

The Great Phenomenon

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 5 August 1945

It might well be said that the British elections occupied the world for months on end, exactly as the great events of the war itself once occupied it — and there is nothing strange in that. Great Britain holds a genuinely distinguished place among the nations of the earth, possesses her own vast empire, and her own voice carries weight in every problem of world politics; Great Britain, moreover, leaves her own imprint, whether strong or weak, upon the internal and external politics of a great many independent nations, or nations that merely resemble independence. Should something occur in Great Britain capable of altering her own policy, whether slightly or greatly, it is only natural that the world should ask, and that nations affected by that same policy should ask, exactly what this change amounts to, where it might eventually lead, and what consequences might follow from it.

The election campaign in Great Britain became the source of a great many fierce disagreements in interpretation and assessment, not only within England herself, but across a great many other countries besides. The campaign itself proved genuinely fierce between Conservatives and Labour... people read the rival leaders' own speeches with real eagerness and anticipation... and marvelled, genuinely, that this fierce rivalry, this same campaign — one amounting, for the two parties, to a matter of life or death — never once prevented the two parties from cooperating with one another, from supporting one another, from one lending the other real strength, whenever matters of foreign policy grew genuinely serious.

No sooner had Mr. Eden announced, in the British House of Commons, shortly before its own dissolution, the Syrian tragedy and Great Britain's own position on it, than the Labour leader rose to declare his own party's support for the government's own conduct. No sooner, too, was the meeting of the three heads of government at Potsdam settled than Mr. Churchill announced, in the House of Commons, that he had asked his own rival and friend, Mr. Attlee, to accompany him to this same momentous meeting — so that the world might trust that the British, however much they might differ in domestic politics, remained genuinely united on everything touching world policy after the war's own end, and that Great Britain would never alter her own position in world affairs simply because her own government changed, or because power passed,

within her, from one party to another.

People read all of this with real admiration, genuinely honouring this British democracy, one that knows exactly what it wants, knows how to pursue what it wants, and how to achieve what it wants. At the very same time, they differed over how the election campaign itself would turn out; most believed the Conservatives would win, would surpass their own rivals, even if only by a narrow margin, basing this on Mr. Churchill's own distinguished standing, in the hearts of the British people especially, and in the hearts of people everywhere outside Great Britain, after he had saved his own homeland from disasters scarcely anyone doubted were genuinely imminent, after he had stood firm, and led his own countrymen to stand firm alongside him, against these same formidable, terrifying trials, the like of which history had never known in any age, and after he had expended efforts the mind can scarcely conceive of, and borne hardships people can scarcely bear. He travelled by land, sea, and air, at all hours, exposing himself to real danger, given his own advancing age, and his own frail health, whenever he faced the symptoms that come from rapid travel to distant lands, whatever the season.

Only a small number of people expected a Labour victory, basing this on certain humanitarian currents — currents that had stirred Europe between the two wars, that the Second World War itself had risen up over, and that touch on the very struggle between two forms of governance, two ways of managing peoples' own affairs: one, the genuinely open, generous democratic order; the other, dictatorship, or whatever resembles it among those constrained, uneasy forms of democracy.

The election campaign in Britain ended, then, in a Labour victory — and no sooner was this victory announced to the world than people began disputing its own near and far consequences, a dispute still ongoing. Some believe these consequences will remain confined to British domestic politics alone: Great Britain will now be governed under a socialist order, pushing socialism further or less far, while foreign policy continues along its own traditional lines — gentle here, firm there, flexible toward some nations, rigid toward others, extending British influence regardless.

The world has never once shown as much concern for the results of a British election as it has shown this time — Great Britain stands a victorious power, having taken part in crushing Germany and Italy, and in

liberating Europe from German domination; scarcely a country on earth, East or West, remains free of some British force already settled within it, or seeking entry and settlement within it, whether briefly or at length — America alone excepted. Any change in British policy would, by its very nature, lead every one of these countries to ask what effect this same change might have on their own present or future life.

However true it may be that the very substance of Great Britain's own foreign policy remains constant, unaltered by changes in the governing party, and that British policy's own singular, unchanging aim is the extension of British influence everywhere, the methods of this same policy do, without doubt, change with a change of governing party, and differ according to whoever happens to oversee and administer it. I have no doubt whatsoever that the most significant reason behind the Conservatives' own defeat was their own excessive conciliation, both within Great Britain and beyond her, throughout that same harsh, exhausting ordeal — treating the British people with the utmost gentleness, drawing genuinely close to Labour, borrowing from socialism a great many arrangements the war itself required, then making promises, and exaggerating those promises, to the point that the British themselves — and foreigners besides — came to believe Great Britain was heading toward pure socialism.

At the same time, they courted their own allies and supporters, and the neutral nations too, exaggerating this same courtship, scattering their own promises freely, unveiling before humanity, and before weaker nations in particular, genuinely captivating hopes — so that scarcely any nation subject to this or that power's own influence doubted it would secure freedom and independence, once victory itself became an established fact.

The Americans joined their own British allies in this same external courtship, and in these same promises extended to weaker nations — the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations Charter, and a great deal of other talk besides, was published, all of it promise, all of it adornment for hopes and aspirations alike. But the war had scarcely drawn near its own end in Europe before the Conservatives recovered their own old traditions, resuming their own original conduct, both within Great Britain and beyond her, alike.

People have not yet forgotten how deftly, how gracefully, the Conservatives disposed of Professor Beveridge's own plan, moderate

though it genuinely was; nor have they forgotten how the Conservatives returned to their own traditional foreign policy — supporting parties of the right, opposing parties of the left, showing no real hesitation, at times, in resorting to force in that same support. Disagreement emerged between them and the Russians over the affairs of Poland and the Balkans, and over Spanish affairs; their own influence grew equally strong in Italian and Belgian politics, to the point that one Labour member once told Mr. Churchill he went too far in supporting, and flattering, monarchs.

This same return to the Conservatives' own traditional policy resulted in dashed hopes in British policy, both within Great Britain and beyond her. The British people themselves sensed something resembling genuine deception, and resented submitting to that deception — having tasted, throughout the war, every variety of hardship and privation, while tasting, at the same time, certain measures of social justice circumstances themselves had required, and having tasted, in particular, the sweetness of those same promises. They resolved, then, never to be deceived, resolved never to let slip whatever they had already secured, resolved never to let those same promises prove false.

As for the world beyond Britain, it woke, one day, to find British policy supporting moderate democracies at times, sham democracies at others, and perhaps even backing certain minorities without hesitation — and grew genuinely weary of this same departure from promises barely made, from charters whose own ink had scarcely dried.

British policy's own reputation was exposed to a great deal of doubt and suspicion. The truth is, Mr. Churchill overindulged in a policy of opportunism, and managed his own genuine concern for securing the Empire's own power, and extending its own influence, poorly — rushing headlong into it, rather, with the very recklessness of a victor who cares for nothing, and answers to nothing, confident, as he is, in his own capacity for everything.

For all of these reasons, Mr. Churchill's own position, since the end of last summer, had grown outwardly strong, yet secretly weak — his own opponents in Great Britain began murmuring among themselves first, then within the House of Commons itself, before finally voicing open, forceful opposition, until matters ended with Labour withdrawing from the coalition entirely; the coalition itself fractured, and Mr. Churchill found himself compelled to put the matter to the people.

Labour would have preferred the circumstances allowed the election campaign to run calmly, unhurriedly, over a longer period, and pleaded with Mr. Churchill to that effect — but he was misled about his own true position, hastened toward the victory he felt confident of, and justified himself with the claim that the British government needed to remain stable, strong, beyond any doubt of its own strength in the eyes of the outside world. Labour reluctantly accepted this same challenge, one they described as genuinely distasteful — and victory was granted them, and they came to oversee British policy, backed by a majority larger than any they had ever won before.

Whatever differences of opinion remain over the results of this election, there are three facts that admit of no doubt whatsoever. The first: the British people have proven they understand democracy in its own precise sense, and are genuinely intent on fully enjoying it, wanting the people themselves to manage their own affairs, for themselves, by themselves, whatever the circumstances. The second: this same result has removed the contradiction the victors had entangled themselves in, through the Conservatives' own return to their traditional policy — the Second World War, after all, had risen up to defend democracy in its own broadest sense, so it was only natural that British democracy should step forward, not backward, and that the outside world should feel some measure of freedom, enabling peoples — I will not say to determine their own destiny, but at least to hope for the chance to determine it. Labour's own victory achieves both these ends at once: advancing British democracy toward socialism, and restoring to weak and liberated peoples some measure of hope.

The rapid consequences of this same step have already appeared: the King of Belgium's own hope of returning to his homeland has weakened; the Royalists' own position, in Greece and in Italy, has weakened; and certain members of France's own Consultative Assembly have managed to cry out, to General de Gaulle's own face, against dictatorship — even though the General has nothing whatsoever to do with dictatorship.

And so the peoples of Europe have begun, likewise, to breathe more freely, having become genuinely certain the Labour government will never support parties of the right, and will never back minority governments.

The third fact is this: whatever peoples wait for their own freedom, their own independence, their own enjoyment of social justice, to come from the Conservatives' own defeat, and Labour's own victory, in Great Britain, are simply unworthy of freedom, unworthy of independence, and unworthy of social justice alike.

All of these things, after all, are never granted — they are seized; they never arrive from outside — they issue, rather, from the hearts of citizens themselves.