Karl Polanyi:

LESSONS OF THE WESTMINSTER REVOLT.

There are lessons to be learnt from the Labour Party rebellion. If they are rightly understood, something like the co-operation of progressive forces on the two sides of the Atlantic may yet emerge.

In perspective, the rebellion in the House of Commons was an Anglo-American domestic affair. It was a healthy reaction against the misintegration of the two countries by Winston Churchill. But it was, at the same time, also a sign of a new progressive solidarity.

Nothing came so much as a shock to the British public as the realization of the extent to which Britain had been already committed to America, or, more precisely, to Republican big business. True, in apparent contradiction to this, Wallace complained of American dependence upon British "imperialism". But there is no contradiction. For, what causes alarm, both here and there, is the degree to which Bovin and Byrnes are "ganging up". The danger is precisely this clandestine co-operation, which has to shun the light of day.

Churchill's plan, which he tried to accomplish <u>via facti</u>, was to join England to America. Not by virtue of declarations, to which neither party would have assented, but through the creation, even before the war was quite over, of a joint army, a joint global strategy, joint finance, a joint trusteeship system, and a joint foreign policy.

He never intended to put this up to the considered vote of the English. At Fulton he even made a rhetorical attempt to prejudge the verdict of the American people.

Yet, as seen from the British angle, Churchill largely achieved his aim. His plans were well laid. The war had not only "mixed up" the Allied armies, but also unmixed atomic affairs, leaving the bomb altogether in American hands. Lend-lease was bound to end soon, and since Churchill's government made no provision to meet the emergency, Britain would have to ask for American help and thus land herself both in financial and in military dependence from the United States.

Churchill's foreign policy, it should be noted, was, by and largo, in harmony with his domestic policy. There was no contradiction in lirking a still capitalist Britain to a still more capitalist America. Indeed, he may well have believed that no change of government in Great Britain would ever be capable of reversing the fait accompli. However, he forgot the remedy of "scoossion". The Westminster Revolt against Wall Street rule of England was a faint counterpart of 1776. An evening paper reported that when Attlee rose to answer Grossman, many Labour members wont to have their tea and deliberately missed the historical division. It was the Boston Tea Party, in reverse. Though it will not be followed by a war, it might easily undo what Churchill believed had already been secured by him as the result of the Second World War, namely the crecting of a world bastion of Anglo-Saxon capitalism.

Before we drop the whimsical analogy, we should stress the prominence of the trade factor in 1776 as in 1946. Then America was being deprived by a tyrannical England of the means of protecting herself against the sweep of the mother country's superior trade. This was one of the economic causes of the American Revolution. Yet the stranglehold of English trade on the Oolonies in the eighteenth century was no more cruel than American free trade imperialism threatens to be to a rejuvenated England, in the twentieth. Here lies the key to the lessons of the revolt.

In brief, the earthquake in British policies was caused by the fact that decontrol in the United States made the implications of the American connection patent. Labour Rebellion was by Republican Victory out of Bretton Woods. This accounts for its deep roots in the masses and its vital impact on foreign policy.

The people of England could never be persuaded to overcome their aversion to the American loan, coupled, as it was, with Bretton Woods. To the political routinier nothing could have been more surprising. The alternative to the loan - this was patent - was a condition of chrinic undernourishment, and a lack of elementary comforts. Bretton Woods, on the other hand, was declared by almost every group and party, every practical and theoretical authority in the country, to be politically harmless and economically sound, besides being financially unavoidable. The Communists joined Transport House in denouncing the handful of brave men who warned of the consequences. Yet, according to unanimous reports, the mass of the people remained obdurate,

In effect, the loan would have been rejected, but for the fact that the Coalition government had forced the hand of its successor. The Ohurchillian view prevailed, that, after all, there was no harm in dependence upon America.

times had changed and

But this was now a socialist government. And how long would the United States be ruled in the spirit of the New Deal? Gould Britain afford to take the help. An industrialized isk nd could not plan its domestic existence, unless it controlled its foreign economy. The point was crucial. The common man grasped the implications and remained irreducibly hostile to Bretton Woods, which under the clock of free trade demagogy declared war on controlled foreign economies.

At this juncture John Maynard Keynes destroyed his life's work by defending what Wall Street firmly intended to be a return to an international gold standard. But the man in the street had not forgotten the lessons of the 'Twenties:- that free trade meant unstable trade, and an a traine

that stable exchanges meant unstable employment. To this he held stubbornly, and when talked into acquiescence, he did not cease to wonder.

His eyes were ever since fixed on the American scene. From there the great freeing of business was to take its departure, with the decontrol which would follow VJ Day. But while Tory England was spellbound by the wonders of overflowing Fifth Avenue shop windows, the Labour voter's feelings were divided between anxious envy and a wistful doubt of this kind of prosperity.

He was not surprised, when the American landscape was transformed into what appeared to him as a fair sample of Bedlam, and Truman caved in. The United States was in the grip of a social epidemic with all its unattractive concomitants. When the President fired Wallace, the British tract unionist may have experienced a premonition of peril. Yet, even though the postilence was now apparently getting out of control, the man in the London street may still have felt separated from it by the Atlantic.

The increasing certainty of a Republican victory made the difference. The strength of the opposition at the Brighton conference of the Trade Unions indicated a rising tide of concern. And when the Republicans gained hold of Congress, fear of contagion strode the ocean, and panic was loose.

The dilemma of the American connection was once more upon us. Why, why indeed, had the British people been made to accept Bretton Woods, if despite the loan, it might spell ruin to them? Not only to their hopes of the future, but also to their prospects for the present?

Yes, the present. At the time of Bretton Woods "dollars" were the bottleneck in British economy. Meanwhile a more basic shortage was revealed, that of manpower. It is the common denominator of the needs of a larger army, the speeding up of the export drive, the cry for more houses, the demand for a forty hours week, the craving for consumers' goods. As a result of full employment England learnt to think in terms not of "dollars", but of manpower.

Only steady, purposeful planning can overcome this bottleneck. A decontrolled United States exporting unemployment and spreading international anarchy, is an immediate danger. But the first requirement of self-protection against it, is a controlled foreign economy. Thus, Bretton Woods, wielded by ruthless Republican hands, waxes into a peril to the common people of Britain.

Why, then, had they built their new house on the back of the krakenthe living island which might submerge and leave its inhabitants floundering in the deep? Was the ultimate reason economic, as had been professed, or was it not rather political? Did Britain have financially no other choice, than to accept such a position of dependence on the United States, or, did she, on the contrary, accept the dependence in order not to risk America's political support against the Soviet Union? Behind the financial and trade agreements there loomed the spectre of Churchillian anti-bolshevism. Since the fifth of November we were back to seemingly forgotten Bretton Woods - only this time it was spelt out in terms of forcign policy. British socialists - this is now clear - must cut loose from a Republican America. Neither the adherents of a one-sided Russian orientation, nor the more numerous but no less one-sided promoters of an anti-soviet socialism, played any appreciable part in the formulation of the new policy. To decry it as anti-American would be as mischievous as it is ludicrous. Since Bevin chose to raise his voice when Molotov spoke, but not to object to what Byrnes would say, the declaration of an independent socialist policy had of necessity to criticise American policy, if it wanted to emphasise neutrality.

The future will unfold the significance of the Wostminster Révolt. But very much must depend on the response of American New Dealers. It will need an effort on their part to realize the importance, which a controlled foreign economy holds for British socialism. Britain must remain free to manage her currency, she must be free to plan her foreign trade, and free to co-operate industrially with any other country. Wall Street is determined to cut these life lines of a socialist Britain. If New Dealers Will help to fend off Republican free trade imperialism, then the people of Britain may be able, not only to establish democratic socialism at home, but also to carry its principles into all dealings of the Commonwealth.

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