore, argues Taylor, it was in the interest of the British to force the emergence of a bi-polar world, with a West dominated by the US but manipulated in its dominance by the UK, using its very weakness as a scare to buy into an Anglo-American relationship. The Cold War was born and it was the USSR that was to be the loser.

The implication of Peter Taylor's argument, which becomes explicit at some points in his narrative, is that the US, at the war's end, was on the contrary gripped by another philosophy, by a kind of one-worldism, which nonetheless Taylor has the wit to see was but a different form of hegemony. However, it was a form of hegemony that might have left the British if not *out* at least *down*. »One-worldism« would have sapped the British Empire — and the Americans would have done the sapping, inspired by their thirst for a liberal world economy in which protected colonial empires would have no place.

As Taylor shows, the post-war British government, a Labour government, also had its proponents of one-worldism, the principal figure being, in Taylor's narrative, none other than the prime minister himself, Clement Attlee, a supporter of a UN-based security system. Since the Labour Party had in its election manifesto *Let Us Face The Future* committed itself to the pursuit of a Socialist foreign policy — and everyone knew, including Tories, that Socialism and colonialism were incompatible, then we are faced with a bit of a mystery. That bit of a mystery is about why the anticolonialism and pro-UN stance of the new British government could not gell with the anti-colonialism and one worldism of the US as well as with the anti-colonialism and UN activism of the USSR.

Taylor indicates several answers, making a reference, among other things, to the vagueness of one-worldism and especially Socialist foreign-policy convictions, but still his analysis seems to me to resolve itself ultimately into two main factors. The first of these takes in the power of the rough-hewn British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin and the influence in turn upon him of the permanent officials of the Foreign Office and the leading members of the diplomatic corps (all Empire men). The latter group's views about the Soviet Union were shared, as Taylor shows, by some of the more persuasive figures of the US diplomatic scene, particularly by a fellow called George Kennan, then in one of his doom-laden moods. With this first factor therefore we are practically on the verge of a conspiratorial theory of history. But then the author puts us on quite another track. Indeed towards the end of the book we are jerked out of our mounting *frissons d'horreur* at the enormity of the conspiracy to be told by Peter Taylor that »Britain's foreign policy in 1945 would have had to maintain the aura of a great power no matter who was in charge«.

So this second factor is, after all, the old favourite of continuity. The shift into continuity as an explanation in the

CAN HISTORY BE BREACHED?

Peter J. Taylor: *Britain and the Cold War. 1945 as Geopolitical Transition*. Pinter Publishers. London 1990. xiii+142 pp. Bibliography+index.

Peter Taylor's work is a study of Britain's responsibility for the inception of the Cold War. As one who, some years ago, was started off by a grant from the Academy of Finland on a closely related theme — only to be denied funding by the Academy of Finland at a subsequent crucial stage in the research, I find Peter Taylor's text absorbing. Taylor is a political geographer (the current editor of *Political Geography*, in fact), who uses geopolitics to effect without getting involved in the simplicities of early Mackinderism. His work may be seen as part of the revival of a geopolitical approach to international relations, long overdue, but tricky, very tricky to utilise.

Taylorian narration occurs easily enough with the author's use of the Braudellian time-scale. Thus the *courte durée* (1945) allows the individual scope, while something bigger is going on and winding down over the decades anyway. What this view slides into is geopolitics (policy) because of geopolitics (a set of geographical constellations). Consequently Peter Taylor, though avoiding the basic trap of geopolitics, which is to take its revelations for eternal verities, has fallen into the more concealed trap, which is to take geopolitical figurations as binding because of their dominance over opinion.

Whose opinion? The question must be asked, for in the *courte durée* of 1945 in Britain a lot of people were fed up with »the aura of a great power«, which they rightly associated with war. These were the people referred to in the statement by the Labour M. P. John Freeman when he said: »In future, the housewife and the wage earner must dictate the foreign policy of nations«. Peter Taylor quotes this statement. What he fails to mention is that the ardent supporter of a Socialist foreign policy John Freeman was elected to Parliament by the electors of the bourgeois borough of Watford.

The partisans of a Socialist foreign policy, who spread their message so widely as to help attain one of the most astonishing electoral victories in British politics, aimed to cut through history, to break the very cycles that Braudel and his institutionalized followers have later held up for our inspection. What was going on in England in 1945 was a part of the great attack on history (the European and American peace movements of the early eighties were another example of this, by the way). The Socialist foreign policy of the mid-forties was founded on rationality, on an identification with rational states like the Scandinavian social democracies (not Finland), of pride in the Labour governments of Australia and New Zealand, of the ability of »Left to speak to Left« in Europe (whether France or the Soviet Union — it was understood in both senses), the phrase that even Ernest Bevin had to let fall from his lips. In response in Europe, the Greek Left, to take a key example, having laid down its arms earlier in the year, enthusiastically welcomed the advent of the British Labour government. They were to get short shrift. They were also to get short shrift from the Russians, who broadly honoured the percentage agreement made with the British in 1944 at least as far as Greece was concerned (which is why Peter Taylor's assumption of Russian pressure on Greece has little to recommend it).

The 1944 percentage agreement represented the endorsement of geopolitics by the Russians as well as the British. This was a geopolitics that expected the British to have power in Greece while the Russians kept Eastern Europe (some obscurity about Finland, which was not in the percentage agreement and got out of the war before these deals were finalized). Far from having to stand up to a Russian threat to Greece, the British fulfilment of assumed geopolitical goals in Greece (the defence of Empire) was part of a matching policy sanctioned by the Russians. Since the Russians behaved vulgarly and brutally in »their« Eastern Europe, this confirmed the wisdom of the geopolitical deal and freed Bevin from his Socialist foreign-policy critics, some of

whom, like the Denis Healey mentioned by Taylor, went over to the Bevinist camp. It also freed the West from having to bother about the burdensome area of Eastern Europe, which henceforth had only one function; to serve by way of horrifying example to keep the West pure. As for the Russians, the rational elements in their policy, like Molotov's proposals for distribution of Marshall Aid (needed much more by Eastern Europe than Western) and which were, as Lundestad and others have shown, very near the views of the Scandinavians on this issue, well, these elements could be dismissed as a crude attempt to bolster the Soviet Union's own piece in the geopolitical play.

Peter Taylor in his book has asked for a debate and that is what I am engaged in here. It is important to lay geopolitics bare and there is truth in the reactive model of international relations (see, e.g., Christer Jönsson's *Superpower*), which makes me, inspired by Taylor's thesis, go on to pattern British and Russian policy in complementarity. But this is not enough. Geopolitics is a politics, the ultimate actors in which are not states but human beings, especially human beings in interest-groups. I leave to the Sovietologists, and, more hopefully, the Soviet historians, the task of investigating the correlation of forces behind the geopolitics of Stalinism. For the corresponding geopolitics of Britain, however, I shall suggest that the gang-up between Bevin and the Foreign Office within a context of what appears to be a slowly weakening holding operation is not a sufficient explanation. For one thing, as Christopher Hitchens has recently emphasized in his *Blood, Class and Nostalgia*, the holding operation, *mutatis mutandis*, is still going on, now that Britain is so firmly ensconced in the special relationship with the United States that it cannot foreseeably break free and really doesn't want to. In this sense »transfer«, which is Hitchens' essential theme, would be a more appropriate term than the »transition« of Taylor's title. For another thing behind this on-goingness and identification with the US is a dominance of similar forces, financial and commercial, military and territorial, in the two countries. Attlee's Labour governments did not change the socio-economic structure of Britain for Freeman's prediction to come true. Bevin's message to the headmaster of Eton to send to the Foreign Office »more of your boys« was a natural consequence of this self-denying ordinance.

Britain, especially in its stand-up against the Soviet Union, was good at calling itself a democracy. In fact Britain is a complex piece of constitutionalism, which is not the same thing. Constitutionalist states like Britain do, for their immediate citizenry, grant a lot of individual rights — which means that they try to preserve a lot of individual lives. The Labour governments of 1945—1951 were splendid in this way, extending the rights of citizens into the sphere of positive social rights through the creation, for example, of the National Health Service and the five-day week. But when it comes to the exercise of power in an allegedly democratic state constitutionalism in Britain is a great con. Governments are elected but the civil service is not; it remains to give advice to its new »masters«, as the permanent officials of the Foreign Office gave advice to Ernest Bevin and his little *alter*

ego, that sterling product of the »democratic« Scottish university system, Hector McNeil, whose nominal responsibility for the fate of Greece (if we are to talk in terms of the *courte durée* in which the play of individuals occurs) was great. McNeil is not mentioned by Peter Taylor, but my old teacher Harold Laski, chairman of the Labour Party in 1945, does rate a few mentions in Taylor's text. Sadly — because Taylor has written what is in many respects a powerfully argued work — I have to say that in treating of the conflict between Laski and the Parliamentary Labour Party Taylor has failed to see the import of the issue as well as its irony.

The irony resides in the fact that Laski, a great writer on constitutions both British and American, divined, late in his life, the negative impact of the constitutionalist mechanism for the elected mandate it claimed to sponsor. As a counterweight, Laski sought to create a popular Labour Party outside Parliament to be the guardian of the popular mandate inside Parliament. He failed, later to be savaged by a Tory-dominated judicial system — a revenge of the constitutionalists, if you like. Before this happened, however, the Parliamentary Labour Party exerted its power against him. But then the government, the Labour government, exerted its power against the Parliamentary Labour Party, against Parliament, in short. And who exerted power against the government? Why, the old forces left intact by the Labour movement's sensitivity towards a constitutionalist system headed by a king (and this meant — the reality of it all — that Britain was a command state, since the king was the nominal head of an executive exercising military, administrative and economic power over a vast set of territories overseas that had to be defended by re-establishing a sham monarcho-constitutionalism in Greece). Occasionally Tarylor comes to the surface — brilliantly — from these murky under-currents, when he claims that the significance of the king's choice of Bevin to be foreign minister was that Bevin would be the man to stand up to Attlee's waverings towards, possibly, a Socialist foreign policy or at least a total withdrawal from imperial destiny.

It is through Attlee's prime ministership that we can really see the workings of constitutionalism, however. As we have noted — and this is one of Taylor's more important observations, Attlee abandoned his professed anti-imperialism and reliance on UN security structures. He abandoned them for loyalism. He had been loyal, too, in the First World War, urging his men over the top of the trenches to fight the Germans (at that time most believers in a Socialist foreign policy had held it to be their duty not to fight). The defence of the constitutionalist state was thus already in Attlee. Why it came out again after 1945 — and here I am leaping beyond anything that Taylor is implying even — has much to do with something the readers of *Politiikka* know much about, that power is a manipulation of a set of relations, of what, so often, simply lies at hand, easy to the grasp. In a constitutionalist state there are a set of forces that do not agree with you but are waiting for an accommodation with you, and given that, you can rest upon them, rather more comfortably assured of your identity, having an ambience, as it were. Into that ambience you can put in a plank of your own, like a loyal trade unionism, which was one of the mainstays of the status quo of

the forties and fifties (remember that Bevin before becoming foreign secretary had been minister of labour).

To sum up, the continuance of geopolitics from 1945 onwards was a function of this readily attainable but far from inevitable correlation of forces. The alternative was at hand, too, but realising it would have imposed a strain on constitutionalism. In any case when you are faced outside by an »opponent« like Stalin (how much of an opponent?), or Saddam Hussein for that matter, you are certainly helped in your choice.

Finally a word to the wise. For I would still like to draw out of this a role for the Academy of Finland. Could it not sponsor a few younger researchers (nationals, of course) to take a new look at the pursuit of international relations, drawing out for inspection the inner concatenation of forces and then their overseas connections? These researchers could start, say, by looking at the coy approach of Finland to the European Community (a constitutionalism selling itself short in the defence of the special interests it could no longer accommodate?) or the euphoria over the recent Helsinki summit (»jäätipotti Suomelle«?). Having thus started at home, these young men and women could then work their way outwards into the world. A sort of internationalism. Maybe even one-worldism.

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